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2 April 2026

To Wattie Watson
National Secretary
New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union

cc: Joseph Stanley, National President, NZPFU
cc: Martin Campbell, National Vice President, NZPFU

Dear Wattie,

Solidarity and Support – DIRE EMERGENCY Campaign

I am writing following our productive meeting earlier today to formally express the full and unreserved solidarity of the Fire Brigades Union with our brothers and sisters in the New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union as you continue your DIRE EMERGENCY campaign against Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ).

Having had the opportunity to discuss your campaign in detail and the situation you are in, I want you to know that what your members are facing is deeply concerning and, frankly, all too recognisable. The situation you have set out is not merely an industrial dispute; it is a fight for the safety of your members and the communities they serve.

The issues you have documented speak for themselves. FENZ has failed to employ sufficient career firefighters to maintain safe minimum crew levels, a situation that has barely changed since the 1990s, even as recruit courses have been cut rather than expanded. Fire appliances and specialist aerial equipment that are 20 to 30 years old breaking down enroute to emergencies, leaving firefighters without the tools and support they need in life-or-death situations. Firefighters being caught inside burning buildings without water due to equipment failures. In emergencies, every second counts and FENZ's neglect of its fleet is placing lives at unnecessary risk.

Beyond the immediate operational failures, the wider picture you set out is just as troubling. FENZ refusing to properly fund occupational cancer health monitoring, despite the well-established link between firefighting and elevated cancer risk, taking an ad hoc approach to psychological wellbeing, despite research showing that career firefighters and your dispatchers are experiencing dire states of mental health. And your members have been working under an expired Collective Employment Agreement since July 2023, whilst FENZ board pay has reportedly jumped 79% - a staggering injustice that your union has rightly called out in the strongest terms.

We stand with you.

The strike action your members are taking is courageous and necessary. It is the response of workers who have been left with no alternative, workers who have exhausted every avenue for negotiation and have been met, time and again, with institutional indifference. The FBU stands fully behind the NZPFU and the action your members are taking in defence of their safety, their livelihoods, and their communities.

We know what this fight looks like because we are living it too.

Here in the United Kingdom, the Fire and Rescue Service has been subjected to over a decade of sustained austerity. Since 2010, the service has lost thousands of firefighter posts, dozens of fire stations have been closed, and the number of appliances on our streets has fallen sharply. The cumulative impact on operational capacity, response times, and the wellbeing of firefighters has been severe and the cuts have not stopped. The pressure to do more with less continues and too often employers treating firefighting as a cost to be managed rather than a service to be properly resourced and valued.

We have just concluded an industrial action ballot in one fire and rescue service where our members have voted overwhelmingly in favour of industrial action, up to and including strike action. That ballot was taken in direct response to proposals to close fire stations, reduce appliances, and cut firefighter numbers, exactly the kind of attacks on fire cover that we, like you, refuse to accept.

We make no apology for that. Firefighters will always fight back to protect themselves and to protect the public they serve. It is in our nature and it is our duty.

What the experiences of our two unions demonstrate is that attacks on fire and rescue services, wherever they occur follow a familiar pattern: underfunding, understaffing, ageing equipment, and employers who push workforce safety and welfare to the margins.

These are not isolated failures; they are the consequences of deliberate political choices. And it is only trade unions like ours and yours that stand in the way, hold employers to account, and fight for the standards that firefighters and communities deserve.

The FBU will continue to watch your campaign closely. We are on hand to offer support, whether that is international solidarity messaging, sharing your campaign materials, or lending our voice publicly to your cause.

Please do not hesitate to call on us at any time.

Your fight is our fight.

In solidarity,
Steve Wright

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Wright', with a stylized, cursive flourish extending to the right.

Steve Wright
General Secretary