



**National Headquarters**  
Fire and Emergency New Zealand  
National Headquarters  
Spark Central, Level 7  
42-52 Willis Street  
Wellington Central  
Wellington 6011

Ref: 13784

11 April 2024

Wendy McGuinness  
Chief Executive  
McGuinness Institute Te Hononga Waka  
[wmcg@mcguinnessinstitute.org](mailto:wmcg@mcguinnessinstitute.org)

Tēnā koe Wendy

Thank you for your email of 13 March 2024, to Fire and Emergency New Zealand requesting information relating to wildfires, under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA). Our response to each aspect of your full request (in italics) is below.

*Our OIA 2024/02: Request for data on wildfires in New Zealand  
The Institute is currently in the process of writing a discussion paper on wildfires. It is now in draft, and we have identified a few outstanding data gaps. I am writing to see if your team could help us with these.  
Once the data is included, I would like to send you an early copy of the draft and ideally meet with you or your team. Is this of interest?*

*A: Background*

*We are aware of the following papers, many of which are quite old:*

- a. A series of 'Wildfire Season Update' reports prepared by SCION. These include two reports: 2019/2020 and 2020/21. Furthermore, we note that the 2020/21 report shows the area burned by type of land use (see p. 5). We would appreciate additional information by vegetation type: grass, scrub, forest (plantation) and forest (indigenous).*
- b. A 2009 research paper published by the New Zealand Fire Service Commission. This paper gave a detailed breakdown of total economic costs of wildfires from 2002 to 2007, listing pre-suppression, suppression, and after-fire costs. See report attached (see p. 26).*
- c. Your OIA 2017.4189 letter in response to an old OIA letter (attached). We noted the breakdown by vegetation type for the years 2015/16 and 2016/17 did not equate to the total area burned. The figures for FY 2015/16 left 0.08 Ha unaccounted for and the FY 2016/17 left 1000 Ha unaccounted for.*

*Q1: Is there a reason for these? We would like to use this data in a diagram.*

Unfortunately, we have been unable to find a record of the documentation that informed this response dated 8 November 2017. Therefore, we are unable to confirm if there was an error in the collation of this data and the creation of the table. For this reason, it is necessary for us to refuse your request under section 18(e) of the OIA, because the document alleged to contain the information does not exist or, despite reasonable efforts to locate it, cannot be found.

- d. Operational reports on individual fires (e.g. the 2020 Lake Ōhau Operational Review)*
- e. Briefs to the Incoming Government*
- f. FENZ Annual reports*

*Q2: Are there any more recent reports that we should be aware of? Are there any reports in progress?*

Beyond what is already publicly available, we can advise that the following reviews are in-progress but are not yet ready for release:

- Waiharara wildfire
- Evergreen wildfire
- Loburn wildfire, along with Waikari
- Lee Valley
- Port Hills
- Middlemarch
- Matakana Island

The Operational Review for Tangoio and Tikokino, which relates to a vegetation fire that commenced on 6 January 2020, has been completed and will be made publicly available on the FYI website within the next couple of weeks.

Regarding the Wildfire Season Summary, we are changing the approach for how these reports are produced hence the reason the last couple are yet to be released, our plan is to release these as soon as they are available.

*B: Questions are set out in four tables in Excel. Given the above, would your team be able to complete the data gaps in our four tables and return by email. The table titles are as follows:*

*Q3: What is the area burned annually? See Table 1: Area burned (Ha)*

*Note: We have assumed you have a category for total peatland/wetland or is it included in one of the other categories?*

Based on what is recorded in our system, please find attached, as **Appendix 1** to this response, data on area burnt in hectares for vegetation fires by land categories since financial year commencing 2003.

You will see we have provided you additional land categories from financial year 2016/2017. This is because we changed the way we categorised land in 2017. This is reflected in the shift of numbers in the categories from the left side to the far right.

*Q4: What is the estimated annual emissions from these fires? See Table 2: Total wildfire emissions (Megatonnes)*

We do not hold information on the estimated annual emissions from these fires. For this reason, it is necessary for us to refuse this portion of your request under section 18(e) of the OIA, as the document alleged to contain the information requested does not exist.

*Q5: What are the estimated annual costs of these fires? See Table 3: Economic costs of wildfires.*

While work has been done to try and develop a methodology for calculating the economic costs of fires, a lot of the information is either not collected by agencies or held in a format which doesn't enable easy sharing and use in a calculation process. There is also the issue of needing to collect the data over an extended period of time as some economic costs can last for extended periods beyond the fire event. Other project commitments mean we have not been able to progress establishing a tool for providing this information. For this reason, it is necessary for us to refuse this portion of your request under section 18(e) of the OIA, as the document alleged to contain the information requested does not exist.

*Q6: Can you tell us more about the three largest wildfires over the last ten years? See Table 4: Area burned (Ha), total emissions (Mt) and total economic cost of the three largest wildfires of each wildfire season.*

In terms of the largest three fires by year, we can provide information relating to the areas burnt since financial year 2014/2015. Please find attached, as **Appendix 2** to this response, data showing area burned for the three largest fires we have on record.

Information is not held on total economic cost, total emissions and the three largest fires by hectares burned prior financial year 2014/2015. For this reason, it is necessary for us to refuse this portion of your request under section 18(e) of the OIA, as the document alleged to contain the information requested does not exist.

You have mentioned that you would like to send Fire and Emergency an early copy of the draft of your discussion paper and also meet with a relevant person from our organisation. We're happy to facilitate this, so please feel free to email us at the address provided below.

This reply addresses the information you requested. You have the right, by way of complaint under section 28(3) of the OIA, to request an investigation and review of Fire and Emergency's decision to withhold information by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at [www.ombudsman.parliament.nz](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or freephone 0800 802 602.

We trust that the information being provided is of assistance. If you require further information, please email [officialinformationrequests@fireandemergency.nz](mailto:officialinformationrequests@fireandemergency.nz).

Nāku noa, nā

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]