Northland Local Advisory Committee Meeting

Minutes

Date: Thursday 23 October 2025 **Time:** 10.00 am – 1.45pm

Venue: Whangārei Fire Station, 132 Bank Street, Regent, Whangārei 0112

Present:

Mita Harris	LAC Chair
Kārena Joyce-Paki	LAC Deputy Chair
Kate Alexander	LAC Member
Sheila Taylor	LAC Member
Kubi Witten-Hannah	LAC Member

Attendance:

Wipari Henwood	District Manager, Northland
Mitchell Brown	Community Risk Manager, Northland
Michelle Bartlett (Online)	Senior Advisor, Local Advisory Committees

Apologies:

Sarah Benikowsky	LAC Member
Isopo Samu	LAC Member
Ron Devlin	Region Manager, Te Hiku

Welcome

The meeting was opened with a karakia by the chair, followed by a welcome from the District Manager who provided a brief overview of the station and area.

District Update

Briefed the LAC on Fire and Emergency's new strategic direction and Future Operating Capability project. An organisational ACC audit is underway with Whangārei selected as one of 645 stations nationally. The District Manager is meeting with auditor today.

Current Operations: Weather event declarations active in Canterbury, West Coast, and East Coast. Active fires in Kaikōura and Hawke's Bay; the district is on standby for any large fire response.

Whangārei Hospital Incident: On Tuesday 21st October FENZ attended an incident in the hospital car park where a car ignited a green space in the carpark. Eight cars were totally destroyed, 24 damaged. Multiple explosions from vehicles, airbags, and one ruptured fuel tank.

Fire Preparedness: Winter on-call rotation continuing; returning to a two-person on-call system commencing next week. Had been only having one on call over winter.

Wood Council Engagement: Biannual meeting held in Kerikeri focused on fire season preparedness and lesson sharing. Council satisfied with Fire and Emergency performance last year.

Infrastructure Projects:

- Coordination centre: Looking to establish in the old Advocate building behind Pak n Save (top floor) out for procurement with council and property manager
- Papamoā new build progressing well; crews excited about new facility
- Katikatī new build: Community challenged original site as the water bore is shared community asset; council miscommunication identified. Alternative site provided next to community hall. Long-term plan to close Rangikotara as more personnel live in Katikatī
- Tinopai: Ablution block consent obtained but local iwi opposed; iwi now billing Fire and Emergency for time despite Fire and Emergency not being building owners
- Rawhiti: Station shed upgrade completed; business case submitted for Ute

Partnerships:

- Land Management Forum: Focus on risk management rather than revitalisation
- Te Whatu Ora collaboration: Exploring secondment opportunity to support building compliance work. Te Whatu Ora team reduced from 11 staff to 1; Te Whatu Ora would fund secondment with interested team member identified

Training and Development:

- SIMEX exercise: Led 3 incidents with 33 participants from multiple agencies; shared system noted as still requiring improvement
- Kawakawa cadet program: Two cadets being considered for Australian fire cadet competitions. Bay of Islands Deputy Principal (former deputy firefighter) supporting youth cadet program recruitment

Community Risk Manager Update

Te Tai Tokerau Fire Season:

Fire Permits: 40% increase in permit applications for Te Hiku in 2024/25.

Public Education: Information distributed on safer housing and wildfire preparation tools.

Fire Weather Stations: These stations provide the capability to adjust response levels. For example, a "hot fire response" protocol triggers additional resources when weather-elevated risk detected.

Fire Activity: Greater fire alarm heat map shows increase from 18 fires (2023/24) to 24 fires (2024/25).

Weather Outlook: Neutral La Niña effect; above-average temperatures and rainfall likely. Micro-climate variations noted (e.g., Waitangi weather station relocated from valley for accuracy). Western northern district has greater drought risk.

Operational Safety:

- Forestry and DOC fire access protocols reviewed
- Brigade reminders issued on safe entry/exit protocols; fire trucks not to be driven into forests due to retreat difficulties

Staffing: Representative designated at each station to support Community engagement.

CRM Survey: Survey distributed to all brigade leaders yesterday regarding current brigade capability and capacity for assessment.

Community Programs:

- Wildfire safety program expanding to Hokianga (third week of November)
- Waitangi Day preparation commenced; national funding secured
- Three-step escape plan focus through community engagement staff linked to "Check it's alright" campaign

Community Events: Busy period ahead with fire season coinciding with multiple community events (Waitangi Day, field days and touch-a-truck days). Reviewing community engagement spend, outcomes measurement, and metrics (e.g., "Check it's alright" website analytics).

Committee operations

There were no amendments to the members register of interests. The minutes from the LAC's meeting on 24 June 2025 were confirmed, actions updated, and correspondence noted. Additional email received from Amit Prasad in response to insights report.

Chair's update

LAC Chairs Hui – 17 July 2025, Wellington

Most LAC Chairs attended the hui which identified key themes from LAC reporting:

Community Risk & Partnerships: Local relationships and knowledge under-leveraged. Opportunities exist for formal partnerships and data sharing, replicating successful examples (smoke alarm projects, forestry agreements, iwi MOUs).

Demographics & Vulnerability: Aging populations, youth disengagement, housing insecurity, and population movement increasing community risk, particularly for isolated, elderly, migrant, and disadvantaged groups.

Rural & Environmental Risks: Geographic isolation limits response capability. Community readiness uneven with expectations misaligned with Fire and Emergency capability. Land-use changes and environmental risks outpacing mitigation strategies and funding.

Community Engagement: Strong appetite for deeper iwi and community partnerships. Repeated feedback without visible results creating frustration. Current outreach may miss isolated communities. Cultural competency needs development.

Volunteer Training: Training too centralized and inflexible. Delays, waitlists, and poor recognition of prior learning affecting recruitment and retention.

Recruitment & Retention: Aging volunteer base, barriers to entry, lack of youth pathways, and recruitment not reflecting local communities or generational expectations.

Mental Health & Wellbeing: Support limited or inaccessible. ACC coverage gaps and low awareness of trauma support pathways.

Māori Engagement: Strong Māori leadership in emergency response. Cultural competency programs well received but consistency of meaningful engagement lacking. Ongoing trust and data sovereignty concerns.

Culture Change & Leadership: Local leadership driving positive change but brigade-level progress uneven. National strategy not always translating to local action. Legacy mindsets persist despite progress on inclusion and diversity.

Communication & Autonomy: National messaging not resonating locally. "One-size-fits-all" approach ineffective. Insufficient local autonomy and poor communication weakening morale. Volunteers want involvement in decisions and visible action on concerns.

Role Clarity & Feedback Fatigue: Community unclear on Fire and Emergency mandate. LACs providing similar advice annually with limited evidence of change, creating cynicism and frustration.

More people not insuring their houses so the FENZ levy intake has dropped.

LAC Engagement

The Stakeholder engagement plan was reviewed and reset for 2025-26.

The LAC plan to review portfolio allocations when new members come onto the committee.

Communities of Interest

The LAC feedback that for this to be a useful tool it needs further work. Some of the areas of interest interests are incorrect, does not include Primary Industry. General discussion around role and purpose of LAC roles. Feeling like it can be detrimental to member relationships as it is a one-way flow of information.

Community engagements

Members attended a number of community network meetings and let them know about Fire and Emergency NZ's restructure. Civil defence was visiting Marae recently to review emergency plans – feel it was a missed opportunity that fire plans were not updated at the same time. Forestry - training, they are wanting further training but not getting support from FENZ. Forestry could not speak highly enough of FENZ.

Engagement toolkits

Committee are yet to review this.

General Business

The committee confirmed actions.

SharePoint Access: National LAC team is working to provide all members with SharePoint access in preparation for new Board Management application. New login guidance has been distributed. Members experiencing access issues should contact IT Support on 0800 374 843.

Community Perceptions Report (Verian): The report included in LAC meeting packs highlight four engagement types, challenges, and six principles for effective engagement.

Previous Insights Report Follow-up:

- 2024/25 Insight - Operational Review Learnings: Link to operational reviews provided in meeting pack (not previously visible to LACs).
- 2023/24 Insight - Carbon Forestry Fire Risk: Link to information and research on carbon forestry fire risk provided in meeting pack.

Next meeting:

Trimester 2 meeting: **12 February 2026**: Kawakawa station TBC depending on where new members are coming from.

Closing

The meeting closed by the Chair at 1.45pm with karakia.

Action Log

Date	Action	Responsible	Due	Status
23 October 2025	Invite Civil Defence Damon Reo to speak at T2 LAC hui 12 February	Chair	January 2026	
24 June 2025	Complete the Annual Insights 24-25 Report for submitting	Chair/Deputy Chair	Before 2 July 2025	Complete
24 June 2025	Confirm LAC meeting dates for 25-26 Year	Chair/ Senior Advisor	End of July 2025	Complete
24 June 2025	Update Northland engagement plan with additional reports	LAC	Immediate post-meeting	Complete
26 Mar 2025	Engagement plan amendments: Addition of Pacific portfolio and assigned to Kārena Joyce-Paki Note for Whāriki - communities of interest: add of Primary Industries as a Community of Interest.	Chair	Trimester Three meeting – June 2025	Completed
26 Mar 2025	Māori engagement portfolio: follow up on progress with Mana Enhancing agreements. Follow up on potential of collaboration at Rūnanga level.	Chair/ Portfolio holder District Manager	Trimester Three meeting – June 2025	Completed

26 March 2025	Confirm mileage rate for LAC members	Senior Advisor	Post meeting	Completed