

21-M-00588

s 9(2)(a)

Dear s 9(2)(a)

Concerns regarding reporting on forest and rural fire danger levels

Thank you for your letter of 19 February 2021 about concerns with reporting on forest and rural fire danger levels in *Our atmosphere and climate 2020*. The Ministry for the Environment (the Ministry) places a high value on the quality of our analysis, and we always welcome feedback on our reports.

I acknowledge your comments about the appropriateness of the data used in relation to trends and fuel types, and the resulting media interest. Particularly since the Ministry received similar feedback on the wildfire risk discussion in the report from other interested parties.

To address the matters raised, the Ministry worked with officials from Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ), NIWA and Scion. We were able to satisfy concerns that the data, analysis, and statements in the report were correct, and that the data and trends in the report were interpreted and presented correctly.

We think some of the confusion may have stemmed from the use of two different data sources in the report. Data on days with very high and extreme wildfire danger were used to analyse trends in the past (and identified six sites with very likely increasing trends, and six sites with very likely decreasing trends). Although the Ministry determined that the analysis was correct, we acknowledge the need to better convey the nuance with the forest/grass fire risk data in the future.

Working with scientists at Scion, the Ministry also addressed a concern around the statement about a projected 70% increase in fire danger levels by 2040. This statement is taken from a modelling study (Watt et al., 2019), and is not extrapolated from the wildfire risk indicator data. Following discussion, the Ministry updated the citation in the report so that it references the most current and relevant research results that calculate this statistic.

These changes were considered sufficient to address concerns around messaging and data handling stemming from the report, and the Ministry has committed to work more closely with FENZ on wildfire risk data, analysis, and communications in our future reporting. While the study you published (Dudfield, Pearce & Cameron, 2021) was not available to the Ministry during publication of this report, it will be considered along with any other recent findings in our next wildfire reporting.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Vicky Robertson', with a long, sweeping underline.

Vicky Robertson
Chief Executive and Secretary for the Environment

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