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To: All Members

Dear member,

Wildfires: The FBU is making the case for change

This week has seen important developments in the FBU's work to secure better preparation for wildfires and the resources firefighters need to respond to them.

The summit chaired by the Prime Minister in Liverpool today was one our union called for. It followed months of work by the FBU to ensure the growing threat from wildfires, the experiences of our members and the needs of fire and rescue services were taken seriously by government.

I want to thank all members and representatives who have provided evidence, feedback and practical experience to support this work. The national meeting of FBU representatives in September was particularly important in bringing together the experiences of firefighters and control staff across the UK. The contributions of whole-time and retained firefighters, control room members and officers helped us build the case we took into discussions with government.

That evidence matters. It has helped put the realities of fighting wildfires, the risks to firefighters' health and safety, the equipment we need and the wider question of fire and rescue service capacity firmly on the agenda.

Progress at Westminster

At today's summit, the government announced £45 million of immediate investment from MHCLG budgets, alongside a series of commitments intended to improve wildfire preparedness and response.

These include:

- **Personal protective equipment:** Work to improve access to appropriate wildfire PPE, with the aim of ensuring firefighters across UK fire and rescue services have suitable lightweight wildfire kit.
- **Training and competence:** Developing wildfire training and competence standards, with the FBU involved in the process.
- **A national wildfire strategy:** Work is under way to develop a national strategy, in collaboration with the devolved administrations.
- **Aerial firefighting support:** A commitment to have aerial support in place by 2027 to assist fire and rescue service operations.
- **Land management:** £25 million announced by DEFRA for land management, alongside consideration of legislative options to help reduce wildfire risk.
- **Data, forecasting and technology:** Work towards a single agreed definition of wildfire, improved data collection and analysis, better forecasting and a new Wildfires AI Unit bringing together universities, technology firms and government officials.

These are important steps towards improving preparedness, providing firefighters with the right equipment and strengthening the ability of services to respond. We will work constructively with government to ensure the commitments deliver practical improvements for our members.

The Prime Minister also reiterated the government's intention to introduce a statutory duty on fire and rescue services in England to respond to flooding. This is an issue the FBU has been pressing for, recognising the vital role firefighters play in protecting communities during floods and the need to move away from the current postcode lottery in provision and resources. We welcome the commitment to make this a statutory responsibility and will continue to press for it to be delivered, properly resourced and backed by the equipment and training firefighters need.

However, announcements are only the beginning. We need the detail behind these commitments, clarity on how they will be delivered and confidence that the improvements will reach firefighters on the ground.

Firefighter numbers and resources remain central

Throughout this work, the FBU has been clear that equipment, aircraft and technology cannot replace trained firefighters.

We have lost around 12,000 firefighters since 2010. That decline has weakened the capacity of our services, and we need to begin reversing it if we are serious about building resilience against wildfires and the other emergencies our members face.

I raised the need to recruit thousands of additional firefighters directly at the summit. The NFCC chair also made the case, and other organisations supported the need for a clear direction towards increasing firefighter numbers.

There was no specific funding commitment to additional firefighters or safe crewing levels at today's summit. These questions are being linked to the forthcoming Spending Review and wider discussions about how fire and rescue services should be resourced over the next 20 years.

The Prime Minister gave a clear steer on the need to address these issues, and the Secretary of State committed to working with others across government ahead of the Spending Review.

We will continue to press for that work to lead to meaningful investment. Improving wildfire resilience cannot be separated from the number of firefighters available, the crewing of appliances

and the resources services have to respond to emergencies. Cuts to services must also be addressed, and these concerns were raised at the summit.

Developments in Wales

There has also been progress in Wales this week. Gareth Tovey, Gemma Thomas and I gave evidence to the Senedd committee on the experiences of our members during this summer's wildfires, setting out the challenges facing firefighters and the need for investment, appropriate PPE, improved preparedness and a clear strategy.

Gareth also attended the Welsh Government's wildfire summit in Merthyr Tydfil. The First Minister has since set out priority areas for further work, including strengthening national coordination, improving risk monitoring, reviewing land management, bringing in international expertise for training, and examining firefighter health monitoring and decontamination.

The Welsh Government has also committed to continued work with the UK Government and other devolved administrations on aerial firefighting provision.

These developments are welcome, and Gareth and the Wales officials deserve credit for keeping the issue firmly on the agenda. However, the Welsh statement does not commit to additional funding for fire and rescue services. We will continue to make the case that plans and strategies must be backed by the resources needed to deliver them.

Turning commitments into action

Today's summit is a step forward. It reflects the work the FBU has done to bring the issue to government, put our members' experiences at the centre of the discussion and secure commitments on a number of our demands.

But our work does not stop with a summit or a government announcement. We must ensure that the commitments made lead to better equipment, effective training, improved preparation and the resources firefighters need to do their jobs safely and effectively.

Above all, we will continue to make the case for thousands of additional firefighters and properly resourced fire and rescue services. Aircraft and technology have a role to play, but they cannot replace firefighters on the ground.

We will provide further detail as the outcomes of the summit and the work that follows become clearer. We will keep pressing government to deliver on the commitments made, continue to raise the concerns of our members and keep you updated as this work progresses.

Thank you again to everyone who has contributed their experience and evidence. It has helped get us to this point, and it will remain central to the work ahead.

In unity,



Steve Wright
General Secretary