

What can the UK learn from New Zealand wildfire risk management systems?

New Zealand has a long tradition of living and working with fire. Land clearance over the last 2,500 years has taken place largely using fire and it remains widely used to improve grazing, remove cropping residues and other wastes. New Zealand's climate and land surface area are similar to the UK's but there is much more land under native vegetation. Wildfires have been an endemic problem in this predominantly rural country. It's no coincidence then that New Zealand has evolved legislation, a dedicated government department, research programmes and a well developed communication resource to help land managers plan for and respond to wildfires when they occur (figure 1).



Figure 1: Fire danger warning public sign, South Canterbury, New Zealand [Moffat and Pearce, 2013]

A new 42-page report *Harmonising approaches to evaluation of forest fire risk*, concludes that the UK can learn from New Zealand's approach. Available data on forest fires show a similarity in the scale of the challenge between NZ and UK. There is a growing need to manage forest and wildfire risk in the UK due to changes in forestry policy and practice and likely changes in climate. The report's authors, Andy Moffat (Forest Research, UK) and Grant Pearce (Scion, NZ), conclude that:

'NZ have evolved a range of tools to manage fire risk and a number of these are considered suitable for the UK. However, ... it is more important to engender a culture and policy environment supportive of fire risk management. Without it, the development of similar tools may fail to make much difference.' [p. 2]

The report is the result of a four week study tour in November and December 2012 to explore the need and potential for implementing New Zealand wildfire danger and prediction systems in the United Kingdom. The visit was kindly hosted by Scion, the New Zealand Forest Research Institute with more than 20 years experience of developing fire danger warning systems. It was funded by the Forestry Commission and the European Union.

[Download the report](#) (PDF, 2,064KB)

Moffat, A.J. and Pearce, H.G. (2013). *Harmonising approaches to evaluation of forest fire risk*. NZ TRANZFOR Visit: Final Report. Forest Research, Farnham.

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