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**Developing a Decade of Data: Results of the National Fire Information Database Sustainability Workshop**

**Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs**

**Canadian Council of Fire Marshalls and Fire Commissioners**

**For Submission to Public Safety Canada and DRDC**

**National Fire Information Database Project**

**Task 3.61 and 3.62**

**March 21, 2018**

**Executive Summary**

The purpose of this report is to outline sustainability considerations for the future of the National Fire Information Database. The report is the result of a sustainability workshop that was required under the National Fire Information Database contract. The sustainability workshop took place at a joint meeting of the Canadian Council of Fire Marshalls, Fire Commissioners as well as the National Advisory Council and Board of the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs in September 2018.

The sustainability workshop discussion was prefaced by a paper written for the NFID project by Statistics Canada which provided a technical assessment of the database and made six key recommendations for next steps. These were used to guide the discussion. The session began with an overview and proposed methodology to allow each participant to provide confidential voting on sustainability issues. Through a proposal from the floor and agreement of the chairs, this was moved to an open discussion rather than a vote. Results were recorded on flip chart paper, included in this report, synthesized and analyzed.

The six issues discussed included Statistics Canada recommendations to explore:

1. Improving participation/coverage rates
2. Increasing frequency of data collection
3. Ensuring the highest level of data quality
4. Improving data collection methodology
5. Improving capacity for future record linkage
6. Communications and networking

The discussion began with considerations of all these elements, but evolved into a discussion of what sustainability meant to the group and more importantly, the needs and interests from a practical perspective related to the national fire information database. It was agreed that the most important was not necessarily for more data, but for more intelligence from the data. In an ideal world, data would be current, up to date and real time, but in the meantime, even generating new intelligence from existing data was felt to be valuable.

It was also felt that if we were to continue data collection, it might be helpful to move towards common data definitions and collection forms, irrespective of whether there was a central repository. The legal obligations and considerations of the Fire Marshalls and Commissioners were acknowledged. Finally, the importance of making the data available for use was discussed. This has been done in part by Statistics Canada as part of the paid elements of the NFID contract. The CAFC itself, who contractually holds the database, will likely offer and assist in making this database further available over time with the appropriate parameters.

Finally, it was agreed by the workshop participants, who also constitute the leadership of the CAFC and the CCFMFC that the two organizations should have a joint committee to continue the potential of the existing NFID, to analyze the data and develop parameters for making the database publicly available. The CAFC and CCFMFC wish to thank all involved, particularly the funders and leaders who envisioned this project over a decade ago.

***Developing a Decade of Data: Results of the National Fire Information Database Sustainability Workshop***

**Introduction**

***Purpose:*** The purpose of this report is to satisfy task 3.6 of the National Fire Information Database project contracted between the CAFC and PS. The task calls on the contractor

*To develop a NFID focussed strategic financial sustainability work-shop at Fire Rescue Canada. Workshop attendees must receive preliminary options for consideration so the session is focussed on the specific commitments that stakeholders are prepared to make comments to ensure the long-term sustainability of the NFID. The workshop must follow the workshop tasks defined in the Workshop Statement of Work (Annex 2)*

**Background:** The purpose of the National Fire information database was to develop an evidence base for effective operational decision making by establihing a single central database about Canada’s National Fire Experience and linking that database to other indicators, research objectives, and the potential for data improvement and other research.A contract between Public Safety Canada and the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs facilitated this. The Canadian Fire Marshalls and Fire Commissioners are key partners and provided the data. Statistics Canada was paid to aggregate and produce the database as well as make a portion of the database publicly available, and various project managers and consultants were engaged throughout the project. In addition, 10 research projects were commissioned.

**Methodology:** The methodology for this workshop is characterized by the following:

1. It followed the specifications for the workshop that was outlined in the contract between Public Safety and the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefsas described inAnnex 2 of the contract. The subheadings in this section are intended to respond to some of those requirements.
2. The backdrop for the questions posed during this workshop was a next steps report prepared by Statistics Canada reflecting on the National Fire Information Database and areas for future discussion and/or improvement. The Statistics Canada report discussed the following:

***Workshop announcement:*** The workshop was announced in May 2017 and included in the program for Fire Rescue Canada 2017 which was released that month for the September conference. The workshop took place on September 15 at the Vancouver Westin Harbourfront in Vancouver British Columbia.

***Participants:*** Participants in the workshop included the CAFC’s Board of Directors, the CAFC National Advisory Council and the members of the Canadian Council of Fire Commissioners and Fire Marshalls, consultant Len Garis of H+H consulting and CAFC Staff who took over the project management function when Rhapsody Strategies CEO who was the project manager had to resign for personal reasons. The participants were the following:

**CCMFMC Members (Need to check)**

Dave Rossiter, Provincial Fire Marshal, Environment Labour and Justice, PE, President

Gordon Anderson, Provincial Fire Commissioner, BC 2nd Vice President

Duane McKay, Fire Commissioner and Executive Director, SK

Ross Nichols, Acting Fire Marshal, Toronto

M. Louis Morneau, sous-ministre associé, Quebec

Fred Jeffers, Fire Marshal, Halifax

Douglas Browne, Fire Marshal, NB

Mr. Dave Schafer, Fire Commissioner, Manitoba

Chucker Dewar, Fire Marshal, NWT

Gordon Anderson, Fire Commissioner, BC

David Rossiter, Fire Marshal, Charlottetown, PE, C1A 6B8

James Patterson, Acting Fire Marshal, Dept. of Community Services,

Mr. Spence Sample, Executive Director & Fire Commissioner, Edmonton AB

Mr. Derek Simmons, Fire Commissioner & Emergency Services NL

Robert Prima, Fire Marshal, Government of Nunavut

LCol / lco A. L. (Lee) Goodman, CD, PEng Canadian Forces Fire Marshal / ADM(IE) DND and CF

**CAFC Board Members**

Chief Ken Block, Chair of Board

Chief Dan McCoy, Chair of NAC

Chief Ken McMullen, Board Member at Large

Chief Daniel Perron, Board Member at Large

Chief Ken Stuebing, Member at Large

Chief Pierre Voisine, Treasurer

Chief Vince McKenzie, Member at Large

Chief John McKearney, Board Member

**CAFC NAC Members**

Chief Peter Krich, Alberta

Chief Phil Lemire, British Columbia

Chief Cam Ambrey, Manitoba

Chief Duane Antle, Newfoundland

Chief Jim Sawkins, Northwest Territories

Chief Rod Neilson, Nova Scotia

Chief Rick Arnel, Ontario

Chief Kevin Eskra, Saskatchewan

Commissioner Richard Kent, Aboriginal Firefighters Association of Canada

Mr. Blaine Wiggins, Aboriginal Firefighters Association of Canada

Chief Mike McKenna, Canadian Fallen Firefighters Association

Mr. Graham Pawlett, Canadian Volunteer Fire Service Association

Chief Harold Poithier, Council of Canadian Fire Marshalls and Fire Commissioners

A/Deputy Fire Marshal Martin Gravel, DND

**Regrets:**

Chief Jim Regimbald, Yukon

Chief John Lane, Canadian Metro Chiefs

Chief Richard Amnotte, Quebec

Chief Rod McDonald, Prince Edward Island

**Guest/Consultant:**

Chief Len Garis, H+H Consulting/Surry Fire Department

**Staff:**

Ms. Vicky Constantineau, Director of Operations & Events

Dr. Tina Saryeddine, Executive Director, CAFC

Ms. Anabel Therrien, Assistant/Graduate Student, CAFC

***Agenda for the workshop:***

The agenda and meeting package for the workshop is appended.

***Conceptual framework:***

The conceptual framework for the sustainability workshop resolved around two central principles (1) the meaning of sustainability and (2) the dimensions of sustainability that were assessed by the technical experts at Statistics Canada and discussed in a report that itself formed a deliverable in the NFID contract (Task 2.4). The dimensions they identified, which were presented as their recommendations included the following:

1. Improving participation/coverage rates
2. Increasing frequency of data collection
3. Ensuring highest level of data quality
4. Improving data collection methodology
5. Improving capacity for future record linkage
6. Communications and networking

**Methodology**

To begin the Session Chief Len Garis and Dr. Saryeddine provided the group with a presentation and overview of the NFID and the Statistics Canada report. The original methodology was set up so that all of the Fire Marshalls and Fire Commissioners, each of the Presidents or Delegates of the Presidents of the Provincial Fire Chief Associations and National Affiliate organizations, and the members of the CAFC Board of Directors who are elected Fire Chiefs were provided with tags that would allow them to vote anonymously on the extent to which they agreed with each of the six sustainability items identified by Statistics Canada. It was suggested by one of the Fire Marshalls that this may be unnecessary and that an open discussion was a better approach. This was accepted and we moved to that format. Appendix A shows the slide deck that projected to guide the discussion on each of the sustainability areas. However, since the group preferred the open discussion format, the results were summarized in terms of themes and we come back to the 6 items in the discussion section. The Executive Director of the CAFC, Dr. Saryeddine recorded the discussion openly on flip chart paper which was posted and photographed (available) and Ms. Anabel Therrien a CAFC staff person and graduate student also took notes.

**Results**

**Is the NFID important to Fire Marshalls, Fire Commissioners, and Fire Chiefs?**

* It allows us to understand what our industry values
* We need to bring evidence to the anecdote
* It allows us to tell the story using the narrative
* NFID is important to show what we do

**What other areas do we need to look at not in database: linkage?**

* Linkage? What is the importance of cross linkages?
* Is cross linking the data our job?
* Who has the linkage of data capacity?

**What is the frequency of data collection and availability?**

* Real time linkage – is there a sweet spot?
* At what cost?
* When do you want to tell your story?
* How do we maintain momentum?

**Is the database what we need it to be?**

* Is it about a standard form or is it more than a standardized form?
* Need a standardized system?
* Should we be looking at NFRS and NFORS?
* Revision of compare databases?
* How do we populate a committee?
* Fire service included in database
* What is collected?
* How do we reexamine elements?
* NA vs. Canadian data vs. province data? Compliance?

**Sustainability**

* Is it an opportunity to establish a national office?
* Value of sustainability database for research but not at all or any costs?
* Avoid legal issues?
* Starting point, need to add or grow on an annual basis
* Improve the quality
* Do we even want to continue the data collection?

**What is the value**

* Not confuse government interest with national need for data
* Reporting – do we need to increase frequency of reporting, data collection, analysis?
* Need to leverage the data and release at least one new piece of data nationally

**Discussion**

The discussion revealed the many definitions of sustainability. Was it about the sustainability of data collection and synthesis? Was it about the sustainability of research? Was it about the sustainability of available data? Was it about the sustainability of common data collection standards? Was it the sustainability of the objectives of evidence informed policy and practice? What is about the sustainability of the resources?

The idea that Fire Marshalls and Fire Commissioner offices would through their own existing resources continue to collect the large number of elements proposed for the NFID did not seem feasible. Some wondered why we would have a format that is different from the form used in the US which provinces use. To have common data collection on a few elements, was considered more feasible. If data collection standards for even a few elements were shared, then this would be an advance in the field. If a larger data collection effort were needed,

Greater emphasis however, was placed on keeping the analysis going. It was felt that it was fine to have data collection and build a database, but the real issue for the fire service was using the data. It was acknowledged that even before the close of the project in 2018, the last year of data in the database was 2014 data.

In a sense, the most cost-effective route for the maintenance of the research and analysis perspective was to make the database publicly available, as was the intent in the project plan, so that researchers could access it. The research projects would then need to come back to the CCFMFC and CAFC so that they could be used appropriately, i.e. not research for research sake, but research for the sake of evidence informed policy, practice and planning.

The CAFC and the CCFMFC might choose to generate key research. In this way, the database becomes an exchange currency – data in exchange for analysis – researchers win and the partners win as well. In this regard, the issue of researchers accepting payment for analysis using the database was also raised with the Executive Director of the Association. This needs to be considered in the sustainability model. If consultants are charging other members of the sector to do analysis with the data, should they not have an accountability back to the sustainability of the database.

Finally, one of the most important aspects of the sustainability of the database from our perspective it to let “a thousand flowers bloom”. As such the CAFC itself will keep working on making the database available, doing analyses and ensuring oversight and communications, and keeping the website up to date. We will invite our partners at the CCFMFC to consider their interest and others as well (see Appendix B for proposed CAFC commitment).

**Recommendations/If Accepted, Record of Decisions Made**

1. That CAFC and CCFMFC feel the NFID database is important
2. That at least one research project/annual report should be produced from the database
3. The availability of the database needs to be communicated
4. That various sustainability strategies should be further discussed and considered
5. That the CAFC and CCFMFC should not let the potential of the database slide
6. That the form for collecting the data should be simplified
7. The the timing, frequency and elements in the next data collection should be considered
8. That the CAFC and CCFMFC establish a joint committee to look at the data and future research needs.

**Next Steps**

As next steps the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs will ensure that

1. Research projects are made available and the remainder of the contract is completed
2. The data can be made accessible in the public domain
3. A joint CAFC and CCFMFC is struck to lead the next steps.
4. A conversation will ensue with the CCFMFC

The CAFC has proposed a draft financial sustainability plan in Appendix B. Partners and funders will be invited to help offset these costs which will expedite the speed at which they can be delivered.

**Conclusions**

The CAFC and the CCFMFC are extremely grateful for the opportunity to lead this project. Extraordinary thanks to the Fire Marshalls and Fire Commissioners for providing the data. We appreciate the consultants, contractors, and researchers who received payment to produce exceptional work. We also appreciate those committee members whose work was purely voluntary. Special thanks to Chief Len Garis who was both a consultant on this project and also a visionary in conceptualizing the importance of a National Fire Information Database for Canada; and especially our funders at Public Safety and Defence Research Development Canada whose vision, leadership, advice, guidance and trust in us has been an immense gift. We are looking forward to leveraging and honouring this important investment.

Appendix A – See attached discussion guide with agenda and presentation given at the Sustainability Session.

Appendix B – Financial Sustainability of NFID

Proposed Commitment from the CAFC (task 3.6.2)

The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC), as the owner of the project deliverables, is committed to honouring and leveraging the resources invested in this project. As such, through the development of the CAFC Operating Plan for 2018, the Association is prepared to take this on as a project within its current budget. Additional resources will determine the speed, depth and breadth of the work that is undertaken. However, the goals are as follows:

1. Improve the usability of the database
2. Make the database publicly available and searchable
3. Market the availability of the database to researchers and determine the exchange relationship as well as the data protection requirements
4. Help to disseminate and communicate the existing research projects
5. Host a committee to review requests for the data and oversee next steps
6. Consider partnerships and alternate sources of funding
7. Prepare at least 1 new data report in 2018 (outside of the project)
8. Prepare a funding submission to DRDC S&T competition in 2018

Assuming there are no external resources, the CAFC proposes to begin with staffing, supporting and preparing materials for meetings to occur two months for the joint CAFC – CCFMFC committee that will oversee the items above. The CAFC will also assign the current Communications and Administrative Coordinator to spend half to one day a week on this project. She will either work with the committee or with the data.

Resources contributed in cash/in kind from CAFC:

* Coordination and Administration staffing: $10,000
* Legal resources: $3,000
* Software: $1200
* Marketing and communications: $5000 per year
* Web-maintenance (need to find out where we pay for this) $1000
* Executive Director, Board, NAC and Committee time: $40,000

Total proposed in kind commitment from CAFC: $60,000