

NZ FFA PULSE SURVEY

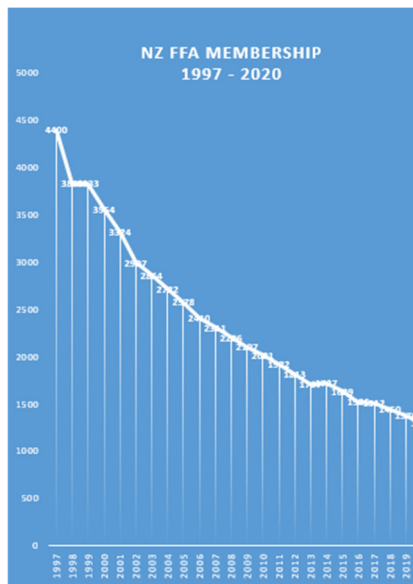
Report Presented to: FFA Council, Wellington

17 November 2020

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1) The survey of all 25 NZ FFA Branches reveals a pulse considerably weaker than previously anticipated.
- 2) Eleven Branches have formally discussed closing. While these branches include those with smaller memberships it also includes Branches that have average and high membership.
- 3) Branch closures will progressively occur over the following three years.
- 4) While many Branches have not formally discussed closure, they acknowledge that closure will occur by default and that if there is a quorum, they will continue.
- 5) Branches with larger memberships that intend to close are keen to see an enticing national Branch be established and that such Branch closures can be proactively managed to hopefully avoid such closures being a catalyst for members to not renew their subscriptions.
- 6) Coming to terms with the prospect of closing Branches is weighing heavily on many Committee organisers who have in many instances been members of the FFA from earlier times when membership and participation in events was high. Branches are in part reluctant to close due to the negative consequences such closures may instigate on the FFA.
- 7) Proposed Branch closure is due in part to low memberships but also to much larger Branches that have poor to non-engagement by members.
- 8) Many FFA Branches have categorisation of membership that has migrated from a focus from “forest growing” to “interest only, Associates, & retired”, and “service providers”.
- 9) Branches have very little information regarding the detail of their membership other than at any time they can view the total membership that includes Associates and there is an associated transfer of subscriptions into the bank account. Annual subscriptions are received over many months and because there is no formal process to resign it is many months to learn who has not renewed their subscription – assuming anyone in the Branch has the interest or time to key out such information.
- 10) Other than the desire for more members, some Branches that have been in existence for up to 63 years are fiercely protective of the status quo and don't want change.



BACKGROUND

The Pulse Survey is born out of my serious concern for the ever-declining membership of the NZ FFA. During the past 23 years membership has declined by over 3,000 members representing a loss of 70%.

The voluntary status of the FFA organisation means that applying rigour to addressing such serious “shareholder” decline does not receive the same attention that it would receive in a business entity.

To lose 70% of an organisations membership over just 23 years is considerable. However, such membership decline is insidious and for 23 years has been met with the words “all we need is an initiative to grow the membership”.

For voluntary based organisations that are approaching demise addressing the future is a difficult conversation. The first step is to gather information on the pulse or status of the organisation, and that is the objective of this survey.

METHODOLOGY

The Pulse Survey requested information from the FFAs 25 Branches relating to a 12-month period prior to the March 2020 Covid-19 lock-down. Questions included; how many field days were held, how many members attended each field day, how many members attended the last AGM, does the Branch produce a newsletter, and if so how many editions were produced, has the Branch Committee ever discussed the future possibility of closing the Branch, and if so how many years before such action may have to be implemented?

The request for survey information from the Branches was made on the basis that results would be depersonalised. Such an approach was considered necessary to ensure information was provided that truthfully reflected the pulse of each Branch and without any judgement of personalised results by the FFA.

The information was obtained from those Branches that returned their survey forms. Many Branches entered into email dialogue to elaborate on the various aspects of their Branch’s pulse. Most Branches required contact by phone to obtain the responses and this provided a personal exchange of matters influencing the pulse of such Branches.

Data regarding membership per Branch including Associates was derived from the FFAs spreadsheet data base for October 2020.

All the pulse data collected is held electronically by Jeff Tombleson. The key data is contained in a spreadsheet and held in confidence. This data has been analysed and the results presented below.

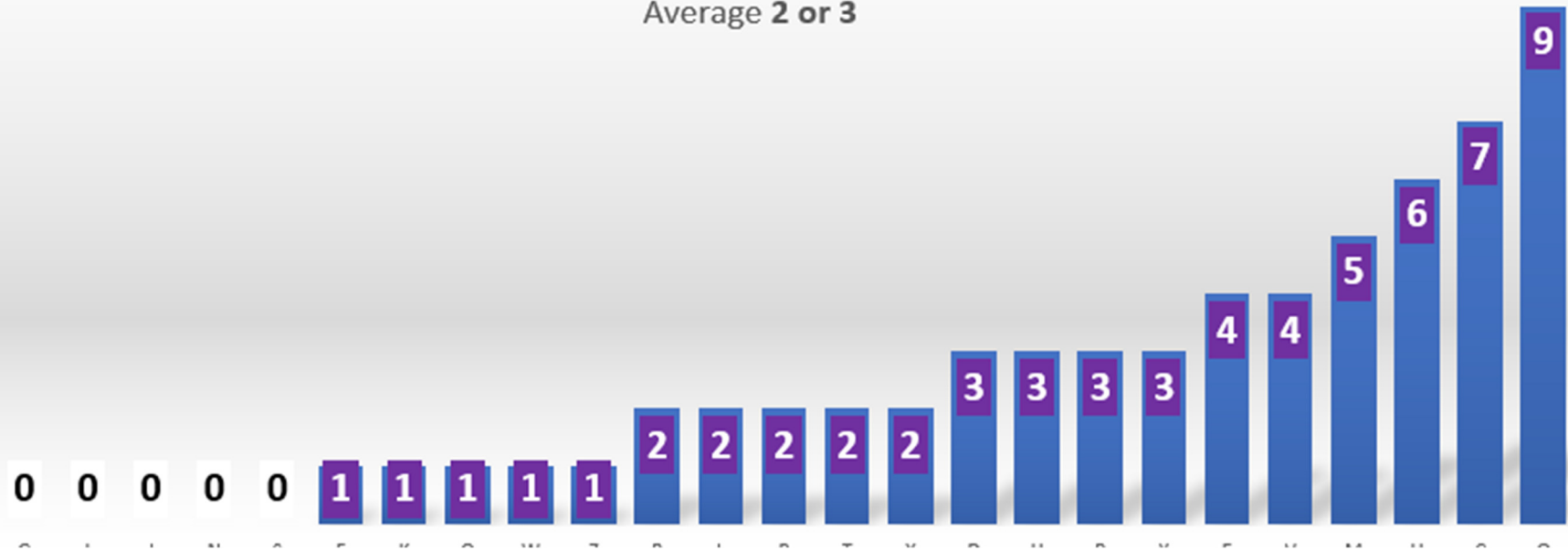
Preparation of the survey form and preliminary results have been discussed with the FFA Executive by Graham West and feedback given. The final analysis of results and reporting have also been reviewed by Graham. This is gratefully acknowledged.

Results from the FFA Pulse Survey are presented below. Twenty-five branches are represented in each graph. Each of the twenty-five Branches has been sorted in ascending order for ease of visual interpretation ie. the Branch order will most likely be unique in each graph presented.



Number of Field Days Held per Branch

Average 2 or 3

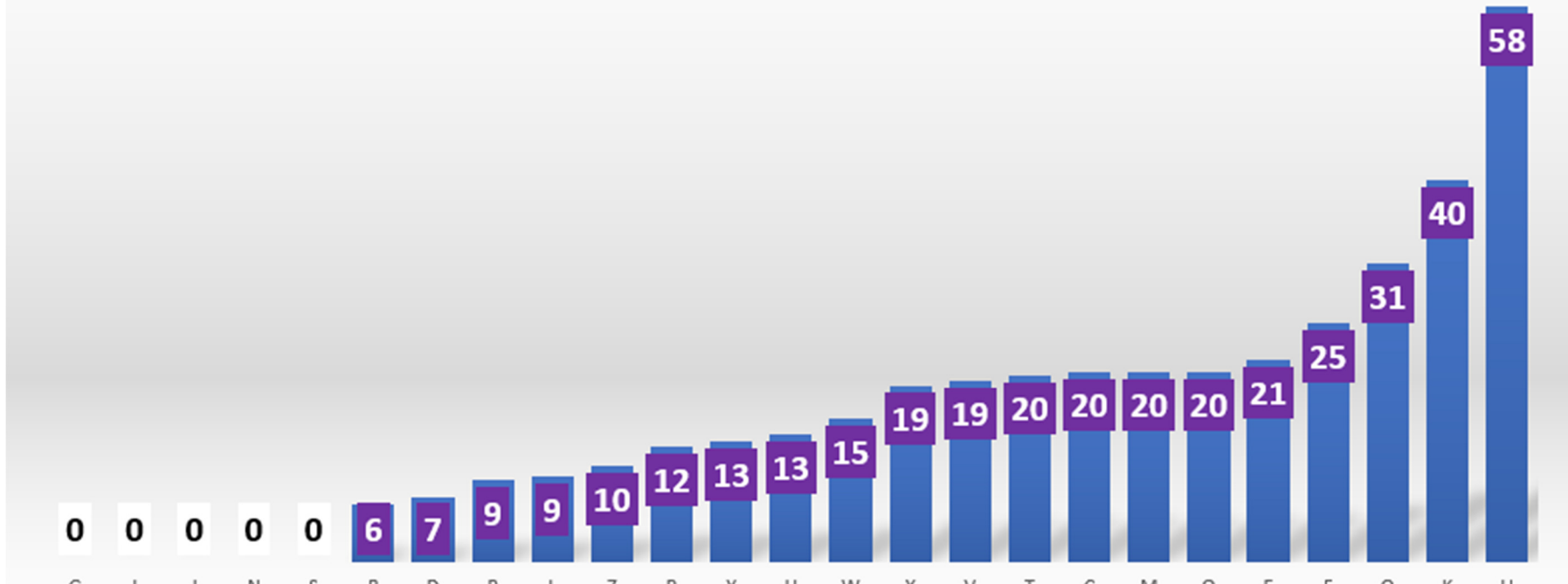


It is pleasing to see that during the previous 12-month period, 20 of the 25 FFA Branches had one or more field days. While the highest number of field days was nine, the average was two to three. On the other hand, five Branches did not hold any field days or related activities and some of these Branches have not held any such activities for two or three years.

The number of field days or related activities organised is obviously a key pulse indicator of Branch activity, engagement, and viability. To have ten Branches either not organising field days and related events or organising just one such an event for the year is very concerning.

Average Number of Field Day Attendees per Branch

Average: 15

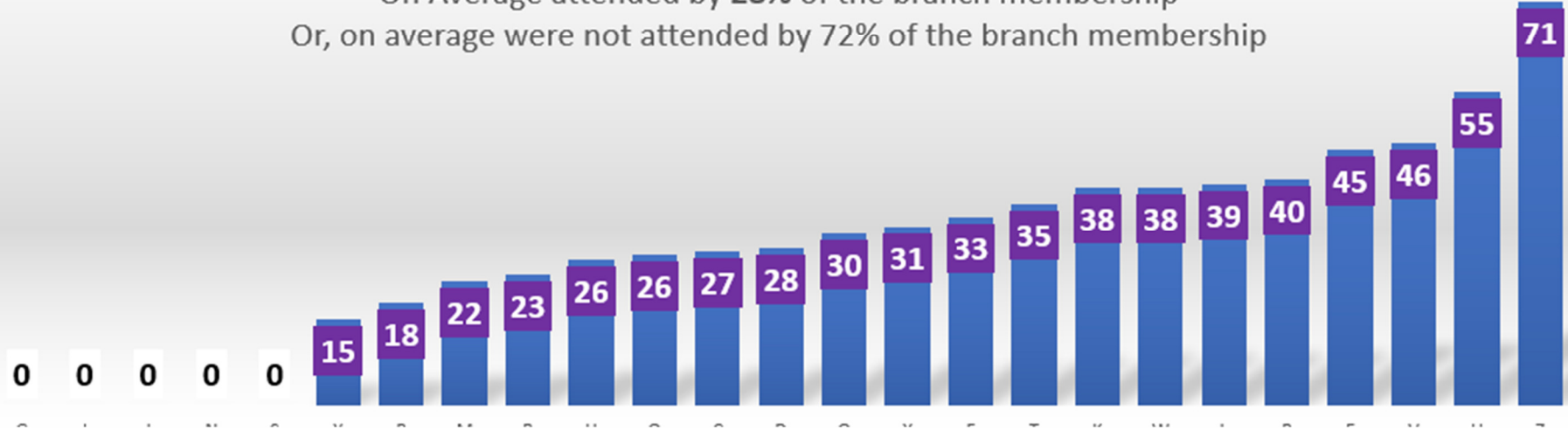


For the 20 Branches that held field days and related activities the average number of attendees per Branch was 15 and ranged between 6 and 58.

Attendance at field days and related events is also a key pulse indicator of Branch activity, engagement, and viability.

Percentage of Members per Branch that Attend Field Days

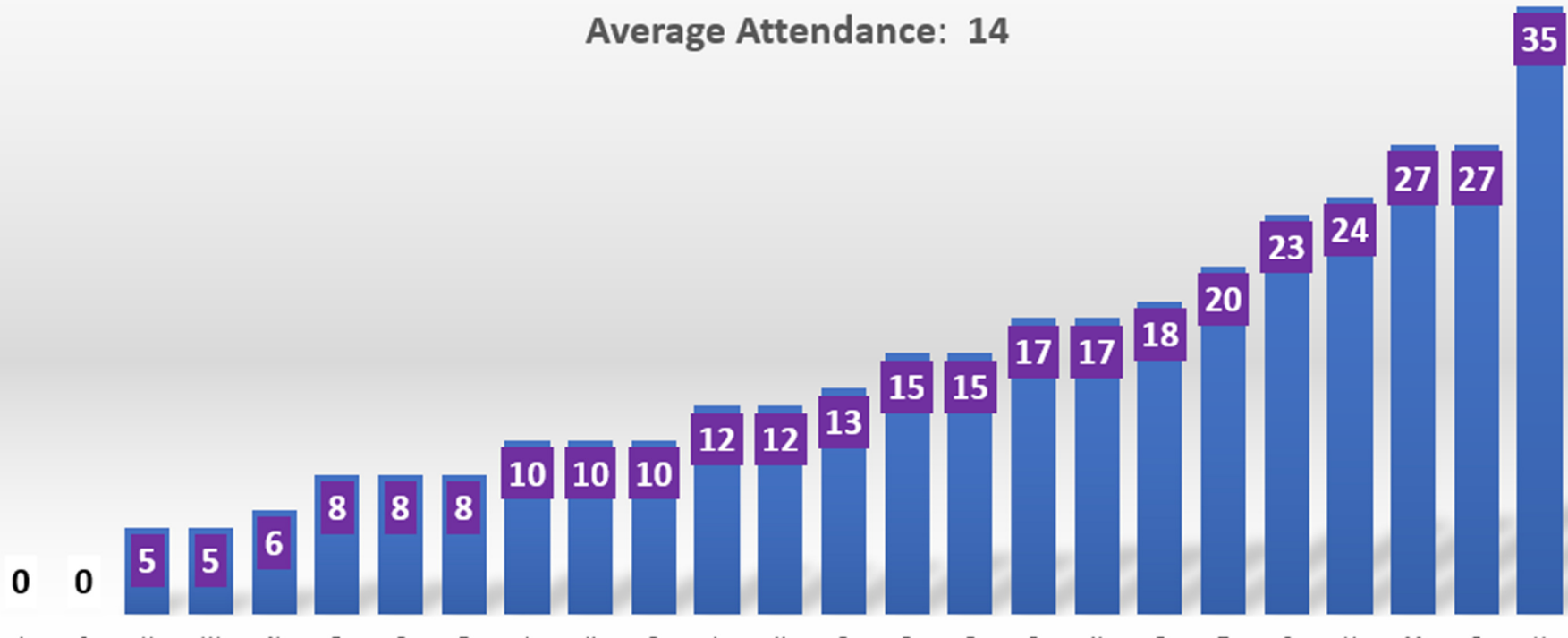
On Average attended by 28% of the branch membership
Or, on average were not attended by 72% of the branch membership



Again, for the 20 Branches that held field days and related activities attendees expressed as a percentage of Branch membership averaged 28% and ranged from 15 to 71% of the Branches membership in attendance. On the other hand, “a glass half empty” summation would conclude that on average 72% of Branch members do not engage in Branch activities.

Number of Members per Branch who Attended the Last AGM

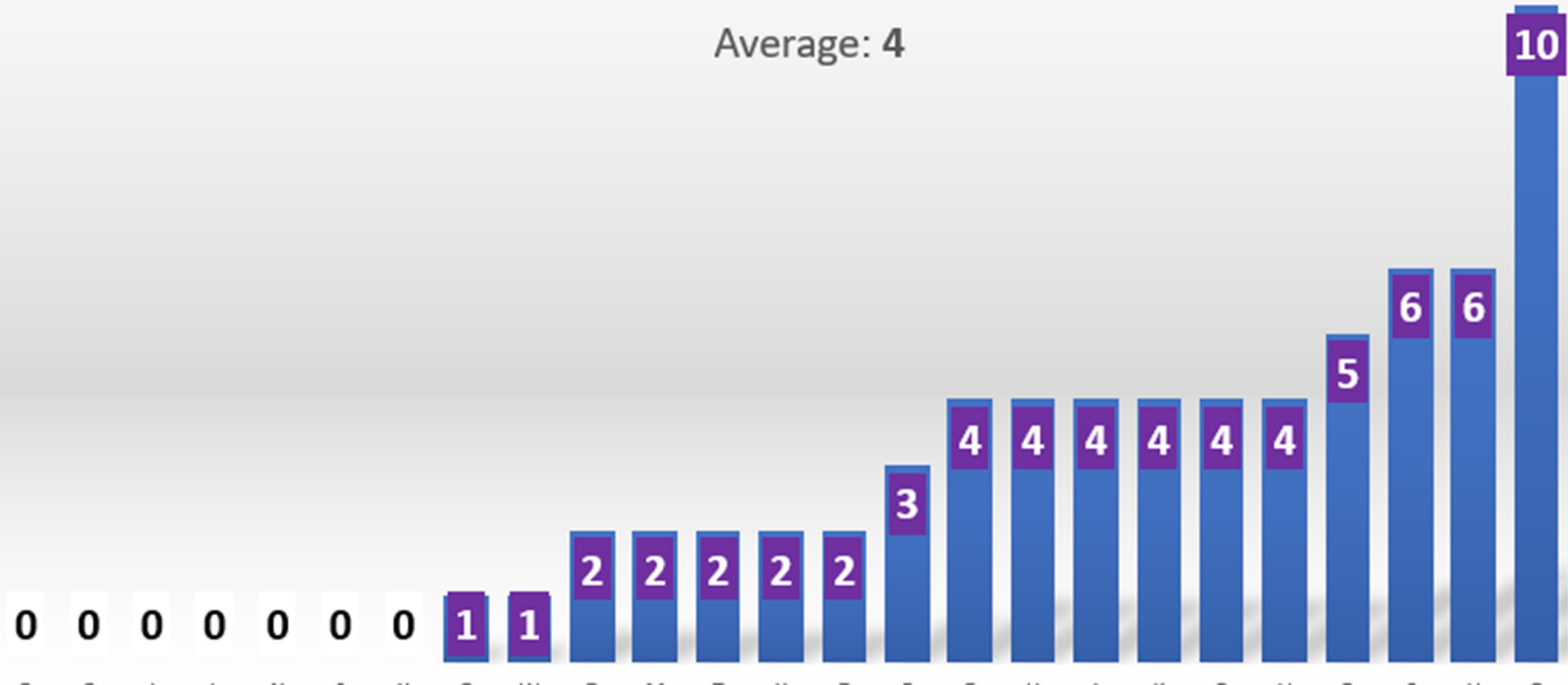
Average Attendance: 14



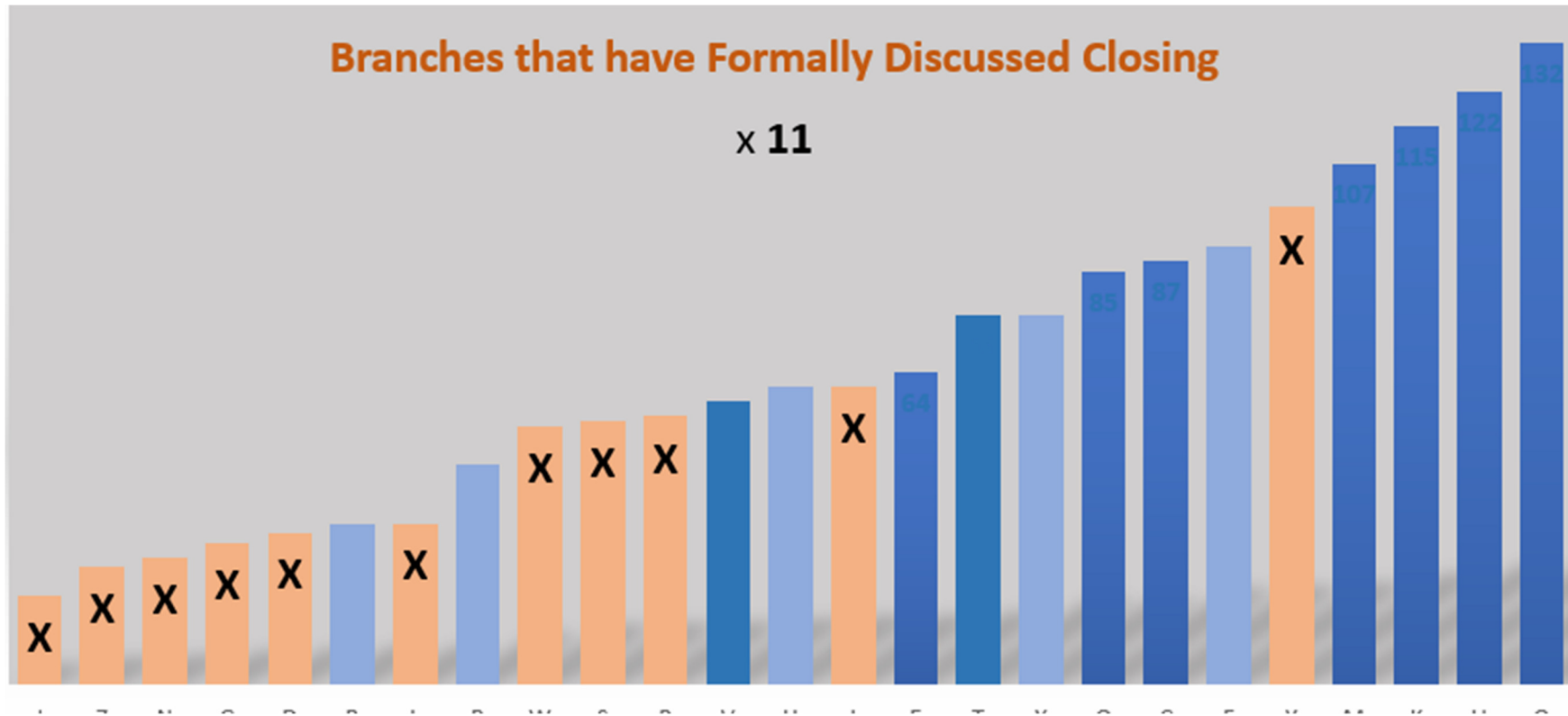
Again, it is pleasing to see that 23 of the 25 FFA Branches held an AGM and no doubt that on all occasions attendance was sufficient to establish a quorum. Branches with higher AGM attendances commented that such annual meetings were held in conjunction with an enticing field day or similar event.

Newsletter Editions Produced per Branch

Average: 4



18 of the 25 Branches produced a newsletter for distribution to members and Associate members. The average number of editions produced over the 12-month period was four and ranged between one and ten. Many Branches commented that such newsletters were commonly group email communications advising details of field days and related activities.



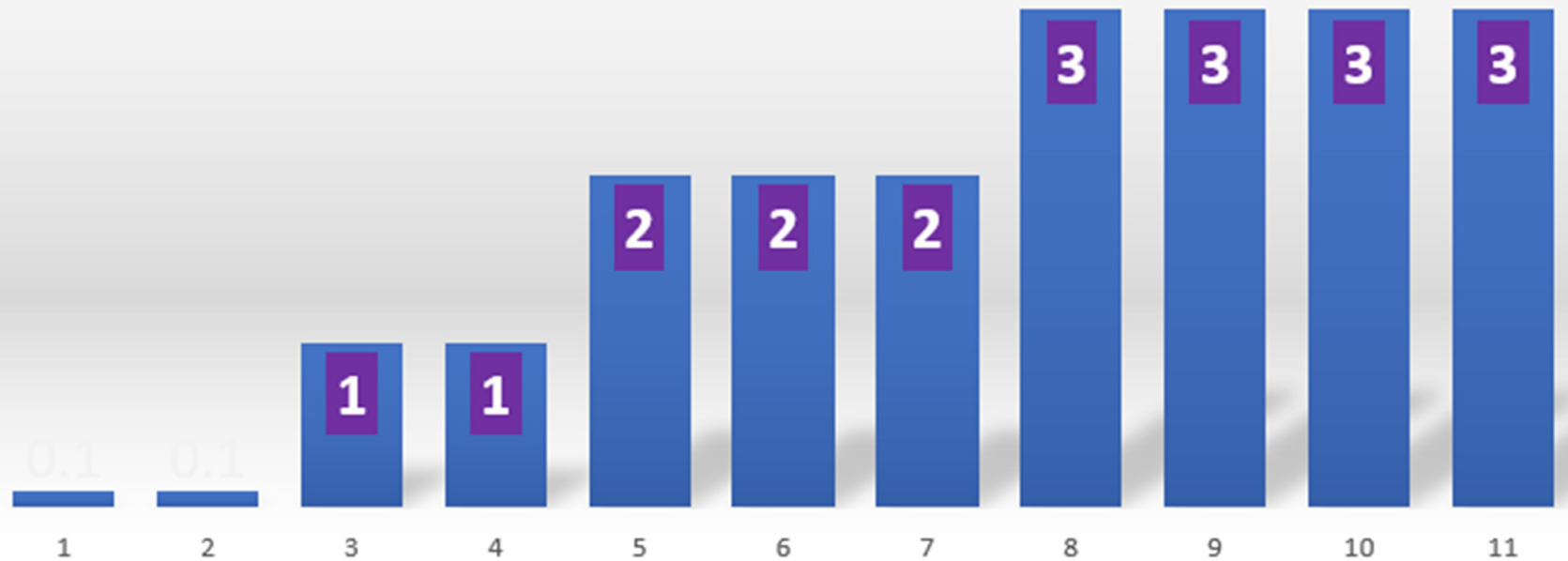
This was the most negatively surprising result for me. Eleven of the 25 Branches responded that closing the Branch has been formally discussed at the Committee level. Some Branches have had such ongoing discussion for several years.

Of further interest is that while the closure of Branches with dwindling membership is expected, four Branches with average membership and higher have also responded they have formally discussed closing. These larger Branches have stated that likely closure is based on a lack of engagement by members in well organised and topical events of interest and comments regarding difficulty in recruiting committee members.

Of notable concern is that while some branches both small and large responded they had not formally discussed closing at the committee level there was general acknowledgement that closure was imminent due either to dwindling membership or non-engagement by the Branch members.

11 Branches Indicative Life Expectancy to Closing

(Years)



For the 11 Branches that responded they are likely to close, two of them are currently barely functional. Five Branches responded that they are likely to close within the following one or two years. Four Branches responded they may close in approximately three years.

For those Branches with larger membership that anticipate closure there was recognition that closure of such Branches would inevitably result in an acceleration of members not renewing their membership of FFA.

NZ FFA Membership Including Associates across 25 Branches

1,633

October 2020



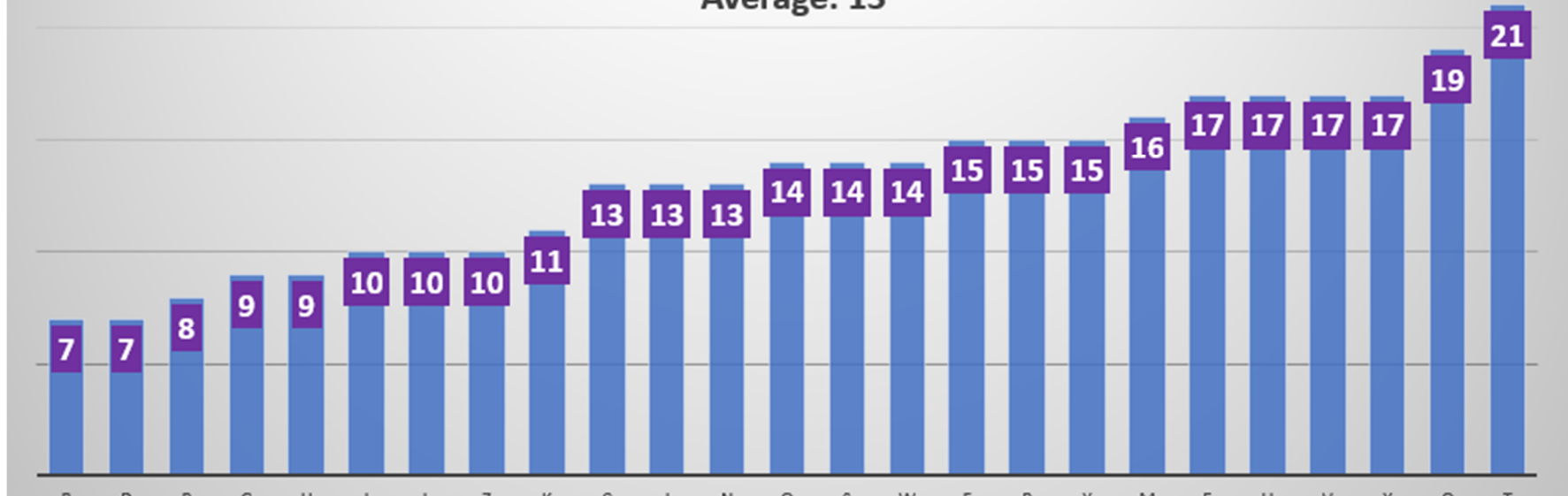
Based on a detailed examination of the membership data base, as of October 2020 membership including Associate members is shown for each of the 25 FFA Branches above. Branch membership ranges from 18 to 132 members (including Associates). The total membership amounts to 1,633.



Furthermore, as of October 2020 membership excluding Associate members is shown for each of the 25 FFA Branches above. Branch membership ranges from 5 to 118 members (excluding Associates). The average Branch membership is 52. The total FFA membership amounts to 1,302 that is a reduction of 331 Associate members.

Number of Associate Members per Branch

Total: 331
Average: 13

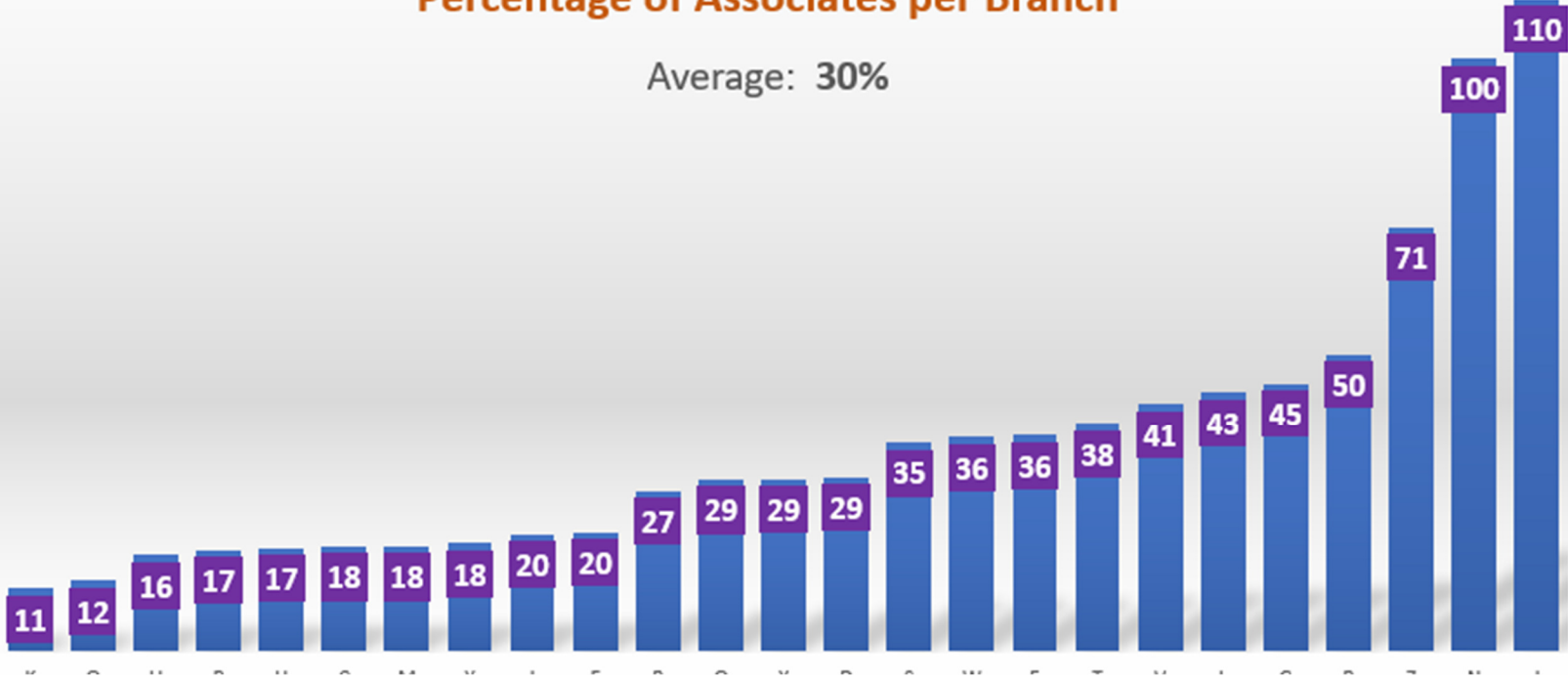


Presented above is the number of Associate members for each of the 25 FFA Branches. The average number of Associate members per Branch is 13, and ranges from 7 to 21 per Branch.

This may be the first occasion that Associate members have been precisely quantified for each of the 25 Branches of FFA. As such it may be a surprise for many Branches to discover a significant proportion of their membership are comprised of Associates who live in a distant location from the Branch, pay a small to modest fee to obtain newsletter communications.

Percentage of Associates per Branch

Average: 30%



Furthermore, presented above are the Associate members expressed as a percentage of each of the 25 FFA Branches.

The percentage of Associates across Branches ranges from 11 to 260%. While the average is approximately 30%. The very high percentage of Associates commonly relates to the smaller Branches.

For the first time many Branches will be viewing the number of Associates who contribute to their Branch membership. The high percentage of Associate members confounds the membership statistics particularly for the smaller Branches. Given Associate members subscribe primarily for the purpose of receiving newsletter communications only understanding that a very high component of Associate members may provide a better understanding of a contributing reason for any poor member engagement particularly for smaller Branches.

NZ FFA PULSE SURVEY

DISCUSSION

- 1) The results of the Pulse Survey may be held in disbelief by some members. Any post-mortem at the individual Branch level should be avoided. Instead, energies should be placed into recovery of the FFA or in the least a managed wind down that avoids a collapse.
- 2) The biggest threat to the near future of the FFA is to deny that it is dying.
- 3) I believe that based on a strategic review, there will be one question “Do you want change”? Yes or No? If change is not desired (as is the case across many voluntary based organisations) then a well-managed wind down will be required to prevent any premature collapse associated with the closing of Branches. If change is adopted, then we look forward to the required pathway that may come out of a strategic review.
- 4) The high percentage of Associate members per Branch is having an unintentional impact of considerably overstating membership particularly for smaller branches. For some Branches Associate members amount to two to three times the Full members. Approximately 35 full members have multiple Branch Associate membership totalling over 100 memberships and pay as little as \$5.00 per membership. The remaining at a cost per Associate membership. Additionally, approximately 300 Full members pay as little as \$5.00 to be an Associate member of what is commonly a neighbouring Branch. The purpose being to receive newsletters from the neighbouring branch and attend any events of interest.
- 5) Considering the distortion that Associate member numbers has on Branch membership it is recommended that ongoing Branch member statistics be based on Full members and that Associate members be presented but separately under the Associate member category.
- 6) As in part presented to the FFA Council meeting during the 2019 Rotorua based FFA Conference, I have undertaken surveys to categorise and understand the membership interests of three Branches including the BOP Branch. The two additional surveys were undertaken with the associated Branch chairmen. Completing the surveys was a very drawn out and time-consuming process and it is fair to say that none of the three surveys managed to obtain contact and responses from the last remaining few members.
- 7) 83 members of FFA do not have an electronic device and/or email connection. All 83 members cannot communicate electronically. As such for these 83 members, communication is via the post. Many of these members hold senior roles across Branches and higher governance.

- 8) May I be candid because it must be said. Seeking responses from all 25 FFA Branches was a marathon similar in effort to seeking straight forward survey responses from Branch members. Is this a reflection of a national organisation that is based on 21 century communication? Finally, anyone who suggests a national survey of FFA members (or Branches) can be successfully achieved is naïve – it is not possible.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The FFA is somewhat dominated by males who by nature are not always openly communicative regarding the true status of their Branches and commonly disguise the reality of the concerning low level of member engagement and activities associated with so many Branches.
2. The FFA has a proud history of 63 years and punches well above its weight as a voluntary organisation in terms of being the only body representing small scale growers nationally.
3. The voluntary commitment of FFA members to running Branches, serving as Councillors and on the National Executive is outstandingly admirable. Such voluntary commitment is exemplified when participating in forums surrounded by career based; forest company, Ministry, Regional Council, etc staff.
4. FFA obviously shares with other voluntary based organisations nationally and globally that are commonly suffering an unabated dearth of membership. The looming concern for FFA is that the association may be just a few years away from a tipping point of collapse.
5. Avoiding the inevitable by burying our heads in the sand and repeating “all we need are new members” has been ongoing for 23 years and will not occur without a prioritised and urgent initiative to address the inevitable collapse of the FFA.
6. If our primary sector-based Association were a formal business entity the serious decline of shareholders would be the most critical and urgent matter for the Boards attention.
7. Founder Neil Barr emphasised that the Association have a culture of activity not Administration. Neal would be dismayed at the 70% decline in membership and I am sure would direct that we need to pause activity and give priority to determining the future of the Association.

