

## 3. Fire Services Review

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**Reporting officer** Mark Shaw (Acting Manager – Infrastructure Project and Services)

**Date of meeting** 8 July 2015

### *Vision, mission and values*

*This item is in accord with Council's vision, mission and values statement as fire services activities protect our people and help build resilience in our communities.*

### **Background**

Forest and rural fire management in New Zealand is provided by a large and diverse variety of stakeholders, including Territorial Authorities, the Department of Conservation, the New Zealand Defence Force, forest owners and others.

The Fire Services Review is a sector-wide review looking at all aspects of New Zealand's fire services. The aim is to help ensure New Zealand has fire services that are safe, strong and resilient so they can effectively meet the varied needs of our different communities.

On 27 May, the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Honourable Peter Dunne, released a Discussion Document for the Fire Services Review. The Discussion Document presents options for changing the fire services' governance and support arrangements, and funding sources.

The Department of Internal Affairs is seeking feedback from stakeholders on the options presented in the discussion document. The due date for submissions is 10 July.

This item provides an outline of the key issues and options presented in the discussion paper. As this is providing feedback on a discussion document, the Group Manager – Infrastructure and Services and the Chair of the Infrastructure Committee have the delegate authority to submit feedback on behalf of Council. Should a consultation process result from this discussion document, Council will be fully involved in providing a formal submission.

### **Significance and Engagement**

Having considered the Significance and Engagement Policy this proposal or decision is not considered significant and the public will be informed via agenda publication on the website.

### **Discussion and options**

Three main factors are currently increasing pressure on the New Zealand Fire Service:

1. Changed community expectations of the Fire Service to attend accident, medical and Civil Defence emergencies, search and rescue and international assistance,
2. Lack of coordination and national oversight of fire fighting services, inability to standardise services or intervene when **Enlarged Rural Fire District (ERFD)** or Rural Fire Authorities (RFA) fall below expected standard,
3. Investment in services is inconsistent with community needs or expectations.

In addition, current legislation (e.g. employment legislation) does not fully protect modern fire fighters to undertake the activities that they are increasingly required to undertake.

The Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) considers that the organisation of the NZ Fire Service and rural fire services needs to be changed in order to be fit for purpose and deliver effective services in the face of these pressures.

Three suggested options "packages" for providing a more effective fire service are:

1. **Enhanced Status Quo:** representing minimum legislative and organisational change, which would be sufficient to provide some improvement (e.g. legislative protection for non-fire response),
2. **Coordinated Service Delivery:** representing legislative and organisational change to provide coordinated national support and leadership / governance to separate fire fighting service organisations,
3. **National Fire Service:** representing re-organisation into a nationally coordinated fire service (single organisation) for delivery of urban and rural fire and emergency services.

Options 2 and 3 involve significant legislative change, and carry risk of requiring a skilled and experienced workforce to resource the new organisation, and risk of significant cultural change from the status quo.

The amount of funding for change, and funding for ongoing costs, depends on the selected option. Changes are also proposed to the fire service levy, which aim to simplify the calculations and better reflect the risk of fire and the range of activities undertaken by the fire service.

## Considerations

Feedback from the Principal Rural Fire Officer (PRFO) and & Volunteer Rural Fire Fighters (VRFF) for Whangarei indicates the following changes would improve the current situation:

- National Health & Safety System,
- Legislative protection for non-fire callouts and for volunteers employment,
- National incident reporting, skills & training maintenance system,
- Better equipment and resourcing, including for long duration fire events,
- Community driven decisions on Rural Fire District boundaries,
- Consistency / rationalisation of fire services charging model,
- Clarification of roles between RFAs and NZFS.

Some of these improvements are included in the NZFS Vision 2020 review.

At the time this item was prepared, Council staff were unable to determine what position Kaipara District Council or Far North District Council intend to take regarding the options presented.

The options have been presented in the discussion document as “packages”; however the final restructure can borrow from any/all options in order to provide the best perceived solution.

From the perspective of staff:

- Option 2 represents an improvement in organisation of the NZFS and coordination of services under a Crown Entity. However, stakeholder involvement in the management of the Crown Entity may result in a reduction in Council’s control of costs for which Council is responsible for.
- Option 3 represents a possible reduction of Council’s involvement in management or funding of rural fire fighting services. However, this option also represents the greatest change to current rural fire service providers and the communities.

## Conclusion

Option 1 appears to address some pressing issues currently facing the NZ Fire Service. It does not appear to effectively address organisational or service coordination issues.

Option 2 and 3 will both require legislative change. If legislative change is going to be undertaken then it is logical to try to achieve the maximum benefit from it. It appears that Option 3 will more comprehensively address current legislative, organisational and service coordination issues than Option 2.

From Council’s perspective, Option 3 provides the greatest opportunity to reduce Council’s responsibility for management and funding of rural fire fighting.

From the PRFO and VRFF perspective, Option 3 carries a risk of reduction in resources for rural fire and for long duration firefighting.

It is considered that Option 3 provides the greatest potential benefit to the Council; however, it also carries risk of reduced resourcing to current rural fire fighting services.

Consequently, feedback provided by Council to the DIA should include:

- Inclusion and endorsement of the comments of the PRFO and VRFF,
- Statement of support for review of the funding model,
- Statement of support of a modified Option 3,
- Suggestions for inclusion in the Option 3 package, such as:
  - Greater commitment and protection of resourcing for rural fire,
  - Reduction of Council's involvement in debt collection or debt management on behalf of the NZ Fire Service.

## **Summary**

Council will provide feedback on the Department of Internal Affairs' Fire Service Review – Discussion Document. The Group Manager – Infrastructure and Services and the Chair of the Infrastructure Committee have the delegated authority to submit feedback on behalf of Council.

## **Recommendation**

That the information be received.