

NZ EXECUTIVE FIRE OFFICERS SOCIETY

Fire Services Review Discussion Document

Following release of the above discussion document, the following submission is provided on behalf of the New Zealand Executive Fire Officers Society.

The Society represents almost all of the Area and Assistant Area Commanders within the New Zealand Fire Service. Area and Assistant Commanders effectively manage each of the twenty four designated command areas in New Zealand, both from an administrative and operational command perspective. In essence, we ensure the effective delivery of Fire Service Provision across a specific geographical area through the efficient management and leadership of both paid and volunteer Brigades and the establishment and maintenance of strong relationships with our emergency services partners, stakeholders and communities. In turn we report to one of the 5 Fire Region Commanders that manage the individual regions across the country.

This places our members in a relatively unique position as our role requires us to attend and take command of the more serious, protracted and technically demanding incidents often involving a mix of our own personnel, rural fire service members and other agencies. In essence giving us a first hand insight into the difficulties that exist within the current fragmented structure.

Furthermore as our role also requires us to manage and be accountable for front line personnel, we are well positioned to comment upon some of the frustrations that exist between delivering a highly effective service and the inertia that exists within some facets of the organisation ultimately limiting our ability to modernise and improve some aspects of service delivery.

Perhaps the most telling incident which highlighted many of the shortfalls in the current structure relates to the incident at the Icepak Cool stores in Tamahere on 5th April 2008. This incident led to the death of one fire-fighter and serious injury to seven others. The circumstances of the incident, subsequent report and recommendations basically encapsulated many of the difficulties associated with the confusing legislation, overlap of responsibility and command of serious incidents outside urban fire districts.

With this backdrop therefore the society welcomes the prospect of making comment on the review document, seeing it as a real opportunity to modernise and improve the service for the benefit of all. Members of our Society will play a pivotal role in ensuring that many of the changes and improvements considered within the review document are carried through and managed effectively. With this in mind, the Society very much welcomes the review, as it accurately reflects the current circumstances. Given the fact that the Society has witnessed a number of previous Fire Service reviews that never came to fruition, we encourage Government to follow

through on this prospective change so that the Service can keep pace with the demands placed upon it by the community.

Within the above context therefore, and with our preference being firmly aimed at Option 3, 'One Service,' we provide the following comments:

- We accept that community expectations will continue to change and we are aware of variations in coordination and leadership in some areas of the country, along with inconsistent investment in some Brigades. There are varying degrees of equipment, training and competence within some aspects of the Service which we regularly see when we command incidents where a variety of crews attend.

Additionally, the review is silent on the current difficulties associated with the designation of the 'Incident Controller role' for incidents in rural areas. In many parts of the country, there are large complex commercial manufacturing and storage sites, (such as dairy plants and cool stores), which are located outside of urban Fire districts. Command of fires at these locations is complicated by the fact that whilst the senior NZFS Officer commands our own resources, the Incident Controller role is held by the Senior Rural Officer present. Option 3 clearly obviates most of these complications and therefore the Society actively supports this option.

- The Society also welcomes the prospect of all Volunteer Fire-fighters having a direct relationship with the new National Fire Service. This *"folding of NZFS volunteer brigades into the national Fire Service, so that they are more integrated"* as outlined in the discussion document would vastly improve our ability to effectively manage the Volunteer Brigades in our areas. Current arrangements leave us somewhat limited in terms of authority and influence over what can sometimes appear as detached self governing entities.

Additionally, we see the prospect of enhancing potential incentives for Volunteers being fundamental in our desire to support Brigades as many areas struggle to maintain effective establishments

- The Society is also particularly supportive of the potential in Option 3 of creating new pathways and opportunities for career staff. We are pleased that the review recognises the current time pressures existing on Area Management making it difficult for our members to spend time with their Brigades. Much of this pressure emanates from the very low number of Executive Officers to cover the entire country requiring our members to be 'on call' for periods outside the limits of the organisation's own fatigue management policy. For example there are areas which have only one Executive Officer position leaving the post holder permanently on call (West Coast Area). Area Management positions have

been scoped on paid staff numbers (approximately 1,800) but the reality is we are also expected to manage 8,000 volunteers in addition to paid staff numbers.

In this respect given the additional potential workload arising out of a revised structure we would expect that the number of Area and Assistant Area commander positions would be increased to effectively manage the transition and implementation process .

The Society would also welcome the opportunity to improve the skills base of its members to include rural fire fighting qualifications. We are eager to ensure our continued professional development aligned to the enhanced role of a single service.

- The Society fully supports the concept under Option 3 of specialisation of stations to undertake specific tasks such as complex vegetation incidents. This will allow a great deal more flexibility in terms of meeting local community needs and negate the inclusive nature of the current Operational Skills Maintenance System which, as the review points out, *'risks spreading the focus of the Brigades and Volunteers too thinly.'* It would also support the concept of providing appropriate resources matched to risk something the Society feels is long overdue
- The Society notes the numerous references to efficiency and effectiveness contained within the review document and we agree that there is considerable scope to improve. We would see many opportunities arising out of greater flexibility with regard to response standards, working practices and risk reduction.

The Society would therefore assume that some of these existing challenges to improving efficiency would be addressed which could assist with overall costs. In terms of funding, the Society favours the mixed funding model, (Option 2), with additional direct contributions from the main Government beneficiary of the services provided. This would improve the transparency and basis on which many of the non fire related functions are carried out by the service. It will also assist our members in working cooperatively with other stakeholders to drive down non fire related risks to the community such as motor vehicle accidents, etc.

- The Society would see the replacement of the old prescriptive legislation as a major step forward in meeting the changing demands placed upon the Service. Updating legislation to reflect modern day practice, and better support the true nature of the Fire Services work would be deemed by the Society to be essential.
- Finally the Society notes that all of the options included in the review document leave the Fire Service under the responsibility of the Minister for Internal Affairs. The society can see

absolutely no logic in this.

Whilst we welcomed the establishment of an Emergency Services Coordination group (the Chief Executive Forum) we have seen no material outcomes from this group and wonder why, as the review states *"the forum has started slowly"*. The society feels that the forum and more importantly the Fire service in general would benefit considerably if all the emergency services reported to one Minister. We believe this would drive modernisation and collaboration amongst the emergency services far quicker and simpler. We note the release of the supplementary paper dated 24 June. The society would appreciate the opportunity to further contribute through consultation to the development of the next phase of the Fire Services Review.

In summary, the New Zealand Executive Fire Officer's Society is highly supportive of the need to review the current imbalance of Fire Service provision. Our members are eager to support the fundamental shift towards the 'One Service Model - Option 3.'

We fully endorse the service's "vision 2020" and we would see the creation of "one service" being complimentary to each of the vision's aims particularly with regards to the aspiration of *"being able to demonstrate that our performance is equal to, or better than any fire and emergency service in the world"*

Equally the Society fully supports the notion of ongoing improvements in efficiency and effectiveness to the Service. There are many overseas Fire Services that have demonstrated significant modernisation and we would see the "one service" model providing real opportunities for improvement.

Our members will form the backbone of managing the change processes and our engagement with further progression of the review would be seen as vital.

In essence as front line Commanders we see "one service" (option 3) as being the most appropriate solution. We see antiquated legislation, inflexible working practices and mixed rural/urban arrangements as being fundamentally at odds with a modern efficient Fire Service.

In this respect, we applaud the review to date and remain committed to assisting with further progress as required.

Yours Sincerely



Des Irving

Secretary EFOS