

**SUBMISSION ON THE FIRE SERVICE REVIEW –DISCUSSION DOCUMENT
FROM THE NEW ZEALAND PROFESSIONAL FIREFIGHTERS UNION
July 2015**

1. The Firefighters Union represents virtually all Career Operational Firefighters and the vast majority of Black Watch workers (Comm. Centres, Fire Safety Officers and Volunteer Support Officers).
2. There have been considerable reviews of the Fire Service (including how the Fire Service ought to be financed) over the last 20 years. The Union has been deeply involved in all these reviews and maintains a very keen interest in how the Fire Service should function and be structured.
3. With any review, this Discussion Document is understandably broad and addresses macro concepts. It is the detail as to how change is to be effected that is critical. Therefore, the Union records that it does wish to be closely involved in the development of the detail that will necessarily arise out of what decisions are made on the direction of change.
4. The Union has for some time believed:
 - a) That the quite artificial distinction between Rural and Urban needs to go.
 - b) The mandate for the Service needs to be clearly and formally prescribed in legislation – at the least, this must encompass activities the Fire Service is currently, and has for some time, carried out.
 - c) The nationalisation of the Urban Service was commenced some 40 years ago and it took a long time to actually happen in practice. It is time now that we move to one national Fire Service – this is particularly so when reasonable demands and expectations are to be considered.
5. Any successful review needs to be considered in a context that the cuts made to front-line Operational Firefighters made in the 1990s have not been restored. Therefore, despite the growth in our communities over the last 20 years, front-line firefighter numbers are lower than what they were 20 years ago.
6. The Union sees that for the 21st Century and looking forward, Option 3 is where we should be aiming. The Discussion Document notes that it is likely to take a number of years to implement this Option. Given this, Union would say that, given the number of interested parties and looking at history, this is not a likelihood, but a certainty.

7. As the Union has stated above, the detail of how changes are implemented has still to be worked through, but the Union would strongly submit that it is essential that the person that leads whatever eventuates must have an operational background.

2.

The brief experience in the 1990s when the Chief Executive and National Commander positions were separated was a complete disaster. It is essential as well, that the broad criteria for appointment onto the Commission include operational experience and background. Any new structure (Option 3) must not continue the artificial distinction between Rural and Urban.

8. When considering mandate, the Discussion Document provides sufficient detail on what scope of work the Fire Service currently carries out. The Union has no problem with the scope and mandate for the Fire Service to be an even broader based emergency service. Many of these new tasks have been simply picked up by default as there is no other agency able to perform these functions. The expansion into responding to medical emergencies for example, reflects the inability of current Ambulance Services to properly cope with the demands put on them.
9. An expanded mandate does raise two critical issues any changes to legislation must address:
 - Who is in charge – Command & Control? Clarity is vital.
 - Funding must be provided that allows these additional services to be provided. Firefighters must be properly trained and equipped/resourced to safely and efficiently carry out these tasks.
10. Looking at funding, the Union is not especially hard and fast as to how this should be provided, only that the Fire Service has sufficient money to operate, that additional tasks are not demanded for free, and the necessary additional resources to support existing rural resources are funded.
11. The document provides a useful analysis of various options for funding. The Union would support the mixed funding model. This model's ability to fund activities such as Civil Defence Emergencies or U.S.A.R. responses is not however that clear. These events can incur very significant costs and therefore need to be specifically funded.
12. Issues surrounding the funding model, the Union sees, as being the principal stumbling block in the past in making progress in developing a Fire Service for the 21st Century. It may be therefore that pragmatic decisions need to be made that at least make some progress.
13. The Union would finally submit that there is nothing in the Document that explains or outlines why the Fire Service is, and apparently will continue to be, a Crown Entity. Why shouldn't the Fire Service report directly to a Minister as does the Police or Defence Forces.

3.

As well, the Document notes that the Department of internal Affairs monitors the Fire Service Commission and therefore the Fire Service. Nowhere in the Document is this discussed or considered.

The Document does note a risk that the current Commission may not have enough skilled and experienced personnel in support and management roles capable of delivering the proposed changes.

The Union would simply comment that the Department of Internal Affairs has no one skilled and experienced or with detailed knowledge of the Fire Service to undertake any monitoring role.

14. The Union notes the supplementary detail of community involvement if Option 3 is pursued. The Union sees considerable and sufficient community engagement at present and sees no reason why, with Option 3, this should in any way be affected.
15. The Union sees no practical reason for formalised community involvement and would resist any suggestion that some sort of local Community Board could have the ability to determine local resources or operational matters. The Union sees the Fire Service should be no different in this regard as are the Police, Work & Income or Work Safe etc.
16. To conclude – the Union sees that the time is now to take bold and significant steps to:
 - Recognise the reality of the present work of the Fire Service;
 - Eliminate the artificial distinction between Rural and Urban;
 - Provide funding that recognises the scope of the work of the Fire Service, and provide fair contributions from all that benefit.
17. The Union looks forward to further involvement in the development of more detailed implementation details.

DEREK BEST
SECRETARY
NZPFU