# Background –unified fire services with regional committees

## Fire Services Review results in new model for New Zealand’s fire services

The Department of Internal Affairs and the New Zealand Fire Service Commission have worked together in 2014 and 2015 to review the way New Zealand’s fire services are managed and delivered.

In November 2015 Cabinet agreed in principle to unifying New Zealand’s fire services into a new organisation, with regional committees to provide regional influence. Decisions on funding the new organisation are yet to be made.

## Change to unified fire services with regional committees

The change will bring all New Zealand’s fire services together into one new organisation. The new organisation will unify urban and rural fire services with a new way of working, a new culture, and with regional committees. These committees will provide a strong regional influence to ensure the regional voice balances the national direction.

Fire services will be delivered against sound risk management principles and the risk profile of particular communities or industries.

## New organisation will be the successor to the New Zealand Fire Service Commission

The name of the new organisation hasn’t been decided yet. For practical and legal reasons it will be a successor to the current Crown entity – the New Zealand Fire Service Commission. The Minister will announce new appointments to the Commission next year and the Commission will be tasked with managing the transition to the new unified organisation.

The new organisation will have an expanded role – it will be an amalgamation of the current New Zealand Fire Service, the National Rural Fire Authority, and the Rural Fire Authorities (including Enlarged Rural Fire Districts).

## Regional committees will ensure there is strong community engagement

During the public consultation on the fire services review in 2015, stakeholders said that any changes must ensure that fire services meet local community needs and risks, and have strong community engagement with local decision-making about the fire services.

There will be public consultation on the boundaries of the new committees, and there will be a process developed for deciding who sits on the new committees.

The new organisation will provide support for the committees and will have to set up operating guidelines to set out how the committees will work and how they will interact with the new organisation.

## The changes are designed to support the rural fire sector as well as the urban sector

The new organisation will ensure that both rural and urban fire services have the resources and capability to be effective. There will be focus on things such as coordinated funding, support and training.

The roles of other organisations that provide fire services in rural areas – the Department of Conservation, the New Zealand Defence Force – will be recognised by the new organisation, probably by way of a formal service agreement.

## Better support for workforce will be a key driver for the new organisation

During the public consultation stakeholders sent a strong and clear message that more support for volunteers is key to improving our fire services. Volunteers make up more than 80% of the fire services workforce.

From mid-2017 when the organisation is set up, volunteers will move into a direct relationship with the new organisation, and this means they will be better supported and recognised.

Local identity will remain important, so volunteers will still be organised into sensible, effective units, like the current brigade/volunteer rural fire forces structure.

## Next steps in setting up *unified fire services with regional committees*

Cabinet approved the new model in November 2015. Decisions on how to fund the new model are still to be made. Legislation is planned to be introduced into Parliament in 2016, and the new organisation is planned to be set up from mid-2017. Stakeholders will be involved in planning the transition to the new organisation.

## New unified fire services organisation will be a 21st century fire service

The fire services review was tasked with ensuring New Zealand’s fire services are modern, efficient, have a sustainable volunteer firefighter base and meet the needs of both urban and rural communities.

Fit-for-purpose 21st century fire services are:

* flexible and adaptable
* coordinated with strong leadership
* able to provide a consistent and effective service
* contributing through partnerships to strong local communities.