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| Fire Services Review Background: Rural Fire  27 May 2015 |
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# Purpose

The *Fire Services Review:* Discussion Document identifies three options for improved governance and support for fire services. This rural background paper provides more detailed information on what may change in the rural fire sector if any of the options were to be implemented. It has been prepared because the changes that are proposed under options two (coordinated service delivery) and three (one national Fire Service), as outlined in the discussion document, are much greater for the rural fire sector than they are for the urban fire sector.

This paper represents the review team’s current thinking and is subject to change following the consultation process on the discussion document. It has been provided to assist interested parties in making their submissions on the discussion document. The review team is not seeking submissions on this background paper.

# Background

## Report of the Fire Review Panel

In 2012 the Government set up an independent Fire Review Panel (the Panel) to provide advice on New Zealand’s fire services. The Panel was appointed to provide independent advice on how the Government can achieve:

* a clear mandate and operating platform for the fire services’ functions;
* effective, efficient fire service operations that will provide value for money in the future; and
* a sustainable, stable and equitable funding system for fire services.

The Terms of Reference for that review specified that the Panel was not to provide advice on whether:

* New Zealand needs a national fire service in the form of the New Zealand Fire Service (NZFS);
* the NZFS should maintain its core fire-related roles;
* management of fire on forest and rural lands should be provided by Rural Fire Authorities (RFAs);
* the NZFS should be funded by the Crown; and
* the industrial framework applying to firefighters should be reformed.

The Fire Review Panel publicly released a report in February 2013 – sometimes referred to as the Swain Report.

Although the terms of reference for the Panel did not include whether the management of fire on forest and rural lands should be provided by RFAs, the Swain report did make some recommendations for the rural fire sector. These included:

* redrafting the Forest and Rural Fires Act 1977 (FRF Act) in plain English (recommendation 2);
* focusing the RFAs on vegetation fires but with the flexibility to be accredited for other fires and non-fire emergencies with funding, equipment and training for the accredited services to come from the New Zealand Fire Service Commission (Commission)(recommendations 6 and 7);
* ensuring that there are equivalent senior management positions for each of the urban and rural fire functions that report to the chief executive (recommendation 31);
* that after one year of the new legislation, the Minister be empowered to mandate rural fire district enlargements by Order in Council (recommendation 39);
* continuing to fund rural fire through the Rural Fire Fighting Fund (RFFF) and National Rural Fire Authority (NRFA) grants to RFAs from the proceeds of the fire service levy, in recognition that some rural levy payers do not receive an emergency response to urban standards (recommendation 49);[[1]](#footnote-1) and
* establishing an Emergency Services Chief Executives’ Forum to collaborate on the delivery of emergency services (recommendation 10).

## The Current Review

In 2013, work started in putting the Panel’s recommendations into action. Cabinet agreed that the:

* fire legislation recognise the importance of rural fire issues by:
  + continuing with separate Fire Service and Forest and Rural Fire Acts;
  + continuing the Commission’s separate statutory role as the NRFA;
* Chief Executive of the NZFS to have a strategic focus on both the urban and rural fire sectors;
* fire legislation require appointment of a National Commander (NC) responsible for operational command of the NZFS and a National Rural Fire Officer (NRFO) responsible for oversight and coordination of rural fire issues;
* Commission has discretion about whether a person can hold one or more roles;
* Minister of Internal Affairs set clear expectations and deadlines for the Commission around the creation of Enlarged Rural Fire Districts (ERFDs), without the need for changes to legislation;
* fire legislation be amended to:
  + acknowledge the role of volunteers in the fire services; and
  + require the Commission to actively provide for the continued sustainability of the fire services’ volunteer base;
* fire legislation be amended so:
  + RFAs may seek authorisation from the Commission to perform specific non-rural fire functions; and
  + in giving such authorisation, the Commission must consider the capability of the RFA to effectively perform the non-rural fire function.

In 2014, the Government decided to widen the scope of the fire services review. The current fire services review is not a first principles review but rather builds on the Swain report by:

* considering the structure and funding of rural fire services;
* considering workforce engagement issues, both urban and rural (instead of focusing just on volunteers); and
* modernising the fire services’ legislation.

After the scope of the review was widened, the Department of Internal Affairs (the Department), the NZFS and the NRFA used the Swain report and conversations with stakeholders to inform the development of options for improved governance and support of fire services. Three options have been identified and are presented in the discussion document. The options are presented as discrete, fixed packages so they can be compared but there are many different ways the options could be put together.

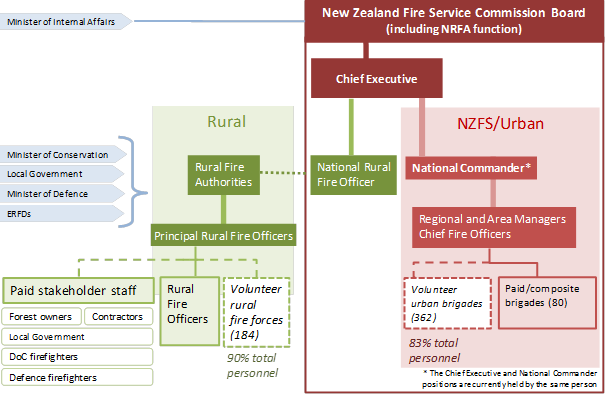
# Fire services

Fire services include:

* services that operate in rural communities whose prime focus is managing vegetation fire risks, such as RFAs, the Department of Conservation (DoC), forest companies and Volunteer Rural Fire Forces (VRFF);
* services that operate in urban communities and rural towns, such as NZFS career and volunteer brigades; and
* privately-funded services that operate on behalf of private business owners (industrial brigades), such as airports and large commercial operations.

Figure one below shows the current structure of the urban and rural fire services. The diagram does not show industrial brigades.

Figure 1: Current structure of fire services



The Commission is the Crown entity responsible for coordination of fire safety throughout New Zealand. The board that governs the Crown entity is also known as the Commission. In this background paper, when talking about the Commission, we are referring to the organisation rather than the board members. Definitions of these and other terms can be found in *Appendix C: Glossary.*

# Rural fire sector

The rural fire sector is distinctly different from the urban fire sector. Historically the focus of the rural fire sector has been on the protection of forests and vegetation, and management of rural land (including the use of fire as a way of clearing vegetation as a legitimate land management tool). Rural fire management emphasises rural landowner fire obligations, local ownership and responsibility, and management of risk by the stakeholders whose assets are at risk from fire. Vegetation fire prevention protects significant Crown properties so the Government also has an important role in regulating rural fire. Compared to structure fires, vegetation fires have the potential to be significantly longer in duration and behave variably depending on fire environment factors such as fuels, weather and topography.

The Commission does not have direct national operational responsibility for the rural fire sector. The legal responsibility for operational delivery lies with RFAs (including Enlarged Rural Fire District (ERFD) Committees). However, the Commission is also the National Rural Fire Authority (NRFA), and has responsibility for the coordination of rural fire management by RFAs and ERFDs. The NRFA also sets standards for RFAs and ERFDs, audits their compliance against these standards, and assesses their performance.

All RFAs must carry out all fire control measures[[2]](#footnote-2) in their district including an important fire reduction role. To do this they employ rural fire officers and rely heavily on volunteers and contractors as well as NZFS brigades for essential firefighting operations. There are currently 57 RFAs (including 12 ERFDs), 57 Principal Rural Fire Officers (PRFOs), 150 Rural Fire Officers (RFOs), paid stakeholder staff[[3]](#footnote-3) and 3,400 volunteers working in the rural fire sector. The NRFA has a staff of eight.

While the rural fire sector’s primary focus is on forest and vegetation fire, the NZFS (career and volunteer brigades) currently attend a significant number of vegetation fires both within urban and rural fire districts in a first response capacity.[[4]](#footnote-4) All NZFS firefighters are trained in basic vegetation firefighting techniques and safety. The NZFS largely provides an effective first response function for vegetation fires, given that NZFS brigades are well dispersed geographically to provide this first response, including in rural fire districts.[[5]](#footnote-5) The NZFS has agreements in place with RFAs to provide this first response function.

Only a small percentage of vegetation fires advance into longer duration incidents which require more specialised resources. RFAs will lead and provide resources for these types of fires, often with minimal or no ongoing NZFS support after the initial response. Rural fire response teams and incident management teams can be moved around the country where needed, and are managed and coordinated nationally through the NRFA.

The RFAs comprise:

* ERFD Committees (where a rural fire district exists);
* the Minister of Conservation for public conservation land, state areas and one kilometre fire safety margins where they exist;
* the Minister of Defence for defence areas; and
* local authorities for the balance of land outside urban districts.

An RFA must:

* encourage, promote and carry out fire control measures, which includes writing fire plans; and
* prevent, detect, control, restrict, suppress and extinguish fires in forest and rural areas and other areas of vegetation.

In carrying out these functions, RFAs with the NRFA must:

* observe weather conditions and assess fire hazards;
* give warning of the imminence of fire hazard conditions; and
* give out information on fire hazard conditions.

RFAs may also make bylaws under the FRF Act to promote and carry out fire control measures in their districts.

The NRFA coordinates and promotes rural fire control matters and sets out the minimum standards for:

* training, equipping and clothing of persons required by an RFA to attend a fire;
* achieving timely responses to fires;
* fire weather observations;
* assessing fire hazards.

From the mid-1990s, the NRFA has encouraged RFAs to merge on a voluntary basis and form ERFDs. ERFDs are seen as a way of improving both the effectiveness and efficiency of rural fire services. There are currently 12 ERFDs, which cover approximately 56 per cent of the land area that is covered by the RFAs. A further two planned amalgamations would take it to 80 per cent if they go ahead.

RFAs are increasingly responding to a number of non-fire emergencies, such as motor vehicle accidents. Under the FRF Act, however, they have no mandate to respond to any class of emergency other than fire.

Information on background issues and consequences for the rural fire sector can be found in *Appendix B: Rural fire sector background issues and consequences*.

# Options

This section of the paper outlines the three options for improved governance of fire services identified in the discussion document, and the possible impacts that each of the options may have on the rural fire sector. It represents the review team’s initial thinking about how each of the options may work if they were to be implemented. This information is subject to change if the options are redesigned following the consultation process.

The three options are:

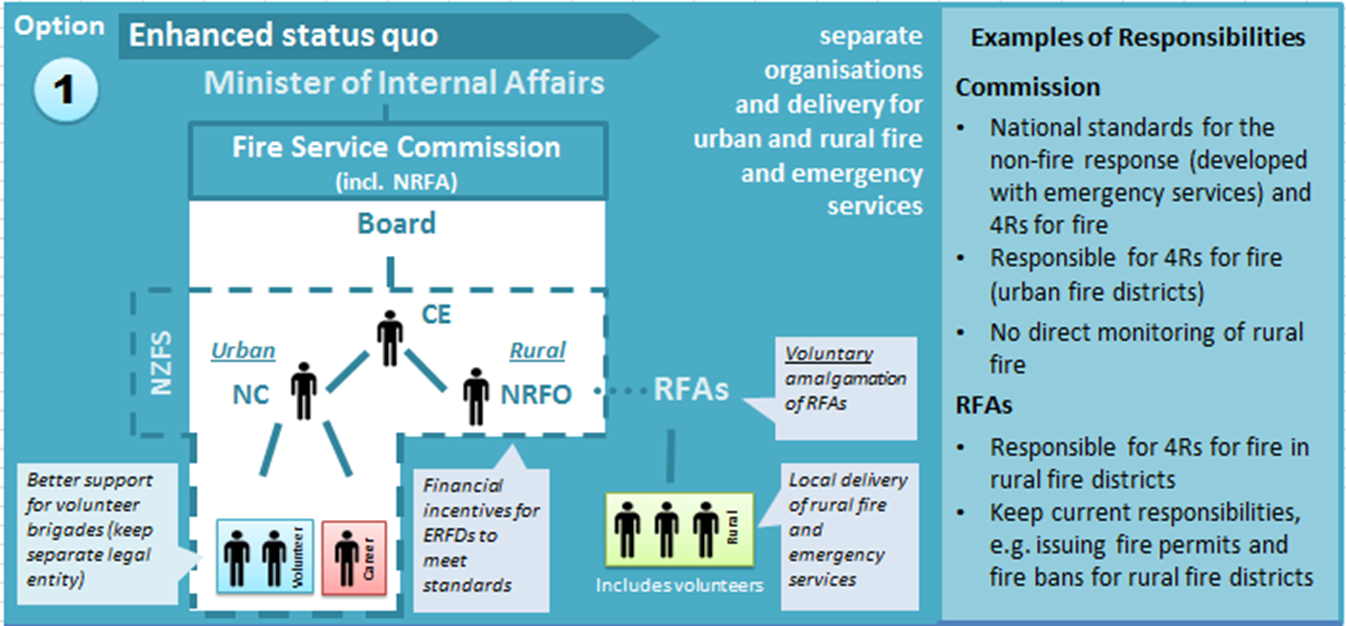
* enhanced status quo;
* coordinated service delivery; and
* one national fire service.

As in the discussion document, the options are presented as discrete, fixed packages so they can be compared but there are many different ways the options could be put together. A more detailed assessment of the governance and support options as well as the status quo is provided in *Appendix A: Options for improved governance and support*.

Under all the options, fire would continue to be recognised as a rural land management tool.

# Enhanced Status Quo (Option One)

**Figure 2: How the governance and support options could operate under Option One**

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The enhanced status quo option includes the Swain Report recommendations that have been accepted by the Commission, including the development of Vision 2020, the Commission’s vision and strategy.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Under this option the:

* importance of volunteers to fire services would be put in legislation;
* Commission’s Chief Executive would have a strategic focus on both the urban and rural fire sectors;
* governance structure of the Commission would be modernised; and
* the Commission would have a mandate to respond to certain non-fire emergencies and could authorise other agencies, including RFAs, to attend those emergencies (this is also a feature of options two and three). Funding or equipment would be provided at the discretion of the Commission. How well resourced an RFA is to pick up this work would be taken into account in the Commission’s decision to authorise.

This option would maintain the current organisational and service delivery structures for the urban and rural fire sectors. They are:

* the NRFO and the NC report to the Chief Executive of the Commission;
* the Commission is the NRFA;
* urban and vegetation fire and emergency services are delivered separately; and
* the rural fire sector is fully devolved and funded locally.

RFAs would continue to operate independently with a range of governance structures.

### Impact on the rural fire sector of this option

Under this option there would be small changes to the:

* role of the Commission including as the NRFA;
* role of the RFAs;
* role of local authorities;
* Ministerial responsibilities; and
* funding.

### Roles of the Commission and the NRFA

Under this option the roles of the Commission and the NRFA would essentially remain the same:

* NRFA’s power to set fire district boundaries would be retained;
* NRFA’s separate statutory role would remain as would its current leadership functions;
* NRFA would continue to set minimum national standards for RFAs in relation to:
  + the training, equipping and clothing of Fire Officers and other persons required by an RFA to attend a fire;
  + achieving timely responses to fires;
  + weather observation; and
  + assessing fire hazards (section 14A(k) of the Fire Service Act 1975);
* coordination of matters relating to national fire control would be retained by the NRFA;
* Commission would continue to provide the Rural Fire Fighting Fund (RFFF) (and DoC would continue to contribute); and
* NRFA would continue to provide some national systems.

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| Proposed change Under this option it is proposed that when making appointments to the Commission, the Minister would be required to have regard to skills and experience in relation to the urban and rural fire sectors. |

### Role of the RFAs

Under this option the current mandate for RFAs to be responsible for the 4Rs of all fires within their geographic boundaries would continue. RFAs would still be able to negotiate section 15 FRF Act agreements with the Commission to decide how services would be delivered and charged.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The RFAs’ existing statutory functions would not change. RFAs would continue to:

* be independent legal entities (as established under the FRF Act);
* be required to develop a fire plan which sets out their policies and procedures under the 4Rs (and provide a copy to the NRFA);
* manage the local fire workforce;
* be charged for using another brigade’s resources, undertake cost recovery, apply to the RFFF to meet the cost of suppressing a large vegetation fire, and charge a levy to forest owners to meet the costs of the firefighting response.

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| Proposed change: Under this option it is proposed that if an RFA wanted to be able to provide a mandated non-fire emergency response it would need to approach the Commission to seek authorisation. The Commission must consider the capability of the RFA to effectively perform the non-rural fire function. Additional funding of the RFA for this service would be at the discretion of the Commission. |

### Role of the local authorities

There are no proposed changes to the role of local authorities under this option. Local authorities that are RFAs would continue to be RFAs. Those local authorities that are part of an ERFD would continue to be a stakeholder of that ERFD.

This option is not proposing to make any changes to the specific functions, powers or responsibilities of local authorities relating to planning, or fire and emergency management under the Resource Management, Local Government and Civil Defence and Emergency Management (CDEM) Acts.

**Ministerial responsibilities**

The Minister continues to be responsible for the Commission (not RFAs).

The Minister of Conservation’s responsibilities would stay the same:

* the Minister would remain an RFA for DoC land, and therefore would retain current statutory and financial responsibilities even within ERFDs.

The Minister of Defence’s responsibilities would stay the same:

* where the Minister of Defence specifies a defence area, section 4(2)(c) of the FRF Act enables that area to be a rural fire district of which the Minister of Defence is, unless otherwise stated in the notice, the RFA.

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| Proposed change: Under this option it is proposed that the Minister would set clear expectations and deadlines for the Commission around the creation of ERFDs, without changes to legislation. |

### Funding of RFAs

There are no proposed changes to how RFAs are funded under this option. The rural fire sector would continue to be funded from various sources including:

* the fire service levy;[[8]](#footnote-8)
* property owners through local authority rates;
* DoC funding; [[9]](#footnote-9)
* levies on commercial forest owners; and
* cost recovery.

RFAs would still be able to try to recover firefighting costs from persons responsible for causing vegetation fires and if they are unsuccessful would be able to apply to the NRFA for the cost of fighting a vegetation fire from the RFFF.

### Forest brigades

Some forest owners have their own fire brigades, which are often made available to RFAs. Where this occurs, such arrangements are identified in the RFAs’ fire plans. This would not change under this option.

### Coordination with other emergency services

Emergency services agencies would continue to provide strategic direction and coordination for the emergency services sector through the Emergency Services’ Coordination Group (Chief Executives’ Forum).

The rural fire sector’s interests are not formally represented on the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management’s Coordinating Executive Groups (CEGs). RFAs may, however, be co-opted into the group.[[10]](#footnote-10) This would not change under this option.

It is not proposed that the relationship between the RFAs and other emergency services (e.g. Police, civil defence and ambulance) would change under this option, but some RFAs would be mandated to provide a non-fire response.

### Implementation of this option

This option would be relatively easy to implement as it would only make small changes to the status quo. Providing the Commission with the ability to authorise other agencies to respond to non-fire emergencies, where appropriate, would create more certainty regarding the role of the RFAs in such situations. More information on the implementation of this option is provided in the discussion document at page 18.

# Coordinated service delivery (Option Two)

**Figure 3: How the governance and support options could operate under Option Two**





This option would include all of the changes from Option One. It would retain, to a large extent, the current organisational structures for fire services, while clarifying roles and responsibilities. The key difference between this option and option one is that it would increase funding to the rural fire sector and improve the lines of accountability for the rural fire sector and rural volunteer fire forces. It would provide for a new rural fire sector structure and clearer delivery of funding to the RFAs from the new Fire Service through service agreements. Only one RFA would operate in each rural fire district, which means that some RFAs would amalgamate.

### Impact of this option on the rural fire sector

This option would:

* increase national leadership, support, activities, funding and governance of the Fire Service for the rural fire sector;
* set new RFA boundaries (establishing larger, new RFAs);
* devolve day-to-day responsibilities to new RFAs for the 4Rs for fire;
* retain local funding to support the local delivery of service;
* make new RFAs responsible for the health and safety of all rural firefighters at incidents under the new RFA’s control, even if the firefighter is employed by another body;[[11]](#footnote-11)
* mean that all volunteer firefighters receive greater support and training;
* increase community and stakeholder engagement and consultation;
* allow for better coordination and collaboration between the new Fire Service, NZFS Brigades and the rural fire sector for fires in rural areas (including 4R activities) and for other mandated emergency responses.

### Role of the new Fire Service

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| Proposed change: The new Fire Service would have the legal mandate for the 4Rs for all fires as well as for specified non-fire responses as outlined in option one. Service agreements with each new RFA would set out how the 4Rs for fire and non-fire responses would be delivered in each community. NZFS brigades and the new RFAs would need to coordinate to deliver the 4Rs and non-fire responses. All mandate decisions would be made based on community needs and risks and would involve consultation with the community, stakeholders, the RFAs and local brigades. Funding, training and equipment for the authorised non-fire responses would be paid by the new Fire Service to the new RFAs. |
| The new Fire Service would be responsible for providing national support, national leadership and national services. It would set national standards[[12]](#footnote-12) and monitor the performance of the new RFAs to ensure that the standards are met. The standards could be set up to cover things like the 4Rs, training and equipment as well as service delivery, governance, financial and asset management.  The new Fire Service would provide national systems and processes to support the new RFAs when it considers that a national approach is appropriate, that national consistency is important, or that national investment would reduce costs. The new Fire Service would work with stakeholders and RFAs to identify these systems and processes. Examples are a national incident reporting system and national coordination of reduction activities.  The new Fire Service would set the new district boundaries for each new RFA. A public consultation process would continue to be used to allow communities and other stakeholders to have input into the fire district boundary decisions. In setting the new district boundaries, a number of factors could be taken into account. These could include:   * the boundaries that other emergency services are operating within; * local authority boundaries; * maintaining strong links with the local community; * efficiencies that come from scale; * NZFS urban fire districts; and * creating districts covering areas with similar fire risk.   The boundary setting process would need to be flexible so that changing land use patterns, for example, could be taken into account.  Under this option the new Fire Service would be expected to allocate more funding to the rural fire sector to achieve improved outcomes, probably through service agreements. It would also have enhanced powers for monitoring the performance of the new RFAs. The service agreements would set out the level of funding that would be provided by the new Fire Service to the new RFAs, and the expectations for the funding provided.  The monitoring is likely to cover service delivery (for both fire and authorised non-fire emergencies), governance, financial management, relationships, asset management and statutory obligations (such as operational readiness). The new Fire Service would be responsible for an Appointments Committee. The Appointments Committee would be made up of members who are representative of new RFA stakeholders across the country. The Appointments Committee could appoint professional (paid) Board members on the basis of the skills, knowledge, and expertise that are required for the relevant district. |

### Role of new RFAs

The new RFAs would continue to be independent legal entities. They would continue to be responsible for local reduction activities, including permitting and education, and working with landowners to promote safe use of fire as a land management tool.

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| Proposed change: Under this option it is proposed that the new RFAs would have increased oversight by and support from the new Fire Service. Local authorities, DoC and forestry owners would be stakeholders of the entities. |
| The new RFAs would be responsible for:   * delivering all the 4Rs for fire to the expected standard as set out in their service agreements (with the new Fire Service); * delivering Commission-led national reduction activities that require a local delivery (e.g. working to implement a national reduction strategy); * setting and confirming their own operating structures (within national guidelines or standards); * engaging regularly with the local community on the 4Rs for fire and emergency response needs; * consulting and engaging with other emergency services, which deliver services to communities in their areas; * the health and safety of their employees and volunteers as well as the personnel provided by other organisations[[13]](#footnote-13) (NZFS, DOC, contractors etc) during fire and emergency responses; * the use of possible new sanctions – such as infringement and enforcement notices and fines.   Where funding for non-fire is provided by the new Fire Service, the new RFAs would need to work with the new Fire Service to:   * identify the level of risk in their fire districts; * determine local capability and capacity, to identify where the new Fire Service may need to contribute (e.g. training and equipment) to support the new RFAs.   This option would also enable the new RFAs to be funded from alternative sources so that they could be flexible and adaptive to community needs. VRFFs could pick up community activities that suit their capability and capacity. Where funding comes from alternative sources, for example, surf life-saving, the new RFAs would need to work with the alternative funding agencies to determine the need for services, and to ensure that the fit of those services does not detract from the new RFA’s ability to provide the 4Rs for fire and authorised non-fire emergency responses. They will do this on behalf of VRFFs and then make sure the money and appropriate equipment goes to the VRFFs. |

### Role of the new RFA stakeholders

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| Proposed change: Under this option local authorities, the Minister of Conservation and forestry owners would be new RFA stakeholders. As stakeholders they would:   * be represented on the Appointments Committee responsible for appointing the Boards of the new RFAs; * assist with monitoring the new RFAs; and * be consulted on the service agreements between the new RFAs and new Fire Service. |

### Local authorities

The local authorities would continue to:

* have an interest in reducing rural fire in their area by supporting the new RFA;
* make decisions on how they contribute financially to the new RFA; and
* support the new RFA in their area by providing staff and/or contractors to supplement the paid and voluntary rural workforce.

This option is not proposing to make any changes to the specific functions, powers or responsibilities of local authorities relating to planning, or fire and emergency management under the Resource Management, Local Government and CDEM Acts.

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| Proposed change: Under this option it is proposed that local authorities would be stakeholders of the new RFAs. This includes those that are currently RFAs. |

### NZDF and DoC Responsibilities

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| Proposed change: Defence areas would be included within the geographic areas of the new RFAs. The New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) would operate its own defence areas and fire plans and would consult with the new RFAs. The NZDF may agree with the new Fire Service about the resources the NZDF would contribute to fire and non-fire emergencies outside of defence areas.  Under this option it is proposed that DoC would agree with the new Fire Service about the funding and workforce contribution that DoC would contribute to the rural fire sector in recognition of the reduction, readiness and response activities for fires on public conservation land and state areas. The new Fire Service would distribute the national DoC contribution to the new RFAs through the service agreement process. |

### Funding of the new RFAs

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| Proposed change: Under this option it is proposed that the new RFAs would be funded by the new Fire Service, local authority rates, a levy on commercial forest landowners, and DoC paying an agreed grant (via a service agreement with the new Fire Service). |
| These funding arrangements would mean that the new RFAs would be pre-funded for all 4Rs for fire. The RFFF would no longer exist.  Given that the risk of vegetation fire can fluctuate markedly depending on climatic conditions and other factors such as arson, the new Fire Service or the new RFAs may need to hold a contingency fund to assist the new RFAs to cover the suppression costs of significant fires (large or complex). New RFAs could still have the power to recover firefighting costs from the person responsible for the fire.  Consideration could also be given to whether other land owners (e.g. farmers) could be required to contribute directly via a fire levy under the FRF Act. The review will work with stakeholders to consider how local funding of the rural fire sector should best occur.  If the new RFAs are authorised to respond to non-fire emergencies they would be funded by the new Fire Service for this function. |

### Enforcement regime

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| Proposed change: The enforcement regime under this option could include new compliance tools that would be part of a compliance and reduction strategy for the rural fire sector. The current compliance tools in the FRF Act do not enable RFAs to steadily escalate enforcement action. A wider range of tools such as being able to provide formal warnings or issue enforcement notices may be helpful.  The regime could include the use of infringement notices, to fine people for low level or non-compliant behaviour that was posing a fire risk. This would require a review of the current offences and penalties in the fire services legislation, to confirm which offences would become infringement offences, which would remain as they are in the legislation, and what new offences would be required. The infringement scheme would be designed to encourage compliance and hold people to account. By imposing a monetary penalty, an infringement offence scheme could be a more proportionate response where there have been relatively minor breaches of the law. |

### Forest brigades

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| Proposed change: Under this option, forest owners’ brigades could be treated in a similar way to industrial brigades under the Fire Service Act.[[14]](#footnote-14) |

### Coordination with other emergency services

Emergency services agencies would continue to provide strategic direction and coordination for the emergency services sector through the Emergency Services’ Coordination Group (Chief Executives’ Forum).

Under the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act every regional council and every local authority within a region must unite to establish a Civil Defence Emergency Management Group. This group must establish and maintain a Civil Defence Emergency Management Co-ordinating Executive Group (CEG). CEGs currently include a senior member of the NZFS. The close operational links to the fire services through the CEGs would not change under this option.

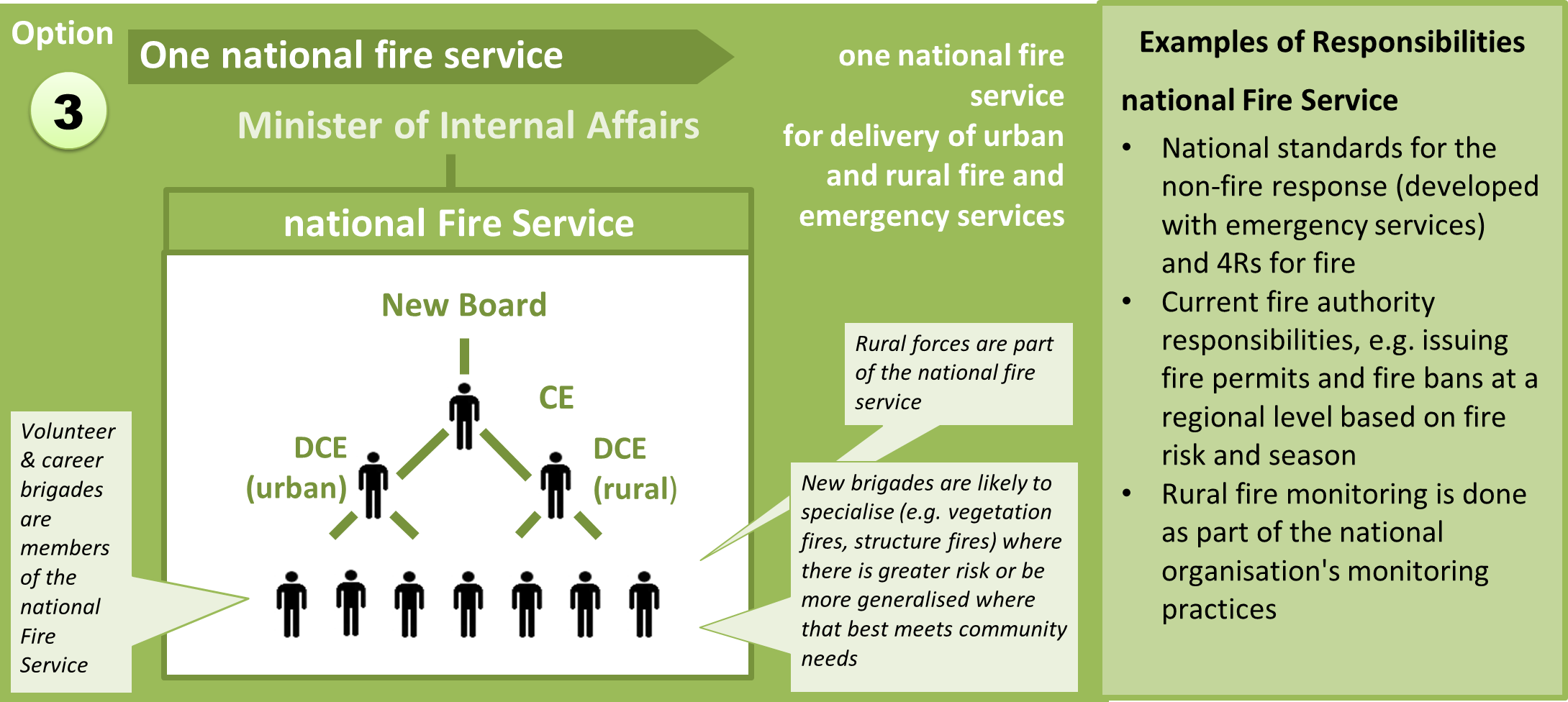
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| Proposed change: Under this option it is proposed that the new RFAs are also represented on the CEGs by a senior member, who would be nominated by the new RFAs in a region. |
| Under this option, the new RFAs would engage with their communities, the new Fire Service and other emergency services on community needs, how they are being met and whether the new RFA has a role in meeting those needs. The priority for the new RFAs would be to provide the fire and non-fire services authorised by the new Fire Service. |

### Implementation of this option

This option would require significant legislative change to set out the new roles and responsibilities of the new Fire Service and the new RFAs. A transition period would be required, to undertake public consultation on the new rural fire districts and to establish the new RFAs, their Boards and structures. The new Fire Service would need to prepare national standards and guidelines. More information on implementing this option is provided in the discussion document at page 22.

# National Fire Service (Option Three)

**Figure 4: How the governance and support options could operate under Option Three**



Under this option the mandate for all fire and non-fire responses would be vested in the national Fire Service.

This option would involve amalgamating the different parts of the fire services into one national Fire Service. The national Fire Service would have:

* the mandate for the 4Rs for all fires;
* the non-fire mandate as outlined under Option One: enhanced status quo;
* a unified governance, strategy and structure, with fully unified service delivery;
* all volunteers in a direct relationship with the new national Fire Service rather than through their brigades or RFAs or ERFDs;
* no devolution of rural fire, although local funding could still be provided for;
* an emphasis on community engagement and stakeholder engagement;
* flexibility to match the fire service’s resources to community needs.

### Impact of this option on the rural fire sector

Vegetation fire reduction and compliance measures would continue under this option. As is currently the case, some of these measures would be different from what is required in the urban fire environment.

Paid rural firefighters, such as forestry and local authority contractors and workers and DoC staff, would continue to provide vegetation fire services.

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| Proposed change: Under this option it is proposed that there would be no NRFA or RFAs and therefore no urban or rural fire districts or boundaries. Services would be delivered by brigades/forces with the skills to do so, including having brigades/forces that specialise in a vegetation fire response. What each brigade/force would deliver would be based on an assessment of risk and community needs. For example, a high vegetation fire risk region would always need brigades/forces that specialise in vegetation fires.  The mandate for the national Fire Service would reflect the current range of activities of the NZFS and RFAs. The national Fire Service would decide what services each brigade/force would be trained and equipped to provide based on a national risk model. A regional approach would be taken to managing resources and response, based on a risk assessment of the needs of that region, including through community consultation. Current RFA functions would become the responsibility of the new organisation at either the regional or local level.  The national Fire Service would have the following powers to manage the risk of vegetation fires in rural areas at a regional level by:   * prohibiting the lighting of fires during times of extreme fire hazard;[[15]](#footnote-15) * specifying restricted or prohibited fire seasons;[[16]](#footnote-16) and * issuing permits to allow individuals to light fires during restricted fire seasons or during an open season (in a state or forest area).[[17]](#footnote-17)   The National Fire Weather System (FWSYS), which is currently managed by the NRFA for all RFAs, would be managed by the national Fire Service for and on behalf of personnel working in rural regions and areas. |

### Role of national Fire Service

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| Proposed change: The national Fire Service would be responsible for fire management across the whole of New Zealand. The national Fire Service would have a mandate to respond to certain non-fire emergencies and could authorise other agencies to attend those emergencies.  There would be no need to specify separate urban/rural boundaries, districts and mandate, although, as noted above, a regional approach would be taken to management and administration. |

### Role of local authorities

This option is not proposing to make any significant changes to the specific functions, powers or responsibilities of local authorities relating to planning, or fire and emergency management under the Resource Management, Local Government and CDEM Acts.

### Funding of the ‘rural’ fire sector

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| Proposed change: Under this option it is proposed that fire management in rural areas would be funded by the national Fire Service. Consideration would need to be given to meeting the costs associated with managing the risks and suppressing vegetation fires, which are currently met by commercial forest owners and property owners, through local authority rates and DoC.  DoC would agree with the national Fire Service about its funding and workforce contribution in a three yearly national service agreement.  It is unlikely that local authorities would contribute directly to the cost of fire management under this option but this could change if the option is redesigned.  The review will work with stakeholders to consider how funding of the rural fire sector should best occur.  Responding to mandated non-fire emergencies would be funded by the national Fire Service. |

### Forestry brigades

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| Proposed change: Under this option, the relationship between the national Fire Service and forest owners’ brigades could be treated in a similar way to industrial brigades under the Fire Service Act. |

### Coordination with other emergency services

Emergency services agencies would continue to provide strategic direction and coordination for the emergency services sector through the Emergency Services’ Coordination Group (Chief Executives’ Forum).

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| Proposed change: Under this option the national Fire Service, instead of the NZFS and numerous RFAs, would work with other emergency services. The national Fire Service would coordinate with other emergency services about the national Fire Service’s non-fire response to ensure that gaps and overlaps are minimised, and to agree any service delivery standards and operational delivery arrangements.  Civil Defence Emergency Management Coordinating Executive Groups (CEGs) must currently include a senior member of the NZFS. Under this option, local rural fire sector interests would be formally represented on the CEGs by a senior member of the national Fire Service delegated by the new chief executive. |

### Implementation of this option

Option three would be the hardest option to implement because of the extent of organisational change required. A significant amount of legislative and operational change would be needed to create a national Fire Service. The transition programme would need to be planned and managed carefully to ensure all workforces are ready for the merger. More information on implementing this option is provided in the discussion document at page 26.

Appendix A: Options for improved governance and support

|  | **Status quo** | **1**  **Enhanced status quo** | **2 Coordinated service delivery** | **3 One national Fire Service** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Structure – urban/rural | | | | |
| Structure and service delivery | Governance and service delivery of urban and rural fire sectors is separate. | Same as status quo. | Governance of urban and rural fire sectors still separate but modified.  Greater coordinated service delivery between urban and rural fire sectors. | One organisation for governance, strategy and service delivery. |
| Ministerial and Departmental responsibilities | Minister of Internal Affairs is responsible for NZFS. Commission (includes NRFA).  Minister of Conservation is an RFA.  Minister of Defence is an RFA in a defence area (unless stated otherwise in the Gazette creating the rural fire district).  No Ministerial oversight of RFAs. | Same as status quo with the following changes:   * the Minister would set clear expectations and deadlines for the Commission around the creation of ERFDs, without changes to legislation; * in appointing members of the Board of the Commission, the Minister would be required have regard to the extent that the Commission requires skills and experience in relation to urban and rural fire sectors. | A single Minister would be responsible for the new Fire Service.  Minister of Conservation no longer an RFA. Three yearly negotiations between DoC and Fire Service on resources (workforce, equipment, facilities and funding). DoC would contribute to the Fire Service for the rural fire sector (only for fire). DoC would no longer contribute directly to new RFAs.  Three yearly negotiations of the size and nature of in-kind contribution by the NZDF to the new Fire Service for the rural fire sector and non-fire emergencies outside of the defence areas. | A single Minister would be responsible for the national Fire Service.  Three yearly negotiations between DoC and national Fire Service on resources (workforce, equipment, facilities and funding). DoC would contribute to the national Fire Service for the rural fire sector (only for fire).  Three yearly negotiations of the size and nature of in-kind contribution by the NZDF to the national Fire Service for the rural fire sector and non-fire emergencies. |
| Setting boundaries & amalgamation | Commission has power to set rural fire district boundaries following public and RFA consultation process – and has a policy of voluntary amalgamation. | Same as status quo. | Same as status quo, but only one RFA would operate in each rural fire district. | Boundaries would not be divided by type of service, but by region. There would likely be a number of response zones, within which all fires (including vegetation) and mandated non-fire services are delivered. |
| Forest and Defence areas | Forest areas may be declared where the RFA is satisfied that the relevant forest owners have adequate fire protections in place.  A defence area may be part of a rural fire district (where not excluded in the Gazette Notice creating the district). | Same as status quo. | Forest areas would be removed so there would be less prescription on forest owners if they choose to set up their own forest area. Forest owners could operate their own forces and would be supported by new RFAs to do so (similar to an industrial brigade).  NZDF would have autonomy to manage the fire risk created by its operational activities in defence areas. Defence areas would be included within the geographic boundaries of the new RFAs but would have their own fire plans. NZDF must consult with the new RFAs on fire plans and live-fire during high fire risk season. | Forest areas would be removed so there would be less prescription on forest owners if they choose to set up their own forest area. Forest owners could operate their own forces and would be supported by the national Fire Service to do so (similar to an industrial brigade).  NZDF has autonomy to manage the fire risk created by its operational activities in Defence areas. Defence areas would have their own fire plans. NZDF must consult with the national Fire Service on fire plans and live-fire during high fire risk season. |
| Structure of Rural Fire Authorities/ ERFD Committees | RFAs and ERFD Committees set their own operating structures. | Same as status quo. | New Boards appointed by Appointments Committee of the new Fire Service.  The new Fire Service would be responsible for the Appointments Committee that would appoint the Boards of the new RFAs, which would include stakeholder representatives. The Appointments Committee would appoint the members of each new RFA Board according to the skills, knowledge and expertise required for that area.  New RFAs would set and confirm their own operating structures (within national guidelines or standards for governance). | No RFAs/ERFDs.  Different parts of fire service unified into one national Fire Service. What is delivered by each brigade/force would be based on risk and community need. There could be a mix of generalist and specialised teams in stations as required for the local community (e.g. vegetation fire, motor vehicle response). |
| Relationship of Commission/  NRFA to RFAs | NRFA coordinates matters relating to national vegetation fire control.  NRFA influences the rural fire sector through grant funding. | Same as status quo. | The new Fire Service would be responsible for providing national support, national leadership and national services. Possible examples are shared support services, national systems or national vegetation fire reduction activities. | N/A, part of management of one national fire service. |
| NRFA standards setting and funding | NRFA sets some national standards for RFAs for vegetation fires for: training, equipping and clothing of firefighters; timely response to fire; fire weather observation and assessing fire hazards.  Commission administers the RFFF for response costs. RFFF is funded by the Minister of Conservation (for fires on conservation land) and the fire service levy.  NRFA is reviewing Commission grants to RFAs so that funding is more consistent, certain and transparent. | Same as status quo | Service agreements between the new Fire Service and new RFAs would set out expectations for authorised 4Rs for fire and non-fire readiness and response, and corresponding level of funding from new Fire Service to new RFAs. | N/A, national Fire Service sets standards and funds all mandated responses as part of management of one national fire service. |
| Commission’s national systems/policies for rural fire sector | NRFA provides national systems to support RFAs e.g. fire weather systems. | Same as status quo. | New Fire Service would provide national systems and processes to support new RFAs where a national approach is considered appropriate (in consultation with the new RFAs). Possible examples are a national incident reporting system and national coordination of reduction activities. | N/A, national Fire Service manages as part of management of one national fire service. |
| Monitoring of rural fire sector | The Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (PMEF) is used by the NRFA to evaluate RFAs performance.  If an RFA doesn’t meet performance standards the NRFA can reduce grant funding or not pay out of the RFFF. | Same as status quo | New Fire Service would be able to monitor the new RFAs for service delivery, governance, financial management, relationships, asset management and statutory obligations (e.g. health and safety).  New Fire Service could have stepped remedies when a new RFA fails to meet performance expectations. | N/A, part of management of all fire services |
| Role of RFAs | RFAs are independent legal entities under the FRF Act.  RFAs manage the local rural fire sector workforce.  RFAs fund the rural fire sector (see funding of rural fire sector) in addition to funding received from the Commission.  RFAs can be charged for using another brigade’s resources (including NZFS brigades).  RFAs have a role in fire bans and permitting. | Same as status quo | New RFAs would be required to deliver the services set out in their Service Agreements.  New RFAs would engage with the community, new Fire Service and other emergency services on the community needs, how they are being met currently and the role of the new RFA in meeting them. This could include the new RFA providing services for another organisation, as long as the services do not detract from the new RFAs ability to provide fire and non-fire responses authorised by the new Fire Service (see range of activities).  New RFAs would provide local fire reduction activities.  New RFAs may have use of possible new sanctions to reduce risk (e.g. enforcement notices) or to hold people to account for actions (e.g. fines and infringement notices). | N/A, national Fire Service would have relevant powers and functions as part of management of all fire. |
| Role of local authority | Local authorities are the RFA in a rural fire district.  In ERFDs, local authorities are a stakeholder.  Local authorities have a role in fire risk reduction (including under District Plans under RMA, setting bylaws for fire control, removal of fire hazards as building consent authority and in relation to dangerous buildings).  Local authorities responsible for providing firefighting water supplies (s648 Local Government Act 1974). | Same as status quo. | Local authorities would be stakeholders in the new RFAs.  Local authorities would be responsible for supporting the new RFAs to deliver services by e.g. contributing funding to the new RFAs, helping to establish VRFFs and Rural Fire Offices.  Current functions as local authorities under RMA, Local Government Act etc. would continue | Current functions as local authorities under RMA, LGA etc. would continue. |
| Structure and support – workforce | | | | |
| RFAs’ VRFF structure | VRFFs are the responsibility of RFAs. | Same as status quo. | Same as status quo. | VRFFs would become part of the national Fire Service. |
| Support for VRFFs from Commission | NRFA sets national standards but has no relationship with, and provides no direct support to, members of the VRFFs. | Same as status quo. | New Fire Service and new RFAs may agree through service agreements that the new Fire Service provides support to VRFFs, such as skills and management training. | N/A, national Fire Service provides support to VRFF members as part of national Fire Service. |
| Benefits to volunteers | No change | The Commission would work with the rural fire sector to promote the sustainability and resilience of the volunteer base. | Volunteers would be better supported.  The new Fire Service and the new RFAs may agree through new service agreements that the new Fire Service provides support to rural fire sector volunteers such as skills and management training.  The new RFAs would likely have improved resources to support rural fire sector volunteers, so they can focus on training and responding to incidents. | Volunteers may have access to relevant professional development opportunities where appropriate to their role. Greater scope would exist for movement within the organisation.  The national Fire Service could investigate possible financial incentives to support volunteerism |
| Legislation acknowledges role of volunteers across both fire services | No legislation acknowledgement. | There is a commitment to the importance of volunteers in the legislation. Legislation acknowledges role of volunteers in the fire services and requires the Commission to actively provide for the continued sustainability of fire services’ volunteer base (both urban and rural fire sectors). | Same as Option 1. | There would be a commitment to the importance of volunteers in the legislation. Legislation would acknowledge role of volunteers in the fire services and require the national service to actively provide for the continued sustainability of the volunteer base. |
| Range of activities | | | | |
| Fire mandate for RFAs | Mandate of RFAs for 4Rs for all fires within their boundaries. | Same as status quo. | New Fire Service would have responsibility for all 4Rs for rural fire sector which would be delegated to new RFAs. | N/A, mandate of the national Fire Service to reflect current range of fire activities of NZFS/RFAs. |
| Non-fire mandate for RFAs | No legislative mandate but some do it anyway. | Commission could authorise other parties, including RFAs, to deliver non-fire functions. Commission must consider capability of RFAs to effectively perform the non-rural fire function.  Commission would have discretion to fund other parties to deliver non-fire services, but the Commission would not be required to do so. | New Fire Service could approve new RFAs and other agencies to deliver non-fire services, with funding, equipment and training from the new Fire Service. Regional approach to managing resources and response. Decisions on approval would require public consultation with new RFAs and local communities. | The national Fire Service would decide what services each brigade/force should be trained and equipped to deliver, based on risk/resource allocation model, and following public consultation with local communities.  Regional approach to managing resources and response. |
| National standards/ guidelines | NRFA sets minimum standards for RFAs in relation to: training, equipping and clothing fire officers and any other persons; required by the RFA to attend a fire; achieving timely responses to fires; fire weather observation; assessing fire hazards. | Same as Status quo. | New Fire Service would set national standards for new RFAs for governance, financial management, relationships, asset management and statutory obligations, and for mandated non-fire emergencies. | The national Fire Service would consolidate, review and amend national standards and operational instructions for fire and mandated non-fire services for responses by all national Fire Service forces/brigades. |
| Coordination with other emergency services | | | | |
| Coordination | Chief Executives’ Forum has been set up and has started to meet.  RFAs may be co-opted into CEGs. | Commission would work with Chief Executives’ Forum to provide improved coordination of emergency services across the country (including for vegetation fire).  RFAs may be co-opted onto CEGs. | Same as Option 1 – enhanced status quo, with improved coordination through use of new Fire Service’s enhanced powers in relation to response and governance by new RFAs.  New RFAs formally represented on CEGs. | Same as Option 1 – enhanced status quo, but improved simplicity and clarity for coordination as there would be one national Fire Service, with single governance and management.  Rural fire sector interests formally represented on CEGs as part of one national fire service. |
| Transparency | | | | |
| Decisions are transparent | NRFA is reviewing NRFA grants to RFAs so that funding is more consistent, certain and transparent. | Same as status quo. | Same as status quo. Transparency and negotiation through service agreements between the new Fire Service and new RFAs (see NRFA standards setting and funding). | Increased transparency would be one of the benefits of the one national fire service. |
| Consultative decision-making processes | NRFA consultation on setting rural fire district boundaries.  NRFA consultation on setting minimum standards for RFAs. | Same as status quo. | Same as status quo.  Consultation on setting new rural district boundaries.  Consultation with rural fire sector stakeholders on service performance agreements.  Consultation on setting standards and guidelines (see range of activities). | Consultation on setting standards and guidelines (see range of activities).  Consultation on how services/resources will be allocated regionally/locally. |
| Governance | | | | |
| Commission governance | Commission is a Crown entity under the Crown Entities Act 2004.  NRFA is part of the Commission.  Roles of National Commander and National Rural Fire Officer both report to the Chief Executive.  Chief Executive can also hold the role of National Commander where the CE has senior operational experience in an urban fire brigade.  Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Fire Officer are positions set out in the legislation. | Commission remains a Crown entity and is the NRFA.  Chief Executive must have a strategic focus on both urban and rural fire sectors.  Roles of National Commander and National Rural Fire Officer report to the Chief Executive.  Commission has discretion about whether a person can hold more than one role.  Same as status quo – Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Fire Officer are positions set out in legislation. | New Fire Service would be established as a Crown entity.  New Fire Service would have an integrated head office to realise efficiencies in managing the operations of the NZFS and supporting the new RFAs.  NRFA continues its role as part of the new Fire Service.  National Commander and National Rural Fire Officer have equal status and report to the Chief Executive. | New national Fire Service would be established as a Crown entity.  Organisational structure could be either:   * Deputy Commissioners responsible for work based on having an operational arm and a corporate/resources arm; or * Deputy Commissioners responsible for work based on having one part of the organisation responsible for “urban” fire and one part of the organisation responsible for “rural” fire. |
| RFA governance | RFAs (including ERFD Committees) are separate legal entities and set their own governance structures. | Same as status quo. | Appointments Committee of the new Fire Service would appoint Board members of new RFAs. The Board may consist of stakeholders (level depends on area).  New RFAs would be responsible for setting governance structure and establishing service agreements in consultation with relevant parties and the community. New RFAs would be required to follow national standards for governance, financial management etc.  New RFAs and stakeholders would have responsibilities under the new health and safety legislation. | No RFAs as rural fire would be managed as part of all fire – governance of one national Fire Service under the Board. |
| Funding of Rural Fire Sector | | | | |
| Funding of rural fire sector | Local authorities (as RFAs) can use rates to pay for the 4Rs.  RFAs can charge a levy to certain landowners to meet ordinary expenditure.  RFAs and certain forest owners can undertake cost recovery where a person is responsible for a vegetation fire.  RFAs can apply to the Rural Fire Fighting Fund to meet the costs of response to a vegetation fire.  RFAs can charge a levy to forest owners to meet the costs of the firefighting response in forests and in fire safety margins.  RFAs may receive funding from the fire service levy through NRFA grants.  Commission and DoC contribute funding to the rural fire sector (see NRFA standard setting and funding). | Same as status quo. | New RFAs would be funded by the new Fire Service, local authority rates, a levy on commercial forest landowners, and DoC paying an agreed grant (via a service agreement with the new Fire Service).  Consideration could also be given to whether other land owners (e.g. farmers) could be required to contribute directly via a fire levy under the FRF Act. | Consideration would need to be given to meeting the costs associated with managing the risks and suppressing vegetation fires, which are currently met by commercial forest owners and property owners, through local authority rates and DoC. |

Appendix B: Rural fire sector background issues and consequences

## Rural fire sector data and information

Data and information on the rural fire sector is limited. For example:

* there is no national incident reporting system for the rural fire sector;
* the national statistics that are available are aggregated, making it impossible to drill down into individual vegetation fires or easily look for trends; and
* financial oversight of some RFAs rest at the local level and calculating how much is spent by the rural fire sector in some districts is difficult to ascertain.

In a number of cases the only information that is available is from discrete pieces of research or surveys, some of which are a number of years old.

The review used available data and information and conversations with stakeholders to help form a view of the problems and consequences for the rural fire sector. The review team’s assessment is that the available evidence points towards some current and emerging problems that need to be addressed.

There is also a lack of information about the number of non-fire incidents that VRFFs are attending. Anecdotal evidence, and feedback from some PRFOs, suggests that over the last five years some VRFFs have experienced increased demand to attend non-fire incidents.

The lack of data and information available on the rural fire sector is why the review team needs to hear from stakeholders about what they think is happening in the sector.

## Volunteers

The rural fire sector is dependent on volunteers. In rural areas, 3,400 volunteers assist a small number of local authority staff and contractors[[18]](#footnote-18) with fire control responsibilities. In some communities the supply of rural volunteer fire fighters is less certain as a result of:

* changing demographic trends (for example, urban drift, increased transience and an ageing rural population);
* declining numbers of people employed in forestry, DoC, and by local authorities;[[19]](#footnote-19)
* changing land use patterns (including lifestyle blocks); and
* increasing numbers of people residing in rural areas and travelling into urban centres for employment, which means they are not available during the working week.

The smaller number of people available to volunteer means that in some areas many volunteers are involved in more than one emergency response agency (for instance they are involved in both rural fire and civil defence). The challenge of meeting multiple training demands and standards is challenging for some.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Although the NRFA sets national standards, it does not have oversight or legal responsibility for rural volunteers because they are in a direct relationship with RFAs (where local authorities have legal responsibility) or with ERFDs (where the Committee has responsibility).

The health and safety issues associated with the rural fire sector, including the findings of an NRFA assessment of nine recent operational reviews of significant rural fires, are outlined in the discussion document at pages 48 to 49.

## RFA funding

RFAs receive funding from:

* property owners through local authority rates;
* levies on commercial forest[[21]](#footnote-21) owners under the FRF Act;
* DoC (where DoC is a stakeholder in an ERFD);[[22]](#footnote-22) and
* the Commission through grants for vehicles and equipment, and administration grants for ERFDs and payment of suppression costs from the RFFF. The Commission’s revenue is derived from insurance levies paid by urban and rural property owners.

The amount of funding that RFAs receive from local authorities varies and is dependent on the importance that individual local authorities place on fire management and control. The way local authorities fund their contributions varies and includes funding from general rates and/or targeted rates. The levy paid by forest owners also varies and is dependent on RFAs’ fire management plan requirements, and the level of fire risk.

The Commission, in its capacity as NRFA, makes grants (funded from the fire service levy) to RFAs for a percentage of the cost associated with replacing vehicles and equipment. Making these grants is dependent on the RFA meeting the national minimum standards[[23]](#footnote-23) set by the NRFA. Under NRFA policy, ERFDs can also apply for an administration grant.

The current total revenue received by RFAs is unknown by the NRFA. This is because the NRFA has no power to require data on financials or revenue from RFAs other than those that are governed by ERFD Committees, and the expenditure of some RFAs is not easily discoverable.

The total reported revenue received by the 12 ERFDs for the last two years (2012/13 and 2013/14) was $11.7 million. Income from stakeholder councils makes up the largest source of revenue overall.[[24]](#footnote-24) This revenue does not consider in-kind contributions for seven of the ERFDs.

Figure 5: ERFD Revenue – Average last two years (2012/13 and 2013/14)

Following a vegetation fire in a rural fire district, RFAs have the legislative power to recover firefighting costs from the person/organisation responsible for causing the fire. If RFAs are unsuccessful (it may not be possible to establish the person/organisation responsible or it may not be practicable to recover the costs) they can apply to the NRFA for the cost of fighting a vegetation fire. The NRFA assesses such claims and if the costs are assessed as fair and reasonable, the Commission may reimburse the RFA the cost of suppressing the vegetation fire from the Rural Fire Fighting Fund (RFFF). The RFFF is funded from the fire service levy and DoC. The NRFA can then try to recover these costs.

**Figure 6: Current fire service levy spend in the rural fire sector[[25]](#footnote-25)**



RFAs lodged 95 claims on the RFFF for the 2013/14 season totalling $1.98 million. In comparison, in 2012/2013, 94 claims were lodged on the RFFF totalling $4.15 million.[[26]](#footnote-26) The NRFA successfully recovers only a portion of the costs associated with grants from the people responsible for causing a vegetation fire.

RFAs do not receive funding for attending non-fire incidents. This means that their funders are paying for RFA attendance at non-fire emergencies, which they state is inequitable because non-fire emergencies do not match RFAs’ roles and responsibilities. RFAs have picked up this work for their communities but their funding has not increased to match it.[[27]](#footnote-27) Some VRFFs are attending an increased number of non-fire emergencies but still need to have the capacity to fight vegetation fires.

Some landowners, particularly those in isolated areas, consider that they pay more for the rural fire service than they receive because they pay a targeted rate for fire services to their local authority, on top of what they pay to the Commission through the fire service levy on their insurance. This varies across the country, because each local authority has a different approach.

The Swain Report provides some information on the level of service provided to rural communities, and notes that the Commission provides good fire prevention advice to rural communities. The Commission also contributes to the rural fire sector. The Commission pays for the NRFA, pays grants to RFAs and contributes to the RFFF. NZFS brigades also attend the first hour at vegetation fires free of charge and attend structural fires in rural areas within practicable response times. As a result, those in rural areas paying a fire service levy do receive services for their money.

### Greater investment needed in the rural fire sector

There is evidence to suggest there may be a need for greater investment in people, equipment and buildings in the rural fire sector. The current level of investment appears to be affecting the ability of RFAs to do the 4Rs for fire (reduction, readiness, response, and recovery), including to manage fire risk comprehensively.

In a survey of ERFDs, for example, inadequate training for volunteer firefighters[[28]](#footnote-28) was identified as an issue by PRFOs. Four ERFDs thought the training for this group was insufficient for the work they perform. Those ERFDs who estimated the cost of the extra training needed for volunteers indicated that it would be between $20,000 and $30,000 per ERFD per annum.[[29]](#footnote-29) Stakeholders, however, think that belonging to an ERFD has improved capacity, governance and management, training and support for volunteers and results: “…before becoming an ERFD, the job got done but things definitely fell through the cracks. We did some training but it was pretty minimal. The gear was serviceable but old. We used part-time staff which meant they had split commitments and often rural fire didn’t get enough attention – things got done late or not at all”.[[30]](#footnote-30)

In the same survey of ERFDs, 10 ERFDs provided asset-related data. The most common way in which ERFDs have access to land and buildings is through either a peppercorn lease or other in-kind arrangements with stakeholders. ERFDs indicated that 36 of the 152 sites (24 per cent) are either in need of maintenance or do not fit current needs; for example, they are too small to house certain vehicles and/or there is no training room or office space. Comments indicated that in some cases possible upgrades would be funded by stakeholders, but in most cases it is not clear where funding would be sourced, or what the shortfall in funding might be.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Information on the remaining useful life of vehicles (provided by some ERFDs and comments from PRFOs) indicates that about 69 of 172 appliances or vehicles (40 per cent) will need to be replaced within three years. Based on the replacement costs for appliances and general vehicles as advised by the PRFOs, the outstanding liability for replacement vehicles could be in the order of $8 million.[[32]](#footnote-32) To some extent these costs will be covered by councils and other stakeholders, but it is unclear how some of these replacements will be funded.

## Cost of vegetation fires

The potential impacts of vegetation fires in New Zealand are significant. As the Swain report noted “there is a strong argument to be made that vegetation wildfire presents a much greater risk to the New Zealand economy than the loss of any particular industrial or processing plant”. As well as economic impacts, vegetation fires on publicly owned conservation lands risk a loss of significant indigenous biodiversity, historic heritage and recreational opportunity.

Between 2002 and 2007, the average annual economic cost of vegetation fires in New Zealand was approximately $98 million. Of this total, pre-suppression costs (fire prevention costs) accounted for $38 million (39 per cent of the total costs). The after fire costs were $52 million (53 per cent) of the total costs. The fire suppression costs were $8 million (8 per cent of total costs). Long-term costs mainly consist of the potential value of timber lost through forest vegetation fires, and the impact on related industries, such as harvesting, transport and wood processing.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Our rural fire sector focuses on suppression (e.g. cost recovery is separate and takes time). While pre-suppression costs are significant, these are not always planned for. After-fire costs tend not to be considered using a structured or evidence-based approach whereas these should be a significant factor in reduction and how fire responses are managed.

## Reduction

Reducing risk is the most effective and efficient means of dealing with fire. Although RFAs are required to develop fire plans which outlinetheir policies and procedures associated with the 4Rs, it appears that some of the approaches to risk are not in line with modern practice. This is because:

* some RFAs are focusing more on responding to vegetation fires at the expense of prevention activities[[34]](#footnote-34) - a number of stakeholders said that when resources are stretched, reduction activities suffer most. In particular, the extent of community education and engagement undertaken was strongly linked to the financial and people resources available to the PRFO;[[35]](#footnote-35)
* RFAs do not have the ability to assess and model the level of vegetation fire risk in an area due to a lack of data and information;
* there is no national incident reporting system for vegetation fires;[[36]](#footnote-36)
* there is no relationship between the incident statistics and the NRFA’s vegetation fire threat analysis; and
* an understanding of the consequences of vegetation fires is also needed to enable better response planning.

The NRFA assessed 19 RFAs’ readiness against NRFA standards. Thirty per cent of the RFAs in high-medium risk areas were assessed as “need improvement” against the readiness standards. The findings of this assessment are available in the discussion document at pages 54 to 55. This is seen as a potential emerging risk.

Appendix C: Glossary

| Term | Meaning |
| --- | --- |
| 4Rs | Four pronged service based on reduction, readiness, response and recovery. |
| Board | Board of the Commission, governance entity. Under each of the three options, there is a Board, though the organisation underneath is different. |
| career firefighters/NZFS career firefighters | Paid staff employed as NZFS firefighters. |
| Commission/New Zealand Fire Service Commission | The Crown entity responsible for coordination of fire safety throughout New Zealand, governance and operation of the NZFS and coordination of rural fire management (in its role as the NRFA). Name used under status quo and Option 1. |
| Emergency Services’ Coordination Group (the Chief Executives’ Forum) | Chief Executives’ group established to provide strategic coordination and leadership to the emergency services sector. |
| Enlarged Rural Fire District(s) (ERFD/ERFDs) | Areas where Rural Fire Authorities have amalgamated to form an Enlarged Rural Fire District, governed by a rural fire committee. |
| Fire Service Act 1975 | Legislation establishing the Commission (including in its capacity as the NRFA) and NZFS for the protection of life and property from fire and certain other emergency services. |
| fire service levy | Levy, payable on insurance against the risk of fire, to fund the Commission (including the NZFS and NRFA). |
| fire services | All fire services in New Zealand, including NZFS and Rural Fire Authorities. |
| Fire Review Panel/Panel | Panel appointed in 2012 to provide independent advice to the Minister of Internal Affairs on New Zealand’s fire services. |
| Forest and Rural Fires Act 1977 (FRF Act) | Legislation establishing Rural Fire Authorities, and relating to the safeguarding of life and property by the prevention, detection, control, restriction, suppression and extinction of fire in forest and rural areas and other areas of vegetation. |
| National Commander | Operational head of NZFS. |
| National Rural Fire Authority (NRFA) | The Commission in its role as the body responsible for coordinating rural fire management by the Rural Fire Authorities. |
| National Rural Fire Officer | The Commission’s person responsible for advising on and ensuring national rural fire coordination. |
| new Fire Service | The organisation under Option 2. |
| new national Fire Service | The organisation under Option 3. |
| new Rural Fire Authorities (new RFAs) | The new authorities for rural fire districts under Option 2. |
| new Rural Fire Authority Boards | The new Boards, under Option 2, which govern the new Rural Fire Authorities and are comprised of professional Board members. |
| New Zealand Fire Service (NZFS) | The New Zealand Fire Service, the operational arm of the Commission responsible for carrying out the Commission’s fire safety functions, and urban fire and other emergency responses in urban communities and rural towns. It also provides administrative support (through national headquarters and regional offices). |
| Principal Rural Fire Officer (PRFO) | Officers of Rural Fire Authorities, who manage fire control and respond to fires in a rural fire district. |
| rural fire/rural fire sector | The rural fire system that provides services operating in rural communities (whose prime focus is managing vegetation fire risks), along with the parties who provide those services and/or have an interest in those services. |
| Rural Fire Authorities (RFAs) | Authorities that administer and are responsible for fire control in rural fire districts or other areas, including the Minister of Conservation, the Minister of Defence, rural fire committees, and local authorities. |
| rural fire districts | Areas where Rural Fire Authorities are responsible for fire control. |
| Rural Fire Fighting Fund (RFFF) | Fund the Commission operates for helping Rural Fire Authorities meet the cost of fire control and legal proceedings to recover costs of fire responses. |
| Rural Fire Forces | See Volunteer Rural Fire Forces (VRFFs) below. |
| Swain Report | Report provided to the Minister of Internal Affairs by the Fire Review Panel, which Hon Paul Swain chaired. |
| urban fire districts | Areas where NZFS is responsible for fire management. |
| Vision 2020 | Commission’s vision of leading integrated fire and emergency services for a safer New Zealand, which it wants to achieve by 2020 |
| Volunteer Rural Fire Forces (VRFFs) | Rural fire forces that are staffed by volunteers. |

1. RFAs also receive funding from local authority rates, levies on commercial forest owners and the Department of Conservation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As defined in section 2 of the FRF Act. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The review team estimates that there is approximately 1000 stakeholder staff. These people are employed by local authorities, DoC, landholders (forest owners and farmers) and do not work full time in rural fire. We do not know how much time they spend working on rural fire. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. According to New Zealand Fire Service Commission statistics, in 2013/14, NZFS brigades attended 84 per cent of vegetation fires, Rural Fire Forces attended 3 per cent, and NZFS brigades and Rural Fire Forces together attended 13 per cent of vegetation fires. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The New Zealand Fire Service Commission has a national section 15 (of the FRF Act) agreement with individual RFAs that cover the arrangements and requirements for NZFS to attend vegetation fires in rural districts. The NZFS do not charge for the first hour of attendance at a rural fire but cost recovers from RFAs after that time. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See the Background paper *Summary of Swain Report recommendations.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. These agreements cover the arrangements and requirements for NZFS attendance at vegetation fires in rural fire districts. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Landowners are exempt from this levy. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. DoC also contributes in-kind (resources and workforce). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. CEGs must include a senior member of the NZFS. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The health and safety of employees of other organisations is also the responsibility of their employer. If there is a contractual relationship between an organisation and an RFA, the employer will retain the duties of an employer during the period of time their employees are under the control of a PRFO. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The new Fire Service would be required to consult, as appropriate, when developing standards. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The health and safety of employees of other organisations is also the responsibility of their employer. If there is a contractual relationship between an organisation and an RFA, the employer will retain the duties of an employer during the period of time their employees are under the control of a PRFO. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Under section 36 of the Fire Service Act, an owner or occupier of any commercial or industrial premises may, for the purpose of protecting those premises from fire, organise and maintain a group of persons as an industrial fire brigade. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The NRFA currently has this power. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. These are currently managed by the NRFA or RFAs. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. RFAs currently issue fire permits. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. These people do not work full time on rural fire. It is one of their roles. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Future Capability Needs for the Primary Sector in New Zealand*, Infometrics/Nimmo Bell for the Ministry of Primary Industries, April 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Alkema, A., Murray, N., McDonald, H (2013) *What motivates people in small rural communities to become Volunteer Rural Fire Fighters?* Wellington: Heathrose Research Limited. Retrieved from [www.fire.org.nz](http://www.fire.org.nz). See surveys of 354 volunteers from 50 VRFFs in 10 RFAs. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Some commercial forest owners and some semi-commercial forest owners have their own firefighting resources and pay their own costs of managing fire in their plantations. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. DoC also provides funding when it is an RFA in its own right. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The FRF Act provides that the NRFA can only set national minimum standards for rural fire authorities in relation to: the training, equipping and clothing of Fire Officers and other persons required by a fire authority to attend a fire; achieving timely responses to fires; weather observation and assessing fire hazards (section 14A(k) of the Fire Service Act 1975). At the request of rural fire authorities, the NRFA has developed other standards. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. This information was supplied by PRFOs. Completeness of the information provided and consistency of approach to reporting across the ERFDs has not been tested. The data should be therefore regarded as indicative. Hunn, N., Ward, R. (2015) *Picture of Investment in Enlarged Rural Fire Districts Draft Report – for discussion and review purposes only* (p28), Wellington: MartinJenkins [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Due to rounding, numbers in the columns do not always add up to the total column. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. New Zealand Fire Service Commission (2014) *Annual Report for year ended 30 June 2014* (p 11) Wellington: New Zealand Fire Service Commission. Retrieved from www.fire.org.nz [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Fundraising is used by some VRFFs to purchase equipment so they can respond to non-fire incidents. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Most ERFDs thought training was sufficient for their staff. Hunn, N., Ward, R. (2015) *Picture of Investment in Enlarged Rural Fire Districts Draft Report – for discussion and review purposes only* (p26), Wellington: MartinJenkins. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid, p26 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Hill, N., Coulon, A., Phillips, T (2014). *ERFDs: Developing a best practice model* (p18) Wellington: MartinJenkins. Retrieved from www.nrfa.govt.nz [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Hunn, N., Ward, R. (2015) *Picture of Investment in Enlarged Rural Fire Districts Draft Report – for discussion and review purposes only* (pp 12, 33), Wellington: MartinJenkins. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ibid, p 20. Data was not received from Otago, Marlborough/Kaikōura or Wellington. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Kaliyati, W., Sanderson, K., Wu, J. (2009). *The Economic Cost of Wildfires* (pp4, 26). Wellington: Business and Economic Research Ltd (BERL Economics). Retrieved from [www.fire.org.nz](http://www.fire.org.nz). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. The estimated amount of time ERFD management and administrative staff spend on readiness and response activities is 58 percent (34 percent on readiness and 24 percent on response) compared to 32 percent on activities that reduce the risk of fire. Hunn, N., Ward,R. (2015) *Picture of Investment in Enlarged Rural Fire Districts Draft Report– for discussion and review purposes only* (p23), Wellington: MartinJenkins. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Hill, N., Coulon, A., Phillips, T (2014). *ERFDs: Developing a best practice model* (p19) Wellington: MartinJenkins. Retrieved from www.nrfa.govt.nz [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. There is no nationally linked system between the NZFS and RFAs. RFAs are not able to enter data into the Integraph Computer Aided Dispatch (ICAD) system and so set up their own systems. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)