

**Report to National
Rural Fire Authority
and Stakeholders**

on a

**Proposal to Establish
an Enlarged Rural Fire
District in Marlborough
and Kaikoura**

Submitted by:
Marlborough-Kaikoura Rural Fire District Transition Board

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Definitions

ERFD	Enlarged Rural Fire District
M-KRFD	Marlborough/Kaikoura Rural Fire District
MNRFD	Marlborough North Rural Fire District
NMRRFC	Nelson/Marlborough Regional Rural Fire Committee
NRFA	National Rural Fire Authority
NRFO	National Rural Fire Officer
NZFS	New Zealand Fire Service
RFA	Rural Fire Authority
RFD	Rural Fire District
DPRFO	Deputy Principal Rural Fire Officer
PRFO	Principal Rural Fire Officer
RFO	Rural Fire Officer
VRFF	Volunteer Rural Fire Force
DOC	Department of Conservation
KDC	Kaikoura District Council
MDC	Marlborough District Council
TLA	Territorial Local Authority
4 R's	Reduction, Readiness, Response, Recovery
CIMS	Coordinated Incident Management System
FSM	Fire Safety Margins
PAC	Performance Assessment Criteria

Purpose of this Document

The purpose of this document is to:

- Detail the proposal to create an Enlarged Rural Fire District in the Marlborough and Kaikoura Districts and to detail the reasons for the decision.
- Seek agreement to abolish the Marlborough North Rural Fire District.
- To signal to the National Rural Fire Authority the intention to amalgamate four of the existing rural fire authorities (the Woodbourne defence area is outside the scope of this proposal) in Marlborough and Kaikoura and to complete the legal criteria for forming a new inclusive rural fire authority.

Intended Audience

The intended audience of this document are the stakeholders in the management of rural fire in Marlborough and Kaikoura. They include, but are not restricted to:

- Marlborough District Council
- Kaikoura District Council
- Department of Conservation
- Forest Owners
- Federated Farmers
- Volunteer Rural Fire Forces
- New Zealand Fire Service
- Marlborough and Kaikoura rate payers
- Rural land managers who use fire as a land management tool
- Rural property owners
- National Rural Fire Authority

Introduction

In 1979 the Marlborough North Rural Fire District was established and was primarily resourced by the New Zealand Forest Service. It was held in high esteem and operated very effectively for many years. Within the last 5 years however, the National Rural Fire Authority has sought to raise the professionalism of rural fire management across the country. There is therefore a critical economy of scale that is required for RFDs to operate effectively and the smaller Districts are now struggling to meet the current national standards of performance.

Since the Wither Hills fire event in late 2000 there have been resources put into implementing and investigating the options to enhance rural fire management within Marlborough. Post this devastating fire the Marlborough District Council invested heavily in fire management within its area of rural fire jurisdiction, south of the Wairau River. The Council employed a full time PRFO and invested in equipment that was of a high quality and fit for purpose and ratepayers are reaping the benefits today.

In late 2002 Robin Thompson completed 'The Marlborough Rural Fire Authority Amalgamation Report'. In it he proposed a number of options which included combining all of Marlborough (i.e. including Marlborough North RFD) into one Fire District. Momentum however was lost as the Department of Internal Affairs began the process of reviewing the Fire Service Act with a view to reconfiguring the way the service was funded and organised. All options were therefore put on hold until the review was complete. In the end the status quo remained.

In 2008 the NRFA, prompted by the new Government's expectations, began to advocate in earnest for Enlarged Rural Fire District's to be established. Later that year a meeting of key stakeholders was held in Blenheim facilitated by the National Rural Fire Officer, Murray Dudfield. From that meeting Bob Penington, a former Marlborough District Council General Manager and experienced Director, was commissioned to produce a paper that proposed various options that could be considered.

During the next 2 years a Steering Committee made up of key stakeholders was established and the options were refined. In December 2010 a Working Group was established and prepared a 'Proposal for the Establishment of an ERFD in the Marlborough-Kaikoura Region'. This report indicated a clear preferred option that included all of the Marlborough and Kaikoura Districts into one RFD. This was accepted by the Steering Committee. The report was then presented to all the key stakeholders at public meetings in the Sounds, Marlborough and Kaikoura. All Volunteer Rural Fire Force's were invited to these meetings and special meetings were also held with Federated Farmers, Fire Brigade Chiefs and Forest Owners. There was a high level of engagement at these meetings and general support was forthcoming from the majority of participants.

At the conclusion of the consultation phase the preferred option was included for comment in both Council's draft Annual Plans. Submissions were received, not apposed in principle to the proposal, but wanting rate funding to be reviewed. Both Councils have been given the mandate through the public process to resource the proposed structure, and the Marlborough District Council will review its rating methodology. The Department of Conservation also has a mandate to resource the proposed structure.

Section One; The Need for Change in Relation to Regional Fire Coordination

1.1. Description of Current Situation

There are four existing Rural Fire Authority's that would be amalgamated under this proposal. The NZ Defence Force administers a RFD at Woodbourne Air Base however this is out of the scope of this proposal. The current RFAs (which are proposed to be amalgamated) are:

- Department of Conservation (DOC)
- Marlborough District Council (MDC)
- Kaikoura District Council (KDC)
- Marlborough North Rural Fire District (MNRFD)

Fire Authority	Hectares managed	%	Total TLA Hectares	%
MDC	311,857	25%	1,039,905	83.5%
KDC	57,595	5%	204,511	16.5%
MNRFD*	343,164	27%		
DOC**	531,800	43%		
Total	1,244,416	100%	1,244,416	100%

*Marlborough North is within the Marlborough District Council rateable area.

**DOC jurisdiction, as a Fire Authority, includes significant 1 kilometre fire safety margins on rateable land within both Council boundaries.

Four separate RFAs result in a significant duplication of effort and time, in particular administratively with fire plans, reporting and permitting. Fire season status trigger levels are not consistently applied across the various RFAs which can lead to confusion of the public and RFA personnel.

The Department of Conservation's 1 kilometre Fire Safety Margins (FSM) in Marlborough south and Kaikoura are not clearly understood by the public and their boundaries are obscure and often unknown. They are also confusing and undefined by Firecom in Christchurch.

1.1.1. Opportunity for Improved Regional Fire Coordination

This proposal will eliminate the duplication and inconsistency identified under the current situation. With one corporate body representing all the current stakeholders the PRFO will be empowered to bring about change and ensure effective and consistent coordination occurs across all the sectors of the new organisation.

1.2. Anticipated Benefits of Change

The stakeholders anticipate benefits in all aspects of fire management, in particular;

1.2.1. Anticipated Improvements to Administration and Management

Many of the benefits listed below can be considered as givens rather than anticipated.

- One PRFO, one fire plan, one training plan, one permit system, one website.
- One governance structure across the District with a clear corporate identity/brand.
- One agreement with New Zealand Fire Service and neighbouring RFAs.
- Removal of all Fire Safety Margins.
- Probable opportunity to rationalise equipment.
- One equipment maintenance facility servicing the ERFD.
- One set of reports for the NRFA.
- Ability to do a combined Wildfire Threat Analysis for the region.
- Relief of duty/standby requirements to one week per month for key staff.
- Retain/improve membership and enhance the current VRFFs fire fighting capability.
- Will free up stakeholders staff time in administration (eg: fire plans) and governance (eg: Regional Rural Fire Committee membership involvement).
- Provide a coordinated reduction programme across the District.
- Clear jurisdiction and improved/coordinated response procedures across the District.
- An increased and coordinated fire suppression capability for all stakeholders.

1.2.2. Anticipated Economies of Scale and Possible Cost Savings

There are issues of economy of scale with both Marlborough North RFD and Kaikoura District Council who both employ part time PRFO's. Both also have a relatively small operating budget that reduces their ability to meet the requirements of the new regulatory framework around meeting national standards for response, reporting, training, equipment and assessing fire hazards. This has been demonstrated by recent Performance Assessment Criteria report and Operational Reviews on the Marlborough North RFD and it is becoming increasingly difficult for smaller Authority's to meet the NRFA's National Standards on their own. By becoming a party to the proposed ERFD it is expected that the current administration, fire suppression and equipment issues across the region will be significantly reduced.

At this stage all parties are increasing their cash contribution towards managing rural fire as part of this proposal however there are expected to be savings within staff time as a result of the amalgamation.

There are likely to be opportunities to rationalise equipment in the medium term however this will only become apparent once a Regional Asset Strategy is completed. The equipment currently owned by stakeholders will remain with that stakeholder and replacement, repairs and maintenance costs will also remain where they currently lie. Maintenance will be carried out at a single depot based at the DOC site in Renwick.

1.2.3. Anticipated Improvement to Alignment with Community Needs

Only one of the current Fire Authority's (Marlborough North) is run by a Committee which includes members of all the key stakeholders. This Committee governs the outcomes of the Fire Authority and ensures it meets the requirements of all the constituent parties. The proposed ERFD Board will represent stakeholders across the entire region and it is expected that they will ensure their community's needs are being met.

1.2.4. Anticipated Improvement to Capability and to the Quality of Service Delivery

The employment of a full time PRFO by the RFA will result in an upgrading of the quality, frequency, and consistency of fire training. It is also expected that the current duplication of training plans and programmes will desist with the development of one training plan that meets the needs of the District as a whole.

The current fire management regime throughout Marlborough and Kaikoura is one the general public find confusing and frustrating. Many farmers require fire permits from two RFAs and experience different fire season status' and signage at the same time. Responses to fires can be delayed or confused because of the enormous jurisdictional boundary issues causing further angst between the Fire Authority's, Firecom in Christchurch and the Fire Service.

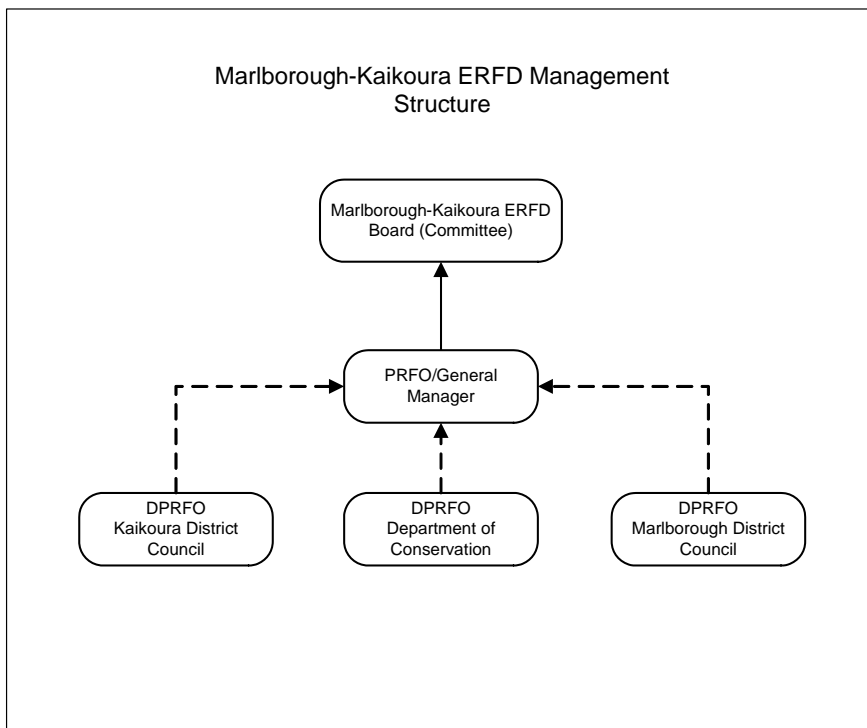
With the establishment of the proposed ERFD there will be one permit system, a coordinated fire season status, one RFA identity and one response structure, all of which will combine to improve the service of rural fire management to the taxpayers and ratepayers of the region.

1.3. Requirements Derived From; Forest and Rural fire Regulations 2005 Part 1 Fire Control Organisations

1.3.1. Proposed Fire Authority Name and Structure

The interim name is Marlborough/Kaikoura however the proposed name of the ERFD is yet to be decided by the Board. It is important to have a name that is not derived from any one of the stakeholders as it signifies a new beginning, and a new entity with a unique brand and regional identity.

The proposed structure is as follows:



The day to day administration of the RFD (eg: permit issuing) will be carried out by the Deputy PRFO's who will be responsible for Management Zones which reflect their agencies areas of influence. This will ensure that current VRF and local community relationships will be retained within those zones.

1.3.2. Proposed Membership of Authority

The Board will consist of seven members:

- (a) 1 person appointed by the NZ Fire Service.
- (b) 1 person appointed by the Kaikoura District Council.
- (c) 1 person appointed by the Marlborough District Council.
- (d) 1 person appointed by the Department of Conservation.
- (e) 1 person appointed by Federated Farmers.
- (f) 1 person appointed by the Marlborough Forest Industries Association.

- (g) 1 person appointed by the Board as an Independent Director.

1.3.3. Proposed Employees of Authority

The Authority proposes to employ a full time General Manager who will have the roles and responsibilities of a Principal Rural Fire Officer.

Three Deputy Principal Rural Fire Officers will be employed by the Department of Conservation, Marlborough and Kaikoura District Councils. These staff will report to their respective in-house managers however they will also have a professional responsibility to the PRFO. This will be established through a MOU between the providers and the Board.

Contractors are likely to be engaged for discrete pieces of work if the stakeholders cannot provide the service in-house.

1.3.4. Proposed Delegations of Powers by Authority

The Board will delegate powers to the PRFO, the three Deputy's and Rural Fire Officers. All these personnel will be suitably qualified and issued with warrants of authority by the Board.

1.3.5. Proposed Voluntary Rural Fire Forces Under the Authority's Management

The following is a list of current registered volunteer rural fire forces operating under three of the RFAs. It is anticipated that they will all be retained by the new Fire Authority and the Deputy PRFO's will be responsible for maintaining the existing local relationships.

Existing Volunteer Rural Fire Forces	Current Fire Authority	Membership
Linkwater VRFF	MNRFD	21
Rarangi VRFF	MNRFD	11
Okiwi Bay VRFF	MNRFD	9
Canvastown VRFF	MNRFD	10
Kenepuru VRFF	MNRFD	12
Koromiko VRFF	MNRFD	12
Clova Bay VRFF	MNRFD	6
Waitaria/Kenepuru Heads VRFF	MNRFD	12
French Pass VRFF	MNRFD	6
Nopera	MNRFD	10
North Bank VRFF	MNRFD	10
Blenheim VRFF	MDC	27
Awatere VRFF	MDC	11
Wairau/Waihopai VRFF	MDC	15
Flaxmore VRFF	MDC	12
Kekerengu VRFF	KDC	18
Goose Bay VRFF	KDC	14
Clarence VRFF	KDC	4
Kaikoura VRFF	KDC	5

Over time the PRFO will work alongside the Volunteer Rural Fire Force's and assess the capability and effectiveness of these forces which are currently the key to efficient fire suppression within the region. With this in mind, and with the Authority's authorisation, the PRFO will look to improve the VRFF's training and equipment if necessary and facilitate the development of further VRFF's where there is an identified need.

Section Two; The Effectiveness of Fire Control Measures.

2.1. The Need for Change

These are described quite fully in sections 1.1 and 1.2 above. To summarise, these are as follows.

- Current levels of duplication are very inefficient.
- Jurisdictional issues are becoming an increasing problem.
- Training is currently done by individual RFAs and often does not reflect the District's needs.
- Reduction programmes are individualistic, vary greatly across the District and are aimed at the RFAs stakeholders.
- Equipment is currently maintained at three locations (Rangiora, Blenheim and Renwick) and probably exceeds the requirements of the District.
- Current structures are stifling the development of professional rural fire management across the District.
- The current requirement for some staff to be on duty 24/7 is unsustainable and unhealthy.
- RFAs can no longer function effectively with part time PRFOs due to administration requirements.
- The capability and capacity of RFA's and VRFFs across the District vary greatly.

2.1.1. Fire Control Needs in Marlborough and Kaikoura

The proposed RFD has two distinct climatic zones roughly separated by the Wairau River. The northern portion is the Marlborough Sounds with its large tracts of native and plantation forests and to the south are drier east coast grasslands and dry forest/scrublands.

During the last 10 years the region has experienced nationally significant fires in plantation forests (Canvastown, Para and Pukaka) and grassland (Wither Hills). In one of the worst fire seasons (2000/01) 6,000ha of grassland, 400ha of scrubland and 300ha of plantation forestry was destroyed. Significant resources were required to extinguish the fires and skilled personnel to manage the multiple fires across the region were in short supply.

The causes of fire vary greatly from year to year, however land clearing is the most common cause of wildfires. Unfortunately "miscellaneous" and "unknown" causes occur too often. This scenario needs to be rectified. Sources of ignition of particular relevance to Marlborough and Kaikoura are power lines (particularly in the Sounds), railway operations, lightning strikes, incendiary devices and vehicles.

Between 1991/92 and 2006/07 records indicate a rising number of fires within the region and a rising annual area burnt. This trend needs to be turned around and it is expected that the proposed RFD will be a conduit for that

change through a coordinated readiness capability and reduction programme across the entire Region.

Marlborough and Kaikoura therefore need a coordinated, professional approach to fire management which enables managers to provide a higher level of service to the community. This service must deliver on all of the following programmes; reduction, readiness, response and recovery and deliver these in a coordinated and efficient manner to all the communities of interest within the District.

2.1.2. What is Currently Provided?

The parties below currently provide the following effort towards fire administration (this will continue):

Party	Full time equivalent	Roles Provided
Marlborough District Council	1.17FTE	PRFO, DPRFO, Admin
Kaikoura District Council	0.21FTE	PRFO, Admin
Department of Conservation*	1.17FTE	PRFO, DPRFO, Tech Support, Programme Mgt, Admin
Nelson Forests Ltd**	0.1 FTE	DPRFO
	Total: 2.65 FTE	

* Note: that the Department currently provides the PRFO and administrative support for Marlborough North RFD.

** Note: Nelson Forests Ltd provides the DPRFO role for Marlborough North RFD.

All four parties above provide for their own equipment replacement, repairs and maintenance. As a general rule this equipment has been purchased to manage fire response within the stakeholder's fuel types and landscapes. Individual stakeholders also produce their own fire response plans, fund their training programmes and provide their own radio network. Marlborough District Council in particular, runs a very good fire reduction programme through commercial radio networks.

As mentioned previously there are a number of duplications within all the 4 R's which each stakeholder also provides individually.

2.1.3 Service Provision Gap Analyses of Current Situation

Obvious gaps

- Single permitting system not in use.
- Completion and application of a wildfire threat analysis.
- Fire season status trigger levels and application.
- Consistency in application of fire training and fire fighter fitness.
- Jurisdictional issues hampering an effective and timely response.
- Consistency in equipment maintenance.

- Application of appropriate databases.
- CIMS structures not always used during large fire events.
- Equitable sharing of fire management and response duties.
- Smaller RFAs lack the funding to meet NRFA minimum standards.
- PRFO succession planning not in place.

2.2. The Anticipated Benefits of the RFD Change to the Provision of Fire Control

2.2.1. Anticipated Improvements to;

2.2.1.1 Fire Prevention

Given the rising number of fires and the increasing size of those fires, a more effective fire reduction programme is needed for the entire region. The issue of increasing subdivisions in the rural landscape which places often inexperienced members of the public in high fire risk locations has become a significant problem, particularly in the Marlborough Sounds. It is expected that a single entity with a clear mandate and a higher public profile will make inroads into these issues, using all the resources at its disposal in a coordinated fashion.

Once a wildfire threat analysis has been carried out in the District the benefits will flow through most of the following anticipated improvements, particularly within the realms of reduction and readiness.

2.2.1.2 Fire Detection

It is unlikely that the proposed RFD will lead to an improvement in fire detection. The 111 system is well understood and utilised by the public who report most of the fires in the region.

2.2.1.3 Fire Control

It is expected that with the establishment of the proposed District, fire control will be enhanced by the regular use of the CIMS model at all fire incidents across the region. It is also likely that relationships with neighbouring fire authorities and the Fire Service will also be enhanced resulting in better fire control generally.

2.2.1.4 Fire Restriction

Operations control and work restrictions in exotic forests according to fire danger levels will be coordinated across the region. The current practice of forest operations management is led by the forest managers of larger forest companies and relies on voluntary actions. If adopted by the Rural Fire Authority it will have wider and consistent coverage.

2.2.1.5 Fire Suppression and Extinction.

It is anticipated that with the elimination of jurisdictional boundary issues and clearly defined reporting lines, that response times to fire callouts will be reduced. There will be one point of contact for Firecom which will also streamline the callout procedures.

The PRFO will negotiate a Section 15 & 16 (mutual cooperation) agreement with the NZ Fire Service Area Manager for the entire region which should strengthen the relationships with the local brigades.

There are currently 19 VRFFs within Marlborough and Kaikoura and these often provide the first response to callouts in more remote areas. The improved training regime should ensure that they become more effective at extinguishing fires. Strategies will also be put in place to ensure membership is retained and enhanced to maintain their current public service.

Given the increase in available resources the ability to do multiple shifts at larger fires will be enhanced as will the ability to fight multiple fire events which will be coordinated by one PRFO. Stakeholders will also have access to a greater range of equipment which will be strategically located throughout the District.

2.2.2 Anticipated Improvements to Safeguarding of Life and Property from Damage and Risk of Damage.

There are many situations in Kaikoura and Marlborough where domestic dwellings are located within dense, highly flammable fuel types such as mānuka, kānuka and gorse particularly in the Marlborough Sounds. Effective advocacy for reduction programmes, clear evacuation options and a rapid response to fire events are vital to prevent tragedy in these situations. The current capacity of part time PRFO's to provide this service is very limited. It is anticipated that the proposed structure will provide greater effectiveness in these situations through better liaison with NZ Fire Service at the rural urban interface. It will also be important for the PRFO to work in with both Councils to ensure by-laws are effective, implemented and are complied with.

2.2.3 Anticipated Improvements to Land Management.

Much of the public conservation land and the exotic forest estate in Marlborough and Kaikoura are highly vulnerable to fire. Biodiversity values are particularly high in south Marlborough, Kaikoura and the offshore islands in the Marlborough Sounds. Forestry blocks throughout the region are of a high quality and well developed. Farming practises in the past have been reliant on fire and it is still a significant management tool for the farming community and forest industry.

One Fire Authority managing fire across the entire landscape will provide for improved land management. A consistent and coordinated application of fire

season status, permit issue and a single fire plan with an emphasis on reduction and recovery will ensure this is the case. Of assistance too will be the representatives of the Board, notably key stakeholders and land managers within the District.

2.3. Consideration of Special Areas

These will be considered on a case by case basis and managed through the fire planning process.

2.4. Forest and Rural Fire Regulations 2005. Part 2 Fire control operations, requirements.

2.4.1. The Fire Plan.

It is anticipated that an operative fire plan will be completed prior to 1 July 2012. Initially this will be an amalgamation of the current fire plans and may be modified prior to the Fire Season commencing on 1 October 2012.

2.4.2. Policies and Procedures for;

2.4.2.1. Reduction: These are expressed in the current agency fire plans and will be enhanced in the 2012-2013 Fire Plan for the RFD. For example this section of the plan will include fire hazard and risk management, wildfire threat analysis, fire prevention planning and public education.

2.4.2.2. Readiness: These are expressed in the current agency fire plans and will be enhanced in the 2012-2013 Fire Plan for the RFD. For example this section of the plan will include allocating fire responsibilities, training, equipment and setting fire season trigger levels.

2.4.2.3. Response: These are expressed in the current agency fire plans and will be enhanced in the 2012-2013 Fire Plan for the RFD. This section of the plan will include all aspects of responding to fires including receiving and dealing with the initial call.

2.4.2.4. Recovery: These are expressed in the current agency fire plans and will be enhanced in the 2012-2013 Fire Plan for the RFD. For example this section of the plan will include reviews and debriefs procedures, cost recovery and rehabilitation of fire sites.

2.4.3. Registered Areas and Restricted Areas

Any need to establish or retain these Areas will be assessed by the Committee once the RFD is operative.

2.2.4 Operators requiring safety clearance

The need for these safety clearances will be investigated by the PRFO and granted if required prior to the RFD becoming established.

Section Three; Alignment to Government Expectations and Strategic Direction of NZ Fire Service Commission

3.1 Alignment with Government Expectations

The current Government has been clear in its expectations that they want RFAs to merge into enlarged regional entities.

The Department of Conservation's National Fire Strategy 2009–14 under Goal 1 states that *'the Department actively supports the development and implementation of ERFD where they are of benefit to the Department'*.

This proposal is consistent with both of these expectations and the Department does acknowledge the benefits to be gained by being a party to this proposal.

3.2 Alignment with NZFS Commission's Strategic Direction

From; New Zealand Fire Service Commission Statement of Intent 2010/2013

'The NRFA will continue to promote the amalgamation of rural fire authorities, through the establishment of enlarged rural fire districts. In conjunction with the Department of Internal Affairs the Commission has published guidelines on the establishment, governance and management of enlarged rural fire districts. Currently, negotiation and consultation is in progress for the establishment of five enlarged rural fire districts with two of these having established steering committees and in the process of developing firm proposals.'

Work done to date on developing the proposed ERFD is consistent, and indeed has been primarily driven by this intent. The Board intends to abide by the guidelines developed by the NRFA with respect to the governance and management of this proposed ERFD.

From NRFA Statement of Strategic Direction 2009-2014

Strategy 2

Establish a Robust Framework to Promote the Establishment of Enlarged Rural Fire Districts

The objective of this strategy is to encourage Fire Authorities to merge into larger but better resourced Rural Fire Districts within a framework based on sound forest and rural fire management hazardscape guidelines.

This proposal includes the merger of four RFAs into a single entity. These include two TLAs, the Department of Conservation and the Marlborough North Rural Fire District. The gazetted area will be contiguous and follow the TLA boundaries.

Work done to date is consistent with this requirement and included a NRFA facilitated session on hazardscape assessment which forms the basic foundation of the funding agreement between the parties involved.

The ERFD Transition Board expects to be in a position in mid 2012 to sign a purchase agreement with the NRFA and provide a sound financial model that will entitle it to an agreed portion of the Administration Grant for ERFDs.

It also intends to appoint an Independent Director as soon as possible to involve them in the establishment phase of this proposal.