# **November Update from the Constitutional Review Committee**

The RNZFB’s Constitutional Review Committee last met on 17 November. Here are the key points of note from that meeting.

## **Your Feedback**

The Committee remains grateful to everyone who is engaged with the process. Every submission you send to us via any medium is considered by the full Committee, so you can be assured that the effort you make to participate makes a difference.

We’re committed to an open, inclusive process of discussion. Here’s a summary of the ways you can continue to influence our work.

Following our December meeting, it’s our intention to publish an interim report for consultation. We hope that this single document will give you a clear picture of how our proposed amended Constitution would look. The Interim Report also provides us an opportunity to circulate another version of the RNZFB’s objects, further amended in response to the feedback we have received.

We aim to make the Interim Report a clear, plain English summary as much as it’s possible to do so when dealing with a legal document, and we look forward to your thoughts on its contents.

We also appreciate that some members wish to review the actual text of the Constitution as soon as possible.

The Committee adopted a sequential approach to reviewing the Constitution, and has broadly finished its review of the document’s first nine sections. Bell Gully has completed a first draft of the Constitution giving effect to our recommendations to-date. Once the CRC has signed off on that work, we will publish the full text of the sections of the Constitution completed so far, and each subsequent section as it is completed. Since the sections remaining are comparatively straightforward, albeit with some issues that we know might be contentious, we anticipate completing this work early in the new year. This means that the full proposed changes to the Constitution will be available widely, well before the official four-week period of consultation that will conclude our process. We welcome the views of anyone who takes the time to study the draft sections, and are committed to making further refinements based on your feedback.

To assist consumer organisations and others who may wish to review the final, complete version of the Constitution, we will give as much notice as possible as to when we intend to circulate our proposed final version, so you will know when the four-week period is to begin.

We also propose holding a telephone conference call at a point where you can still influence our thinking, and prior to the final version being circulated for final feedback. Participation will be open to anyone who would like to have dialogue with the Committee directly.

As well as the amended Constitution, the grievance process the CRC intends drafting will play an important role in strengthening self-determination. It is our intention to circulate this for consultation as well.

Finally, the CRC is proposing a requirement to consult with members before any changes to mandatory policies required by the Constitution are put to the Board for adoption.

The sum total of all these changes is, we believe, an organisation where self-determination is even stronger, while making changes that allow the organisation to be responsive.

## **Composition and tenure of the Board**

It remains the CRC’s view that a four-year term for directors ensures that first-term directors have ample time to understand their role in the governance of a vital and complex organisation. Having given directors time to come up to speed, members may then express a verdict by way of the next election regarding the performance of each director.

The move to a model of electing the Board based on self-determination was an important shift for the RNZFB. In recognition of the vital role that sighted supporters play in the work of our organisation and the lives of blind people, the present Constitution includes a class of membership known as Associate Membership. Associate members can elect one director to the Board, who serves a three-year term. The RNZFB would not be able to do all that it does without the support of people who are generous with their time, talent, and of course financial support. We believe we can continue to show that gratitude through a range of mechanisms such as community committees and recognition programmes for supporters of all kinds. Consistent with a model of self-determination, the CRC proposes abolishing Associate Membership.

This would leave a Board of eight directors, plus the existing provision for the Board to co-opt under specific circumstances. Two directors would be elected by members each year.

In 2016, a Board of nine elected members is on the large side. Being able to renew a quarter of the Board each year preserves the retention of institutional knowledge, as well as the important principle of self-determination.

The CRC acknowledges that a Board of eight may mean that when dealing with contentious matters, the Chair’s casting vote may be used more frequently.

## **Deputy Chair**

In 2011, the role of Deputy Chair was abolished. The Committee proposes reinstating this role. We believe it facilitates succession planning. While it doesn’t bind the Board in terms of who it may elect as Chair in future, it sends a clear signal about who should be prepared to step in to the Chair’s role should it be vacated either temporarily or permanently.

## **Next Meeting**

Our final meeting of 2016 will be on 9 December.