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

The RNZFB’s Constitutional Review Committee last met on 7 March. We continue to discuss the feedback we’ve received, and in some cases, make modifications to our original recommendations as a result. This bulletin contains several items of significance.

## **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.

You have two opportunities this year to have your say on what we’re proposing and help influence our thinking before we conclude our work. The first of these rounds of consultation is underway now.

As promised, we have published an interim report for consultation with a deadline for submissions on this report set for **31 March**. We hope that this single document will give you a clear picture of how our proposed amended Constitution would look. If you wish to review a draft of the new Constitution, that is now also available.

The CRC will consider all your feedback and may make further changes based on it. We’ll circulate our latest version of the Constitution towards the end of July. Once again, we’ll receive your feedback and may make changes before the final version, on which there will be a binding vote.

We welcome the views of anyone who takes the time to study the draft sections and we are committed to making further refinements based on your feedback.

We also propose holding a telephone conference call at a point where you can still influence our thinking. Participation will be open to anyone who would like to have dialogue with the Committee directly.

We recognise that it can be helpful for members to exchange points of view on a matter like this. To that end, we’re pleased to advise that Blind Citizens New Zealand has agreed to encourage discussion on the Blind Discuss email list it operates. To join, send a blank email to abcnz-blinddiscuss-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

We’ve also established a forum for open discussion on the Blind Foundation’s Telephone Information Service. You can leave messages at option **3, 1, 5, 3**. These will be played for others to hear on menu option **3, 1, 5, 4**.

## **Proxy Voting**

Following receipt of written and in-person submissions, the CRC once again considered the matter of proxy votes, and what, if any, place they should have in the RNZFB’s Constitution. Related to this question is how members can put forward their own proposals for change, and how any proposals are tested and discussed ahead of a binding vote.

The CRC is committed to promoting processes in the Constitution that are democratic and inclusive. It’s important that everyone who wants a say can have one.

To that end, we have reached the following position on proxy voting and related matters.

* The use of proxies will be removed entirely, apart from to form a quorum and to vote on the appointment of the auditor at an AGM;
* A group of 30+ Members may put forward a proposal to be discussed at the next AGM;
* The Board can still call a meeting of members;
* Resolutions at a meeting of members will be passed by simple majority;
* Major transactions and constitutional changes will be approved by postal ballot without the requirement to hold a special meeting and will be passed by a two-thirds majority;
* Where major transactions or constitutional changes are proposed there will be a six-week consultation process and an opportunity for a counter-proposal to be developed and voted upon. The aim here is to promote wide debate within the community before a vote takes place, to ensure members have a clear understanding of what is being proposed;
* A major proposal with the support of 100 Members will trigger a postal ballot, the result of which is binding on the Board.

This is a significant new series of initiatives that further promote self-determination and transparency.

## **Length of term of Board directors**

The CRC has received feedback in submissions, and consulted with past and current Board directors, regarding our suggestion that the terms of directors should be extended from three to four years.

Views on this topic appear to be fairly evenly split. We’ve therefore decided to withdraw this recommendation, which would mean that directors would continue to be elected for a three-year term if our proposed new Constitution is adopted.

We note that it is important for directors to receive a thorough induction, to get them up to speed as quickly as possible.

## **Co-opted directors**

The current Constitution allows the Board to co-opt directors, as a means of addressing any skills deficit or specific need that may arise. Co-option has always been a contentious matter, because co-opted directors are not directly accountable to members. We have sought to address some of the concerns that have been expressed.

The CRC recommends that any director the Board co-opts may only serve a maximum of two consecutive terms. Anyone who has been co-opted may seek election to the Board at any time.

We propose that a decision to co-opt must be supported by a majority of elected directors.

### **Next Meeting**

The CRC next meets on 20 April.