



Service Standard 1.3.5

Zoning and Teaming

Version	2.0
SOPs	Nil
Policy Owner	Deputy Commissioner Field Operations
Policy Contact	Director Area Operations
Approval Date	2 September 2026
Next Review	2 September 2031

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This service standard governs the review and modification of RFS District boundaries through processes known as zoning and teaming.

2. Policy

- 2.1. The *Rural Fires Act 1997* (the Act) constitutes rural fire districts (RFDs) using local government boundaries. The Act also sets out how two or more Councils may agree to share their responsibilities across those RFDs, and then either individually or in combination enter into rural fire district service agreements with the RFS.
- 2.2. These legislative arrangements provide the basis for the RFS to create organisational units called RFS Districts. Each RFS District has responsibility for one or more RFDs with boundaries that encompass those RFDs.
- 2.3. RFDs can be grouped into RFS Districts in one of two ways:
 - **Zoning** is the formal joining of two or more RFDs with one combined service agreement between the RFS and all relevant Councils. Responsibilities, resources and processes are integrated by agreement between the Councils within the zone.
 - **Teaming** is an internal process that consolidates RFS functions and administration across RFDs into a single organisational unit but retains separate service agreements with the Councils.
- 2.4. A new or modified RFS District may be made up of any combination of previously stand-alone, zoned or teamed RFDs.
- 2.5. The boundaries of RFS Districts may be modified from time to time in response to changing circumstances or organisational need. Such boundary changes may require new zoning or teaming arrangements to be established, or existing arrangements ceased.
- 2.6. Any creation or change to the boundaries of an RFS District will potentially impact people, processes, and systems. Planning, consultation and information sharing throughout the process

is critical to achieving a successful outcome. The steps required to implement a new zoning or teaming arrangement or modify an existing one are outlined below.

- 2.7. The same assessment, consultation, approval and change management requirements apply whether a new zone or team is proposed, or an existing arrangement is proposed to be ceased, separated or substantially modified.

Proposal

- 2.8. A proposal to create, modify or cease a zoning or teaming arrangement may be initiated by the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner Field Operations, relevant Director Area Operations, Area Command, affected District Manager, or one or more affected Councils. The proposal should identify the issue or opportunity being addressed, the affected RFDs and Councils, and the expected operational, administrative or community service benefits.
- 2.9. When a new or modified zoning or teaming arrangement has been proposed the relevant Area Command will establish a working group to conduct an initial assessment of the proposal.
- 2.10. The working group should include appropriate representation from Area Command, affected Districts, staff, volunteer leadership, affected Councils, and relevant enabling functions. Membership should be proportionate to the scale and complexity of the proposed change.
- 2.11. In assessing the proposal, the working group will consider how likely it is to deliver the following criteria for zoning or teaming:
- a. improve service delivery to the community;
 - b. provide operational benefits and increased support for brigades; and
 - c. deliver greater administrative efficiencies for the RFS and affected Councils.
- 2.12. The assessment should also consider any likely adverse impacts, including impacts on local leadership, volunteer identity, brigade support, travel distances, access to facilities, council relationships, staff workload, operational readiness and continuity of service delivery.
- 2.13. Following initial assessment, the working group will make a recommendation to the Deputy Commissioner Field Operations to either support or not support the proposal.

Change Management Plan

- 2.14. If the Deputy Commissioner Field Operations accepts a recommendation to support the proposal, a change management plan (CMP) must be developed via the working group detailing the proposed change, reasons for the change, its likely impacts and the stakeholder consultation plan. Areas to be addressed in the CMP include but are not limited to:
- The current and planned staffing structure
 - Current and planned locations of and access to district infrastructure including administration, operations, and training facilities
 - Any proposed changes to the location of staff or functions
 - Any proposed changes to the operation or management of brigades or brigade groups
 - The proposed structure and operation of the Senior Leadership Team or Teams
 - The functions and responsibilities of each Council involved in the proposed arrangement
 - How changes to systems or processes arising from the new arrangement will be implemented.
- 2.15. The CMP should also include identified risks and mitigations, implementation milestones, communication arrangements, transitional governance, financial and resourcing impacts, and the proposed approach to post-implementation review.
- 2.16. The working group must consult with the Workforce Strategy and Analytics team when developing the Change Management Plan.

Consultation

- 2.17. The Change Management Plan should identify all affected stakeholders and the appropriate method for seeking their input and feedback on the proposal.
- 2.18. In accordance with PSC Directive 2011-014 - Agency Change Management Guidelines, the Public Service Association (PSA) will be formally engaged through appropriate forums such as the Joint Consultative Committee.

Approval

- 2.19. Following consultation, the final change management plan will be submitted to the Deputy Commissioner Field Operations for endorsement and to the Commissioner for approval.
- 2.20. The final Change Management Plan must include a summary of consultation undertaken, key themes raised, issues requiring resolution, and any changes made to the proposal as a result of consultation.
- 2.21. Once approved by the Commissioner, implementation of a **teaming arrangement** can commence in accordance with the approved Change Management Plan..
- 2.22. Before a **zoning arrangement** can be implemented, a Zoning Agreement must be entered into by the Councils involved in the zoning and provided to the RFS Commissioner.
- 2.23. A post-implementation review should be completed within an agreed period after commencement to assess whether the zoning or teaming arrangement has achieved the intended service delivery, operational and administrative outcomes, and whether any further adjustments are required.

Zoning agreement

- 2.24. A zoning agreement is made under the provisions of section 7 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*: Responsible local authorities in rural fire districts.
- 2.25. A zoning agreement is an agreement in writing between councils to operate and manage their separate rural fire district responsibilities as one zone under the terms of a single service agreement with the RFS. The zone agreement will set out how the rural fire responsibilities of the different councils will be allocated and managed between them.

3. Definitions

- 3.1. For the purpose of this policy document the following definitions apply:
 - a. **Council**: the council of an area constituted under the Local Government Act 1993
 - b. **RFS District**: an organisational unit within the RFS structure with geographic boundaries made up of one or more rural fire district, led by a District Manager.
 - c. **Rural fire district**: a legally defined area of land, constituted by the Rural Fires Act for the area of each local authority with boundaries of the district being the same as the boundaries of the local authority's area.
 - d. **Service agreement**: a Rural Fire District Service Agreement made under s12A of the Rural Fires Act 1997 between the RFS and a Council or group of Councils.

4. Document control

Release history

Version	Date	Summary of changes
1.0	16 Jun 2010	This policy replaces Policy 6.1.2 Zoning and Staff Consolidation v1.0

Version	Date	Summary of changes
2.0	2 September 2026	Repeals previous policy P3.2.6 and remakes as SS 1.3.5 Zoning and Teaming v1.0 Comprehensive review and update

Approved by

Name	Position	Date
Trent Curtin	Commissioner	2 September 2026

Related documents

Document name
Rural Fires Act 1997
Local Government Act 1993
NSW Dept Premier and Cabinet Agency Change Management Guidelines