

Proposal to change the governance structure of Hoe Tonga

Background

The Hoe Tonga Pacifica Waka Ama Association (Hoe Tonga) is the organisation representing Waka Ama (Outrigger Canoeing) in the lower North Island. The region comprises the sub-areas Wellington, Horowhenua, the Manawatu, the Wairarapa and Whanganui.

Hoe Tonga is one of six regional associations in New Zealand and affiliated to Waka Ama New Zealand (Nga Kaihoe o Aotearoa). Waka Ama New Zealand represents Waka Ama at the national level.

Waka Ama New Zealand defines the region's functions (including Hoe Tonga's) as follows

- Support the Objects and Strategic Plan of Waka Ama NZ and assist the operation of Waka Ama NZ within the Hoe Tonga Region
- Representing and governing Waka Ama in the region
- Developing and growing Waka Ama in the region
- Informing (and communicating with) its regional clubs and paddlers
- Organising regional events, and facilitating the organisation of events and competitions
- Providing assistance in the development and management of clubs, where appropriate

As part of our Strategic Plan 2014-2018, Hoe Tonga has committed to reviewing the roles and accountabilities of office holders and club representatives.¹ In this context it is timely to consider the structure of the region, which provides the framework in which officer holders operate.

In order to achieve the objectives of the strategic plan, the Hoe Tonga President has considered the shortcomings of the current approach, and has considered ideas to ensure that the region (i) is best placed to manage and grow the sport within the Hoe Tonga region, and (ii) is in a position to most effectively fulfil the functions set by Waka Ama New Zealand. While compiling this proposal, the President worked with the Hoe Tonga Vice-President Petra Melville and ex-Vice-President Christine Fox, and consulted with Waka Ama NZ Chief Executive Lara Collins, and the Chair of the Waka Ama NZ Board Paora Howe (also past executive officer in Hoe Tonga).

This document sets out the current structure, the issues with the current set-up, and an alternative structure to better deliver on our strategic objectives.

¹ http://www.hoetonga.co.nz/?page_id=795

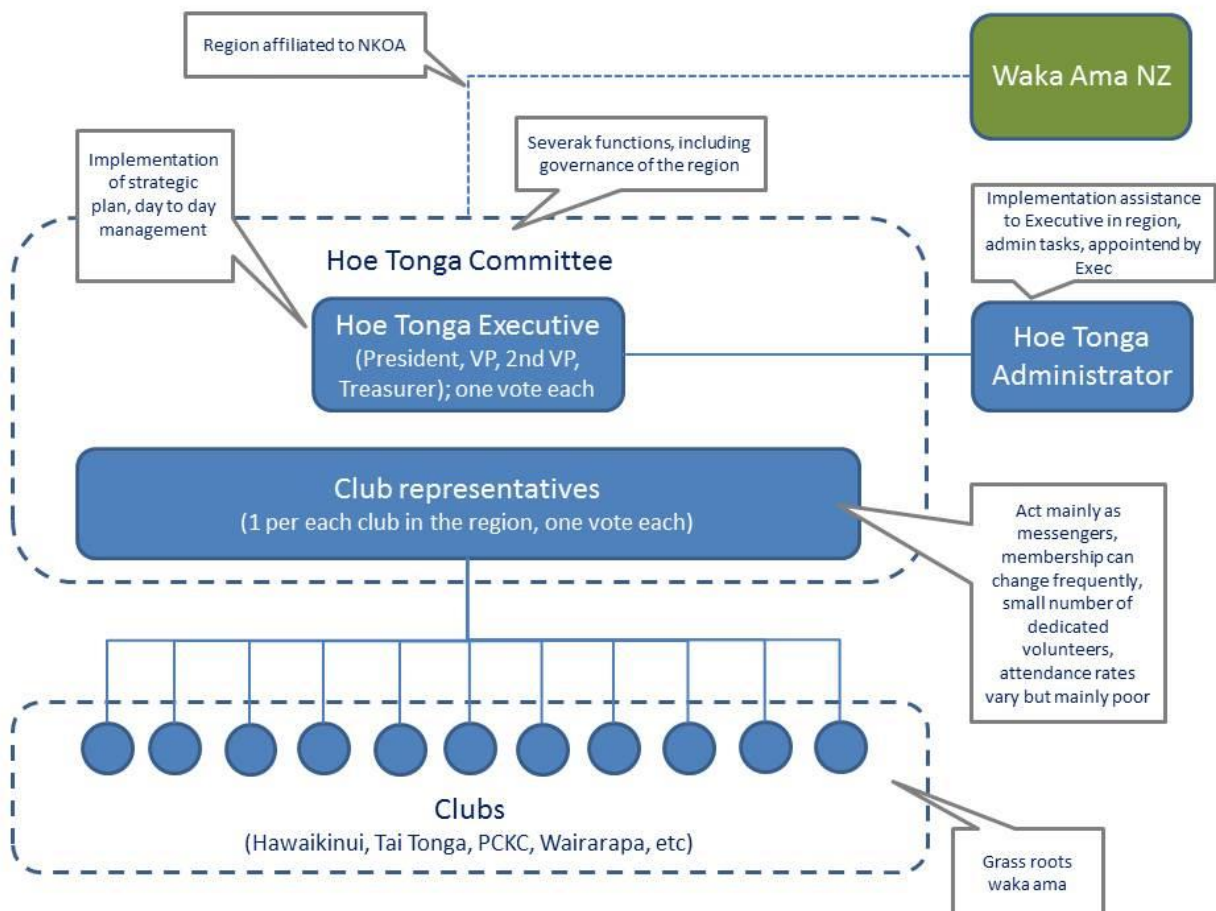
Current structure

In the current structure, the region has a regional committee that is tasked with carrying out its functions. The regional committee is made up of club representatives (1 per club), and the executive officers (up to 5).

There are currently 11 affiliated clubs in the Hoe Tonga region, so the committee can have a total of up to 16 people. Each person has one vote. At AGMs and SGMs only club representatives are eligible to vote (eg to elect the executive officers). The committee makes relevant strategic decisions, although day to day matters rest with the executive, and increasingly the administrator.

The current constitution defining the structure is available at www.hoetonga.co.nz/?page_id=795 ('About').

The figure below illustrates the structure and relevant linkages.



Problems

There are a number of problems with the current set up.

Lack of clarity of role of club representatives

Club representatives are formally tasked with representing the views of the clubs at the regional meetings, and representing Hoe Tonga's views at club meetings. This would suggest that they are key messengers between Hoe Tonga, clubs and paddlers. However, as the regional committee is required to make key decisions on a regular basis, they do not just act as representatives of the clubs, they also need to think about what is in the best interests of the sport in the region as a whole. There can be some level of confusion and misunderstanding regarding the role. What happens when the two roles conflict?

Rising importance of other information channels

While the role of the club representative does entail a messenger function, in practice most information between Hoe Tonga and paddlers is actually provided through other means. This includes the regional website, Facebook, and emails to/from club executives.

In particular, the website has been an increasingly important mechanism for Hoe Tonga to reach paddlers, because a lot of information does not tend to be passed on. This is partly a function of non-attendance of club reps at meetings.

Loss of ability to make decisions

A small number of clubs and their reps have consistent attendance. However, in many cases attendance is inconsistent, and in some cases clubs have not sent representatives in a number of years.

On occasions this has led to a lack of a quorum at meetings, thus relevant decisions cannot be made. For example, at a number of meetings there have been 3 executive officers, and only 2 or 3 clubs (out of 11). Decision-making has become increasingly difficult over the past two years. This is despite making phone conferencing facilities available at meetings, to assist clubs that are located more than 1 hour drive from Wellington/Porirua. Only one of three clubs located outside the Wellington/Porirua area has taken up this opportunity.

Lack of continuity

The position of Hoe Tonga club rep can change frequently in some clubs (eg someone else from within a club may attend instead of their formal club rep). This can lead to a lack of continuity, and those people won't be in a position to actively contribute to the committee as they may not be aware of relevant previous discussions and/or decisions. They may also be unclear about the role of the club rep (eg relevant messages are not passed on, or they may not know what their club's position is on a certain issue).

Lack of specialist skills

The nature of the region's governance and administration increasingly requires specialist skills (eg finance, strategic planning, governance, etc) but the combined regional membership (clubs, paddlers) has little ability to affect the make-up of the regional committee as a whole. In a number of cases it is just whoever is available on the day to attend, as opposed to who has the best skills to contribute actively.

Other contextual factors

No direct link with Waka Ama New Zealand

How can we ensure that relevant goals, objectives, and initiatives are aligned and coordinated with Waka Ama NZ? For example, Hoe Tonga has no vote at the Waka Ama NZ AGM, and equally, Waka Ama NZ has no direct input into regional matters. While regions are required to be consistent with the goals and objectives of Waka Ama NZ, and NKOA has defined the role of regions, it is timely to think about whether the current regional structure can deliver on its role effectively and whether there needs to be a better 'connection'.

Initiatives in other regions

Some of the above problems are not unique to Hoe Tonga. Both the Auckland region (AROCA) and the Gisborne/Hawkes Bay region are considering potential improvements and associated governance changes. AROCA is most advanced, on 24 May 2015 the region agreed unanimously to change its governance structure to a Board structure. They are planning to formally adopt a revised constitution by July 2015.

Proposed structure

In order to address the above concerns, a change in structure of the regional governance framework is proposed. With it, the roles of officer holders would change.

Board

In the proposed structure, a Board would govern the region. This Board would be made up of 4 to 6 members, each with relevant skills to contribute. Up to 4 board members would be elected by the clubs within the region, and up to an additional 2 people would be appointed by a special appointment committee involving Waka Ama NZ. The appointment committee could also include another independent sports body (eg Sport Wellington).

The Board would meet at least 4 times per year.

The Board would be tasked to make decisions based on the whole of the sport and all its members in the region. The Board would look after the best interests of Waka Ama (present and future) in the region. This would be the first duty of members of the Board.

The Board would be responsible for making decisions of a strategic or policy nature, and will do so on behalf of the Waka Ama community in the region. In the short to medium term, the Board will have to assume both governance and management responsibilities. In the longer term it is envisaged that the Board would focus on governance, with the administrator taking on all management responsibilities.

Administrator

As currently, a paid administrator would assist in the administration of the region. The Board would appoint the administrator, who in turn will report to the Board.

The role of the administrator is to support the Board in carrying out its duties, and by assuming as much as possible the majority of administrative tasks (communication, website and Facebook updates, general admin, funding applications, event planning and organisation, etc).

Clubs

As currently, the clubs in the Hoe Tonga region would be the members of Hoe Tonga. Under this new structure they would continue to account for 100% of the votes at the AGM, as they currently do. In this way the Board is accountable to the members of Hoe Tonga.

The role of club reps would no longer exist. However, Hoe Tonga already consults with clubs on all strategic and policy decisions and this would continue to be the case. In addition, the Board would meet with clubs at least once per year at the AGM where they may raise concerns or issues that may be raised at Board level. There is also the option of having an additional meeting if required or requested (eg to enable consultation, etc) and clubs have the option of making contact with the Board via the Chair.

In addition to this, the administrator and the Board would communicate with all clubs and paddlers via its website, Facebook, and email, as is currently the case.

Clubs and paddlers would continue to be able to contact the administrator at any time with concerns (as is already the case); the administrator is the main point of contact for clubs and paddlers.

AGM

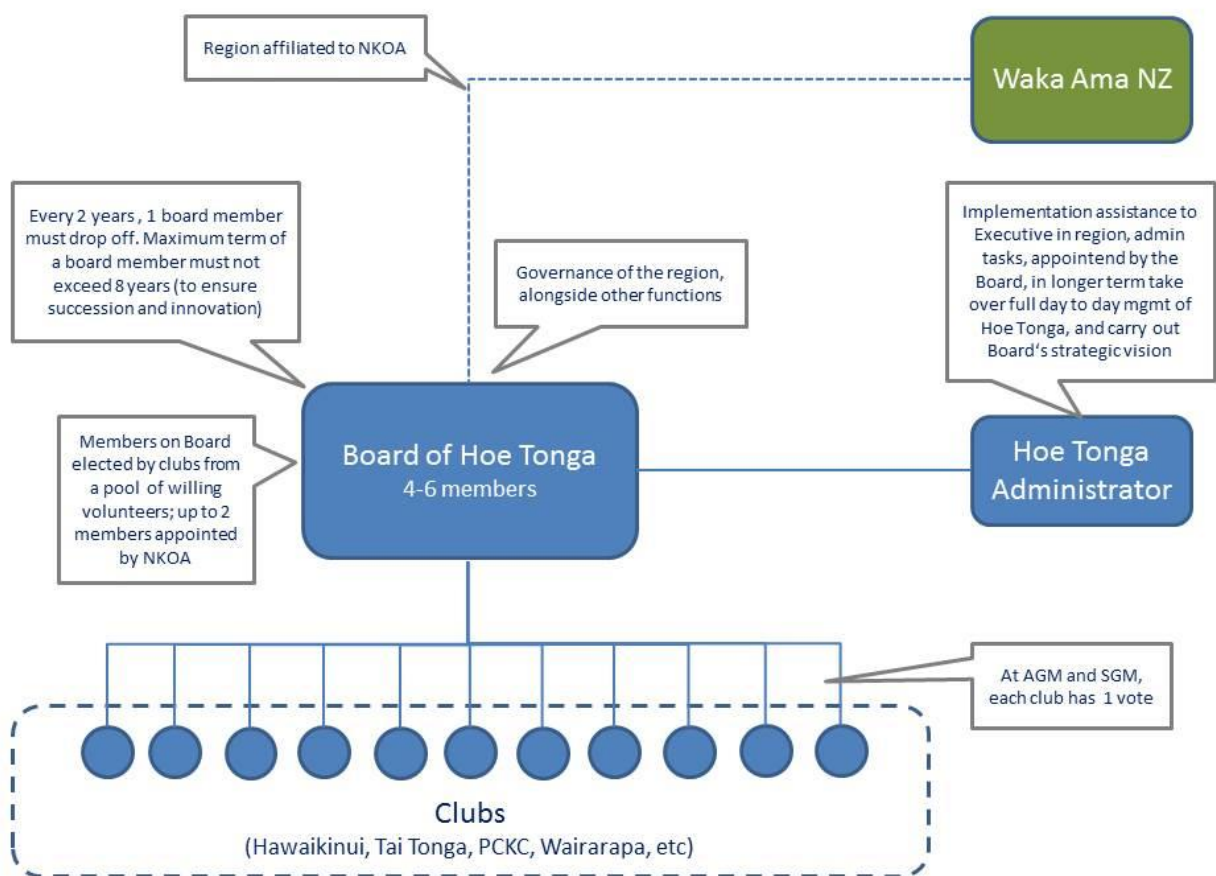
Every year at the AGM clubs would vote on relevant rules, constitutional changes, and remits as raised by clubs or the Board, as per the constitution.

In terms of votes, the proposal is for each club to have one vote (as is currently the case).

The Board would NOT vote at the AGM.

There would be provision within the constitution for clubs to call a special general meeting should they feel they have just cause or evidence that the Boards' ability to govern is compromised.

The following figure illustrates the proposed structure.



Benefits

The benefits of a board structure for Hoe Tonga are as follows:

- Clear role of board members to work for the benefit of the region and its members
- Improved ability to make effective decisions
- Better spectrum of governance and specialist skills represented
- Improved continuity on the board, as board members fulfill a dedicated role
- Improved link to Waka Ama NZ (via input to appointed board member)
- Continued opportunity for discussions of regional issues at special regional meetings (eg to enable consultation and exchange of ideas)
- Continued communication via web, email, and facebook
- As effectiveness Hoe Tonga increases as a result of the change in governance, this is expected to enable further growth of the sport in the region

Next steps

- 8 June: Presentation of proposal at regional committee meeting (COMPLETED)
- 29 June: Further discussion of proposal, meeting between regional clubs and WANZ CEO Lara Collins will provide an opportunity to discuss WANZ experience, and experience in other regions
- 15 July: Deadline for clubs and paddlers to provide formal feedback by way of submissions
- 22 July: Revised proposal and draft constitution sent to clubs (via email, website, and FB), Special General Meeting to be scheduled for later in August
- August (tentative): Special General Meeting to formalise changes, if applicable