**New Zealand Inline Hockey Association**

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| **September 2022** | **www.inlinehockeynz.org.nz** |

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| **Conference proposal** | |
| **Background** | Inline hockey in New Zealand has for over 20 years operated based on geographical, region-based system in which a locally elected committee oversees the implementation of inline hockey at a local level on behalf the IHNZ Board.  For at least this duration of time, four regions have been active with regional committees empowered to govern each. Also, during this time membership numbers declined with ineffective regional committee governance and leadership considered to have contributed to this.  Insufficient action was taken by previous IHNZ administrators to address this where regional committees operated autonomously and, in many instances, no in line with the objectives and requirements of the Board.  At the 2021 AGM, a proposal was presented by Cam Rock with an alternative system that is based on a conference model commonly operated in North America that would support and encourage increased participation and implementation of the sport as well as provide a more equitable dispersion of players across grades to foster and support fairer competition for all members. |
| **Purpose:** | To transition to and establish a new operational model for the administration and implementation of inline hockey in New Zealand. |
| **Proposal** | The overall goal of the conference model is to have more hockey being played and more people being involved in the sport. The proposal requires clubs to be available to play locally within their conference as well as cross-conference travel further afield to play the scheduled number of games to determine qualification for national club championships (where applicable).  The administration of the conference model would be overseen by conference committees that would be appointed by the IHNZ board and guided by a policy document that would delegate authority from the board to operate the sport.  The conferences (areas) will be determined by the Board and would be loosely based on geographical areas, however, player/member demographics will also be considered in any determination to ensure a fair balance where possible.  Zoning or catchment areas will be established to encourage clubs to grow the sport locally and for players to support their local hockey community. This also provides controls to minimise competition manipulation. This aspect will be made clearer with respect to game competition structure in which across grade participation can apply.  The scope of the conference committees is to organise local competition to determine eligibility for national club championships in the case of senior grades, and to organise and schedule competition for junior grades to support participation and development at the grassroots level. Their other focus will around organising inter-regional competition for both junior and senior levels to support the first level of high-performance inline hockey.  Competition draws/scheduling, referee scheduling, dispensation and disciplinary panels will be done centrally to support fairness and consistency across all aspects of the sport. Conference committees will be included in the discussion and planning.  Finances will be manged centrally where delegated conference committee members will be able to access and manage the necessary finances for their respective conference.  Clubs will be required to form teams based on the age grade they are eligible for and for senior grades (19+), depending on the total numbers of registered players, clubs will be required to enter teams in certain grades  i.e:  15< (one team) can enter in Premier, Snr A or snr B  15- 30 (two teams): must enter at least one team in Premier or Snr A, may enter in Snr A or Snr B  30+ (three teams) must enter a team in each premier, Snr A and Snr B.  [may need to have some flexibility here e.g, Vipers have a large number of Snr players but most are Snr B level, and not of high enough skill level to play in Snr A or Prem team  The barrier identified to the full implementation of the conference model is the lack of teams across multiple grades within clubs to complete inter-club competition as a part of the local conference competition.  What is proposed is a two-stage transition with the initial phase being a review of our current regional setup where the southern region is removed completely with the Nelson Whalers are inserted into Lower North Island and Christchurch Lions are inserted in Northern Region.  The rationale for this being that logistically, it is easier and arguably more cost efficient for Christchurch Lions to get to Auckland to play games on the basis they would be able to travel 2-3 times throughout the competitive season in addition to attending National Club Championships.  And for Nelson Whalers, over the last few years, Nelson Whalers have regularly organised/travelled to LNI to play exhibition games once per year as well as some LNI clubs having travelled to Nelson to do the same. As long as this is still something all involved are willing to do, then it is the most appropriate option.  The basis for this being that it has been demonstrated it has worked and can work and can be accommodated in the proposed local conference competition.  The second phase would be implemented once the majority of clubs have multiple grades (minimum five teams across grades) to make it viable to organise club to club travel. This stage will be heavily dependent on clubs being proactive in their recruitment and retention which could take some time to build and develop capability.  Subsidising of fees for Christchurch and Nelson could be considered as a part of planning to help offset the increase costs they will incur for participation. Of note, this could also be something that might need to be considered for Northland Stingrays given their location and travel requirements. This obviously will need further discussion.  **Zoning/Catchment areas**  The shift to the new conference model also offers the opportunity to review how we manage competition manipulation and encourage proactivity on recruitment and retention within a club environment given the lack thereof we have seen across most clubs within our inline hockey community.  To date this has been achieved by implementing a game percentage-based criteria in terms of eligibility to participate at Nationals and despite its seeming unpopularity for making clubs accountable for how they organise their teams, it has shown to a certain extent to be successful in providing a fair and as even a playing field as possible.  With the shifting dynamic in how our sport operates and its participants, and incorporating the ideas around the purpose/intent of the conference model (i.e., the importance and need for clubs to be actively recruiting and building their capability), introducing a location based requirement would be the best option to support achieving this objective. It would also encourage clubs and players to be more accountable and responsible for how they manage their relationships in order to build and strengthen their respective club.  The proposal is that clubs will be designated a zone or catchment area primarily based on the locale of the club (i.e., New Plymouth Ravens would have the New Plymouth and perhaps the wider Taranaki area to draw players from, Northland Stingrays would have Keri Keri and the wider northland area).  Any players/potential players residing in these catchment areas would be required to play for the designated club.  This will also allow clubs to focus their efforts in terms of recruitment and provide for future proofing the sport within their area. Hamilton and New Plymouth are perhaps the best examples of having focussed on local communities to build their clubs and arguably are the most prosperous and successful clubs in NZ because of it.  Auckland and Wellington areas would be slightly different in that these big cities have multiple clubs and poses a slightly different problem. These cities would need to be divided up to accommodate the current clubs.  e.g.:  Wellington –  Renegades would have Hutt Valley,  Penguins would have Khandalla – down to the south coast,  Wolves would have Broadmeadows/Ngauranga up to Tawa/Takapu Valley (just before Lower Hutt)  Auckland:  Vipers would have North Shore up to Northland boundary.  Orcas would have Newmarket/Mt Eden across to the west  Panthers would have Mt Wellington across to the east and south to Manurewa  \*\*\*\*The above are just suggestions, I do not know the cities intimately enough to know if this would be the best division.\*\*\*\*\*  [let's consult with the current clubs and come up with viable catchment zones]  This would also give IHNZ more control and responsibility over those applying to be IHNZ member clubs as any new clubs would require a zone/ catchment area and they will have to be able to demonstrate that the establishment of any new club is needs based rather than because they can’t resolve or manage issues or disputes within a club. This will allow us to starting moving away from permitting “one-team” clubs who don’t have any growth and development motivation.  Having a structure such as this allows for clubs to be able to support their teams by permitting players to play across multiple grades throughout the year. This provides development experience for younger players and provides for players that may not be available for scheduled conference league games where teams can still show up and maintain a competitive edge without being disadvantaged and at the same time, minimising the risk of competition manipulation.  This would be limited to players playing up one age grade only:  e.g., prems could pull from Snr A, Snr W, 18U  Snr A could pull from Snr W, Snr B, 18U  Snr B could pull from Snr W, 18U  Snr W could pull from 18U and 16U female players  18U could pull from 16U  16U could pull from 14U  In the case of participation at Nationals, players would still only be able to play for one team, so clubs will have to mindful of their numbers when they are deciding on their entries.  Any 14U players that might be called up to 16U, they would need to choose Festival of Hockey **or** National Championships, they could not play at both.  **Conference Leagues**  Due to the identified barriers in establishing the conference model as initially designed, a slightly different version will be required in the interim.  This may include more travel for those club/teams within conferences where numbers in grades are low.  The format for these leagues could vary between grades depending on overall numbers and the needs of any competition qualification criteria.  **Premier/Exhibition League**  With the advent of a new competition structure, it also allows for the creation of a separate elite competition as a spectator component for our sport.  It is not entirely different to the normal competition structure with the exception premier grade teams would play three rounds of games throughout the season all together rather than as a part of their respective conference, earn points at each event and be seeded for nationals – this being on the presumption that we have around only 8 teams in the premier grade nationally. Obviously, this may need to be reviewed upon an influx of premier grade teams or changes of the like.  Teams would still be part of Clubs and players would adhere to the same rules as everyone else.  [how would catchment concept affect teams such as Lightning? Do we put a ‘historical’ clause in, to allow these teams to continue to be viable while they endeavour to build their club?]  These teams would play regularly throughout the premier league season to maintain that high level of hockey.  The proposed events where this league would be at  Bauer Cup / MWI – Auckland (April)  Queens B’day tourney – New Plymouth (June)  Third event (to be confirmed - in august)  Ending with Nationals in October  These events are approximately 2 months apart and allow for sufficient time in between rounds given the amount of travel likely to be involved. Of note, most prem teams go to compete at these events anyway so we would be “killing two birds with one stone”.  This would mean that the Prem competition would start slightly earlier than everyone else (after Queens B’day weekend).  [don’t agree entirely with this concept, I think Prem teams need to have games (even if non-comp) between these competition weekends, two months is a long time between games, and for Central teams, this is less games than they had this year. Many of the Prem teams play in these tournaments as it is, so it is not giving them anything different, just a name change. There needs to be ability in schedule to play local teams against each other, or against Snr A, to keep interest in the sport and to fulfil the objective of playing more hockey more often]  [need a statement to the effect that IHNZ reserve the right to change the event notice as needed to ensure the viability of the Conference competition] |
| **Desired Outcomes** | Better stability and consistency in the administration and operation of inline hockey.  Improved leadership and visibility  Members have more confidence about what is actually going on.  More players playing more hockey.  Improved competition and promotion of the sport  Improved player recruitment and retention |
| **Budget** | To be developed.  Likely to be mainly user pays unless we can secure and funding or sponsorship. |
| **Proposed by** | Cameron McIver |