**Rural Women New Zealand**  
**Submission on the NP Scope of Practice and Qualifications**

**Introduction**

1. Rural Women New Zealand (‘RWNZ’) is a charitable member based organisation that reaches into all rural communities and advocates on issues that impact on those communities. RWNZ has advocated since 1925 for accessible and equitable health services for rural families. We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Nursing Council’s (‘the Council’) consultation on its review of the Nurse Practitioner scope of practice and qualifications,

**Overview of submission**

2. RWNZ is on the whole supportive of the changes proposed to the Nursing Practitioners (‘NP’) scope and educational programme. We think that increasing the number of NPs in rural areas should be a key focus of the proposed changes. For this reason we:

- strongly support the proposal to remove specialty area of practice requirements from the NP scope of practice; and,

- support the establishment of a dedicated NP education programme, provided this programme is delivered in a way that is accessible for RNs in rural areas. For example, we think any decision over prescribed clinical hours must be considerate of what is reasonably achievable for nurses practicing in rural areas.
Increasing the number of NPs in rural areas should be a key focus

3. Access to primary health care, remains a significant issue in rural New Zealand. The tyranny of distance and lack of GP’s in rural parts of New Zealand means that these communities are still not having their health needs met.

4. The potential for NPs to play a critical role in addressing these health disparities is well understood. The NP role was introduced with the policy intention of improving access to primary health care in underserved rural communities. However the relatively low number of NPs in New Zealand suggests that this goal is not being realised to its full potential. We think that more should be done to increase the number of NPs in rural communities, and that this goal should be a key focus of the Council’s review.

Strongly support removal of specialty area of practice requirements from NP scope of practice

5. RWNZ strongly supports the removal of the requirement for registration to be restricted to a specific area of practice. Lack of access to health care in rural areas, means that nursing practice in these areas is inherently generalised. NPs in rural areas must be flexible to a broad range of areas so that they can effectively meet the diverse health needs of the populations they serve, and to truly make an impact on patient health outcomes in these areas.

6. We also support the proposed wording changes to better articulate and differentiate the NP role from other nursing roles. We think the changes suggested, successfully highlight the leadership role and level of seniority that NPs should be expected to take on.

Proposed changes to the education programme must not compromise the goal of increasing NPs in rural areas

7. RWNZ supports the establishment of a dedicated nurse practitioner education programme. We think a dedicated programme could go some way towards encouraging an increase in NP numbers, by making registration requirements clearer. However we think it is imperative, that any prescribed qualification pathways remain accessible and reasonably achievable for RNs in rural areas. The NP role was introduced with the primary goal of improving access to primary health care in underserved rural communities.
8. The proposal for specified clinical release time, for example, could be a barrier for some RNs practicing in rural areas, who may need to travel some distance to meet this requirement. Issues with under-staffing in rural areas, may also make employers less inclined to support participation on an NP program.

9. We would be pleased to speak/discuss this submission with you.

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