

Marlborough Express

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New marine ambulance well designed



New Zealand's first marine ambulance boat is heading for retirement as work begins on designing a new custom-made marine ambulance.

Marlborough Coastguard boat sub-committee chairman Gary Askew said Picton boat designer Naiad had started to

design a new rescue-marine ambulance with features like an onshore ambulance, including an ambulance bay on the back to store equipment and treat patients.

The boat will look the same as the current Coastguard rescue-marine ambulance, but be bigger, he said. The ambulance bay part of the boat will be the same size as a conventional ambulance. The new boat will be 14m long and 4.4m wide, powered by three outboard motors between 300 and 350 horsepower each and have a cruising speed of 37 knots (68kmh).

"It [Coastguard] will just carry on the same as it is now. It's just the design that's working towards [being a marine ambulance], but it's quite capable of doing both jobs," Mr Askew said.

Marlborough Coastguard have had their current rescue boat since 1995 and it is New Zealand's only recognised marine ambulance. The majority of Coastguard call-outs are to help St John reach patients in the Marlborough Sounds and as New Zealand's only marine ambulance, the upgrade made sense, Mr Askew said.

It could be up to two months before Marlborough Coastguard know how much the new boat is likely to cost, but they hope to get the funds from the Coastguard Federation, the sale of the old Coastguard marine ambulance boat and through donations.

"We'll probably have to go to tender and see who is available to build it. We hope to see it built in Marlborough. It will be early next year before we actually start it," he said.