

Connecting the Search and Rescue Sector

news

Everyone's a Winner at the NZSAR Award Ceremony

Search and rescue representatives from around the country gathered at Parliament in April, to attend a moving ceremony celebrating the 2007 NZSAR Awards. It was an emotional time for many of the people there, especially those most closely involved with these remarkable rescues. Transport Minister Annette King, who hosted the event, also announced a significant funding boost for the sector.

The awards marked the 40th anniversary of the Wahine disaster. Two volunteers, who were involved in the rescue effort on that day, attended the awards and were publicly thanked by Ms King.

She also recognised the SAR sector as a whole by announcing additional Government funding of \$8.4 million over two years for Search and Rescue (details inside). Ms King drew special attention to the high volunteer involvement with Search and Rescue (more than 90 percent of the 10,000 people involved in rescue operations are volunteers!)

The NZSAR Gold Award was presented to lifeguards Lilah Foote, Rebekah Gee and Briar Macken from Pukehina Beach in the Bay of Plenty, for their rescue of four people trapped in a boat after it capsized.

The NZSAR Certificate of Achievement was awarded for the first time. It went to the Operation Brewer team for the rescue of caver Michael Brewer from the Middle Earth Caving System, near Takaka.

The final award of the evening was the International Maritime Organisation's inaugural 'International Bravery Award'. Fisherman Brett Churcher received this award after using the expanding box search technique to rescue a man and his four year old daughter, who were drifting in the sea off Lake Ferry.



Charleston and Smit family members with their rescuers, the NZSAR Gold Award winners, Lilah Foote, Rebekah Gee and Briar Macken. Ms King said if these lifeguards had not responded in the way they did there could have been four lives lost.

New SAR Coordinating Definitions

NZSAR council has agreed to new SAR definitions that will improve search and rescue coordination in New Zealand. This initiative (effective from July 1) was carried out in consultation with the NZ Police, RCCNZ and the wider SAR sector, through the NZSAR Consultative Committee, to ensure greater clarity of SAR definitions and coordinating responsibilities. Class II and Class III classifications no longer exist. New or changed terms include:

- **Coordinating Authority.**

The Coordinating Authority is the agency or body responsible for the overall conduct of the Search and Rescue Operation. The Coordinating Authority will lead and manage the operation. The New Zealand Police and the Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand are the recognised Coordinating Authorities in New Zealand.

- **Search and Rescue Operation.**

A Search and Rescue Operation (SAROP) is an operation undertaken by a Coordinating Authority to locate and retrieve persons missing or in distress. The intention of the operation is to save lives, prevent or minimise injuries and remove persons from situations of peril by locating the persons, providing for

initial medical care or other needs and then delivering them to a place of safety.

- **Category I SAROP.**

A SAROP coordinated at the local level; including land, subterranean, river, lake, inland waterway and close-to-shore marine operations.

- **Category II SAROP.**

A SAROP coordinated at the national level; including operations associated with missing aircraft or aircraft in distress and off-shore marine operations within the New Zealand Search and Rescue Region.

Responsibilities

For any SAROP there can only be one Coordinating Authority who is responsible for the management and coordination of the operation. The current responsibilities are as follows:

- New Zealand Police are the Coordinating Authority for all Category I SAROPs.
- The Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand is the Coordinating Authority for all Category II SAROPs.

A full description can be found on our website: www.nzsar.org.nz.

news continued

Significant Funding Boost for Search and Rescue

Search and rescue agencies have received a welcome boost with the announcement of an additional \$8.4 million for the sector over the next two years. Transport Minister, Annette King, announced the funding increase at the NZSAR Awards. She said the new funding (received July 1st 2008) nearly doubles the amount the search and rescue sector receives through direct government funding.

NZSAR Secretariat Manager, Duncan Ferner, says the new funding will help address a number of serious strategic risks. "It will also allow us to improve the conduct and coordination of SAR operations throughout New Zealand's huge search and rescue region, and strengthen the voluntary SAR sector."

The additional money will be used for national SAR exercises, seminars and training, improving and enhancing RCCNZ, strengthening SAR governance and organisational capacity, as well as supporting the voluntary sector.

In recognition of their enormous contribution to the SAR sector, \$2.7 million per year of the funding is to be ring-fenced for volunteer support. This money will enable the approximately 9000 SAR volunteers to plan strategically and improve their responses to future incidents.

Ms King also announced that, in addition to the SAR funding, long-term funding for the sector will become available through the Land Transport Management Amendment Bill. The Bill will allow fuel excise paid by recreational boaters to be used to fund search and rescue, boating safety education and maritime safety services that benefit the boating community.

NZ Researchers to Present Antarctic SAR Paper at Leading International Symposium

Grant Prattley (SARINZ) and Erik Barnes (Antarctic NZ)'s paper entitled Increasing National Antarctic Programme Capability in Antarctic Search and Rescue has been accepted for the 13th Symposium on Antarctic Logistics and Operations to be held in Sankt Peterburg, Russia, in July.

It will be the first time a New Zealander has presented a SAR paper at this headline international conference for the 29 National Antarctic Programmes operating in Antarctica.

The paper was picked from 57 submissions. A significant part of the presentation will cover the Antarctic SAR Training Manual and training developed/provided by SARINZ for ANZ/AAD/JASART/USAP.

If you are interested in this event you can find more details at: <http://www.comnap.aq/>

NZSAR Council Welcomes New Chair

Wayne Donnelly has taken over as Chair of the New Zealand Search and Rescue Council. He is presently Acting Chief Executive for the Ministry of Transport. Wayne brings extensive knowledge of the transport and voluntary sectors, having held chief executive roles in local government and transport related Crown Entities. With his extensive leadership experience and his strong networks across central and local government, Wayne will be of great benefit to the Council.

Immediately prior to his role at the Ministry, Wayne was Chief Executive of Land Transport New Zealand. He has personal experience of the voluntary sector, having been the Chief Fire Officer on Great Barrier Island, and has gained a good understanding of emergency services and situations as Acting Chief Executive of Auckland City, when the power was cut for 5 weeks in early 1998.

Wayne takes over the chair from Alan Thompson who left the Ministry of Transport last month for a position in Australia.

Introducing Nigel Clifford: RCCNZ's New Group Manager



Nigel Clifford settling into his role as RCCNZ's new Group Manager

In a previous life Nigel Clifford flew jet fighters for the RAF, but he now has his feet firmly on the ground as he focuses on the future of RCCNZ. Nigel took up this role in February, having previously worked at DefenceHeadquarters as a project manager. Prior to that he was OC 208 Squadron in the RAF in Britain.

Nigel says this is an exciting time to be involved in RCCNZ, especially as greater government funding has been secured. It will allow them to increase personnel to ensure suitable 24/7 coverage, and to put in place well overdue initiatives, such as greater liaison, education and training across the SAR sector.

A high priority is to increase communication between the various organisations that make up the search and rescue sector. Nigel says although RCCNZ has substantive knowledge and databases, there is always more to learn.

"It is vital that we know who everyone involved in this sector is; whether that be an organisation or an individual, where they are,

what they do, what assets they have, what skills they have or who they know. Because, if we have that information our staff can call on the best assets, knowledge and experience when someone is in the middle of the ocean, or forest, and needs help," Nigel says.

Anyone involved in search and rescue should also understand what RCCNZ do and how they do it. Nigel wants to see a more active exchange of knowledge, as a way to improve communication, and he is happy for the RCCNZ team to get involved. "We are very keen to spend time with organisations telling them about our work and learning about theirs. They can come to us or we will go to them. Putting faces to names is so valuable."

Nigel is also looking forward to increased joint training initiatives with Police. "It's about up-skilling and supporting observers and coordinators at the local level, to ensure they are at their best when managing incidents on the ground."

So, a busy time ahead for Nigel and RCCNZ: "A period that should provide greater understanding of how we all fit together. These relationships, both formal and informal, are why we exist, along with a constant focus on getting the best possible result for the people in distress: those that need search and rescuing."

RCCNZ at Work

At any given time on any given day, The Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand (RCCNZ) could be called upon to coordinate a search and/or rescue anywhere around New Zealand, or within the 30 million square km of sea it has responsibility for.

RCCNZ's role is to coordinate major maritime, aviation and beacon-related search and rescue missions in New Zealand's search and rescue region. (Around 1000 incidents a year.) It also assists with some 300 – 400 other rescues, for which Police are responsible. Police and RCCNZ work very well together. They have a process in place to exchange information when a rescue is underway so that everyone is coordinated.

RCCNZ is staffed by a team of search and rescue officers, trained to international standards, who work a roster system providing coverage 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Two of those officers are Keith Allen and Ramon Davis. Ramon brings extensive maritime experience to his role, while Keith (who has been involved in SAR since age 18) spent 25 years with the Police before taking up this job.

They are required to decide and plan how a SAR event is to be run. Ramon says a background in marine, aviation or land SAR is a vital component of the job. "We've got to be able to get in the mindset of somebody who is missing – some sense of thinking what they may be thinking. Some of it is just nouse, but it is not the kind of nouse you pick up as an 18 or 20 year-old."

Keith says that while people may be trained in SAR "there are an awful lot of things that you pull out of experience that makes an operation go faster or better. It comes from having made a few of the decisions yourself. You can't teach experience."



Keith Allen and Ramon Davis

An incident can start either from a phone call, via maritime radio, or a beacon alert, which shows up on the display systems linked into the satellite alert systems. Keith and Ramon assess the information they've got and look at planning the necessary response, then locate and dispatch appropriate resources. The key word is appropriate; Keith says, "It is not just throwing everything at it. Often a couple of phone calls will stop you sending a helicopter. For a 406 beacon alert you ring the contacts first because it may be the aircraft is parked in a hanger!" (This illustrates the importance of beacon registration).

Ramon says their job is to take a systematic and dispassionate approach to search and rescue, requiring experts not closely involved with the incident. They do rely heavily on detailed local knowledge of an area and of where resources are. "If we know what aircraft, boats or people are available around the country we can use them to get the best possible outcome."

It is imperative that local SAR services, the tramping clubs, boat clubs, etc understand they are part of this nationwide system, which in turn is part of an international system.

"The benefits of the modern world, with modern speeds, modern communications and modern technology, mean there can often be something available that is more appropriate, better, quicker and faster," says Ramon.

RCCNZ have the broader, strategic overview while local SAR services have a more specialist knowledge of the area. "Together we build the full picture," Keith says.

"We mightn't know about the local fisherman that has a big flash fishing boat capable of going out in all types of weather, but we would know about the helicopter 80 km up the road that they mightn't know about. It is about sharing information. Potentially these are critical things that can be the difference between saving someone's life or not."

Both Keith and Ramon are passionate about their work. They know they are not at the "flash end" of Search and Rescue – there aren't many photos of them pouring over maps and screens – but their work calls for great commitment. Ramon says he has something to add, but still has lots to learn, and Keith sums it up:

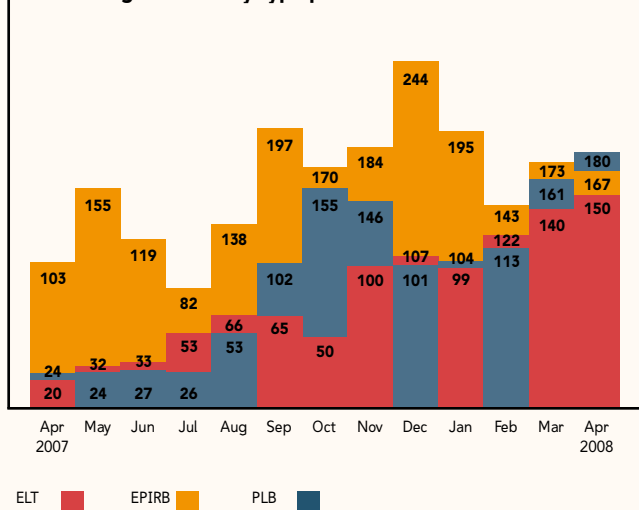
"It is more than a job. We have people's lives in our hands."



beacons update

All aircraft ELT's and EPIRB's on commercial vessels must now be changed. For brochures or more information, please go to www.beacons.org.nz

Beacon registrations by type per month



The NZSAR Council is concerned that up to 20% of new 406MHz beacons are not being registered with RCCNZ.

calendar

- **NZSAR Consultative Committee: 20 August and 19 November**
- **NZSAR Council meeting: 27 August and 26 November**
- **Coastguard New Zealand Conference: 12 – 14 September in Wellington**
- **NZSAR Awards nominations close: 31 October**
- **LandSAR New Zealand Conference: 21 – 23 November, Massey University, Palmerston North**

useful website links

- <http://www.nzsar.org.nz> – New Zealand Search and Rescue Council
- <http://www.beacons.org.nz> – Beacon switching information & online registrations
- <http://www.mountainsafety.org.nz> – New Zealand Mountain Safety Council

The newsletter is available as a pdf, visit the NZSAR website: www.nzsar.org.nz

To view the pdf and access the hyperlinks you will require Adobe Acrobat Reader version 7 or above. A free download is available at:



www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readerstep2.html

If you encounter problems with the pdf it may be the security/firewall set up on your computer.

from Duncan's desk

Our Search and Rescue sector got a well-needed and greatly deserved shot in the arm, securing over \$8 million in extra funding from the latest budget.



It is particularly pleasing to see the Government acknowledge the enormous contribution volunteers make to the SAR sector recognised, with \$2.7 million allocated each year for the voluntary SAR sector.

Now that the resources have become available, I've been putting the NZSAR Councils plans into action. A big part of that has been developing and negotiating service level agreements with SAR voluntary agencies. Planning is underway to increase training and communication across the sector. We are also looking at the sustainability issues our organisations face. Volunteer/staff retention, infrastructure and assets all play a role in maintaining a robust SAR sector.

Research is another area NZSAR wants to pay greater attention to. Reflecting this, the joint NZSAR council and consultative committee meeting in May agreed to an update of NZSAR's strategic goals. Three additional, research related, work-streams have been added:

- Conduct a review of volunteer issues. Make recommendations to enhance recruitment, retention, workload, and skill sharing.
- Review the conduct of SAR individual and collective training and its effectiveness throughout the sector
- Identify changes or improvements (if any) to be made to the NZSAR governance structure.

New definitions for SAR coordination were also agreed to at that meeting. These changes are to delineate coordinating and other responsibilities for SAR operations (see front page story). Complete versions of updated strategic goals and the new definitions are on our website www.nzsar.org.nz. Please take the time to look at them.

I've also begun planning a sector-wide NZSAR seminar for May 2009. It will run over two days and include the 2008 NZSAR awards, the Combined NZSAR meeting, as well as informative presentations. To assist me in all this work, I plan to employ an additional staff member to the Secretariat.

Finally, we had a great NZSAR awards ceremony in April. It really is worth celebrating the remarkable work this sector does. It is time for you to nominate that person, or organisation who deserves the 2008 NZSAR Gold Award. Details and forms are on our website www.nzsar.org.nz

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