

Speech Notes

New Zealand Search and Rescue Awards

You will be speaking from 6:15pm for 5 - 10 minutes

The Awards are being held in the Grand Hall, Parliament Buildings

Introduction

- Good evening, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you tonight. It is a privilege to be a part of this year's New Zealand Search and Rescue Awards.
- I would like to acknowledge my Parliamentary colleagues, the Chair of the New Zealand Search and Rescue Council, Peter Mersi; as well as New Zealand Search and Rescue Council members, award recipients, and other leaders from the Search and Rescue sector.
- New Zealand Search and Rescue play a vital role for our country - especially considering we have a search and rescue region stretching 30 million square kilometres!
- At the heart of this role is a team of dedicated, committed and courageous volunteers. I am here tonight to recognise you - the often unsung heroes of our community.

Recognise the great work the Search and Rescue sector does

- New Zealand is an outdoor utopia. From our spectacular hiking tracks, to our snowy mountains and golden beaches, we take great pride in our abundance of outdoor activities.
- Unfortunately what may start out as a fun school trip or family day at the beach, can quickly turn into a stressful and life-threatening situation.
- At any given moment you may be called upon to locate a missing walker, rescue a group of kayakers, or assist a skipper from his burning boat, the scenarios and circumstances are endless.
- When this happens, these operations often require exceptional skills and specialist knowledge.

- For a number of tonight's award recipients, you have devoted many years of service to Search and Rescue operations and have made significant contributions to the SAR community during this time.
- This not only speaks to your outstanding commitment, but your dedication to help others. And it is this passion that resonated with me as I read through the list of finalists for these awards.
- Behind each nominee there is a story of courage, a focus on safety and the conscious decision to place the wellbeing of others above your own.
- There is also an outstanding display of teamwork. From operating the radio and coordinating the response, to piloting and crewing the rescue vessel, every member has a vital role to play.
- No matter what the conditions, you are the first on the scene. And it's due to your skills, dedication and effective collaboration those missing and injured people received the medical attention they need.
- More than 11,000 people are directly involved in the Search and Rescue sector - and 95 percent of you are volunteers.
- Being on-call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year is a big commitment, not only for you but for your families and workplaces as well.
- I want to recognise all of those people whose support and personal sacrifice allows their partners, loved ones and colleagues to perform this vital service for the New Zealand community.
- I also want to recognise the people behind the headlines, the ones who ensure team members are receiving the necessary training, those who safeguard and check the gear, and those who generously give their time to fundraise.
- Search and rescue people, volunteers and paid alike, do a terrific job in what can be very trying circumstance. The work you do can be measured in the most important currencies - as lives saved, injuries prevented, and families reunited.
- In the year to June 2018, 181 people survived ordeals because of your efforts. Another 723 people were rescued, and 953 assisted. Words cannot express the gratitude felt for you by these people and their loved ones.

- Of course this wouldn't be possible without the extraordinary number of hours volunteers contribute. During the 2017/18 year, SAR agencies provided more than 47,000 volunteer hours in support of Search and Rescue Operations.
- The list of work you do is a long and comprehensive one - a list I am sure you will all agree makes for more effective operations and an efficient SAR sector.

Government commitment to the search and rescue sector

- This Government has made a clear commitment to supporting the search and rescue sector.
- Last year, my colleague Defence Minister Ron Mark approved \$2.3 billion in funding to purchase four Boeing P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft.
- The purchase ensures the Defence Force can continue to deliver maritime surveillance, resource protection, humanitarian and disaster response around New Zealand and across the South Pacific.
- In the last seven years of search and rescue operations in our region, Orion maritime patrols have contributed to saving 119 lives.
- The four aircraft will replace the aging six P-3K2 Orion maritime patrol aircraft that have been operated by the Royal New Zealand Air Force since the 1960s. They will be delivered and begin operations from 2023.
- The Government is also investing \$1.6m over 5 years for the joint search and rescue operational information system, called SARdonyx. This system was launched a few weeks ago
- The new system will help improve SAR prevention and SAR service delivery by providing shared access to information on the use of resources, outcomes and effects.
- This has been a long complex project involving multiple organisations and considerable SAR expertise. I want to commend you all - not only for the development of this revolutionary system but for the leadership you have displayed in creating it.

How technology is revolutionising our search and rescue sector

- Over the last ten years there has been a rapid advance in technology. For many sectors, this has been a powerful enabler of change, for the search and rescue agencies, it is revolutionising the way you operate.
- The Cospas-Sarsat programme is a great example of this.
- I would like to acknowledge the Compas-Sarsat Secretariat for the invaluable guidance their dedicated team provide our search and rescue operations.
- As many of you know, Cospas-Sarsat is a satellite system that detects alerts from distress beacons.
- Beacons help to remove the 'search' from search and rescue, which allows you to work faster to rescue someone in distress, and either remove them from danger or get them medical treatment.
- There are now over 85,000 registered beacons in New Zealand, and in 2018 this system helped save 74 lives and assist 118 people.

Conclusion

- I would once again like to thank everyone, especially our volunteers, for the time and energy you spend searching for and finding people in distress.
- I would particularly like to congratulate the nominees of this year's awards. Search and rescue is generally all about teamwork but this evening some of you will have the spotlight shone on you.
- I will now ask Peter Mersi to help me present the New Zealand Search and Rescue Gold Awards and Certificates of Achievement.