

Exercise Evaluation Report

EXERCISE “BLUE WHALE”

Location: Pukearuhe and New Plymouth

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Executive Summary

Marine SAR Agencies participate in exercises that consider or simulate real-life situations. These exercises aim to improve Operational readiness and identify any gaps or weaknesses in the SOP's of all participating Agencies. They also clarify roles, demonstrate agency capabilities and provide a sound training platform.

This exercise occurred on Friday evening and ran through to Saturday mid-afternoon on the 19th -20th March 2021, and comprised of two phases. Both run simultaneously around the Pukearuhe / White Cliffs coastal area of Taranaki South, with the IMT based at the New Plymouth Coast Guard Headquarters.

The two phases tested the IMT's ability to effectively manage the incident within the CIMS process in phase one. The second phase, an on-water scenario, aimed to test the participant's ability to work together in a multiagency deployment to achieve the outcomes required by the Incident Action Plan, particularly the interagency radio communications along the southern Taranaki Coastline.

This Report reflected only the observations during the two phases of the exercise and focused upon the three objectives set by the Exercise Directors.

It makes recommendations for improving the planning process for the MSAREX at the Director Level, improving IMT situational awareness and improving Health and Safety application in the IMT from the field.

1. Recommendations

- 1 When planning multiagency tasking's, selecting agency representatives from each agency involved in the exercise to join the IMT team should be confirmed before the tasking commences.
- 2 Load all available emergency liaison channels into each agency's radio network to build greater communications resilience if the current VHF Channels fail
- 3 When planning a SAREX or MSAREX apply the SAREX planner from NZSAR; this will ensure all learning opportunities and compliance considerations are achieved during the exercise and maximise the hard work and effort put in developing these events.

2. Introduction

Periodically Marine SAR Agencies participate in exercises that consider or simulate real-life situations. These exercises aim to improve Operational readiness and identify any gaps or weaknesses in the SOP's of all participating Agencies. They also clarify roles, demonstrate agency capabilities and provide a sound training platform.

The New Zealand Police, New Plymouth Police SAR District, has requested that selected Land SAR units, Coastguard Units and Surf Life Saving Clubs participate in a combined MSAREX. The MSAREX aims to provide training for and test the capabilities of on water Marine SAR resources and communications networks to work together in a multiagency SAR response whilst under the direction of an Incident Management team working within the CIMS process.

Needs Assessment:

A comprehensive needs assessment related to this MSAREX has been carried out and fully documented in the attached Marine SAREX "Blue Whale" 19-20 March 2021 Scenario Planning Sheet.

Likewise, the specific SAREX objectives and key performance indicators which the SAREX Directors have set have also been documented in the Marine SAREX "Blue Whale" 19-20 March 2021 Scenario planning sheet.

Functions to be exercised:

- Initiation of an IMT and Search asset task development
- Establishment of an ICP at the New Plymouth Coast Guard and Forward ICP in a remote area
- Multiagency and intergroup Coordination with the emphasis being to test the
 - Inter-capability of communications between participating SAR Agencies along the Taranaki North Coastline.
- Search and Rescue incident management.
- Applying CIMS to SAR at a moderate level within a scenario-based environment. For Coastguard Units/Surf life-Saving Clubs Wet Units and their resources

3. Background

The Taranaki Police SAR team undertakes a significant number of SAR Operations each year, both on land and in the marine environment. The MSAREX provided the opportunity to test a new Police SAR Incident Management Team, with an over-watched from senior police SAR Members during the exercise. The IMT for this MSAREX would use members from the New Plymouth coastguard to assist them with the technical marine aspects of the planning.

3.1 Background to the Exercise

The North Coast of Taranaki is a very popular destination for inshore fishing and beach walking; with a marine reserve and spectacular cliff-lined beaches, the attractions hide a hazardous, challenging environment when the tide

3.2 Dates, location, organising agency(s), key people

FRIDAY 19th March 2021

1400 hours

- Exercise “Blue Whale” commences.
- A List of Initial Reflex Tasking’s of all Resources that are available

1430 hours

- Establish Formal IMT

1500 hours

- IMT must establish ICP at the New Plymouth Coast Guard “Red Shed” at the Lee Breakwater.
- Commence setting up Forward ICP at Pukearuhe / check ute at Pukearuhe.

1800 hours

- Communications must be established and tested by 20.00 hours from the Red Shed to the Forward Base on Friday evening; this will include the Marine 61 channel and Land SAR Repeater.

2000 hours (or before)

- All SAR Marine crew skippers MUST be briefed and given a written task.
- Provide each vessel with a food supply bag for Saturday

SATURDAY 20th March 2021

0600 hours onwards

- Cape Egmont is to be in a position to leave from Port Taranaki at 0800 hours on Saturday morning.

0730 hours

- Forward ICP is operational from this time onwards.

0800 hours

- All SAR Marine Resources can deploy into the search area.
- Drone from FENZ deployed
- Tainui Land SAR personnel as required

1000 hours

- Preparation for an IMT handover to incoming IMT
- Written Media Briefing

1200hours

- Demobilisation – timing to be confirmed from Incident Controller
- Debrief – Red Shed

3.3 Participating organisations

MARINE SAR:

- Taranaki Coast Guard
- Taranaki Surf Lifesaving
- Cape Rescue

LAND SAR:

- Tainui Land SAR

AIR SAR:

- FENZ DRONE

OTHER RESOURCES:

- Police SAR Squad
- Subject Matter Experts (SME) – available to IMT to use as they see fit

VEHICLES:

- SAR Squad Toyota Trooper
- Waitara 4 x 4
- Maori Liaison van
- IPT Vehicle

3.4 Exercise aim

To provide developmental opportunities within a CIMS protocol for all the participants from the IMT, the land and marine search assets. From Search plan development to execution.

3.5 Exercise objectives

Test Incident Management Team (IMT)

During IMTEX Scenario, the IMT must:

- Appoint persons to appropriate CIMS roles
- Do an appreciation of the Incident and Response using the initial information
- Complete Marine Search Urgency Form
- “Alert” initial agencies with appropriate information to stand them up, including “RCCNZ.”
- Complete the initial Missing Person/Vessel form
- Complete an IAP that reflects their initial objectives and strategies
- Begin an Information Collection Plan
- Complete Marine SAC sheet based on MP information and sea conditions
- Complete Marine Vector worksheet based on Tides/Winds/Target Details
- At least three SRU Tasking forms completed electronically with attached pictorial reference sent to OSC (Comms Truck)
- Complete Search Area/Chart work for the initial period
- Develop a Situational Report
- Set up initial Incident Control Point (ICP); and Forward ICP
- Develop and carry out an Incident Action Plan (IAP)
- Document formal planning process of IMT
- Control / Coordination of Resources, Marine, Land and Air
- Document a Health and Safety Plan for Operation Blue Whale
- Demonstrate ability to carry out a handover to new IMT

Test Ability of Marine Resources to:

- Launch / arrive on the scene promptly after the initial call
- Work together with other marine resources involved in the exercise
- Receive/reply instructions and carry out tasking's from IMT
- Have adequate /serviceable equipment/supplies to carry out the task
- Ensure that each of the assets demonstrates health and Safety of crew and resource

Test Communications and Logistics between IMT / Participating Assets

- Establish and Test radio communications from Forward ICP for Marine, and Land Searchers set up Repeater if required
- IMT can communicate between Marine SAR Resources and Land SAR Resources
- Movement of personnel and supplies between to and from land to search vessels

3.6 Exercise Scenario

Around 0700 hours on Friday the 19th March 2021, Ivor Greengrass left his home in New Plymouth to drive to the Pukearuhe / White Cliffs area to go sea kayak fishing. He goes by himself, and he usually spends a couple of hours on his sea kayak. He told his wife that he would be back at his home in New Plymouth around 1200 hours that same day.

It is now 1400 hours, and Ivor's wife Marge has contacted the Police to report that Ivor has not returned home. It is unlike him to be late, and when he was an hour late, she wasn't too worried as she says he is usually careful when he goes out; however, he is now 2 hours late, and she is now getting concerned.

4. Evaluation Methodology

4.1 The agreed outcomes of the evaluation activity

Undertake observations focused on the IMT objectives of the activity in the IMT on day one during the initial phase of the MSAREX. Undertake observations focused on the Marine teams objectives on day two of the MSAREX.

4.2 Evaluation scope

The evaluation scope of the MSAREX on Day One was the IMT performance cooperation collaboration and document management. The scope on Day two was on the Marine search assets, their interagency collaboration, communications and ability to undertake all tasks safely.

4.3 Aspects of the exercise observed, what was not observed

The observation of the preparation leading up to the MSAREX was enlightening. The Senior SAR team members who were to provide an over-watch for the new team members were called away on a rescue at the initial set up stage of the exercise. Thus dropping the new team in the deep end, having to initiate the IMT stand up without the presumed guidance they were expecting. However, with excellent communication skills, acceptance of minimal marine search and rescue experience and providing the Regional Level CIMS role cards, the new team carried out their tasks remarkably well. I believe they were able to focus upon the Coordination of the operation and, without the marine experience, stayed away from the nuts and bolts of the operation that often pulls more experienced IMT teams into the weeds.

The Police IMT were well supported by a competent Coastguard unit that provided clear operational advice.

I did not observe the physical observation of the Safety Briefing given to the Coastguard assets (due to the physical observation being conducted for the Surf Lifesaving Assets).

Excluded was the physical observation of the IMT performance, cooperation and collaboration by the evaluator on Day two. However, the evaluator was able to review all documentation developed by the IMT on Day two and listen to the communication from the IMT out to the Marine and Land Assets on day two, confirming the consistency of the operation carried over from day one.

4.4 The process followed in preparing and submitting the Report

The Police SAR Coordinator provided a detailed plan of the MSAREX to the evaluator several months before the MSAREX with a comprehensive list of goals and objectives; this greatly assisted in developing the evaluation plan and assessment tools.

The MSAREX was split into two distinctive sections. On Day One, the IMT set up and Day Two the addition of the Field Teams, allowing the evaluator and participants time to focus on a manageable set of activities.

During MSAREX, the Police SAR Coordinator provided the young IMT team with Regional Level CIMS role cards on the specific IMT roles each IMT member was to carry out. These cards offered optimum individual development while diminishing participant frustration often experienced from young IMT team members dealing with many moving parts within an MSAREX.

All IMT documents were collected and passed onto the evaluator immediately following the hot MSAREX debrief on Day Two.

There was no need to follow up or carry out any further investigations outside the MSAREX.

4.5 Health and Safety considerations in scenarios

The IMT consistently documented all alternative communication contact information for the Surf Lifesaving, Coastguard and LandSAR units within the unit tasking sheets. There was only one contact for each team/crew. This is excellent information for contacting the lead of the respective crews, and it would be of more significant benefit in the case of a catastrophic event, i.e. craft sinking. To gather contact information of all operatives in the field is an H&S requirement; all the Crew names and contact information must be collected, and filling the form out will assist in this process.

During the task development period on Friday night, an observation highlighted the need always to have a subject matter expert from each agency in the room when standing up field teams. A task was written for an SLSNZ IRB crew to search on a compass bearing out to the 12Knm limit, turn around and search on the same bearing plus 50m to the Northeast. The tasking was well outside the operational parameters of the craft. When questioned, the task writer had no experience or affiliation with an SLSNZ squad. At least, this could have caused confusion and or frustration as the tasking would have been refused; at worst, an IRB crew could have accepted the tasking.

The failure of the communication plan due to VHF Channel 1 malfunctioning early on Day 2 added an additional risk resulting in only VHF Channel 61 available for the whole MSAREX, including a no-duff frequency. However, early on in Day two, this was identified before assets got on the water following good practice by the communications team and IC testing the system before confirming the comms plan.

Health and Safety were monitored on Day two by direct observation of the set-up and deployment of the Taranaki Surf Lifesaving Search and Rescue Squad. An electronic Operation Risk Assessment was performed and sent out by the Squad and received by the Regional Lifesaving Manager and SLSNZ Search and Rescue Manager. A full safety brief was conducted onshore before all craft launched, and the evaluator witnessed a subsequent check-in from all Squad members at the search half waypoint.

There were gaps in the H&S documentation from the Tasking Sheets for the Land SAR Teams tasking and Safety Assessment forms, and a double up with the same type of form being filled out from the NZSAR Teams Tasking form teams; this appears to be a complete double up. It opens up the possibility of crucial information being lost or assumed collected on the alternative form; there is also an It's recommended the Safety officer use one form to ensure there is established, a single point of truth for the collection of Safety information during exercises and operations. Given that a multiagency exercise was underway, it is appropriate to use the NZSAR Team Tasking Sheet for the IMT; if the individual agencies require an additional agency-specific form to be filled, it would be up to the agency to ensure that their personnel would ensure that it was completed this is done to the standards set down by that agency. Having stated this, the IMT felt that the NZSAR Marine SRU Tasking sheet could elaborate more by adding a section for the Safety plan to be added into the Hazards section to allow all relevant information for tasking and the crew safety to be collated in one place.

5. Findings

The MSAREX achieved its overall Aim To provide developmental opportunities within a CIMS protocol for all the participants from the IMT, the land and marine search assets. From Search plan development to execution.

The application of the MSAR Assets provided a realistic yet manageable search plan to develop and execute for the IMT. And this met the requirements of the scenario set. All of the comprehensive lists of objectives were achieved.

The failure of one of the preferred VHF Channels for field communication highlighted both the good practice of the IMT to functionally test all equipment before deployment, but also the need to load additional VHF frequencies on all the SAR Agencies sets to build resilience into the emergency communications capability for the region into the future.

The planning of tasking's was absent a subject matter expert during the task writing phase; this was not an oversight by the IMT as the SME was late to the exercise. However, it did result in a tasking being written for SLS from another agency, a practice undertaken within the SAR sector yet not advised as those writing the tasking's must have a comprehensive knowledge of the capability parameters of those assets the task. Engaging representatives from each agency involved in the exercise/operation to join the IMT planning team should be confirmed before the tasking commences. Failure to do so will waste the IMT time and cause frustration in having to rewrite tasking's and readjusting search plans, at its extreme, could lead to serious harm with responders following a task outside their operational parameters.

There was a double-up of filling in agency forms alongside the NZSAR forms; this opens up the possibility of crucial information being lost or assumed collected on the alternative form. It's recommended the Safety officer use one form to ensure there is established, a single point of truth for the collection of Safety information during exercises and operations. Given that a multiagency exercise was underway, it is appropriate to use the NZSAR Team Tasking Sheet for the IMT; if the individual agencies require an additional agency-specific form to be filled, it would be up to the agency to ensure that their personnel would ensure that it was completed this is done to the standards set down by that agency.

There was a highly professional developmental culture amongst all the agencies involved throughout the pre-exercise and exercise phases. A clear desire to collaborate, learn from each other and help one another overcome obstacles was clearly evident and modelled from the top throughout the weekend, enabling those taking on new tasks and positions the confidence to try new things without reprisal.

All key design aspects of the planning of the MSAREX in splitting up the exercise phases over two days with a different focus on each day enhanced the learning and development of all participants involved. If assisted in the "getting up to speed" of the relatively new Police IMT, allowing them time to get more familiar with the application of CIMS on the first day before involving the field related aspects on the second day. By taking this approach, the team didn't suffer from any intellectual deficit one might experience, having been involved in a desktop exercise some weeks before running a full MSAREX.

6. Conclusions

The MSAREX was well executed, backed up by an innovative approach to gradually increase the intensity and scope of the IMT over the two-day exercise. To continue the positive development, applying the NZSAR SAREX Planning template will ensure that every opportunity to assess future exercises increases.

A new IMT exercised, which performed well and from applying the experiences and feedback they gained from this experience, the Taranaki Police SAR Squad has advanced its capability to serve its community.

A take-home time spent acquiring additional emergency liaison channels to be loaded into the regions sets and meaningful training for all agencies on how to access them when required will enhance the region SAR capability and build resilience into the communications systems.

7. Appendix

[7.1 Marine SRU Tasking](#)

[7.2 Intelligence File](#)

[7.3 IMT](#)

[7.4 LandSAR Tasking](#)

[7.5 Communications Log](#)

[7.6 MARINE SAREX "BLUE WHALE" 19-20 March 2021 SCENARIO](#)