Exercise Evaluation Report

Wānaka SAREX 2024

Location: Stevensons Arm, Lake Wānaka

Date: 15th – 16th November 2024

Report version: Final

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Aoraki/Mount Cook

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1. Executive Summary

The Southern Region Annual SAREX 15th–16th November 2024 on Stevensons Arm and Peninsula of Lake Wānaka was planned by key members of the Wānaka Police SAR Team in partnership with Wānaka Land Search and Rescue Committee.

Objectives of an Interagency exercise with participants drawn from the Southern Region involved in a large-scale operation with both land and maritime resources deployed managed by joint Incident Management Teams was a bold concept requiring considerable planning and resourcing.

Participants from 10 Land Search and Rescue Groups, Police Search and Rescue Squads, Partner agencies, Coast Guard with four vessels, Amateur Emergency Radio Communication teams involved around 100 personnel over Friday evening and all of Saturday in Field Operations managed by several Incident Management Teams.

Feedback was positive and appreciative from field participants who collectively were provided a multitude of lost subject tracks to search and for Incident Management Team members, most gaining valuable experience of involvement in a large-scale operation. Weather was settled which was ideal for field team training purposes.

Most of the objectives were achieved and the planning and resourcing of evidence along with missing subjects to search for provided a good level of realism to keep everyone involved well engaged in the training weekend.

All involved would have refreshed skills and gained valuable experience from their participation in the Stevensons Arm, Wānaka SAREX.

1. Recommendations

- Review communication procedures for large operations to ensure important messages are processed and responded to appropriately in a timely manner.
- Build on the multi-agency partnerships achieved, especially with Wānaka Coastguard and Wānaka Land SAR to improve communication and location reporting processes.
- Support large operational team briefings with a full IMT leadership presence involving Operations and Planning IMT leads.
- Practice the debriefing processes of personnel returning from field taskings to capture accurately the search effort achieved or not achieved.
- Refresher training covering role descriptions and responsibilities within an Incident Management Team will support development of newer IMT members.

2. Introduction

The Wānaka SAREX 2024 was planned as an regional inter-agency training event involving Police as the lead agency, Land Search and Rescue Groups, Wānaka Coast Guard and The Amateur Radio Emergency Communication Teams.

Planning and organising logistics were led by the Wānaka SAREX planning team comprising Wānaka Police, Wānaka Land Search and Rescue Committee and Wānaka Coast Guard.

Design of the exercise was to address an identified trend of multi-sport water/land-based adventure events on and around the Lake Wānaka region in the summer months.

Inclusion of regional agencies and personnel responders from across the wider Southern Region influenced the thinking and design of the exercise plan. Also providing every field team sufficient evidence and tracks to support their training and sustain interest in the exercise. Several Coast Guard boats supported by additional boats were operational supporting eleven field search teams. Friday evening the Real Tme initiation of the SAREX with Incident Management Teams from both Coast Guard and Land Search and Rescue commencing planning with an objective for an IMT handover mid-exercise Saturday to a fresh Incident Management Team to continue the planning and operations on Saturday.

3. Background

3.1. Background to the Exercise

The Southern Police Region covers a large range of landscapes from rugged coastlines, large lakes, varied farming regions, and extensive conservation areas including two large National Parks, Tititea/Aspiring and Te Rua-o-te-moko/Fiordland. Recognising the geographical distribution of contributing search and rescue personnel and resources, both Land Search and Rescue, Police and Amateur Radio Emergency Communications and Coast Guard, the exercise was developed as a forum to bring together a good cross-section of the rescue community from Otago and Southland to train together and to build and maintain relationships. Simultaneously an Incident Management Team (IMT) workshop was run with the purpose of understanding regional processes in the IMT space.

Overall, the exercise was to test a SAR response for marine and land-based incidents in and around Lake Wānaka, with Wānaka Coast Guard as the primary water-based responder for searching and supporting land-based SAR activities. Land field teams were provided the opportunity to practice in a realistic field environment search and rescue skills.

The SAREX IMT's, Coast Guard and Land have the opportunity to test their capabilities to manage a relatively large operation with multiple resources in a safe environment.

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

Dates: 15th-16th-17th November 2024,

Location, Field: Stevensons Arm/The Peninsula, Lake Wānaka

Location, IMT: Coast Guard and Land Search & Rescue Base, Ballantyne Road,

Wānaka

Organising agencies: Wānaka Police, Wānaka Coast Guard, Wānaka Land Search and Rescue

Key people:- Darren Cranfield, PST Sergeant Wānaka, Raewyn Calhaem, Wānaka Land SAR Chair, Roy Bailey, Wānaka Land SAR, Aaron Nicholson, Wānaka Land SAR Workshop.

3.3. Participating organisations:-

New Zealand Police, staff from Otago Lakes, Otago Coastal and Southern Regions.

Land Search and Rescue Groups.

 Southland Land SAR, Eastern Southland Land SAR, Catlins Land SAR, North Otago Land SAR, Rakiura Land SAR, Wakatipu Land SAR, Clutha Land SAR, Dunedin Land SAR, Wānaka Land SAR, SAR Dogs.

Wānaka Coast Guard

Amateur Radio Emergency Communication Teams

Rescue Coordination Centre Representatives

3.4. Exercise aim

To manage a large-scale Search and Rescue Operation, providing training and relationship building opportunities for the Incident Management Teams, Field Teams and Partner Agencies.

3.5. Exercise objectives

Incident Management Teams

- (1) Process information and establish a search plan for the Initial Response phase.
- (2) Produce Initial Response IMT outputs. (i.e; Profile info, Info Collection Plan, Search urgency, Scenarios, Terrain analysis, IAP, Taskings etc including the development of a safety plan.
- (3) Practise Hand Overs to different IMT teams based on the end of Operational periods.
- (4) Test a communications infrastructure, monitoring and record VHF comms and SAT comms in a SAR environment.
- (5) Develop the search plan into the Extended Search Planning phase (if time allows)

Field Teams

- (1) To Exercise standard field team processes and procedures including:-
 - (a) Tracking and clue processing.
 - (b) Search methods appropriate to terrain
 - (c) Patient and stretcher handing on moderate terrain.
 - (d) Correct VHF/Sat Comms protocols.
- (2) To Familiarisation Field teams with Coast Guard processes and SOPs around transporting Teams in Coast Guard vessels.

3.6. Exercise Scenario

The Stevensons Arm, Lake Wānaka SAREX was planned as a joint agency operation which entailed considerable logistics preparation by the organisers prior to the participants travelling and assembling on Friday evening.

Scenario concept was a multi-sport kayak incident in the Stevensons Arm area, Lake Wānaka with an unknown number of competitors in trouble.

Initial response incident management teams both Coast Guard and Search and Rescue were stood up early Friday evening with water-based search operations commencing. Evening search effort provided finds and intelligence for the incident management team.

Saturday morning briefings for all personnel with most teams being deployed by Coast Guard and support boats and search dog teams by road to their respective field search tasks across the Stevensons Arm landscape.

Mid-morning Saturday the first IMT conducted the operation handover to the next IMT who continued managing the SAREX until the conclusion late Saturday afternoon when a full demobilisation plan was completed.

Operation oversight support was provided by a team of umpires present both in the incident management locations and at strategically positioned field location.

4. Evaluation Methodology

4.1. The agreed outcomes of the evaluation activity

A written evaluation report outlining observations of the Inter-agency and inter-regional SAREX operation in relation to the objectives.

4.2. Evaluation scope

To observe the SAREX Incident Management establishment and overview of the personnel briefing processes. During the SAREX observe the key elements of the management and where possible field teams.

4.3. Aspects of the exercise observed, what was not observed

Observed: -

- Friday evening the Coast Guard Initial Response IMT
- o SAR Incident Management teams, both Friday evening and Saturday.
- Field Team briefings Saturday morning.
- o Overview of the field operations at Stevensons Arm.

Not Observed: -

- Field and Dog Teams only at distance.
- o AREC communication processes.
- Field demobilisation.

4.4. The process followed in preparing and submitting the report

Contact was made mid-October by Sgt Darren Cranfield about availability. Email, phone plus a team's meeting with planning documents being shared. A draft copy of the evaluation report will be shared prior to the final copy being forwarded to NZSAR for their recording purposes.

4.5. Other information

Beyond Friday evening, I was not able to observe the ongoing Coast Guard IMT operation.

5. Findings

Exercise Planning

The exercise plan was jointly developed in partnership between the Wānaka Land SAR Group, Wānaka Police and Coastguard during October and early November. Aligned with the exercise the Southern Region planned a Regional IMT Project meeting. Information about the SAREX was circulated to all the contributing agencies and SAR groups, attendance at the exercise of around 100 participants representing 10 Land SAR groups, AREC from Dunedin and Invercargill and Coastguard reflected positively on the interest generated.

Exercise Conduct

Friday afternoon and evening participants gathered, most assembling and camping at the Neck Campsite and the first IMT staff commencing initial response planning.

Coast Guard commenced operations 17:00 Friday with their IMT receiving the exercise scenario about the kayakers missing on Stevensons Arm. Deployment planning commenced with a delay for a "No Duff" response required at 17:26 for a recreational boat in difficulty on Lake Wanaka. However once this was resolved, the Coast Guard team continued with the evening initial response search from Dublin Bay into Stevensons Arm.

The Land SAR/Police IMT team located at the Wānaka Land SAR base received their GSMEAC briefing on the scenario around 18:00 on Friday evening, the participants collaboratively stepping into IMT roles following the briefing. Under the leadership of the Incident Controller initial response planning progressed during Friday evening while the Coast Guard vessel conducted the water search.

Finds were progressively reported from the Coast Guard vessel which assisted the Wānaka SAR base teams planning. Stevensons Arm Lake search continued until late evening with the Wānaka SAR IMT finalising field taskings for Saturday morning deployment. Issues that became apparent for the Wānaka SAR IMT were communications between the search boat and shore were not working, this was resolved having the coms channel being clarified; Track plus being established for the IMT to view the water search progress and the understanding of different agencies co-ordinates systems, Coast Guard using Lat-Long. Discussion on responsibilities of respective roles, the IMT umpire providing reference to the available clipboard IMT role descriptions.

Saturday morning field teams assembled on the shoreline at the Neck on the shores of Lake Wanaka overlooking Dublin Bay for the 07:00 deployment briefing.

Being a large group of personnel, the first safety briefing was provided via megaphone covering risks, no drones, operating on private land and no duff protocol.

The Incident Controller provided a GSMEAC briefing on the scenario effectively, followed up with team leaders being briefed on each team's specific search task.

Coast Guard vessels were positioned on the nearby shoreline and teams being deployed were given a full safety briefing on vessel embarking and disembarking, life jacket fitting, etc. At the conclusion of the briefing, vessel skippers were provided deployment coordinates by team leaders, first groups of teams departed by vessel 07:48 towards their search areas. The three dog search teams deployed by road access to their search areas.

Once Coast Guard had completed deployment of the land teams, craft were tasked to continue further water and shoreline searching.

Search task briefing would have been more efficient if both the Operations and Planning IMT members were present on site to support this process.

Operation progress was monitored by the forward field umpire team during Saturday from a panoramic vantage point on Mount Burke Station where most of the field resources could be viewed by binoculars and spotting scopes. Search landscape from the lake shoreline involved manuka and bracken terrain on hillsides with some drainage canyons.

Mid-morning Saturday most field teams were making steady progress, one subject located successfully by a search dog team.

The Wānaka SAR IMT had developed a comprehensive timeline and known intel on the white board and had resolved some of the operation tracking issues with the AREC operating a radio log on SARTrack, and the IMT maintaining their own decisions/actions log. IMT Handover briefing was scheduled for 11:00 at the Southern Region IMT Forum at the adjacent venue, the Wānaka FENZ station meeting venue to the incoming team. Creditably the team delivered an excellent GSMEAC briefing on the current operation status in which all section leads contributed. The complete IMT group reconvened at the SAR Base to complete the full handover which was completed around 11:45.

A hot debrief of the outgoing IMT was held, some of the observations covered that as a group, a number were new, and some efficiency was lost initially while team members came to understand their roles. Separation of the Coast Guard IMT without liaison created a knowledge gap of what vessels were doing. Changeover needed staff assigned to monitor the operation while the handover transition was in progress. Discussion on how LandSAR teams report locations v's Coast Guards reporting. And who was the lead IMT. Agreed dedicated staff required to monitor communications, pick up on key messages and manage the IMT log.

An opportunity to view the SAREX landscape by helicopter was taken to observe field teams working on the peninsular part way through their tasks at around 500 – 600 metres altitude level searching in amongst manuka scrub.

Early afternoon the second IMT Incident Controller led a planning meeting with the team, discussion on considerations for extended search planning and demobilisation planning. Tasks were assigned to team members with agreement to checkoff demobilisation via a white board team list.

14:36 – Coast Guard received a "No Duff" callout for a craft taking on water, one vessel assigned to respond.

Discussion on who was receiving and debriefing team leaders at the forward area, gap identified as no one was assigned currently.

Some confusion between Coast Guard communications and SAR Base radio communications on respective team locations during demobilisation.

15:03, the IC briefed the IMT on new information and tasked the team to prepare an extended search plan for a confirmed remaining missing subject.

Full field demobilisation was completed by 16:30.

At the conclusion of the afternoon, the second IMT conducted GSMEAC briefing of the situation which included the extended search plan covering the search area, regions within and segments. Listing the four scenarios, weightings and priorities established for a search. The debrief covered the Intel aspect and about evidence lost in communications. Operations were challenged keeping track of teams and assets, a few to many tracking platforms, appreciated having a coast guard liaison representative in the IMT, that the forward operating base needed a designated person to receive incoming teams. The IC observed that it was a difficult time for a handover being a busy time with field operations.

Sunday Morning, a Field Team debrief was held at the Neck Campground

Feedback from participants in summary: -

Teams found tracking challenging in the dry terrain.

All appreciated having their own track each to engage with.

Radio communications very busy, some teams spent some time on standby.

Communications plan should include list of Simplex channels for teams to use within the field environment.

Search Dog teams enjoyed being part of the exercise, weather impacted on some scent sign. AREC observed that they were not present as a group in Wanaka, appreciated being involved in the SAREX.

Communications, consider having a second channel via the repeater system.

Burdon Family were thanked for access onto their station property.

Coast Guard recognised that a coms gap via the AREC and IMT caused problems, liaison staff assisted.

Exercise was experimental to have 3 Incident Management Teams with new managers, generally a successful training experience.

The Southern Region IMT Forum working on practises, generally Southern Region are on similar systems.

6. Conclusions

The Wānaka SAREX planned as an Inter-agency and Inter-regional relationship building exercise was well planned and executed. Considerable logistics from the planning group was detailed with land access to Mount Burke Station and setting out individual tracks for each of the eleven field teams across the Stevensons Arm Peninsula landscape. Accommodation at the Neck Campsite and obtaining access to both the FENZ Station meeting room and the Land SAR Incident Management area. And at the exercise conclusion providing the successful barbecue catering for a large group.

The Friday night Initial Response aspect with two Incident Management Teams commencing operations, the Coast Guard responding with a water-based search successfully locating a considerable number of finds, and kayaks and two facsimile deceased subjects supported the theoretical scenario. The Land SAR/Police IMT worked into the evening assimilating the information and completed taskings for eleven field teams on Saturday.

Saturday morning, snow on the slopes of Mount Burke and surrounding hills from an overnight southerly weather system provided a spectacular scene for the early briefing on the shores of Lake Wanaka near the outlet to the Clutha River known as the Neck. Eleven teams received safety briefings for ground and vessel operations and the full SAREX operation for Saturday with associated field taskings.

Deployment of teams was well resourced with four vessels ferrying teams across to shoreline start points on the Stevensons Peninsula being completed efficiently. Field teams that could be observed from distance were working tracking subjects from the shoreline kayaks and feedback was each team appreciated having a subject track to work with. Communications logs and field reports indicated that all teams were generally successful with their respective tasks and applied patient management and a stretcher recovery phase near the conclusion of the day.

Both IMT rooms, Coast Guard and Wānaka LandSAR were well resourced facilities for each of the Incident Management Teams to plan and direct the respective resources in the field. The Coast Guard IMT managed three "No Duff" boat incidents on Lake Wānaka over Friday evening and Saturday and it was creditable to them that this had minimal impact on the SAREX operation.

Land SAR/Police IMT personnel drawn from across the Southern Region worked collaboratively in teams and operated professionally considering that most had not worked together previously or managed an operation of this scale. There were learnings and improvements from the experience which will be valuable to all who continue pathways in Incident Management. Planning two IMT Handovers although challenging for the Incident Controllers and team members were delivered effectively and the experience will benefit all involved.

Communications between Coast Guard and LandSAR/Police operations did provide some challenges, over Saturday these improved and the second IMT enjoyed having an imbedded liaison member from Coast Guard which assisted. AREC with most members drawn from larger centres are not regular participants in Wanaka response operations and learnings were taken.

The Stevensons Arm Lake arm and ground landscape with the multi-sport scenario was an excellent concept to test the exercise objectives.

The Objectives for the Exercise

Inter-agency and Inter- regional relationship building (Police/LandSAR Southern/Coast Guard/AREC)	During planning phase, operation execution on both Friday evening and Saturday it was evident that good working relationships were made and renewed between all contributing agencies personnel.	Achieved
2. Exposure of all field and IMT teams to a large-scale managed SAR op to establish common operating processes and identify areas of difference that can be standardised for continuity and regional consistency.	Differences between Coast Guard and Land SAR/Police field reporting processes and communications were identified. All of these are resolvable, particularly with the good working relationship being established during this exercise.	Achieved
3. Exposure to all teams to a large scale SAREX working with different and unknown personnel across different agencies. (To increase cultural awareness and requirements of operating in the Wānaka Area for SAR Responders)	Both the Incident Management Team environment, the field team operations around the lake landscape, and Southern Region IMT Forum provided experience of a scale operation involving several agencies and SAR groups	Achieved

Specific Objectives: IMT (In real time as exercise unfolds)

1.	Process information and establish a search plan for the Initial Response phase. (Consider the Bike Wheel Model)	Both Coast Guard and SAR/Police IMT teams assimilated the scenario information and established a search plan.	Achieved
2.	Produce Initial Response IMT outputs (i.e; Profile info, Info Collection Plan, Search Urgency, Scenarios, Terrain analysis, IAP, Taskings etc including development of a safety plan	All Incident Management Teams achieved a considerable amount of the outputs, it was run as a paper-based exercise along with white board timelines and profile reporting, etc. Team taskings were well developed and all teams achieved their respective taskings	Achieved
3.	Practise Hand Overs to different IMT teams based on the end of Operational periods	Both LandSAR/Police IMT teams delivered excellent GSMEAC handover briefings, the first team creditably in the Southern Region Forum meeting room.	Achieved
4.	Test communications infrastructure, monitoring and record VHF comms & SAT comms in a SAR environment	As the exercise unfolded communications between Coast Guard and SAR/Police IMT's varied. Some unclarity on channels early on, then delays, obtaining clarification of information, tracking assets, etc. Again, AREC and Coast Guard	Partially Achieved

	worked out a system, however it was not seamless.	
5. If time allows develop the search plan into the Extended Search Planning phase	The second SAR/Police IMT were challenged with developing an ESP plan late Saturday afternoon. Creditably this was developed from a derived scenario provided. However insufficient time available to complete taskings beyond a written IAP.	Partly Achieved

Specific Objectives: Field Teams (in real time as exercise unfolds)

To Exercise standard field team processes and procedures including. (a) Tracking and clue processing. (b) Search methods appropriate to terrain (c) Patient and stretcher handing on moderate terrain. (d) Correct VHF/Sat Comms protocols	Observations of several teams for a short period only possible. Unable to assess sufficiently to evaluate. Debrief information seemed to support in general that most teams executed the field objectives.	Unable to evaluate.
2. To familiarise field teams with Coast Guard processes and SOPs around transporting Teams in Coast Guard Vessels.	Most field teams were deployed by boat. All members with provided with a safety briefing on boarding and disembarking by coast guard crew and how to fit and wear a life jackets.	Achieved

7. Appendix (1)

Date: 15/11/2024

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	WHITE explains the nature of the event.						
	any race organisers be people can do it as competitors are not t	eing there. It a group or racked by an racking, but w	is a low-cost type who separately. They m ny modern tracking s	ng it and completing it witho ere we set a course, and the ust do it unsupported. The system, unless they want on that as they supposed			
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	in some details about have. They are encou	who they are raged to post of that stuff,	, maybe something a a photo to their profile	reather and fitness. They posted the bout what sort of kayak the bout that is not mandatory ay the entry fee. I'll send yo			
		to have their	own emergency plan	ey must sort themselves ou and contact stuff. If I did a stuff does my head in.			
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Date: 15/11/2024

2 of 3	N.Z. POLICE Police 29 03/19
	Due
	EVENT:
DATE and TIME	First plan your inquiry then set out the action taken, inquiries made, and statements of persons seen and information gained, etc.

I had a call from some frantic person a few minutes ago saying there is some sort of trouble on the lake. I don't know who this was. The number did not show up on my phone. They were pretty upset and angry, and I had to hang up on them. I don't know what the weether conditions are like today.

WHITE states that when he was told about 'the trouble' he looked at his phone app and could see 6 people had not reported at the first waypoint. He states that according to his app they all started that morning at Dublin Bay at 6.00am.

He believes there to be six people unaccounted for because the six did not report to the race reporting station on point 971 on the 'The Peninsula.' He then states that there were only six people in the event, and that he can see on his app that none of the six have reported at the reporting location on the peninsula ridge.

Ask WHITE to give me a course explanation. He states,

"It is a single day, multi-sport race. It starts on the beach at Dublin Bay. There is a kayak leg across Stevenson's Arm, around Stevenson's Island by the competitors having to paddle around the eastern shoreline of the Island, then back to the Peninsula shoreline where they leave their boats and walk or run up the face to the point to the map that is marked as being 971m. They can take any route up the face they want. There's no one route.

There is a virtual reporting station on that high point that is an automated reporting point. The put in a code on their phone app at the reporting station that is then connected to our race base here in Auckland. Actually, there is no base, I do everything off my phone.

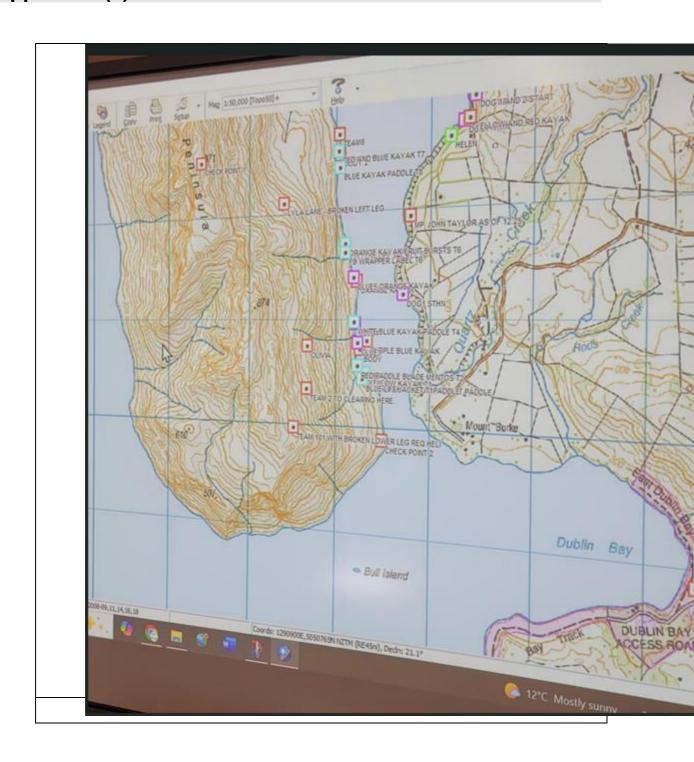
After they get to the 971m reporting point, they descend to the lake anyway they can to another reporting station beside the lake at -44.639529, 169.135981. That's a virtual station as well. There is no actual physical structure anywhere. That is one reason why it is such a great idea. It is all a virtual set up, with no structures or objects or people. It is a carbon neutral event. I can do all the organising on my own from anywhere in the world. Makes me a hell of a lot of money as well. Life's great.

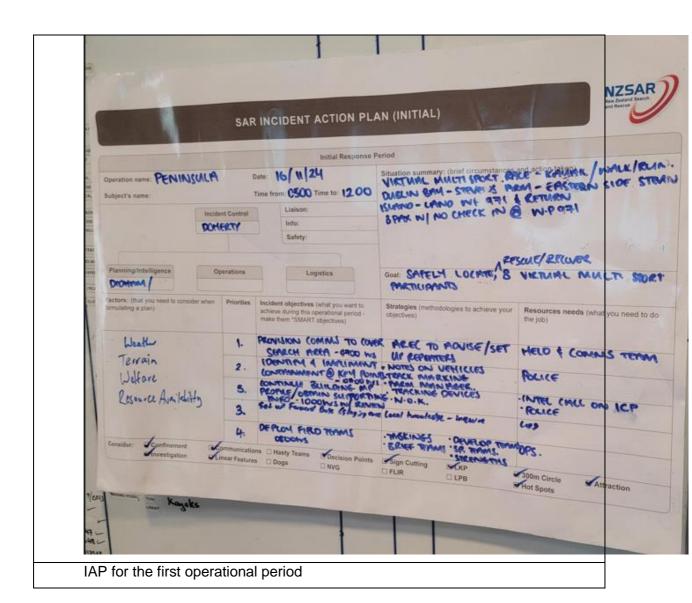
Once they get to that station, they must make their way along the lake, find their kayaks, and return to the start point at Dublin Bay I think it is. Looks a nice place on Instagram.

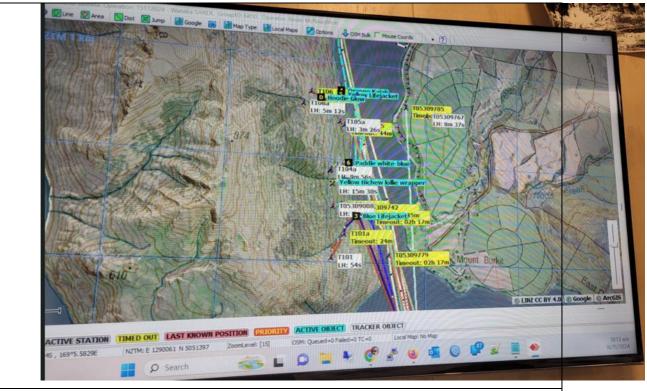
Name:	Alan LEE			Checked by:		
Rank:	Detective	QID	ALH809	Rank		QID
Date:	15/11/2024			Date:	15/11/2024	

3 of 3	N	Z. POLICE	Police 2
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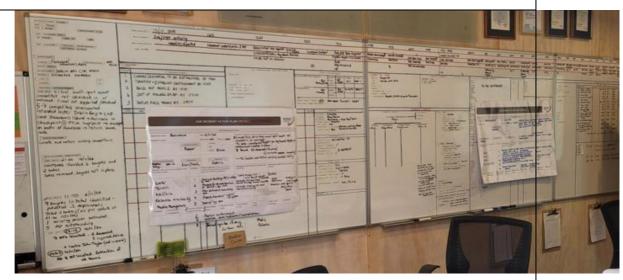
Appendix (2)







Track Plus screen view - Coast Guard Vessel search



White Board – Timeline, IAP for second operational period



SAREX Team Leaders briefing



Safety Briefing from Coast Guard



Coast Guard Vessels deploying personnel



View of search area, Stevensons Inlet and Peninsula

