



Connecting the search and rescue sector

*Link is a quarterly publication of  
New Zealand Search and Rescue*

# Coastguard: moving forward as one



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# Coastguard: Project Horizon

**During the uncertainty** that prevailed when New Zealand went into lockdown, Coastguard had its sights firmly set on the horizon; Project Horizon, to be exact.

On 7 March 2020, Coastguard held five special general meetings in Auckland, voting in favour of merging its four regional entities with the national body. The constitutions of each organisation required a delegate to be physically present.

“It was finely timed,” says Coastguard Chief Executive Callum Gillespie. “Just two weeks later, people were having wedding receptions that would unfortunately turn into COVID-19 clusters. We were fortunate to secure the support of our members before the pandemic took hold, as it meant we could knuckle down over the lockdown period and make some real progress.”

What followed was five months of intensive work on Project Horizon to prepare for the merger – through COVID-19 Alert Levels and in between. On 1 July 2020, Coastguard’s new structure became official. Regional teams now report directly to Coastguard New Zealand rather than through regional boards.

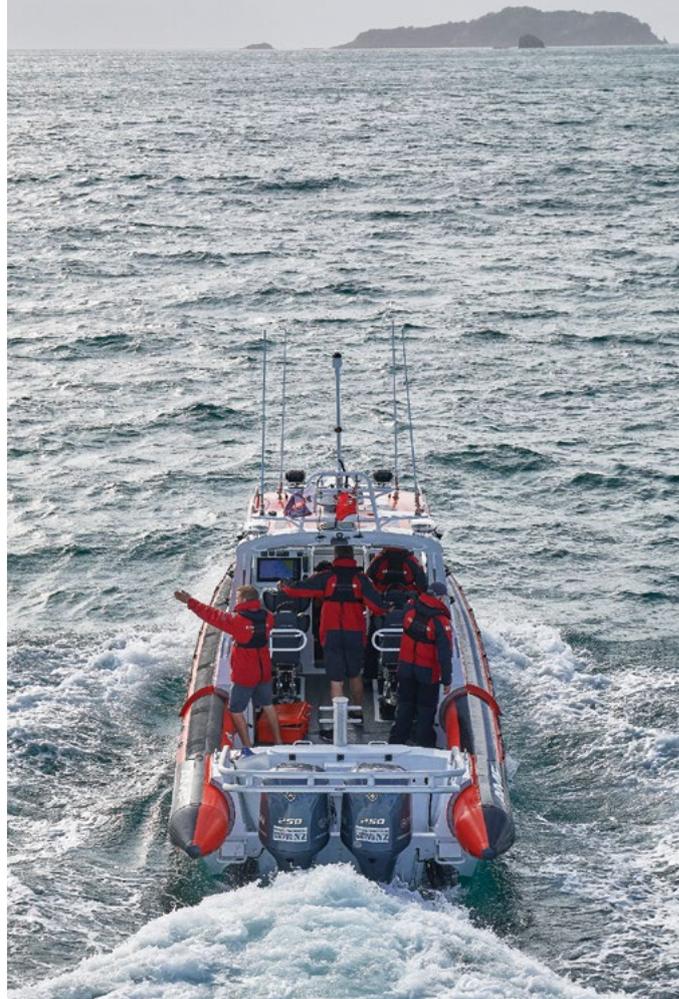
“Most of the implementation and hard work was conducted remotely,” says Callum. “But we found it was a very positive thing. The usual constraints of geography and an Auckland-centric bias were thrown out the window. It was just as easy to talk to members in Christchurch and Tauranga as it was in Auckland.”

“The real challenge was providing leadership on the project at the same time as playing our part in the COVID-19 response. I did not expect to be leading a merger in the middle of a pandemic.”

Fast forward to today and Callum anticipates most of the initial stages of the implementation will be completed by Christmas. He says one of the most important milestones so far is an investment in core competencies that have been missed in the past – creating a strong shared services model for the organisation.

“We now have a Head of Finance [formerly outsourced], a team of HR specialists, and have invested in our training team with the aim of providing more support to units,” he says. “We also have more unit support managers – one for every eight units.”

“With the new structure in place we can reduce overheads and realise efficiencies of scale that were previously unavailable to us. Our volunteers can better utilise their precious time without being overburdened by compliance and administration. Instead they can focus on doing what they joined Coastguard to do, helping other people and saving lives at sea.”



## Why the change?

Over the past six years, Coastguard volunteer numbers have declined by nearly 20 percent. Findings of the Volunteering New Zealand survey in 2019 confirmed that there was a need to take action to retain and attract volunteers, with several respondents suggesting that the training was too complex.

Chief Executive Callum Gillespie says these issues – and getting smarter with their charity dollar – required national solutions. Reaching agreements and executing decisions with four regional boards and a national board was very challenging, he says.

“Integrating the organisation into a single entity has provided the platform we need to ensure Coastguard can continue to serve New Zealand communities,” says Callum. “It allows us to be more efficient and effective in the development and delivery of strategies to address the challenges we face.”

Coastguard members and volunteers were consulted at length on Project Horizon from August 2019 to February 2020. Feedback was listened to, recorded and reflected on.

“I entirely believe this is the right thing to do for the organisation,” says Callum. “And I’m delighted with the progress we’re making.”

# NZSAR Awards wrap-up



The last of six NZSAR Awards presentations around the country took place on 10 October in Wellington. Despite the challenges of COVID-19 (and a power cut in Tokaanu!), recipients appreciated the opportunity to receive their Awards in front of peers and colleagues.

Over the past four months, we presented in Auckland, Tokaanu, Wellington (x3) and Christchurch – in lieu of the cancelled annual award ceremony at Parliament. Below are

a selection of some of the wonderful people receiving their Awards. Congratulations again to the agencies and individuals recognised and thank you for your patience as we worked our way around you all.

For more information about the recipients and their achievements, please check out the 2019 NZSAR Awards Booklet, available on our website: [www.nzsar.govt.nz/nzsar-awards/past-winners/](http://www.nzsar.govt.nz/nzsar-awards/past-winners/)



Members of the Royal New Zealand Air Force 5 Squadron, with rescuee Bruce Goodwin



Members of the Karioitahi Surf Life Saving Club



David Dittmer, Mackenzie Land Search and Rescue



Constable Rochelle Andrews, NZ Police, Wellington SAR Squad



Seth McPhee, Otago Surf Life Saving Club



Members of the Taylors Mistake and Sumner Beach Surf Life Saving Clubs



Members of Coastguard Papakura

# A new era for AREC

**At his home** in Whitby, the man at the helm of Amateur Radio Emergency Communications (AREC) is settling into his dream job. Until recently, it's been a hobby that's occupied most of his spare time. But soon Don Robertson will sign his emails as Chief Executive. This may seem like a subtle change from his former job title of National Director, but for Don and his colleagues, it carries more significance. For the first time in AREC's 88 year history, the organisation will be led by someone who is paid full time to do so.

A Chief Executive's salary is a small part of the Government's \$1.67 million investment in AREC. It's a turning point for the service arm of the New Zealand Association of Radio Transmitters (NZART) – transforming the former voluntary organisation into one that has a small number of employed staff. And it recognises the important role that AREC plays in search and rescue, and emergency services in New Zealand – presenting opportunities for growth and stability that will see both sectors benefit from the expertise of radio communication specialists for many years to come.

Don, or Don ZL2TYR as he is known on-air (using his amateur radio call sign), dubs this unprecedented level of Government support as an investment in AREC's people.

“Like many groups, AREC relies on its volunteers to deliver our services to the community,” says Don. “This funding means we can invest in our people through training, volunteer recruitment and retention, as well as supporting them when they are out in the field. We want to ensure we continue to have the capacity to respond when called.”



Daniel Erickson ZL4DE updates the programming in radios that are about to be deployed on a search. One of AREC's responsibilities is to support LandSAR to maintain a common list of frequencies in radios nationally to ensure inter-operability should groups need to move between areas.

AREC has 350 members nationwide, coordinated by nine National Officers, ten District Managers and 40 Section Leaders. The organisation has strong relationships with Police and LandSAR, ensuring the essential communication links between search teams and the incident management team are reliable and fit for purpose. AREC volunteers are in amongst it during search and rescue operations – whether its creating the



## Rising from the rubble

When the devastating earthquake struck Napier in 1931, the only form of communication available was morse code – transmitted from Napier to Wellington by Amateur Radio Operators. The experience revealed the need for a more co-ordinated approach to disaster communications in New Zealand. In 1932, AREC was born, with a mission to train radio operators in reliable message handling throughout the country, in any type of emergency. Today, AREC sits under the New Zealand Association of Radio Transmitters (NZART), an organisation that represents amateur radio in New Zealand.

communication plan, setting up antennae and repeaters in remote parts of the country, operating radios or checking hand-held sets are tuned into the correct frequency before they are issued to search teams. They have a skillset that is critical to a successful outcome.

## Work in progress

Don says they are already making progress with some of the major funded initiatives. AREC's management capacity has increased, with paid administrative support, they are updating some legacy systems and they're in the throes of refreshing the vision, mission and objectives of the organisation to ensure they are relevant today and to the partners they work with.

Deputy National Director Lindsey Ross ZL4KS is working with Volunteering New Zealand to develop a strategy to better support volunteers and make sure AREC is offering what they need to stay interested and involved.

“When I think back over my time in AREC, we have really been a technical group of like-minded amateurs joined by a desire to help others. And while this may still be true today, what we need to consider is how do we encourage new members to join us, and how do we help all of our members think of AREC as a good use of their time,” he says.

Plans are beginning to take shape on the training front too. Not all AREC members are trained in SAR services, so the goal is to raise competency levels. National Training Manager Steve Davis ZL2UCX says they have consulted some search and rescue agencies to learn how they have developed and delivered their training, to get good ideas on what could work for AREC.

“Our learning has to be a mix of one-on-one, online, and e-collaboration platforms such as Zoom or MS Teams” says Steve. “We want all of our members to be able to participate – regardless of where they live.”

Health and safety, marketing and fundraising, PPE and high-vis gear, innovation and technology are also in line for the Midas touch. They’re big projects – but Don is not averse to hard work and he has a passionate management team behind him.

“It is a big ask for volunteers to help transform an organisation while at the same time deliver operationally,” he says. “But it is up to all of us to build an organisation we want to be part of and one that will endure into the future.”

## A quest for diversity

It was the results of the 2019 volunteer survey that galvanized AREC to seek investment for change. As per the nationwide finding for the SAR sector in general, AREC’s volunteers tend to be men, NZ European and in late middle age, or older.

“We know that young people are only too willing to volunteer for a public good. And AREC is a community service”, says Don. “We want to reach out, for example, to university students with stories about who we are and what we can offer. If you want to help save lives, you can join AREC and operate radios as an essential service for SAR. You don’t need to be licensed to do that with SAR radios – we’ll show you how. Of course, we can help you to become licensed as well.”

# SAREX Lochinver

On the weekend of 5/6 September 2020, 54 people gathered at Lochinver Station near Taupō to refresh and extend their skills in a 24-hour Search and Rescue Exercise (SAREX).

Participants came from as far as Waihi, Tauranga, Hamilton, Taranaki, Wellington and the Hawkes Bay to join the “locals” from Taupō, Tūrangi, Ruapehu and Taihape.

The event was organised by Taupō Police, Taupō LandSAR and LandSAR training.

Evaluator Nick Coyne of LandSAR says search and rescue activity in this area requires the close cooperation of many groups – not only because it crosses Police District boundaries, but also because it is part of LandSAR’s Central North Island Alliance.

Three different scenarios shaped the response of the IMT and field teams:

1. A missing forestry worker, last seen wearing hard hat and ear-defenders, but also wearing ear-buds listening to music. Found concussed with leg trapped.
2. A missing hunter, wearing small day pack and camouflage. History of angina and concussions. Found suffering from a mild heart attack.
3. A missing despondent, recently diagnosed with depression since losing his job due to COVID-19. Found concussed, with broken wrist.

In fact, three was the magic number of the day. Each scenario was three hours long (including the brief and debrief) and, in all cases, the Incident Management Team had three field teams to task.



Some of the skillsets required to get the missing people home safely were tracking, navigation, VHF radio communications, first aid, stretcher and rope management.

Nick says the SAREX provided valuable training and a positive environment for experiential learning.

“There was scope in the exercise for new field members to receive and embed useful training,” he says. “The field team related objectives were satisfied and there were good processes around refreshing skills, judging competency and reporting.”

“The SAREX was well planned and despite some minor clinches, executed capably.”

# Training update

## Incident Management Team Exercise (IMTEX) scenarios

In July 2020, we developed some land, marine and urban scenarios that may be helpful for running an IMTEX. They are available on the NZSAR website: [www.nzsar.govt.nz/training-resources/collective-training/imtex/](http://www.nzsar.govt.nz/training-resources/collective-training/imtex/)

Each resource provides a scenario description and a selection of injects. The scenarios are not location-specific, so you can tailor them to fit a specific location within your district.

There are also two Facilitator Guides (Land and Marine), which offer suggestions on preparation, support material and objectives.

We would love to receive your feedback on these resources – please send your comments to: [training@nzsar.govt.nz](mailto:training@nzsar.govt.nz)

## CIMS 3rd edition

On 1 July 2020, the Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS) 3rd edition replaced all previous versions of CIMS. There are some very helpful resources on the Civil Defence website, including a one-pager on “What are the changes and what does this mean?” Visit [www.civildefence.govt.nz/resources/coordinated-incident-management-system-cims-third-edition](http://www.civildefence.govt.nz/resources/coordinated-incident-management-system-cims-third-edition) for more.

## Search and rescue tutors needed

Could you help others by sharing your expertise as a SAR tutor?

We are currently looking for expressions of interest from people who have the relevant SAR field experience to teach the following courses:

- CIMS4
- Manage the Initial Response
- Extended Search Planning
- Marine SAR Technical
- Manage the Marine Response
- Air Observers
- SAR Leadership
- Investigative Interviewing

You must have the NZQA unit standard 4098 – and a willingness to travel.

These are paid roles, which make a significant contribution to our fees-free SAR training programme.

If this sounds like you, please complete the expression of interest form on our website (select the link from our homepage, [www.nzsar.govt.nz](http://www.nzsar.govt.nz)) and email it with any supporting documents to [training@nzsar.govt.nz](mailto:training@nzsar.govt.nz).

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Training Coordinator Alita Bigwood; email [a.bigwood@nzsar.govt.nz](mailto:a.bigwood@nzsar.govt.nz), or phone 022 010 2426.



## SARdonyx Update

by Jeff Lean, Data Analyst and Assurance Coordinator

**It's been a** busy few months for SARdonyx. The first major round of updates was released to the live system, fixing a number of long-standing issues and improving its general functionality.

There are a few more significant updates coming up, including one that looks at the way agencies collaborate using SARdonyx. We anticipate this will make it easier to record accurate information regarding the commitment of resources to each search and rescue operation.

Some readers may remember that we published a set of dashboards on the NZSAR website earlier this year. The SAR Overview, Beacons Overview, Water Incident Summary and Water Safety Summary were all removed while the website was being updated, but have now been reinstated. They can be accessed at [www.nzsar.govt.nz/sardonyx/index.html](http://www.nzsar.govt.nz/sardonyx/index.html). You can navigate between the boards by using the burger icon at the top left of the page. These dashboards are currently prototypes and are under active development. We're always interested in hearing about ways to improve them, so if you can think of anything you'd like to see, please let us know.

### SARdonyx tip

Did you know that the maps in SARdonyx allow you to select a different basemap? You just need to click on the icon in the top right of the map (shown in the red circle below), and then select the map you want. Available maps include the World Topo (this is the default option), NZ Topo 50, and NZ Marine.





# 10 questions with ...

Isaac Davies, St Clair Surf Life Saving Club

**Surf lifeguard, teacher, coffee roaster, ecologist, and all-round good guy. Ten questions with Isaac just wasn't enough.**

Thirty-year-old Isaac is an experienced member of the Otago Southland Surf Life Saving search and rescue callout team. His colleagues say that his IRB driving and lifeguarding skills are second to none – earning him a widespread reputation as an on-water leader in search and rescue operations. When he's not helping people in distress, Isaac is helping others – passing on his knowledge to upskill and mentor younger lifeguards.

## **What motivated you to get involved in surf lifesaving?**

It's been a hobby and passion of mine from a young age. Since I was 5 or 6, being down at the beach became part of my normal routine – getting involved in club life just evolved from there.

## **What's your current role(s)?**

Lifeguard, St Clair SLSC Coach and Juniors Coach (U14). I'm also the local lifeguarding representative for Otago Southland, responding to SAR callouts year-round. I chair the Otago Junior Surf lifesaving committee and sit on the St Clair SLSC committee too.

## **How long have you volunteered at St Clair Surf Life Saving Club?**

Ten years. I started at Fitzroy SLSC as a volunteer lifeguard when I was 14 years old.

## **How many hours do you spend volunteering?**

In Spring and Summer I hold 9 or 10 coaching sessions a week, so it works out to be between 20 and 30 hours a week. In the off months, I spend about 5 hours a week on admin stuff.

## **What is your day job?**

For the past 18 months or so I've managed to work as a coffee roaster, while starting a commercial composting business for restaurants and cafes in Dunedin. The volume of food wastage is insane, so I service them a couple of times a week, and compost it all at a site at a local high school. Eventually it turns into potting soil. So far, we've built a tree nursery of around 4-5,000 trees. We're aiming for 30,000 trees by the end of the year.

## **What do you enjoy most about volunteering for SLS?**

Definitely the coaching aspect. It's great to work with young keen kids who are passionate about the water. SLSNZ offers awesome opportunities like that to give back to the community – our junior surf lifesaving programme shows kids how to respect the water; how to play in and around it safely.

## **Can you tell us about one memorable SAROP that you were involved with?**

Back in January there was a Police-tasked search for a missing 14 year-old who was lost off the rocks at St Clair.

It was the type of job where you know it's not going to be a great outcome and keeping up team morale is the biggest challenge.

I was on-water comms – delegating on the water taskings that were coming from our team leader, Max. There was quite a large group of us – about 30 – and it was impressive to see the depth of people there, from young to old. Some were dealing with family members, which often brings out the best in people. I was keeping an eye on everyone, checking in on their wellbeing and mental health, making sure PPE was on and we were doing things as trained.

The body was recovered on the fourth day of searching. That's always tricky as you have to be sure not to expose some of the young guys to it. I really just shared some of the burden with Max, who is always so good on the communication front, making sure we'd spoken to everyone on our team and they knew we were there to talk to if they needed to offload.

## **How evident is collaboration in the SAR sector?**

We have awesome interactions with other SAR agencies in Southland. Most jobs involve LandSAR, Police, paramedics, fire brigade and ambulance personnel. Everyone knows the equipment others have and where their skills lie, so our interactions are often seamless. And good things come out of fostering those relationships. I recently had the opportunity to do a pilot programme with St Johns – a first responder course that was tailored for Surf, beyond our existing pre-hospital emergency care.

## **One key thing you would like to pass on to others?**

To pause for a moment and think about what you are about to do. Are you prepared for it? Do you know the conditions? It's better to know than to be caught out. Engage your brain and stay in control of what's going on.

## **How do you relax?**

I go surfing. It really helps to turn the brain off and just be in the moment. I generally bump into mates at the beach and we'll have a beer or a cuppa afterwards.



## Duncan's desk

As I write this column, the country has welcomed Spring and Alert Level One in quick succession. While both of these periods can heighten our moods, they do pose a few challenges and opportunities for New Zealand's SAR sector.

We'll have almost no international tourists visiting our shores for the foreseeable future. Many of our people are reliant on the income generated from tourists for their businesses, so this may affect SAR capacity in some places. And while SAR operations for in-bound tourists have often generated headlines, in reality they typically represent less than 10% of our workload in any given year.

With holidays abroad pretty much off the table this summer, bookings for baches, cribs, tracks and huts along with boat purchases are all up on previous years. This all points to many more Kiwis undertaking adventures in and around New Zealand this summer. With a lot of people doing new activities, or things they may not have done for quite some time, it seems likely that some will need our assistance.

To help them (and us), we recently launched a campaign to promote the carriage of distress beacons. While SAR people know how effective beacons are, there are still a lot of Kiwis who could do more to keep themselves safe during their adventures. More information on this campaign can be found at [www.adventuresmart.nz/distress-beacons](http://www.adventuresmart.nz/distress-beacons). If you see an opportunity to promote distress beacons in your local community this summer, please lean in and take it.

We also have three safety codes (Water, Boating and Land) in multiple languages on [www.AdventureSmart.nz](http://www.AdventureSmart.nz) and in hard copy at a range of I-Sites and DOC visitor centres. In addition, the websites of the Mountain Safety Council, Coastguard, Surf Life Saving NZ, Maritime NZ and Water Safety NZ (listed opposite) all have specialist safety information for a wide range of activities.

Last month, we hosted a meeting of Chairpersons and Chief Executive Officers from SAR non-governmental organisations for the first time. As a group, we explored things we might do to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the SAR sector. It was a really positive and forward-looking meeting, which has provided great guidance for the work of the sector and Secretariat.

Our new joint service level agreements are now in place with SAR non-governmental organisations and many of the required project plans are also complete. I appreciate there has been a huge amount of work across the sector to get us to this point. On behalf of the NZSAR Council, thank you for your endeavours. The Government has entrusted us with a significant investment and with it, a great opportunity to improve the sector. All this planning will keep us on track to achieve that. I am very conscious that this is just the start, but it's certainly great to be underway.

Stay safe  
Duncan

## Websites

### [www.nzsar.govt.nz](http://www.nzsar.govt.nz)

Search and rescue sector resources and information, including a PDF of this newsletter

### [www.adventuresmart.nz](http://www.adventuresmart.nz)

Safety information and tips for people planning outdoor activities

### [www.adventuresmart.nz/distress-beacons](http://www.adventuresmart.nz/distress-beacons)

Example of our latest SAR prevention work - promoting the carriage of beacons

### [www.beacons.org.nz](http://www.beacons.org.nz)

Information about 406 beacons, including where to purchase, rent and register a distress beacon

### [www.nzsar.govt.nz/sardonyx/index.html](http://www.nzsar.govt.nz/sardonyx/index.html)

Interactive dashboards using groups of records from SARdonyx, our joint search and rescue operational information system

### [www.tpp.ac.nz/study-options/search-and-rescue](http://www.tpp.ac.nz/study-options/search-and-rescue)

SAR multi-agency training

### [www.landsar.org.nz/training-calendar](http://www.landsar.org.nz/training-calendar)

LandSAR training courses (member's log-in needed)

### [www.mountainsafety.org.nz](http://www.mountainsafety.org.nz)

New Zealand Mountain Safety Council

### [www.coastguard.nz](http://www.coastguard.nz)

Coastguard New Zealand

### [www.surflifesaving.org.nz](http://www.surflifesaving.org.nz)

Surf Life Saving New Zealand

### [www.maritimenz.govt.nz](http://www.maritimenz.govt.nz)

Maritime New Zealand

### [watersafety.org.nz](http://watersafety.org.nz)

Water Safety New Zealand