



Connecting the search and rescue sector

Link is a quarterly publication of
New Zealand Search and Rescue



Quick thinking saves three

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Link is the quarterly publication of New Zealand Search and Rescue. If you have any feedback on this publication, please let us know.

info@nzsar.govt.nz | nzsar.govt.nz

Websites

nzsar.govt.nz

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

adventuresmart.nz

Safety information and tips for people planning outdoor activities

adventuresmart.nz/distress-beacons

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

beacons.org.nz

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

nzsar.govt.nz/sardonyx/index.html

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

nzsar.govt.nz/nzs-sar-guidelines/nzs-sar-guidelines-overview

New Zealand's Search and Rescue Guidelines

tpp.ac.nz/study-options/search-and-rescue

SAR multi-agency training

landsar.org.nz

Land Search & Rescue

mountainsafety.org.nz

New Zealand Mountain Safety Council

coastguard.nz

Coastguard New Zealand

surflifesaving.org.nz

Surf Life Saving New Zealand

maritimenz.govt.nz

Maritime New Zealand

watersafety.org.nz

Water Safety New Zealand

saferwalking.nz

Safer Walking NZ

COVER IMAGE

The West Coast ROA Mining Rescue Helicopter arriving on the scene at Deception River.

Image courtesy Ian Selwood, Greymouth LandSAR



Governance training for volunteer agencies

The success of a governance training workshop in May this year will be the springboard for further training on the subject. The workshop was hosted by the NZSAR Secretariat to support the sector's non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in achieving top performance from their governance boards.

This need for governance training was prompted by a meeting in 2020 of the chief executives and chairs of these NGOs.

“The training links to two of the strategic goals of the NZSAR Council: to have a robust, integrated SAR system; and efficient and sustainable SAR organisations working collaboratively to enable volunteerism,” says NZSAR Secretariat Manager Duncan Ferner.

“It makes sense to look for opportunities to make this happen at the governance level.”

Governance relates to a structure or process designed to ensure accountability, transparency, stability and a means to encourage broad-based participation.

The workshop was developed by a governance strategy professional, Gail Munro, and delivered to senior leaders and board members from Surf Life Saving NZ, LandSAR and Amateur Radio Emergency Communications.

Some of the workshop's objectives were to inform the NGOs present of the legal responsibilities for boards collectively, and for individual members.

It was also a place to discuss board member roles and responsibilities, impart the importance of adhering to meeting processes, and gain a greater understanding of the boards' role as employers, and in planning and reporting.

Gail said the course was tailored for entry-level governance requirements. However, over the course of the workshop, it became apparent only a few of the participants were at the entry level. Most people attending had some governance experience and knowledge already.

NZSAR Secretariat Training Coordinator, Alita Bigwood, says it was a timely and constructive way for the organisations in attendance to learn from one another.

She says it's evident that these NGOs are at different levels of maturity when it comes to how their governance works.

“This workshop provided an opportunity to share what works and what doesn't work, and also provides a way to create consistency for volunteers, which is what we're aiming for as well.”

Pending changes to the Incorporated Societies Act were discussed, and how these might impact on NGO governance in the coming years.

Alita says feedback from those who attended the workshop was positive, and they are eager to take part in further governance training opportunities.



Land Safety Forum makes a strong start

The Land Safety Forum held its inaugural meeting in Wellington at the end of June, with strong representation from a range of user groups, land managers and prevention agencies.

The cross-sector Land Safety Forum is modelled on Maritime New Zealand's Safer Boating Forum, which has made a real impact on New Zealand's recreational boating fatalities. The Forum is funded by NZSAR and hosted by the Department of Conservation (DOC).

Forum coordinator, Alex Hardy, has spent the last six months engaging with the sector and building the relationships needed to develop a meaningful forum.

"There are a lot of formal and informal relationships across the sector, so it's taken me a while to understand the nuances between people and organisations."

An added challenge is the uniqueness of the land sector, where there is no regulatory mechanism to keep people safe in the outdoors – unlike the maritime sector, which can mandate the carriage of lifejackets and speed limits on the water.

"We don't have any laws preventing people from going into the hills when there's a storm brewing, and it's not compulsory for people to carry a distress beacon.

"Every organisation has their own way of doing things, and to have someone come in and say, 'we're going to try and do it a little differently and a little more collaboratively'

– it's a challenge but it comes down to communicating the idea. There's so much value in all of us working together."

The first forum meeting was facilitated by Geoff Henley, who in 2020 helped guide the development of the new Land Safety Code.

Andy Roberts, DOC's Visitor Safety Manager, says the meeting provided an opportunity for networking that he hopes will lead to improved outcomes for people recreating in the land environment.

"There are some strong lessons to be learnt from what each of us are doing, and what's coming up, especially for the summer. We know a little about each other, but not as much as we would like."

Water Safety New Zealand kaihautū (leader) Rob Hewitt attended the meeting, sharing some insights from his own survival story. The former Navy diver spent four days lost at sea after becoming separated from his diving group in 2006, off the coast of Porirua.

Rob also invited the forum attendees to broaden their understanding of what land recreation looks like, and who's doing it.

Haumaru Tangata Ki uta Ki Tai

*Keeping people safe
from the mountains
to the sea*



“Rob also challenged us to think hard about our audiences and our language,” says Andy.

“He brought home that many Māori don’t explicitly “go tramping” or “go climbing”, but they’ll do a lot of hunting which uses the same environments and the same skills as trampers or climbers.”

It is envisaged that the Land Safety Forum will meet three to four times a year, and sub-groups may be formed to focus on specific areas such as communications and data analysis.

If your organisation would like to get involved, please contact Alex on 027 238 0226 or email alex.hardy@landsafetyforum.nz



ABOVE LEFT
Trampers in the Hawdon Valley

ABOVE RIGHT
Rob Hewitt gifted this whakataukī (proverb) to the Land Safety Forum during its first meeting.

BELOW RIGHT
Rob Hewitt (right)



Kiwis help in Bahamas search and rescue

The Royal New Zealand Air Force crew training with the P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft in Jacksonville, Florida, was recently involved in a dramatic rescue of a group of Haitians, including a baby, after their vessel capsized off the coast of Grand Bahama.

The No. 5 Squadron crew were on board two US Navy P-8As on a maritime intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance exercise with US Navy instructors when a radio channel lit up with a distress call from the United States Coast Guard, RNZAF Flight Lieutenant Reece Tamariki said.

In the United States, the US Navy does not generally get involved in search and rescue tasks, a role which is carried out by local police and Coast Guard. However, No 5 Squadron's role includes year-round, fast notice search and rescue tasks, so the Kiwis were able to offer some of their own experience and insight into search options.

A 24ft vessel had capsized, and while eight survivors and two deceased had been recovered, there were up to six more people still in the water in need of rescue.

The P-8As were 80 nautical miles north of the search area, which was just six nautical miles off Grand Bahama.

Both aircraft responded and flew south in preparation for an official request for assistance.

"The Royal Bahamian Police and US Coast Guard were already on scene, and the regional Rescue Coordination Centre was made aware of the P-8As' positions and ability to assist. A search area was developed and the two aircraft were then requested to aid in the search," Flight Lieutenant Tamariki said.

The capsized vessel was found initially on radar and then visually. Once the drift was assessed, both aircraft commenced a visual search for survivors in the water, unaware exactly how many people were involved, or what survival aids they might have had.

That area of ocean was dead flat, and the visibility was excellent, so the crew held a quiet confidence that if they flew overhead, they could spot survivors in the water, Flight Lieutenant Tamariki said.

"The search and rescue was unlike most missions Air Force operators are used to, with a helicopter, three fixed-wing aircraft, a Coast Guard vessel and Bahamian Police boats all on scene to assist."

On board one of the aircraft, RNZAF Flight Sergeant Nick Rowe briefed the observers in the windows on their duties upon seeing anything in the water, and then controlled the sensors. Flight Lieutenant Tamariki coordinated the aircraft's search while the US Navy instructors focussed on communication and deconfliction with the other aircraft.

"Upon completion of the tasked search area, and 45 minutes away from minimum gas, the aircraft were requested to return to base, refuel and head back to the search area," Flight Lieutenant Tamariki said.

The search was eventually called off with a number of people still missing.

"The crew were sobered as a Haitian woman and a boy had died, while the survivors were taken back to land for treatment. The event was a bleak reminder of the importance of the job No. 5 Squadron currently do with P-3K2 Orions and will continue to do with the P-8A Poseidons."

Eight No. 5 Squadron personnel and their families deployed to Jacksonville early last year to begin a three-year deployment working with P-8A Poseidon aircraft, training to be the first RNZAF instructors when the P-8As arrive in New Zealand in 2023.

ABOVE

The Air Force crew and USAF Lieutenant Commander Jason Brown, training on the P-8As.

This story was originally published in Air Force News and is republished with permission.



Coastguard NZ is gifted a new name

Coastguard New Zealand has been gifted a Māori title to better reflect its guardianship role at sea: Tautiaki Moana Aotearoa

The organisation was gifted the ingoa (name), Tautiaki Moana Aotearoa, at a ceremony in August. It was presented by Te Arawa iwi during the ceremony at Te Papaourua Marae in Rotorua.

Coastguard New Zealand chief executive, Callum Gillespie, said it was a “hugely momentous occasion” for Coastguard and its 2000 volunteers around the country.

He said Tautiaki Moana is more than just a name.

“It’s a way in which we conduct ourselves personally and how we go about our mission of saving lives at sea.”

Tautiaki is a word similar in meaning to kaitiaki, meaning guardian. The difference is that tautiaki is based in action – the actions taken provide the guardianship.

“From responding to boaties in need at 3am, to education, fundraising and everything in between, our actions allow us to tautiaki (keep watch over) everyone who enjoys our beautiful waters,” Callum said.

The name Tautiaki Moana was gifted to Coastguard Rotorua Lakes several years ago by Ngāti Whakaue, a hapū of Te Arawa iwi. Last year Coastguard asked Te Arawa if this name could be used for the whole organisation and the organisation was delighted when its members gave their strong support.

Coastguard Communications Coordinator Madi Hale, who was at this year’s ceremony, said it was an emotion-filled experience.

“A lot of work has gone into getting Coastguard to this point, so we could feel the immense amount of pride, emotion and meaning that this had for a lot of people in the room that day.

“It was quite powerful. I’ve been with the organisation for about three years now, but I could feel the pride and the mana that has gone into this work. It was fantastic.”

Callum said Coastguard is committed to ensuring its volunteers and staff understand the importance of engaging effectively with Māori. With the social outcomes for Māori being worse than that of Pākehā, including death and hospitalisation because of drowning, Coastguard has a responsibility to work better with Māori to help improve these outcomes.

“Making a difference to the alarming drowning toll in our country will only be achieved when we are fully engaged with all people in New Zealand,” Callum said.

“Building strong relationships between Coastguard and Māori is about upholding mana, positive experiences and a genuine desire to create an enduring partnership.

“The gifting of Tautiaki Moana is a crucial step in making these things happen.”

Madi said the organisation was now working through a brand revamp, and it was possible that the new title would be incorporated.

ABOVE
Coastguard and Te Arawa representatives

INSET
Monty Morrisson, Te Arawa Lakes Trust and Callum Gillespie, Chief Executive, Coastguard New Zealand – Tautiaki Moana Aotearoa



Seamless handover leads to successful riverbed rescue

Just after 7pm on 23 April 2021, New Zealand's Rescue Coordination Centre (RCCNZ) received an alert from a personal locator beacon near Arthur's Pass. Search and Rescue Officer Julian Tovey started coordinating a response beginning with contacting the beacon's registered owner.

That initial phone call yielded vital information: the owner confirmed he had lent the beacon to a group of three men tramping into Pfeifer Bivvy in Arthur's Pass National Park.

However, the GPS coordinates from the beacon placed the men in the Deception River valley, several kilometres southwest of their intended destination.

After an RCCNZ shift change, Senior Search and Rescue Officer Conrad Reynecke took over the coordination and contacted the West Coast ROA Mining Rescue Helicopter. With the beacon coordinates giving a clear position, it should have been a straightforward rescue – however the weather had other ideas. Twenty minutes after leaving base, the rescue helicopter had to turn around due to weather conditions in the area.

“While it's frustrating to have the chopper within minutes of people needing rescue, safety has to be the priority,” says Conrad. “We will always defer to the pilot's assessment of the conditions.”

Conrad then initiated a discussion in the operations room at RCCNZ about the next steps for the rescue. Because the search was triggered by a beacon, it had initially been classed as a Category II response with

RCCNZ coordinating. However, with the helicopter unable to assist, a decision was needed about whether RCCNZ should retain coordination – utilising local police as the On Scene Coordinator – or if the whole operation should be handed over to police and transferred to a Category I operation.

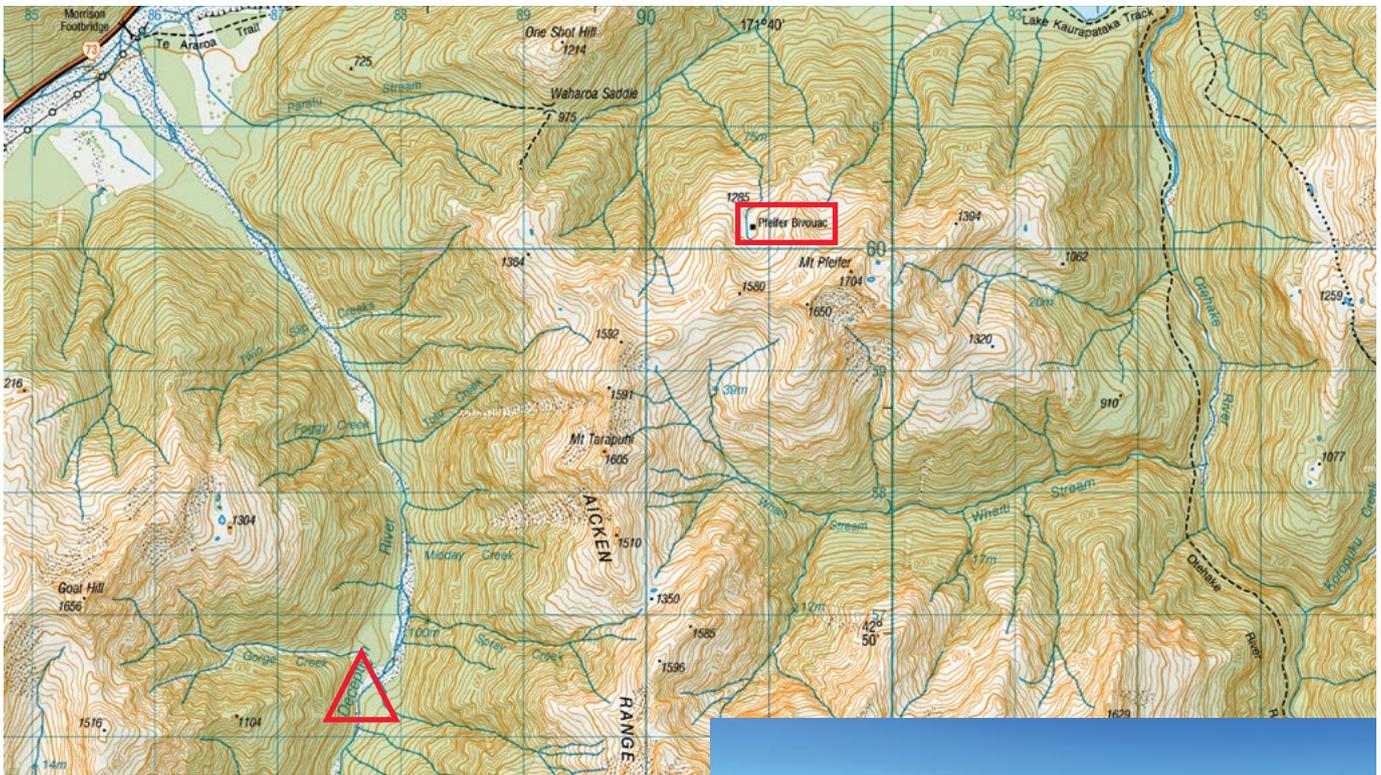
Conrad says it was a straightforward decision to transfer the whole operation to police as a Category I.

“With the helicopter unable to help, there was nothing we could really do to assist,” says Conrad.

“The local police were well placed to appoint an Incident Controller, establish an Incident Management Team, and mobilise ground crews.”

With the decision made, RCCNZ then formally handed over the operation to Senior Sergeant Mark Kirkwood of the Tasman Police District. Location information was still being received from the beacon and continued to be monitored by RCCNZ with Mark receiving regular updates.

Mark had already been briefed on the evolving situation and as a precaution, had mobilised the LandSAR groups from Hokitika and Greymouth by the time the call came through at 8.37pm that the helicopter was returning to base.



“Given the weather at the time, it seemed prudent to organise a field team just in case,” Mark says.

“The LandSAR groups from Hokitika and Greymouth are very experienced and were familiar with the area.”

Mark assumed the role of Incident Controller and placed an On Scene Coordinator at the road end on State Highway 73, near Jacksons, a small settlement in Westland.

“Straight away we established that the river levels were high,” says Mark.

“The team were encouraged to do their own risk assessment and were reminded that they could turn back any time if they felt the conditions were too unsafe to continue.”

The team of six LandSAR volunteers started making their way up the Deception River at 10.30pm. Keeping in touch with Mark using a Garmin InReach satellite messenger device, they reported swollen rivers, rain falling, and an ambient air temperature of -4 degrees.

Using the information provided from the team, Mark was able to contact the families of the three men with regular updates on the rescuers’ progress.

At 2.30am, the rescue team came across the three men, who had set up camp on the riverbed around six kilometres from the road end. They were pleased to find the group hadn’t moved since setting off their beacon.

“One of the men had been showing signs of hypothermia, but his mates had put him in a sleeping bag, so he wasn’t in immediate danger,” says Mark.

“The LandSAR team got a fire going, made hot drinks and then set up camp for the night.”

At first light, with the weather clear enough for a helicopter, the three men and the rescue team were

retrieved from the riverbed by the West Coast ROA Mining Rescue Helicopter.

The reason for the beacon activation was quickly uncovered by talking with the men afterwards. The weather conditions had meant their original destination of Pfeifer Bivvy was unachievable, so they’d changed plans to head for Upper Deception Hut. However, upstream travel was slower than expected and with one of the group hypothermic, they set off their beacon.

“They did all the right things,” says Mark. “They realised that the weather was closing in and one of their party needed help. They stayed put after setting off the beacon, so no additional searching was required.”

From RCCNZ’s point of view, it was a no-brainer to hand over coordination to enable a successful rescue.

“We’re all part of the same system, and in this instance the system worked brilliantly,” Conrad says.

TOP LEFT

The West Coast ROA Mining Rescue Helicopter arriving on scene. Image courtesy Ian Selwood, Greymouth LandSAR

TOP RIGHT

The group’s initial destination was Pfeifer Bivvy (red rectangle). They were rescued from the Deception River (red triangle).

INSET

Pfeifer Bivvy was the men’s intended destination. Image courtesy Andrew Tyrrell/South Arrow Maps



Multi-agency avalanche training

Taranaki and Whanganui-Ruapehu Police Search and Rescue (SAR) teams recently partnered with other SAR agencies for a two-day avalanche training session.

Police, LandSAR, Ruapehu Alpine Rescue Organisation (RARO), Aoraki Mt Cook Alpine Cliff Rescue (ACR), Taranaki ACR, St John, Ski Patrol, LandSAR Dogs, Tukino Ski Patrol and Ruapehu Alpine Lifts came together for a weekend to participate in the training at Whakapapa.

National Park Senior Constable Conrad Smith was one of the local staff who took part in the training.

“The Saturday consisted of training in National Park for the Incident Management Team members, while the field teams trained in the latest search techniques up on the mountain,” says Conrad.



ABOVE

The Aoraki/Mt Cook ACR team briefing all the participants prior to the exercise starting.

BELOW

Department of Conservation Senior Ranger Dave Dittmer from the Aoraki Mt Cook ACR team teaches basic snowcraft skills.

TOP RIGHT

When mannequins were located they were swapped out with a real person who role-played injuries and medical conditions.

Photographs courtesy of Conrad Smith

“The training was led by the Aoraki/Mt Cook team at both locations, and we all benefited from their professional experience.”

On Sunday, everyone got to put the previous day's learning into action with a big avalanche site which hid 11 buried mannequin victims at various depths and locations – all with different levels of detectability to test the various search techniques.

When the mannequins were located, they were swapped out for a team member who role played injuries and medical conditions.

“There were fantastic learnings all round and while we train hard in the rescue scene, the best option for everyone is to not get caught at all,” says Conrad.

“If you are into travelling in the backcountry, get some avalanche education, get on a course, get the right gear and then get out and enjoy our amazing backcountry much more aware and a bit safer.”

This story was originally published by Ten One / New Zealand Police and is republished with permission.



Welcome Wendy

We warmly welcome Wendy Harrison to the NZSAR Secretariat team – Wendy has joined us in a permanent role.

Ensuring the team is well supported is a priority for Wendy Harrison, who recently joined the NZSAR Secretariat as its Team and Projects Administrator.

It's been a steep learning curve navigating the intricacies of NZSAR, but that is also what drew Wendy to the role at the Wellington-based office. She is responsible for providing administration support to both the Secretariat and the NZSAR Council.

“I've always worked in administration, mainly in the private sector, but this is my second role working for a government department.”

Wendy previously worked at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade and was drawn to the role with NZSAR for the variety and challenge it offered.

“I like that it is so involved with the community. I'd heard of search and rescue before but didn't know the ins and outs – it's not like you just send out a helicopter to pick someone up – there's just so much more involved, including the training, and the huge amount of work that goes on behind the scenes.

“There's so much to learn and working with a team that's so passionate about what they do makes this so worthwhile.”

Wendy is a born-and-bred Wellingtonian and loves all it has to offer.

“My husband and I live 30 minutes north of Wellington. We love living out in Whitby as we are central to the Kapiti Coast and Hutt Valley, where it is easier to visit family and friends.”

Wendy says it's great working in an office right on Wellington's waterfront, which the city is lucky to have.

She says downtime is spent walking and watching sport at home, especially netball.

“I was a keen netballer in my time, and I still enjoy supporting the Central Pulse netball team.”

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Deep water rescue

A distress call from the crew on the yacht *Essence* which sank off Northland's east coast in October 2019 triggered a large rescue operation that called upon Defence Force and civilian resources.

Operation *Essence* was a Category II search and rescue operation managed by the Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand (RCCNZ).

A review of the complex and fast-moving rescue operation off Cape Brett was carried out by New Zealand Search and Rescue which identified several findings.

Critical to the outcome was how the yacht's crew responded, planned and managed their own evacuation from the sinking yacht in extreme circumstances. Not only had their liferaft and primary emergency locator beacon been swept away, but their GPS had been knocked out too, when the yacht suffered a knockdown that inflicted serious damage.

The 14-metre yacht *Essence* and its experienced off-shore sailing crew were six days into a passage from Fiji, headed for Tauranga. As they approached New Zealand on Monday 4 October 2019, they encountered worsening weather.

Based on the information at hand, the crew decided to alter course from Tauranga and run for the sheltered waters of the Bay of Islands. They planned their actions and prepared the boat for what turned out to be a more savage storm than predicted.

They were soon battling huge seas later pegged at between 10 and 12 metres, and wind gusts regularly exceeding 60 knots.

Shortly after midday the *Essence* suffered a significant knockdown in the large seas. It turned upside-down and then self-righted but with the cabin windows punched



out, meaning the yacht was open to the waves, and soon awash.

Despite the chaos, including one crew member injured and another having to be recovered from the sea, the crew remained calm and at 12.29pm issued a Mayday call. A personal locator beacon retrieved from the yacht's forward cabin was then activated.

The crew then took stock of their predicament and formed a plan, while tethered to the boat in the cockpit near the shattered steering column. They determined that survival depended on them remaining together in the water for at least two-and-a-half hours, until help arrived.

They were forced to abandon the yacht after it tilted suddenly and headed under the waves, plunging all into the water. They re-tethered themselves to each other and went into survival mode.

Timeline of the rescue:

12:29

Maritime Operations Centre (MOC) received a Mayday call from the *Essence*.

12:46

Defence Joint Forces Headquarters contacted. An Air Force P3 Orion fixed wing aircraft, two Sea Sprite helicopters and HMNZS Otago were all activated.

13:04

Two Auckland Rescue Helicopters deployed, each containing medical personnel.

13.48

Orion airborne, and en route to the scene.

14:09

Bay of Islands Coastguard deployed its 10.2m rescue vessel Bay Rescue II from Kerikeri.

14:48

The Orion crew spotted four people in lifejackets huddled in the water and dropped a liferaft.

15:18

The Auckland Rescue Helicopter arrived on scene.

15:40

Four people recovered from the sea by winch, three survived.

16:32

Rescue helicopter arrived at Kensington ambulance base, Whangārei.

Insights from the NZSAR review:

The operation was well-managed and executed, notably for the calm and professional radio communication between the stricken vessel and the Maritime Operations Centre.

All the assets deployed are to be commended as they acted with urgency, while focused on the risks involved including operating about 20 nautical miles offshore in breaking seas and 50 – 60 knot winds.

Representatives from the Maritime Operations Centre, RCCNZ, 5 Squadron Royal New Zealand Air Force, Auckland Rescue Helicopter Trust and Bay of Islands Coastguard were recognised for their outstanding response in the 2019 NZSAR Awards.

The review's findings focused on helicopter crew compilation for offshore rescues and the unavailability of the Northland Emergency Services Trust rescue helicopter; Coastguard capability and risk assessment for offshore deployments; management of beacon emergency contacts; and media awareness, particularly around the use of information relayed over the open-source marine channel 16.

The review also found that the flow and currency of information worked well and provided the three RCCNZ personnel with the environment they needed to plan, deploy, monitor, and assess the situation.

Should the operation have further escalated, the opportunity existed for police and Defence Force liaison officers to work from within the RCCNZ environment.

Maritime New Zealand report into *Essence* sinking

Maritime NZ has released a detailed report into the sinking of the *Essence*, which is available on their website: maritimenz.govt.nz/public/news/media-releases-2021/20210722a.asp

TOP LEFT
Crew Rescue. Courtesy Auckland Rescue Helicopter Trust

LEFT
The 14- metre yacht *Essence*. Courtesy Maritime NZ

New framework ensures lessons won't be forgotten

The New Zealand Search and Rescue Secretariat has launched a framework that will guide sector wide improvements to how organisations learn from experiences.

The Lessons Framework, which was signed off mid-year by the NZSAR Council, will be used to improve responses to future events based on lessons learned from past.

It is built on the principles of lessons management – an overarching term that refers to collecting, analysing, disseminating and applying learning experiences from events, exercises, programmes and reviews.

The concept of lessons management was created by the US military as part of its continuous improvement process. It is now embedded within the New Zealand Defence Force, Fire and Emergency New Zealand and is being established across the wider emergency management sector.

Observations are collected from an incident or event during the debrief, and then streamlined into insights. The problem is then identified and developed as a lesson.

“The idea is you capture observations from certain events and exercises and from those observations you can identify key insights – things that need actions in some way,” says NZSAR’s National Search and Rescue Support Programme Coordinator, Rhett Emery.

“Sharing insights and lessons within and between organisations ensures everyone benefits from the knowledge gained.”

NZSAR reviews, such as that of the deep-water rescue of the crew off the yacht *Essence*, can provide recommendations based on the observations made during the review. Acting on the recommendations can create lessons to improve operations.

For example, one of the rescue helicopter crew involved in the rescue of the *Essence* crew saw that one of the winchmen dropped his knife.

“That was the observation. The insight was: ‘Okay, if we’d had two knives, that would have overcome that’.

“The lesson was, we need two knives, and putting two on the winchman would be the lesson learned.”

Des Hosie, who chairs the all-of-government Lessons NZ Community of Practice, says the success of a lessons process is reliant on a just and fair culture, which combines a no-blame approach with accountability.



“An agency might accept that people may make mistakes, but those who participate in reckless behaviour are held accountable, which is part of a just and fair culture.

“But you also want people to be honest and open about what’s happened.”

Lessons can be derived from any activity. They can be a product of events, exercises, training, experiments or day-to-day work. The challenge facing any organisation is to build a culture in which everyone feels comfortable and motivated to share their knowledge in a productive way.

Rhett says the framework developed for the New Zealand search and rescue sector will be the platform from which insights and lessons can be shared among sector organisations.

The SAR sector supports a culture of continuous improvement by:

- Encouraging the sector to share lessons, both positive actions to sustain and areas for improvement
- Encouraging learning
- Focussing on systems performance, rather than the performance of individuals.

The NZSAR Guideline for operational debriefing has been updated to include lessons management, and is now available on our website: nzsar.govt.nz/sar-operational-support/operational-sar-information/response-guidelines/

10 questions with ... Geoff Layton, Coastguard Wellington

Coastguard Master Geoff Layton is a familiar face to generations of boaties in the Wellington Harbour. He explains a little more about why Coastguard appeals to him so much.

What is your current role in Coastguard?

I have three roles within Coastguard currently – I'm a skipper of the Wellington rescue vessels, which is the highest qualification within Coastguard and equivalent to piloting a harbour ferry, but with extensive SAR skills. For the last ten years I've been an instructor, and since about 2000 I've taken on the role of maintaining the unit's navigation and comms equipment.

What made you get involved in Coastguard?

In April 1971, the then-President of the Wellington Sea Rescue Service came into the office of the radio company I was working for, and I signed up as a volunteer. The organisation had been set up not long after the *Wahine* sinking in 1968 and they went on to become part of Coastguard in 1991.

What is your day job?

I'm retired now, but I worked as an electronics engineer previously. That part of my life taught me a lot about how to get the best out of teams, and that's something I've carried across into my volunteering with Coastguard.

How many people are involved with Coastguard Wellington?

We have about 70 people in the unit, spread across seven teams. We're one of the biggest units in the country.

What's changed since you started volunteering with Coastguard 50 years ago?

The training has become progressively more structured, and there's now a formal training matrix that is reviewed regularly to make sure it's up to date. We've also formalised how we recruit new volunteers. Each volunteer does three trial days out on the water before committing, so they get to meet three different crews and get a better sense of what's involved.

Can you tell us about a memorable SAROP that you were involved with?

A few years ago, a well-known 70-foot racing yacht came to Wellington for a weekend, before heading out on a round-the-world race. There were many boats following it, including us, when I noticed a small runabout directly in the path



of the racing yacht. They were at anchor and couldn't get their engine started. We gunned it towards them in our rigid inflatable rescue boat, tied a line to them and then went full throttle backwards and pulled them out of the way. The whole thing was over in a flash, but it could have been their lives over in a flash.

A lot of Coastguard work involves towing. What's the longest tow you've ever done?

We once responded to a radio call from an 18-foot runabout near Lake Ferry in Palliser Bay. We had to tow him back to Lowry Bay, hanging vertically in the water. It was slow progress at 1.5 knots, and it took us about 6.5 hours to get him back to safety.

What do you do to relax?

My wife is a singer, so a lot of my downtime is spent supporting her musical endeavours. We also enjoy travelling, and if there's a chance to visit a Coastguard unit then I will. I think I've visited around 45 Coastguard units, plus some in the US, the UK, and Australia.

What's the most unexpected thing that's happened to you while volunteering?

Recently I went out on what I thought was a training session in the rescue boat, when someone suggested we finish up with a coffee at a local café that has its own jetty. I got there to find that the unit had organised a surprise event to acknowledge my 50 years of service. It was so unexpected but very enjoyable.

What's one key thing you'd like to pass on to others?

You don't have to be a boatie to be a Coastguard volunteer. We will train people who have zero boating experience. The only qualifications you need are the ability to commit, as it can be a large time commitment. Our volunteers have a training session several times a month and are on duty for a day every fourth weekend.

Geoff Layton at the helm in Wellington.
Photo courtesy Alex Paterson



Duncan's desk

Kia ora koutou

Winter is always a demanding time for search and rescue, and this year was no exception. The major flooding events in Ashburton, the West Coast and Marlborough have had major impacts on the infrastructure in our mountains, rivers and beaches – some of which will be out of action for months. Sadly, these extreme weather events seem to be happening more and more often, and have a major impact on how, and where we recreate.

The news of another COVID-19 outbreak and resultant Alert Level 4 lockdown is certainly challenging for New Zealand. However, I'm confident the things we learnt from the 2020 lockdown are ingrained in us all. New Zealanders have received the 'stay home, save lives' message loud and clear, and I'm confident that it'll be a quiet period for our SAR sector and that we'll do our bit if necessary.

For the Secretariat, it's been a busy few months as we draft papers, hold sector meetings, make investments and plan work programmes. There's a lot of work in the pipeline for us, so it's a good thing we've welcomed Wendy Harrison to the team. You can find out more about her on page 11.

Over the last few months, I've had the opportunity to meet with senior leaders and in some cases, the boards, of AREC, LandSAR, Surf Life Saving, Coastguard and the Australian National SAR Council (NATSAR). We're starting to see some tangible results from the significant increase in Government investment that commenced in July 2020 with new staff throughout the sector, PPE being rolled out, assets being maintained and training happening across the board.

The Land Safety Forum recently held its first meeting. The discussion was wide and varied, as you'll see from the story on page 4. The value of the forum was immediately apparent

as an opportunity for the various organisations to network, build relationships and keep abreast of what each other are working on. I was heartened by the goodwill and willingness to collaborate that was evident over the course of the day.

Upskilling our people remains a high priority as it directly contributes to our goal of capable SAR people. It was great to have 24 people attend the SAR Managers course at the NZ Police College near Porirua in June. It's no easy task being a manager of a SAR operation and the course content reflected this, covering everything from media stand-ups to search suspension to probability of survival. I was pleased to see that the psychological toll of SAR was acknowledged as well. This can be a challenging sector to be a part of, so please don't hesitate to reach out if you need some additional support.

Prevention is a key part of our SAR work programme but when things go wrong, we want people to be able to access help quickly. Distress beacons take the 'search' out of search and rescue and contribute to better SAR outcomes. Last summer we ran a successful digital marketing campaign encouraging people to hire or buy a distress beacon for their next trip. Planning is currently underway for a similar campaign for this summer, and I look forward to sharing some more details with you soon.

Stay safe – and COVID free,
Duncan Ferner
NZSAR Secretariat Manager

ABOVE

Storm damage on the Queen Charlotte Track.
Image courtesy Department of Conservation

**NEW ZEALAND
SEARCH
AND
RESCUE**

Rapu Whakarauora Aotearoa