



Connecting the search and rescue sector

Link is a quarterly publication of
New Zealand Search and Rescue



Celebrating 125 years at Sumner

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125 years at Sumner
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Duncan's desk

Kia ora koutou

It seems we are in for an El Niño summer, with the possibility of increased rainfall in the West and a higher likelihood of drought in the East. There are a variety of possible implications of this weather pattern for search and rescue in and around New Zealand, so it has been good to see SAR leaders consider these ahead of our inevitably busy summer period.

Across the wider emergency management sector, work is under-way to understand the learnings from the numerous weather-related events that have struck New Zealand during the year. I look forward to the outcomes of these deliberations so we can better position ourselves ahead of future emergencies.

As you'll read on page 11, the Te Manatū Waka Ministry of Transport-led review of search and rescue and recreational safety has recently been completed. A number of recommendations have been made which will be decided upon by the new Government.

Exercise Whakarauora Tangata, our series of Nationally Significant SAR exercises, has continued to be rolled out across the country. A number of agencies have been put through their paces testing their response to a cruise ship in distress, and it's been great to see that our systems are in good shape overall. It's also been good to see other organisations such as the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) and Customs leverage off this exercise series to test their own systems and build

relationships across the SAR sector. My thanks to all of you who have been involved in this work.

In late October, the Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand won the People's Choice Award – Best Communications at the 2023 Plain Language Awards for the www.beacons.nz website. Our team played a small part in the revamp of the website back in 2021 and it was a very pleasant surprise to see the website recognised by the judges as "a shining example of engaging, impactful information that helps keep New Zealanders safe."

Lastly, we have recently welcomed Aimee Flanagan and Matt Mintrom to the Secretariat. Aimee has picked up the training work-stream, and Matt will be focusing on SAR policy. You can read more about what drew them to the roles on page 10. We've also farewelled Evan Hughes who has taken up a new role in the not-for-profit sector.

As we gear up for a busy summer, I hope you're able to take some time out to reconnect with friends and family, and recharge your batteries ready for 2024.

Stay safe,
Duncan Ferner
Director
NZSAR Secretariat

COVER IMAGE

Celebrating 125 years at Sumner. Courtesy Coastguard Sumner

125 years at Sumner

Celebrating the service of the Sumner Lifeboat Institution / Coastguard Sumner

On **25 August 1898**, the first officially commissioned lifeboat was launched at Sumner. For over 125 years, the longest-serving maritime rescue presence in New Zealand has been based there, near the entrance to the Avon Heathcote Estuary in Christchurch.

Rescue was a four person, 25-foot vessel, the first in a series of oar-powered lifeboats. It wasn't until 28 June 1930 that Sumner's first motorised lifeboat was launched. A lifeboat shed was established at the Scarborough end of Sumner in the 1930s, which remains the location of their base to this day.

They continuously upgraded their fleet, which included purpose-built lifeboats bought from Britain's Royal National Lifeboat Institution.

In the 1970s the recently developed jet boat technology was adopted, as it was particularly suitable for operations around rocky shorelines and in surf conditions.

Sumner Lifeboat Institution was a founding member of Coastguard New Zealand in 1977.

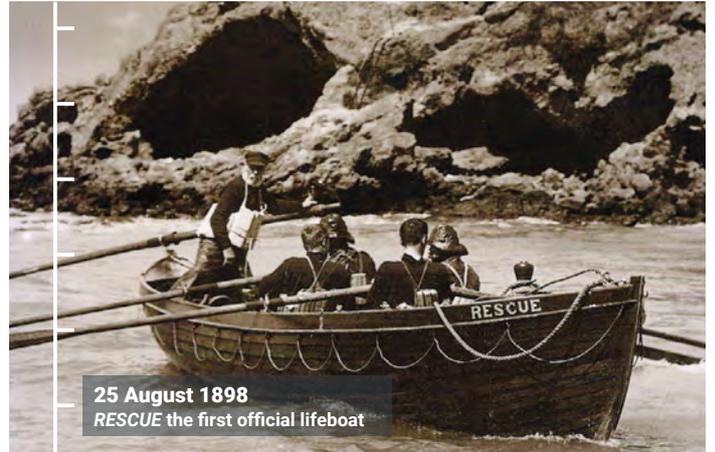
In 1980, Lesley Hayes was the first female crew member. "As a woman pioneering new ground, you need to be at least twice as good as the men doing the same thing... and she was," says Heather McDonald, Coastguard Sumner skipper and volunteer since 1991.

In 2010, *Blue Arrow Rescue* was officially launched. She is a 12.5-metre all-weather rescue vessel, equipped with twin jet units. Designed from scratch, she is equipped with state-of-the-art systems, including radar, sonar and infrared camera rescue sensors.

They adopted Coastguard Sumner as a trading name in 2023 but have proudly retained Sumner Lifeboat Institution as the registered name of their charitable organisation.

Today their entire fleet is propelled by water-jet systems and includes purpose-built rigid hull inflatable jet boats and jet skis.

"As the oldest marine-rescue organisation in New Zealand, our unit has seen incredible change over the last 125 years," says Blair Quane, President of Coastguard Sumner. "Our volunteers today have dedicated themselves to continuing our proud history of innovation and commitment to saving lives at sea."



25 August 1898
RESCUE the first official lifeboat



December 1975
Jet boat AID II officially launched as new inshore rescue vessel



1980
Lesley Hayes joins as the first female boat crew member



2010
BLUE ARROW RESCUE officially launched

NZSAR congratulates Coastguard Sumner on their milestone, and thanks them for over 125 years of service to search and rescue. More detailed historical timelines and videos can be viewed at www.sumner-lifeboat.org.nz

Time to review your comms plan?

Around 8pm on Saturday 29 April 2023, a tramper activated his personal locator beacon (PLB) near Lake Hauroko in Fiordland National Park, triggering a search and rescue operation.

Amateur Radio Emergency Communications (AREC) volunteer Daniel Erickson heard the radio calls made by Southern Lakes Helicopters as they began deploying. "Amateur radio enthusiasts enjoy listening in on what is happening," says Daniel. "Having that interest means we've got the equipment and technical skills to assist in SAR operations as AREC volunteers."

The helicopter crew could not locate the man because the beacon had been damaged and the homing signal wasn't transmitting properly. The crew reported back to the Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand, requesting support from a Land Search and Rescue team. Police became involved and Daniel's AREC group was tasked to assist.

The Land Search and Rescue team deployed to Teal Bay Hut via helicopter and began a search at the last position received from the PLB. Around 3am, the tramper was located, cold and dehydrated but otherwise uninjured. He was unable to be winched due to the rough terrain and dense vegetation, so an on-scene assessment was conducted before the man was assisted to Teal Bay Hut and evacuated by helicopter.

A number of agencies operate radio repeaters around New Zealand. Many have granted permission for SAR agencies to use their repeaters during SAROPS.

"In the past, we've used the Department of Conservation repeater near Lake Hauroko," says Daniel. "This repeater had been moved recently and we weren't sure of the impact on VHF radio communications. We did consider deploying a portable repeater, but the urgency of the operation meant it wasn't an initial priority. In hindsight, perhaps we'd all become used to good radio coverage in the past." The field team's primary VHF radios weren't effective in reaching back to the



Incident Management Team. Their alternative method, a satellite phone, struggled to connect during the operation. In hindsight, longer-range antennas for the VHF hand-held radios could have been taken to improve the primary communication method, or perhaps long-range HF radio sets used as the alternative method.

"When the repeater moved, we should have re-analysed the theoretical coverage and reviewed our SAR communications plans," says Daniel.

Using their contingency communications method, the rescue team on the ground were able to relay information via the Southern Lakes Helicopter. Also, some VHF radio coverage was eventually gained at Teal Bay Hut. After the operation, refresher training sessions on alternate radio communication methods were organised and communications plans were reviewed.

Insight summaries

- Any changes to fixed repeaters should trigger a review of communications plans for the impacted area.
- Land Search and Rescue follows the PACE approach to communications in the field. In this example the field team had primary (VHF), alternative (satellite phone), contingency (via helicopter) and emergency (Personal Locator Beacon) communication methods. Applying PACE allowed them to operate, despite degraded primary and alternate connectivity.
- Regular training with alternative devices ensures people are familiar with the devices, meaning they are more likely to take them on operations.

ABOVE

Field team searching near the missing person's last known point.
Courtesy Dave Fenton

INSET

Teal Bay hut and surrounds. Contains data sourced from the LINZ Data Service licensed for reuse under CC BY 4.0



P-8A Poseidon proves its versatility

The P-8A aircraft, which are operated by No. 5 Squadron, replaced the P-3K2 Orions which served New Zealand for 57 years.

One of the first capabilities to be released in July 2023, when the new P-8A Poseidon became operational in New Zealand, was search and rescue.

To help prepare for search and rescue operations (SAROPs), New Zealand aviators trained in searching for a variety of boats, including the small wooden or aluminium fishing boats they might search for in the Pacific region.

The P-8A is a faster aircraft than the P-3K2 which means the crews can quickly get to a search area and cover large search areas faster. This is an important factor when considering the vast size of the 30 million square kilometre New Zealand Search and Rescue Region.

While the aircraft's home location is Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) Base Ohakea, some searches can take several days and so the aircraft will sometimes base in our neighbouring countries in the Pacific.

When involved in SAROPs, the New Zealand Defence Force works with Police and Rescue Coordination Centre (RCCNZ) which are the coordinating authorities. RCCNZ uses the last known location of the missing vessel, oceanic currents and weather during search area determination.

A recent successful SAROP was in October when crew on a P-8A found three Fijian fishermen nine days after they were reported missing aboard their 8.5-metre wooden fishing boat. Because of the time the boat had been drifting, the search area was considerable in size.

The aircraft left RNZAF Base Ohakea in the morning, refuelled in Fiji and was quickly on station, locating the missing boat in the afternoon.

The successful operation was a testament to the excellent search area determination and coordination by RCCNZ, preparations by the fishermen to survive at sea, and the training of those on board the P-8A who conducted radar and visual searches.



The advanced systems on board the P-8A includes a high-resolution camera, which can capture imagery of moving targets. The P-8A can be further away from a vessel than the P3K-2, but still get very clear imagery.

The P-8A can also deploy a 20-person life raft if there are people in the water or it is unsafe for people to remain on the vessel in distress.

Air Component Commander Air Commodore Andy Scott says once the aircrew finds the missing vessel, they make radio contact with other vessels in the vicinity. The P-8A crew provide coordinates and confirm that the vessel can make way to those in trouble and take them on board to safety.

"The P-8A is proving itself a highly effective and responsive asset to support the people of New Zealand and our Pacific neighbours, and like the Orion was before it, will be an incredibly welcome sight for the people on board any vessel in distress," he said.

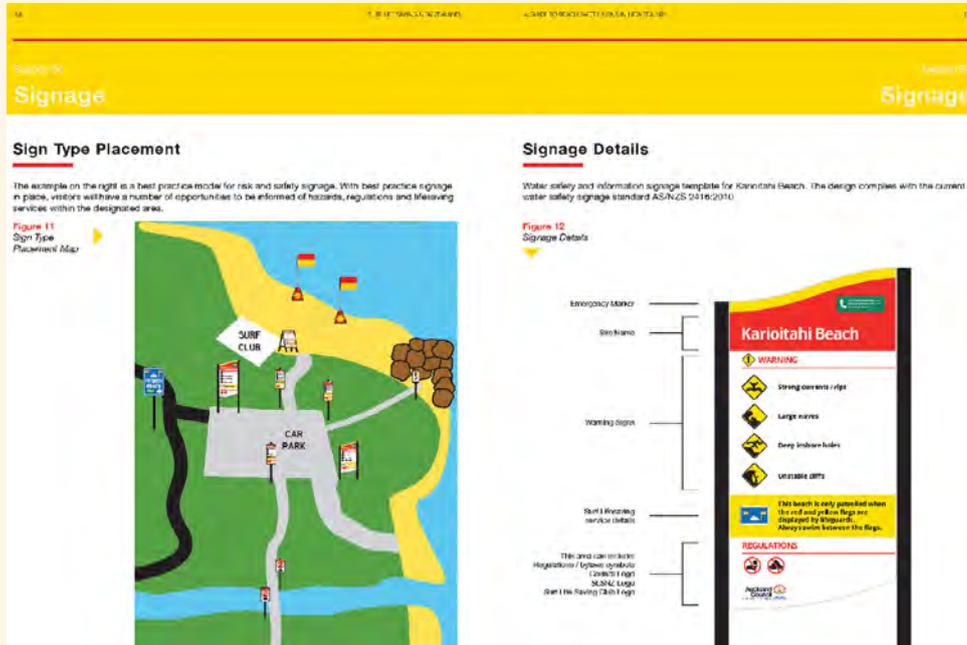
ABOVE

A P-8A in flight. Courtesy New Zealand Defence Force

BELOW

Fijian fishermen on board the *Lewla*, photographed by the P-8A during a search and rescue operation in October. Courtesy New Zealand Defence Force

Coastal Safety Signage and Public Rescue Equipment guidelines



The two guides referred to in this article are available from the Standards NZ website.

www.standards.govt.nz

“A Guide to Public Rescue Equipment for the New Zealand Coast”

“A Guide to Beach Safety Signs in New Zealand”

“Surf lifeguards have known for a long time about the unpatrolled spots where members of the public get into trouble,” says Dr Mick Kearney, National Coastal Safety Manager for Surf Life Saving New Zealand (SLSNZ).

“Our organisation has been trying to address this challenge for years. We’ve been advocating for local government to install proper coastal safety signage, and provide quality public rescue equipment, but it’s only recently that we’ve gained some traction on this mission.”

SLSNZ employed Dr Kearney to drive this initiative forward, as part of its vision that no-one drowns on Aotearoa’s beaches. “We carefully analysed data and research from around the world, to understand what approach would work best in New Zealand,” he says. Research showed that 100 percent of people in New Zealand who drowned during a rescue attempt in the last decade had no flotation device.

Traditional attitudes were that members of the public shouldn’t go in the water to attempt a rescue. Recent research has helped that change to “if you go, take flotation.” New Zealand trials confirmed that the best options for public rescue equipment were a hard plastic rescue buoy for beach locations, and a flotation ring for headland, jetty and wharf locations.

All the research, data analysis and trials helped a joint team from SLSNZ and Drowning Prevention Auckland to produce ‘A Guide to Public Rescue Equipment for the New Zealand Coast’. Dr Kearney also produced a “A Guide to Beach Safety Signs in New Zealand” based on the AS/NZS 2416:2010 *Water safety signs and beach safety flags – Specifications for water safety signs used in workplaces and public areas*. Like the Public Rescue Equipment Guidelines, these signage guidelines were endorsed by the NZSAR Consultative Committee earlier this year.

Dr Kearney also contributes his expertise to Coronial investigations. Recently, two preventable drowning incidents in Mount Maunganui prompted the Coroner to recommend that all councils

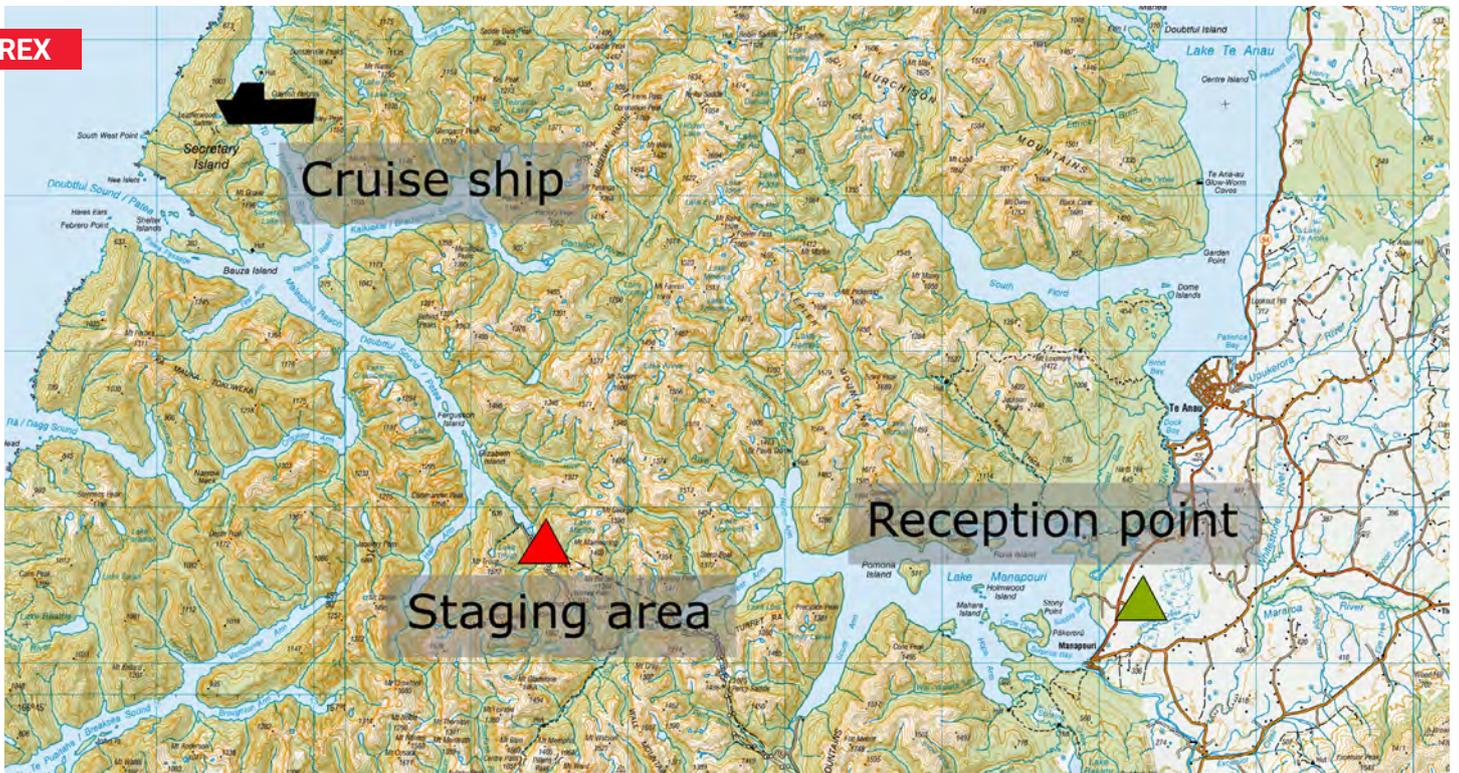
work with SLSNZ to conduct coastal safety assessments, and install standardised signage and public rescue equipment.

“Now when we advocate with local government, we have a clear set of guidelines based on international best practice that is endorsed by the entire search and rescue sector and supported by numerous Coroners recommendations,” says Dr Kearney. “Together, these form a compelling argument, which was only possible thanks to excellent collaboration across the sector, and funding from NZSAR. We’re delighted to see that some councils are beginning to respond.”

SurfCom now assists the coordination of all SLSNZ operations.

For around 20 years, SLSNZ’s communication centre (SurfCom) has been operating in the Auckland Marine Rescue Centre supporting Surf Life Saving Northern Region operations. Thanks to recent government investment in back-end hardware and IT systems, SurfCom now assists the coordination of all urgent SLSNZ operations across the entire country.

“At a local level, agencies such as Police or RCCNZ used to contact our clubs and teams directly,” says Allan Mundy, National Search and Rescue Manager for SLSNZ. “Now SurfCom is staffed and available 24/7 and those agencies can call SurfCom directly to activate a response from SLSNZ. Agency representatives should contact surfcom@surflifesaving.org.nz for the direct phone number. Members of the public who require urgent help still dial 111 and ask for Police.”



Distress in Doubtful Sound

An insight into the latest activity in Exercise Whakarauora Tangata, the Nationally Significant SAREX series.



Exercise Whakarauora Tangata is being conducted between July 2023 and May 2024. The general scenario is a Category II SAR operation, involving a large vessel in distress, with several hundred people onboard. Geographically tailored scenarios are being exercised across four Police districts: Bay of Plenty, Southern, Wellington and Eastern. Activities include tabletop exercises at National level and Police District Incident Management Team level, through to tactical-level functional SAREX, with assets, actors and real-world exercise play.

The most recent activity was a table-top activity conducted on 11 October 2023 in Wellington. The Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand (RCCNZ) coordinated the response to the incident, notionally located in Doubtful Sound, Fiordland.

“Only rescue assets which were physically available on the day were considered in-play for the exercise,” says John Dyer, the NZSAR Secretariat Lead Planner for Exercise Whakarauora Tangata. “But naturally we made the notional weather conditions worse than reality.”

RCCNZ had Search and Rescue Officers (SAROs) working on tactical level search and rescue coordination, tasking helicopter companies and vessels of opportunity such as local tourist ships. Several hundred notional survivors were found, rescued and delivered to the wharf at Deep Cove, near the eastern corner of Doubtful Sound. From there, survivors were transported to Te Anau aerodrome, as the designated point of safety.

“A major focus of Exercise Whakarauora Tangata is around coordinating the logistics, reconciliation and management of large numbers of rescued people,” says John. In the previous Bay of Plenty exercise, the Police were able to apply their Investigative Management Tool to

managing the reconciliation process. “Police had excellent insights and recent experience from Cyclone Gabrielle, where up to 3,000 people were unaccounted for during the state of national emergency. We will continue to explore the utility of this tool during future phases of the exercise.”

Meanwhile, officials from Maritime New Zealand liaised with 17 other agencies, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), New Zealand Customs, Te Whatu Ora and the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment. Together, they dealt with higher-level considerations such as media management and foreign political interest, while also planning the management of longer-term issues such as oil spill and environmental response.

“During a real incident such as a cruise ship grounding, there are likely to be foreign nationals involved,” says John. “MFAT would act in a liaison role with foreign governments, perhaps coordinating offers of additional SAR or support assets, as well as repatriation requests.”

The SARO logs from the Wellington exercise will influence exercise injects for the Southern SAREX in early December, where assets from across the SAR sector and supporting agencies will be physically deployed to Fiordland to play out the scenario.

So far, the exercises have been very successful, with objectives met and lessons identified. “But what has been really great is the interest and willingness of a range of organisations to participate,” says John. “That includes the SAR sector, but also many other government and non-government organisations. They all see the opportunities to test their own processes and procedures, so everyone can work together more effectively during a nationally significant SAR incident.”

ABOVE

Exercise Whakarauora Tangata – Southern Scenario overview map. Contains data sourced from the LINZ Data Service licensed for reuse under CC BY 4.0.

Visit www.nzsar.govt.nz/natsigsarex to learn more about Exercise Whakarauora Tangata.



Land Search and Rescue Dogs

Outlining a niche search capability in our sector.

There are 17 operational Land Search and Rescue Dog teams across New Zealand. "Because it takes two to three years of significant dedication from a dog and handler to become operational, we have relatively few teams to draw on," says Gemma Parkin, Group and Volunteer Support for the New Zealand Land Search and Rescue Dogs group. "Each team is part of a local Land Search and Rescue group, but dog teams are willing and able to support search tasks anywhere in the country."

Using a sense of smell which is tens of thousands of times more powerful than a human's, the unique capabilities of a dog team can be a game-changer during a search. Specific attributes that search managers and field team members should be aware of include:

Darkness can make dogs more effective.

Because scent concentrations are higher at night and the lost party is more likely to be stationary in the dark, the probability of detection increases. Dogs also have superior night vision than humans.

Dogs can operate in any terrain that people can.

Dog teams train and operate in all types of terrain from thick forest or scrub to river corridors and the coastline. With support of an Alpine Cliff Rescue team, they can also operate effectively above the snowline.

Adverse weather can make dogs more effective.

Wind can aid detection, as dog teams can deploy downwind of a search area, allowing the wind to blow the scent to them. Light rain may rehydrate scent particles, making them more detectable by a dog. Although heavy rain, snow or winds can destroy a scent trail left by a lost party, they are still emitting scent. This means area search dogs may still be able to find them.



Dogs are an effective tool for locating non-responsive people.

Because dogs rely on smell, they are particularly useful when looking for despondent people, those with cognitive disabilities, young children, or unconscious people. Search dogs have successfully located people who have been deliberately evading searchers.

Dogs can be effective for days after a person goes missing.

In the right conditions, tracking dogs can follow a scent trail that is several days old. Area search dogs detect scent coming directly from a person; we all continue to emit scent, even when stationary for several days.

"We're in the process of making videos to better explain search dog capabilities," says Gemma. "But mostly it comes down to building good relationships between dog handlers and SAR managers. We hope that as more of these relationships are built around the country, dog teams get called more often when their unique capability could make all the difference."

ABOVE

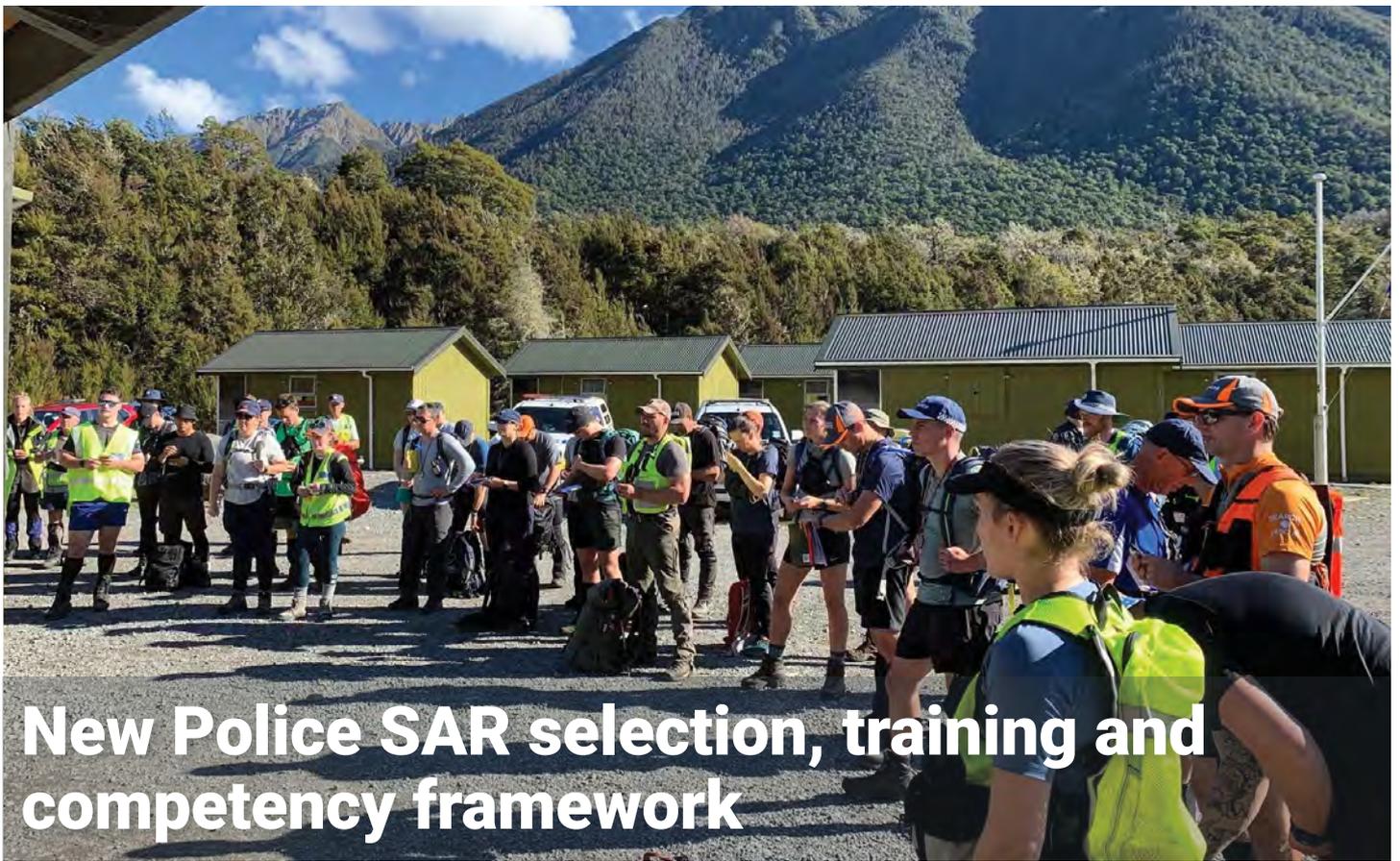
Handlers and trainers at a South Island training camp.

INSET

Trainee area search dog Roxy comes in for a find.

Both courtesy Jane Dunn Photography

To learn more about search dogs or to contact your nearest handler, visit nzlandsardogs.co.nz



New Police SAR selection, training and competency framework

Building national consistency for Police SAR squad members.

“Before the new framework, there was no nationally consistent selection structure for districts to identify SAR squad members, or a mechanism to efficiently deliver training internally and externally across the sector,” says Acting Senior Sergeant Nathan White, the National Search and Rescue Capability Coordinator for Police.

“It became clear that there was the need for a nationally consistent Police SAR selection, training and competency framework to meet the purpose of NZ Police as the coordinating authority for effective coordination and management for Category I SAR services.”

Sergeant Scott Iszard and Constable Brandon McCarthy led the project to create the framework. Along the way, they consulted widely with the District Operations Managers and SAR Coordinators.

The new framework is comprehensive. The improvements begin at the selection phase and continue throughout each stage of a SAR squad member’s career.

Because search and rescue is an additional portfolio for a police officer, they need to make a significant commitment to extra time as well as developing additional skills. This commitment is over and above their day-to-day policing duties, so a robust selection process benefits everyone in the long term.

“We now have a pathway which identifies the right people for the right job at the right time in their SAR career, as they move through the competency framework towards becoming SAR managers,” says Nathan.

New resources for selection include suggested interview questions, or guidance for selection day events.

“These ensure we are covering off the key qualities and attributes required for good SAR practitioners and SAR managers,” says Nathan.

Many of the Police SAR courses have been reviewed and updated, with more pre-course study materials provided. A number of new annual competencies support skill and knowledge retention.

The framework also supports even stronger working relationships with Land Search and Rescue. “There are a lot of similarities with our competencies for foundational SAR skills,” says Nathan. “We’re getting more of our SAR officers on Land Search and Rescue courses. Access to this quality training allows our SAR officers to build or refresh their skills, all whilst developing relationships and interoperability with key operational partners.”

The new Police framework and Land Search and Rescue competencies promote mutual confidence on operations. “Each organisation can demonstrate that our people have high standards of skill, training, and commitment to the role.”

The new framework was rolled out earlier this year. There are monthly meetings for Police district coordinators to further refine the structure and a national review scheduled for early next year to reflect on the project outcomes.

Police officers who want to learn more about the framework can look on the Police intranet or contact their local SAR coordinator.

ABOVE

Police officers attend a briefing for a SAR training exercise at Dip Flat.
Courtesy Matthew Wheble

Welcome to new NZSAR Secretariat staff



Aimee Flanagan joined the Secretariat in July as the Senior Adviser Learning and Development.

Growing up in Wainuiomata, she gained a bachelor's degree in Communication and Media Studies from Massey University in Palmerston North. Aimee has spent time living abroad as well as in Wellington City, and more recently she has returned to her hometown to raise her family. "Prior to kids, we spent a lot of time getting outdoors on the tracks and trails in the Wellington region," says Aimee, "but these days my partner and I are enjoying taking things a little bit slower, exploring the coastlines and looking for 'treasures' with our three- and seven-year-old children."

Aimee has spent the last 15 years in a variety of learning and development roles, including eight at the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management and the National Emergency Management Agency. "A significant part of those roles was building capability in our staff for roles at the National Crisis Management Centre at the Beehive, as well as analysing training needs, and managing course development, delivery and resources," says Aimee. "For a change, I spent a year on a slightly different career track, but when I heard about the NZSAR job, I felt the pull of being back in a sector devoted to helping people when they need it most."

Her Secretariat role traverses training leadership, coordination, management and advice. Aimee is looking forward to the challenge ahead; "I'm excited about getting a better appreciation of the search and rescue sector. I'm also looking forward to developing strong relationships with the people and agencies who do such fantastic work on behalf of our communities."



Matt Mintrom joined the Secretariat in September as the Senior Adviser Policy.

Born in Christchurch and raised in Wellington, Matt studied accounting and commercial law at Victoria University. His graduate role was at PriceWaterhouseCoopers, and after qualifying as a Chartered Accountant transferred to PwC Luxembourg. "We were aiming for London, but the UK was really feeling the bite of the Global Financial Crisis," says Matt. A couple of years later, the job market improved, and Matt and his wife moved to London. After eight "very fast" years at HSBC bank, Matt, his wife and two young sons returned home to Aotearoa during the global pandemic. He comes to the Secretariat from 18 months at Inland Revenue working on international tax policy.

Matt brings his experience of policy, relationship management, systems assurance and governance to the Senior Advisor Policy role at the Secretariat. "My work will involve taking the strategic and governance recommendations of the Government and the NZSAR Council. Then, with the support of the sector, operationalising it into specific policies."

Outside of work he is a competitive mountain runner, with a number of impressive results to his credit. When he's not powering up a hill, or caring for his family, you'll often find him wielding a hammer or paintbrush. "Our 100-year-old bungalow keeps an amateur DIY enthusiast very busy!"

TOP RIGHT
Matt Mintrom.
Courtesy Bryan Rawiri

Nominations close soon for the NZSAR Awards

Agencies and individuals have until 31 January 2024 to submit their nominations.



The NZSAR Awards aim to acknowledge outstanding search and rescue work by individuals, groups and organisations and raise public awareness of SAR efforts across the country.

The awards cover two categories: operational activity and support activity. The operational category is open to SAR operations that took place between 1 January and 31 December 2023. The support category is open to individuals, groups or organisations which have made a significant contribution to search and rescue in New Zealand. A person doesn't need decades of service to be a worthy nominee; some of the previous winners have only been in SAR for a few years but have made a big impact in that time.

Tips for NZSAR Award nominations

Operational category

- Facts and figures are helpful: What was the sea state, temperature, wind speed, or altitude at the time of the rescue?
- Try to list all the agencies involved in the rescue.
- Focus on the action/s which had the most impact on the operation.

Support category

- A short biography covering the nominee's history in SAR can be useful.
- If the nominees' efforts affect more than one organisation, consider a joint nomination.
- Clearly convey the impact of the nominee's efforts on the local community, organisation, or wider SAR sector.

Find out more

Visit nzsar.govt.nz/awards for nomination forms, NZSAR Awards policy and details of previous winners.

Send in your nomination before 31 January 2024.

If you would like help compiling a nomination, or have any questions, please contact us. info@nzsar.govt.nz

Review of SAR and recreational safety systems now complete

Te Manatū Waka Ministry of Transport led the review into New Zealand's recreational safety and search and rescue systems.

The review made 22 recommendations which can be broadly summarised as:

- **System strategy** – combine the recreational safety and search and rescue systems into one system with a common set of outcomes.
- **Governance** – implement revised governance arrangements for the sector, including disestablishing the NZSAR Council, NZSAR Consultative Committee and NZSAR Secretariat. A new entity – the 'System Steward' – will be created within the Ministry of Transport.
- **Volunteers** – Provide more system-wide support to the volunteers who are the backbone of search and rescue in New Zealand.
- **Future demand** – forecast future demand for frontline water safety and search and rescue, to better inform the configuration of assets and people needed to respond to incidents.

- **Funding** – identify funding requirements to better support continued service delivery from the volunteer search and rescue agencies.

The Ministry of Transport are now working on a proposed implementation plan including costing the recommendations. The proposed plan and costings will be given to Government Ministers next year, who will then decide the next steps.

You can read the final report – '*Haumarū Tāngata Ki Uta Ki Tai* | Recreational Safety and Search and Rescue – Review Report' – on the Ministry of Transport website.

TOP

Some of recipients from the 2022 NZ Search and Rescue Awards.



Ensuring lessons identified become lessons learned

A maritime interagency SAREX in Northland was based on a SAR operation that occurred in February 2023 during Cyclone Hale.

Near Great Barrier Island, a yachtsman found himself in difficulty in 80-knot winds and six to eight-metre seas as Cyclone Hale hit New Zealand. The Auckland Police Maritime Unit, supported by the Police Eagle Helicopter and Auckland Coastguard were tasked to respond. Ultimately, the extreme conditions required the capability of the Royal New Zealand Navy Frigate *HMNZS Te Mana* to rescue the yachtsman.

The operation had a successful outcome, but there were a number of lessons identified. Later in the year, the Navy approached Coastguard with an invitation to conduct a combined exercise. After discussions that also involved the Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand (RCCNZ) and Auckland Police Maritime Unit, the opportunity was taken to re-play the February SAR operation so the lessons identified could become lessons learned.

On Tuesday 19 July, Maritime Radio initiated the Search and Rescue Exercise (SAREX) with a simulated distress message from a yacht to RCCNZ. They concluded that a Naval vessel was the most suitable asset to respond. A request was made to Headquarters Joint Forces New Zealand and *HMNZS Te Mana* was tasked to respond.

RCCNZ conducted drift modelling and search area determination for *Te Mana* as the search continued through the night. Refinements to the modelling shifted the search area closer to the Bay of Islands, and a tasking request was made for several Coastguard units to deploy to the area at first light.

At 8am on Wednesday, Northland Coastguard Air Patrol, Coastguard Bay of Islands, Coastguard Whangaruru, Coastguard Whangaroa and a New Zealand Customs vessel joined the SAREX, with *Te Mana* as 'on scene coordinator.' This provided an excellent opportunity to practise working together as part of a coordinated search. They



also exercised air-space management, with the Coastguard Air Patrol aircraft and a Seasprite helicopter from *Te Mana* operating in proximity.

The three occupants of the yacht were located an hour after the morning search began. One occupant was winched off the Coastguard Bay of Islands vessel by the Seasprite. Coastguard Whangaroa and Coastguard Whangaruru each had the opportunity to conduct a patient transfer to *Te Mana* whilst underway.

All of the agencies and organisations who participated in the original SAROP were very open to feedback during the debriefing process. This SAREX provided the opportunity to act on the feedback, ensuring that the lessons identified in February became lessons learnt in July.

Jonny Bannister, Regional Manager – North for Coastguard New Zealand was very pleased with the outcomes of this training activity. "I believe that we are stronger and more integrated as a service as a result of this SAREX and much better equipped to save lives at sea."

ABOVE

Rigid hull inflatable boats from *Te Mana* and Coastguard Bay of Islands. Both images courtesy Coastguard

BELOW

Coastguard Bay of Islands and Royal New Zealand Navy Seasprite helicopter conducting deck winching.

Queenstown all-female rescue on 'Women in Emergencies' day

On 10 October 2023, a woman became disoriented after tramping in the Remarkables Conservation Area, near Queenstown. The trumper was fortunate to have phone coverage and was able to call the Police. Constable Pepper Ruston from the Queenstown SAR squad tasked a Wakatipu Land Search and Rescue team to respond.

Chrissy Schreiber was the team leader that day, along with Emma Hanson and Joanna Hicks-Beach. "Since I began volunteering with SAR about 15 years ago, I've really noticed the changes in demographics in the organisation," says Chrissy. "It's not unusual that we deploy a team with 50 or 100 percent women, but it was pretty cool that we had an all-female team, looking for a woman, on Australasian Women in Emergencies Day!"



Chrissy's team located the disoriented woman quickly and led her safely back to the road end. "She was extremely grateful for our help and in very good spirits after being rescued," says Chrissy. "We even managed to get her to snap a picture of us! Normally we're so focussed on the operation that we hardly get any photos of us as a team."



To learn more about the Australasian Women in Emergencies Day, visit awenetwork.org.au/awe-day

SEARCHENCY

A card game based on the Land Search Urgency Form.

Devised by volunteers, the game allows players to quickly generate scenarios for discussion, Incident Management Team (IMT) training and SAR exercises. Card packs were distributed to each of the Land Search and Rescue Groups recently and will be appearing in IMT refreshers soon.

"This is just another example of our volunteers' ideas supporting others nationwide," says Tony Wells, Chief Operating Officer for Land Search and Rescue. "Congratulations to Ally Rutherford, Ed Cook and Wellington Land Search and Rescue Incorporated for getting this from conception to production."



TOP LEFT

SAR area overview map. Contains data sourced from the LINZ Data Service licensed for reuse under CC BY 4.0.

TOP RIGHT

From left to right: Emma Hanson, Joanna Hicks-Beach and team leader Chrissy Schreiber. Courtesy Land Search and Rescue

ABOVE

SEARCHENCY card game. Courtesy Land Search and Rescue



New base for Coastguard Bay of Islands

Celebrating the official opening of the new Opuia base.

After a summer interrupted by poor weather, Coastguard Bay of Islands came together to celebrate the opening of their new Opuia base in July. The new base represents a significant improvement for marine search and rescue response in Northland. Local iwi Te Aupouri led the official blessing ceremony.

In November last year, the unit moved from its Kerikeri base to the old general store in Opuia to enable volunteers to respond more efficiently to emergency calls on the water. Partnering with Coastguard New Zealand, the new base also doubles as an education hub for community outreach projects such as the Day Skipper and Boatmaster courses. The centre will also be used for volunteer training for Coastguard units across Northland, removing the need to travel south to Auckland.

Despite the inclement weather, which generally meant fewer boats out on the water, last summer was a particularly busy one for Coastguard Bay of Islands. The number of incidents they responded to reinforced their decision to move closer to the bustling boating area. Those incidents included the collision between a pleasure boat and a ferry, rescuing a woman from Urupukapuka Island after a medical emergency, and coming to the aid of five people after their boat capsized at Cape Brett. Last year, the unit responded to 75 incidents, rescuing nine people and assisting 171 people home safely. In total, unit volunteers contributed 1,720 hours to Coastguard.

Coastguard Bay of Islands President Phil Snowdon said the unit is delighted with the new base and have welcomed numerous new volunteers since the move. "It's been a really big summer for us on the water, with volunteers responding to a wide variety of incidents. Having our rescue vessel right next to the base has made a massive difference and connected us with the community like never before," he said.



Coastguard New Zealand CEO Callum Gillespie said the establishment of a Northland-based rescue centre and education hub is critical for a region that loves getting out on the water and enjoying everything the moana has to offer.

"We know access to education and skills is a key factor in people making good decisions on the water and understanding what to do when things go wrong. Coastguard remains committed to improving water outcomes for underserved communities especially in Northland which has some of the worst drowning statistics across Aotearoa," he said. "It's also awesome that our Northland-based volunteers can undertake their training closer to home, instead of travelling south to Auckland."

This story was originally published by Coastguard New Zealand. It is adapted and republished here with permission.

ABOVE
Coastguard New Zealand CEO Callum Gillespie speaks during the opening ceremony.

Alert methods for SAR incidents

There were 3,469 SAR incidents in the year ending 30 June 2023.

A **SAR incident** begins when one of the coordinating authorities is alerted to a situation which could require a search and rescue operation.

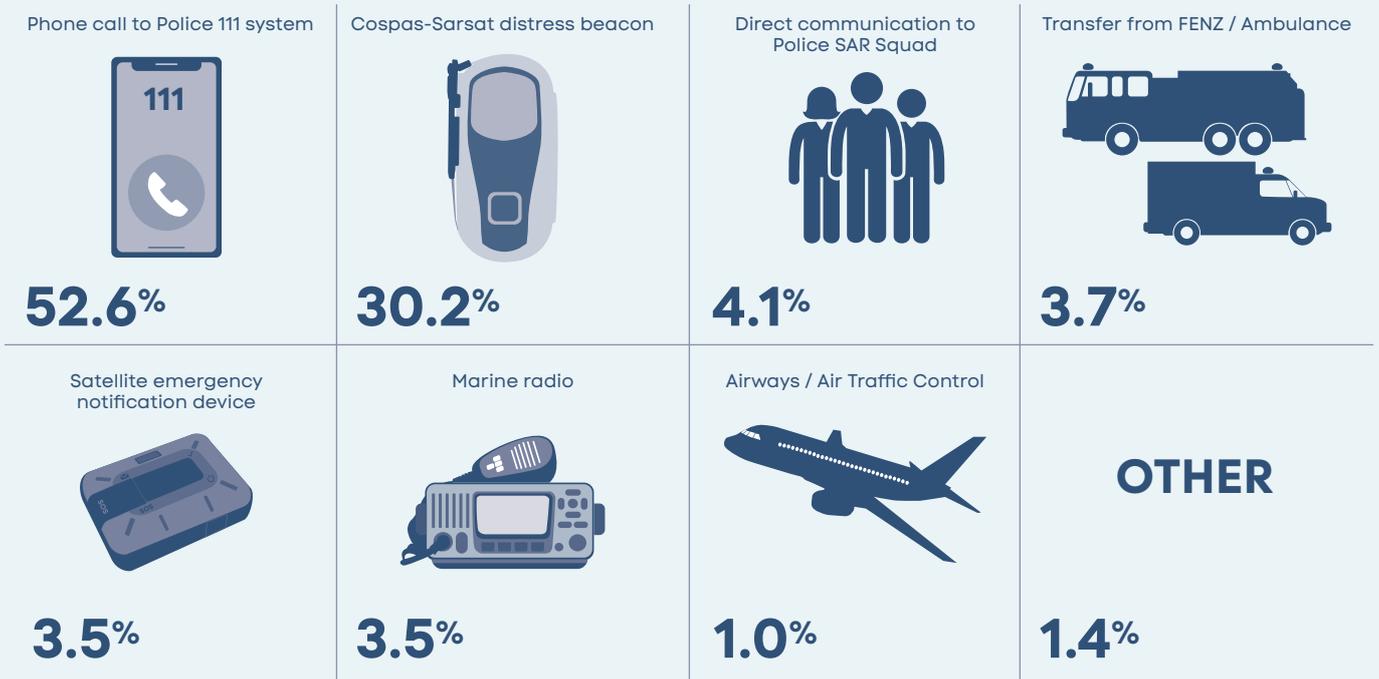
A phone call to the Police 111 system was the alert method for over half of the SAR incidents last year. These alerts include calls from people needing help, those who witness a situation unfolding, or trusted contacts reporting someone overdue.

A COSPAS-SARSAT distress beacon was the next most-used

alerting method, accounting for nearly a third of all alerts. Beacons were used more than eight times more frequently than a Satellite Emergency Notification Device.

Coincidentally, 83 percent of Category I notifications come via a call to 111 and 83 percent of Category II notifications come via a distress beacon.

Overall, roughly half of the incidents resulted in a SAR operation being conducted.



Source: SARdonyx. Data for the year ending 30 June 2023, rounded to 1 decimal place.

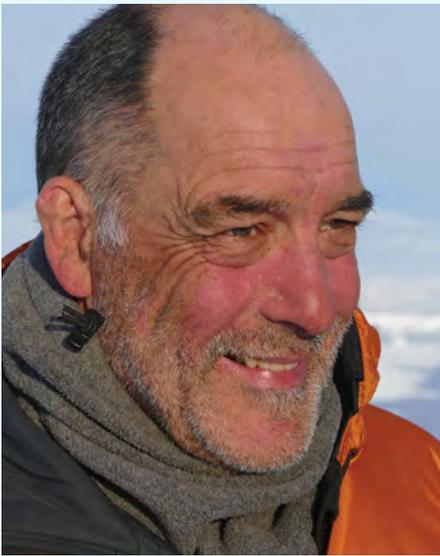
New AREC.nz website

Amateur Radio Emergency Communications launched their new website in September.

"We're pleased to have upgraded our site to a modern and professional appearance, especially with our current recruitment drive in progress," says AREC CEO Don Robertson. "This is one of many projects we have underway to improve our organisation, that are supported by ongoing investment from Government."

www.arec.nz





10 questions with ...

Blake McDavitt

With three decades of experience under his belt, Blake McDavitt is a familiar face to many people in New Zealand's search and rescue sector.

How long have you been involved in search and rescue?

This year marks 31 years since I first started in SAR. I initially joined the Turangi Land Search and Rescue group which I'm still a member of, even though I moved to Hawke's Bay about five years back. I'm also still a member of RARO (Ruapehu Alpine Rescue Organisation) and occasionally get called out for alpine searches.

What's your current role for SAR in New Zealand?

As well as being a volunteer with the Turangi group and RARO, I do some teaching for New Zealand Land Search and Rescue around the country. I was also the convenor of the Backcountry Technical Rescue Advisory Group (BTRAG), which represented the specialist groups within Land Search and Rescue.

What do you do during your work in Antarctica?

I've spent several seasons on the ice, most recently as the lead for Antarctica New Zealand's sea ice work, and the lead field trainer. I oversaw a small team who delivered field training, including crevasse rescue and snowcraft, to the staff at Scott Base. I've also been a team leader for the Joint Antarctic Search and Rescue Team (JASART).

Can you tell us more about SAR on the ice?

Because of the severity of the conditions and logistical challenges, the SAR plans involve a lot of collaboration between nations which have a presence on the ice. JASART is made up of specialist staff from New Zealand's Scott base and the United States' McMurdo Station. If something goes wrong, survival times can be very short, so we are often deploying for seemingly minor things like a missed scheduled radio call. Being proactive helps stop things getting out of hand.

How do you prepare for the Antarctic Season?

In the lead up to each season, we do specific training in New Zealand's Southern Alps. Antarctica isn't just flat ice: there are serious mountains, huge glaciers and crevasse fields, so we need somewhere that is convenient to access, with all those features. The high country near Aoraki / Mt Cook is ideal for us to refresh our general polar skills as well as specific SAR techniques and procedures.

Is there a particular rescue that you'll always remember?

The Mangetepopo canyon tragedy, where six students and a teacher died in 2008, is one that stands out. It's quite sobering to reflect on the lives that those young people could have had, and that New Zealand has been denied the chance to see what they would have made of themselves.

Rescues like that are tough, mentally. Is there anything you do to manage your own wellbeing?

I take a lot of comfort from being able to bring someone home to their family. Sometimes it's a good outcome and we can return someone safely. And if it's not, knowing that I played a part in returning a person to their family so they can mourn and grieve helps me deal with it.

What do you do to relax in your downtime?

Backcountry recreation has always been my go to when it comes to relaxing or removing oneself from life's pressures. We have great rivers in Hawke's Bay, so kayaking and fishing are always on the cards when time allows. It is always great to get back to the central North Island for some tramping and skiing, plus catching up with friends.

What's next for you in SAR?

My involvement is much more of a strategic role these days. I'm at the stage where I take a lot of satisfaction from seeing the next generation of SAR leaders coming through. I still get called out occasionally but I'm very much enjoying being mostly in a training and mentoring role now.

What advice would you give someone wanting to get involved in search and rescue?

You need to look at the reasons why you want to be involved in SAR – are they the right reasons? It needs to be genuine and from the heart.

Antarctica New Zealand needs experienced and emerging field support staff in summer and winter, and expressions of interest are accepted all year round. antarcticanz.govt.nz/jobs