



## Connecting the Search and Rescue Sector

### NZSAR has new SAR Training Responsibilities

In late 2012, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) announced the results of its review of funding for Search and Rescue (SAR) training. The review aimed to create sustainable funding arrangements that focussed on value for money, and put the sector in the driving seat to determine how best to meet its training needs. It was good to hear that a wide range of SAR sector organisations were consulted and took the opportunity to make a submission.



The new arrangements mainly affect land search and rescue training, but we now have the opportunity to more closely align our training across our sector. Opportunities exist around generic SAR requirements such as IMT skills, SAR coordination and management, and CIMS. NZSAR is now working in partnership with organisations across the sector to explore and develop these new joint training opportunities.

In essence, TEC has created an annual ring-fenced funding pool within the Adult and Community Education appropriation, called "Search and Rescue ACE". It will be used by TEC to purchase SAR short award training for SAR people. These short awards can be either formal certificates registered on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework, or informal certificates that are accredited by a SAR organisation (or a mix of both).

Each year, TEC will work with NZSAR to get its advice on how best to meet the sector's training needs. Based on NZSAR's advice TEC will then allocate the funding through its existing systems and monitor delivery (using special quarterly reporting templates) to ensure that



the funding is consumed by SAR people. It is also important to note that TEC funded training may only be used to fund new learning, not refresher training like SAREXs. It is the SAR sector's responsibility to sustain and maintain skills once they are acquired.

#### In developing the final proposal, TEC utilised a number of criteria such as:

- It should allow SAR people to train at no direct financial cost to themselves
- It should be flexible, sustainable and future-proofed
- It should empower SAR organisations to assert an appropriate level of control over the amount, nature, and location of training they receive
- It should be based upon SAR operational needs and provide good value for money
- The model should allow different SAR organisations (and ideally emergency management organisations) to train our people side-by-side where appropriate

These arrangements have placed a new set of training responsibilities on NZSAR. Each year TEC will seek advice from NZSAR about where to invest the SAR ACE funding. This requires us to work even more closely with all SAR partner agencies to determine our training needs [based upon operational experience] well in advance of each year. For 2013 and 2014, Tai Poutini Polytechnic is the sole approved training provider. Collectively, we have a number of challenges to sort out, but we are committed to getting the very best from these new arrangements. Over time, it should be possible to significantly increase the opportunities for joint training and further enhance the "One SAR" concept. ●



[www.nzsar.org.nz](http://www.nzsar.org.nz)



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

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## ◉ SAR IN ACTION

### Combining Factors for Success

A green chilly bin floating in the water was picked up by a Coastguard vessel at 3 o'clock one afternoon. At the time of discovery it was simply a floating object. It had no special significance for Police and other SAR organisations and was, therefore, not reported. But three hours later this chilly bin proved to be a crucial clue for Auckland's Police Maritime Unit who were investigating the report of an overdue fisherman. Now they just had to find him.

*Time is your enemy in the marine environment.*

The Maritime Unit is responsible for all marine SAR responses in the Auckland region. They are co-located at Auckland's Marine Rescue Centre where they share space and work closely with Coastguard, Surf Life Saving, the Westpac Rescue Helicopter, and the Police helicopter.

The Unit carries out about 200 Search and Rescue Operations (SAROPs) each year; they have a similar number of reports of overdue people that are quickly resolved. This means that before tasking a whole series of assets they must ensure someone needs help and is not just late home, says the Unit's Officer in Charge, Senior Sergeant Martin Paget.

"Time is your enemy in the marine environment," says Martin. "The investigation we do early in the SAROP to determine, firstly, whether the person is missing or just overdue and then, secondly, to work out where they may be is critical. It needs to be comprehensive because your search area grows exponentially as time goes by."



More often than not the Unit will come together with the partner agencies at the Marine Rescue Centre, form an Incident Management Team (IMT), and will begin by simultaneously initiating a number of inquiries. They use Police personnel to go to where the vessel was launched; Police run an inquiry at the person's home with family and neighbours, and if the initial information is robust enough, they may get a helicopter to go to the LKP (Last Known Position). The first thing, though, is to initiate an all stations broadcast asking boaties in the area for any information.



"This initial information request resulted in the report of the chilly bin found earlier. We were able to establish that it belonged to the missing fisherman, which suggested he may have capsized. Within minutes further resources were activated, including Police and Coastguard vessels, and a rescue helicopter."

The chilly bin find also provided coordinates that enabled the Rescue Coordination Centre to carry out calculations to better define a search area, known as a SAD (Search Area Determination).

"While this activity on the water and within the ICP (Incident Control Point) was underway we also began shoreline searches. Our inquiries from the family told us where the fisherman had intended to head to. There are a number of islands surrounding the area so the IMT called on the local resources, including DOC rangers on adjacent islands, to undertake shoreline searches on foot."

*No one organisation generally has all the necessary skills and training to be totally effective in all circumstances.*



Another issue they often contend with is the dark – this fisherman was reported overdue at 6.30pm. A valuable tool now available to Martin’s team for use at night is the helicopter’s night vision equipment.

“In almost all circumstances where using it will not compromise safety we get the helicopter crew to turn on the Nitesun searchlight. It does not matter where it is pointing if it is not assisting in the search, as in a heavily populated area, because we have often found that its use makes the public aware that we are searching for something. We have resolved a number of operations this way as people pop up with information once they realise a search for something is underway. Occasionally helpful members of the public have seen something earlier, but it hasn’t been enough to raise concern. The sight of a searchlight in the sky is just the trigger they need to call a Police Communications Centre.

The shoreline search proved successful in this case. At 9.15pm the shore parties heard a male calling for help. The missing fisherman was located, perched on a small rock 150 metres from the island where the land searchers were. He told his rescuers he had fallen out of his dinghy at about 1 o’clock.

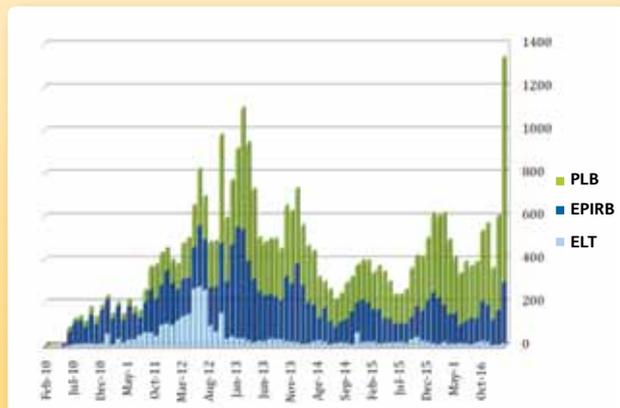
Martin says a combination of factors coming together often leads to a successful outcome. “There is a huge number and variety of people and organisations we can call on, including our SAR colleagues in the Marine Rescue Centre, Police personnel and, in this case, DOC rangers working on these isolated islands. No one organisation generally has all the necessary skills and training to be totally effective in all circumstances.”

He also believes SAR should never be a secret.

“The more people that know about the search, whether that be the public, Coastguard, passing aircraft or boaties, the more chance we have of getting vital information and the more likely we will successfully search for and rescue a missing fisherman.” ●

## Spike in Beacon Registrations

**NZ Beacon Registrations Total = 35,377**



The Rescue Coordination Centre has reported a considerable increase in the number of Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) being registered.

Over the past three months new PLB registrations increased by 67% over the same period last year with 1,711 being registered.

RCCNZ’s Rodney Bracefield, who is in charge of beacon registration, says the spike may be attributed to a couple of factors.

“One is the television programme High Country Rescue, which illustrated the value of carrying a beacon. RCC also noticed a marked increase in the number of phone enquiries when the programme went to air, with people ringing to ask how the beacons work and how SAR organisations use them to find people. We have also noted an increase in positive media reports connecting the use of beacons to successful searches and rescues. We think this helped people decide that purchasing and registering a PLB is more than just a good idea.”

Rodney is asking SAR people to continue pushing the message to register beacons and to also ensure people with beacons understand they should only be used in cases of grave and imminent danger.

“The public need to understand they are a very valuable tool, but should never be used to bring someone home who is late, or who has just got tired.” ●

### BEACON TIPS

- Get a PLB equipped with GPS
- Carry it on you – don’t leave it in your pack
- Register your beacon – there is no charge and it can be done online at [www.beacons.org.nz](http://www.beacons.org.nz). Providing emergency contacts who know where you are can be crucial in a search
- Only use a beacon in an emergency or life threatening situation

## Changing Faces

Gerry Prins has retired from the NZ Police as of 1 February 2013 after 37 years of service, including 21 years of service to search and rescue. He has taken up a new role within the NZ Defence Force.

Inspector Joe Green starts as the Acting National Emergency Manager role on April 15 for 6 months. ●

## Raising Awareness

### Search and Rescue grateful for support

On behalf of Wellington Land Search and Rescue (LandSAR Wellington), I would like to thank all the people who offered their assistance to Saturday night's operation to locate missing five-year-old Ryan Peel.

The generosity of the Waimuimata community offering food, hot drinks and offers of support were greatly appreciated by our members.

We regularly conduct operations in the Waimuimata area and the consistent level of support from the community is fantastic.

LandSAR Wellington is an all-

volunteer unit of 60 members who conduct search and rescue operations from Peka Peka to the Rimutaka Summit and the South Coast.

We provide expertise and personnel to support operations led by police or the rescue co-ordination centre.

Readers who want to see what we do can follow us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/LandSARWellington](http://www.facebook.com/LandSARWellington)) or Twitter (@LandSAR\_Wgtn).

Ross Browne  
Chairman  
Wellington Land Search and Rescue

Writing a letter to the editor is a simple but effective way to promote the work SAR people do, as Ross Browne, Chair of LandSAR Wellington, recently discovered.

Although pockets of SAR organisations and their people write letters to their local newspaper – to clarify information, express expert opinion or convey appreciation to their communities – there are many more that could raise awareness of what they do by putting pen to paper.

*It is a great way to raise the awareness of their organisation and also help the public gain a better understanding of the type of assistance they need.*

Ross believes his latest foray into print (pictured) had an immediate impact.

“We had emails from the local residents thanking us for thanking them. We turned up at the community board meeting a couple of weeks later and people were talking about the incident and the letter – that will help with funding.”

He says it is a great way to raise the awareness of their organisation and also help the public gain a better understanding of the type of assistance they need.

“Educating the community that they can help us more by providing funds to buy equipment, or let us use their land for the day to carry out an exercise, that type of thing, rather than turning up with a pack on expecting they can just help us ‘go look’ when someone is lost, is half the battle.” ●

## International Observations

NZSAR Secretariat Manager, Duncan Ferner, spent time at the headquarters of the United States Coastguard (USCG) in Washington DC before attending the Canadian SARSCENE Search and Rescue conference late last year.

The USCG has very significant SAR responsibilities within the vast United States Search and Rescue Region. New Zealand also has large areas of shared SAR interest in the Pacific and Antarctic. Additionally, New Zealanders are enthusiastic users of COSPAS-SARSAT distress beacons – a system that originated in the depths of the Cold War from an arrangement between the USA and USSR. While over there, Duncan picked up a number of matters that might be of interest to SAR practitioners here:

### • SEND Devices

The development of Satellite Emergency Notification Devices (SEND) by commercial interests continues at a rapid pace. A SEND is a portable emergency notification and locating device that uses commercial satellite systems rather than the COSPAS-SARSAT satellite system. The build standard of these devices is improving and – just like our mobile phones – more features are being added to them all the time. Along with their tracking features, as a paid service they have a near 100% record of correct registration data which is a benefit to search and rescue. However, SEND do not provide a homing signal, which can be a problem in our difficult terrain.

### • Mobile Phones

For a variety of well-considered reasons, the USCG does not endorse cellular phones as a primary means of distress notification in the maritime environment. A USCG issue paper on this is held by the NZSAR Secretariat.

### • Social Media

USCG noted some instances of people attempting to notify authorities of their distress situation via social media platforms, and in particular, government-based social media accounts. As in NZ, the USCG reiterated their strong preference for all distress alerts to be placed by either calling 911 [111 in NZ], using VHF Marine Channel 16 or using a COSPAS-SARSAT distress beacon. A USCG issue paper on this is held by the NZSAR Secretariat.

### • Lessons Learned

The USCG has a sophisticated “lessons learned” system, which includes: an office for lessons learned, capture and share of mishaps, capture and share of best practice and a system of after action reports, which are stored in a searchable database. They also share lessons at conferences and forums as appropriate.

### • Performance Management

The USCG has a different approach to SAR performance management. The US methodology is available here: [www.uscg.mil/hq/cg5/cg534/SAR\\_Program\\_Info.asp](http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg5/cg534/SAR_Program_Info.asp)

### • Direction Finding

The new USCG maritime VHF communications system enables direction finding (and therefore location by triangulation) of a transmitting marine radio. This facility should greatly increase SAR effectiveness. More detail can be found here: [www.uscg.mil/acquisition/rescue21](http://www.uscg.mil/acquisition/rescue21) ●

## INSIGHT

### Ready to Respond

**A drowning incident at Titahi Bay Beach in January last year strengthened the local Surf Life Saving Club’s commitment to a call-out squad, and to their relationships with other search and rescue (SAR) agencies in the Greater Wellington region.**

A 26 year old man turned up at the beach with his family for a swim. They chose not to swim between the flags and were all immediately caught up in a rip. The Titahi Bay Surf Lifesaving Patrol on duty were able to rescue three people. Unfortunately they were unable to find the man and a full scale Search and Rescue Operation (SAROP) got underway. The SAROP involved Police, the Westpac Rescue Helicopter, the Mana Coastguard, LandSAR and the Capital Coast Surf Life Saving Call-out Squad.

Although surf call-out squads have been operating in a few regions around New Zealand, it’s a new initiative in Wellington. The squads are made up of highly skilled, experienced surf lifesaver volunteers who have all attained Surf Life Saving New Zealand’s (SLSNZ) Advanced Lifeguard Award. The Capital Coast Squad comprises members from nine clubs throughout the Greater Wellington region and includes SLSNZ Central Region’s Programmes and Services Manager, Brent Harvey, who is also a member of the Paekakariki Surf Life Saving Club.

Brent was involved in the search for the missing man and says the call-out squad brought greater depth to the SAROP. “Getting our highly experienced personnel on the scene very quickly, to support Titahi Bay SLSC’s existing response, was just the start.

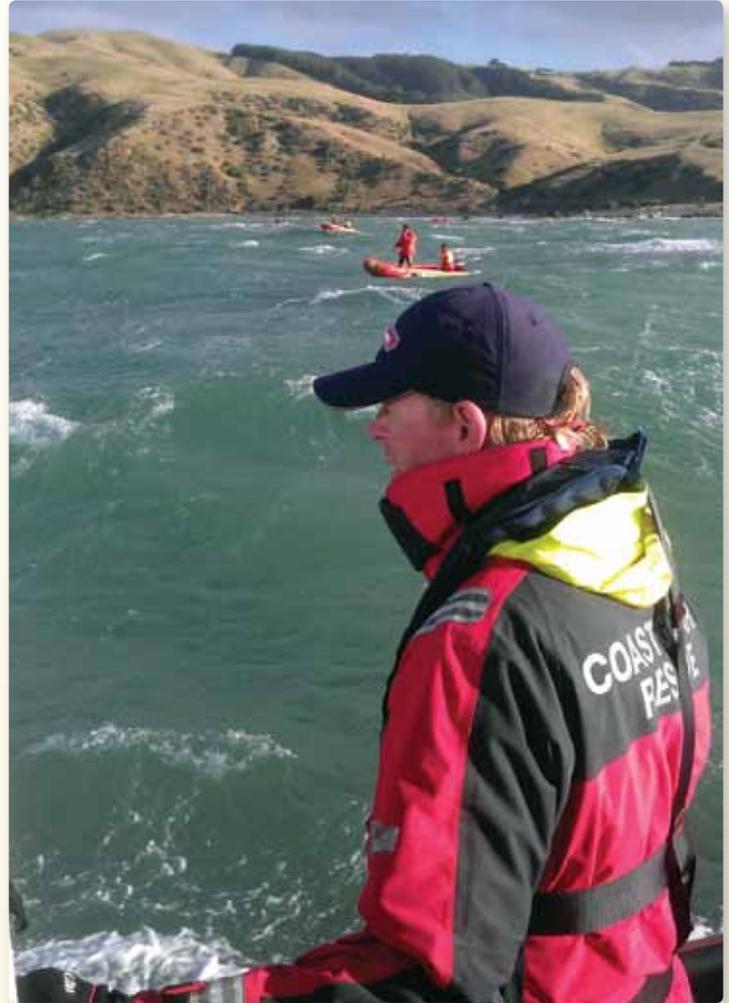
“Once on the water, our skills lie in getting in close to the rocks and shore, in amongst the break, where others can’t go, but where we’ve been trained to operate. It means you can have a helicopter in the air, Coastguard operating outside of the break and the squad members inshore.”

*It was the biggest operation a number of our guys had been involved in.*

Brent says this incident instilled in everyone involved the value of these call-out squads, and for their part, has led them to become more involved in interagency training and off the water collaborations. “This search lasted five days, ending when the swimmer’s body washed up on the beach. Five days is a long time and a number of issues were identified over that period, including requiring a lot of volunteer hours and needing to have robust systems and excellent communications between all the agencies in place. It was the biggest operation a number of our guys had been involved in, and although the agencies all worked well together, we were all still learning what our various capabilities are and how we can pull them together to be more effective. A great example was conducting grid searches alongside the Coastguard Unit.

“Being effective means you have to be aware of each other’s capabilities and how we each operate. To this end we have done things like holding theory sessions with Mana Coastguard, participating in the Westpac Rescue Helicopter training sessions, and attending the Wellington Region Close to Shore Marine SAR Committee meetings.”

These meetings, run by Police, involve all manner of marine SAR units from around the Wellington region, which Brent says is a positive initiative.



“At each meeting a different organisation does a presentation where they spell out their role: how they are called out, how they respond, and all the things that give you that awareness of how other organisations tick and how they fit in to the overall process.”

Brent says the incident in Titahi Bay gave squad members incentive to be involved, “and it also demonstrated our value – a group of expert lifesavers who are ready to respond at any time. It is an exciting and significant new contribution that can only enhance an operation’s effectiveness.” ●

#### INSIGHTS

- The value of local interaction between agencies cannot be under-estimated – this where the full extent of each other’s capabilities is realised
- Use all the opportunities offered to train alongside and meet with other organisations and create some of your own opportunities
- Learn from the job; the real value of the call-out squads became clear during a SAROP
- Having available experienced personnel ready to back up the people on the ground is vital to being successful
- Ensure your group or organisation has the right systems in place to be ready to respond

## Duncan's Desk



Our long hot summer is largely behind us now. While it has been tough on many farmers, it has allowed a lot of us to get out and enjoy the best New Zealand has to offer. From a search and rescue point of view, although we were busy, the overall number of SAROPs appears to be slightly down on previous years. It has also been rewarding to note that the vast majority of SAROPs have been conducted quickly, efficiently and with positive results. The

absence of problems may be an odd sort of performance measure – but in our line of business it is a good one!

The summer is a time for the NZSAR Secretariat to plan, prepare and organise, as operationally most of our key partners are too busy to fully engage with us. A recent NZSAR Council strategy session emphasised the Council's intent for us to work 'on the system' and a little less 'in the system'. In the coming months we will be preparing a revised three year NZSAR strategy for the 2014-2017 period. A likely emphasis will also be on leadership through understanding and evidence. To achieve that, we will likely place more weight on improving statistics, increasing research and in-depth analysis. If you have ideas or information that may be useful as we reconsider our strategy – please let me know.

At a practical level, the prevention partnership between Coastguard, the Mountain Safety Council, Water Safety New Zealand and ourselves is bedding down well. A large amount of safety collateral has been distributed to the public. We have also prepared a short video promoting the Boating Safety Code ([www.adventuresmart.org.nz/boating-adventures](http://www.adventuresmart.org.nz/boating-adventures)) and plan to do something similar for the Water Safety Code soon. We have also been busy translating all three Safety Codes into 16 different languages, suitable for guests and new arrivals to New Zealand. These will become available shortly.

The NZSAR Secretariat is continuing its emphasis on improving joint training arrangements for SAR people. We are excited by the new opportunities presented by the recent TEC review (story page 1) and we are determined to deliver good outcomes to the sector. It may take some time for all the wrinkles to get ironed out, but it is great to get some certainty after a long period of review.

In addition to their usual jobs, Carl and Phil have been busy working on mass rescue and wander SAR. Both of these issues are hugely important to the future of SAR, but they are complex matters and require widespread consultation and consensus. I'm very encouraged by the progress made to date and I hope the sector will see the practical side of this work in the coming months.

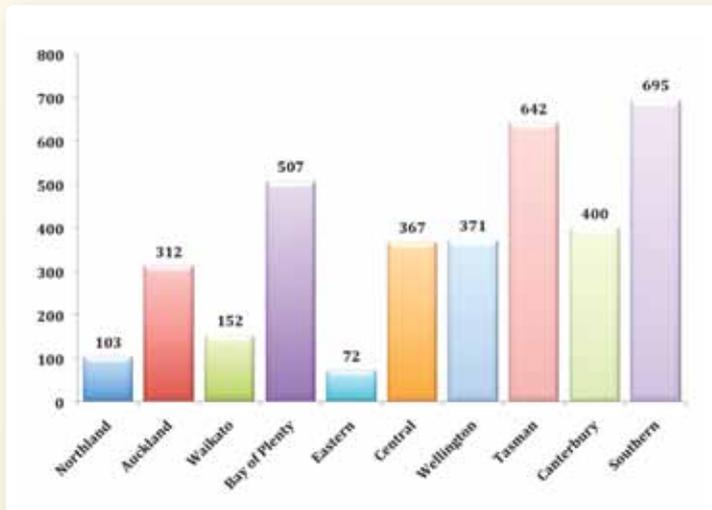
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## STATS ATTACK

### Police Involvement in Land Search and Rescue Incidents – by District

Over the last six years (2005/06-2011/12) the NZ Police has been involved in a total of 3,621 land-based SAR incidents. This graph breaks down these incidents by each of the SAR Police Districts. It is not surprising that the two largest Police Districts, which also contain some of the most challenging terrain in New Zealand, have the most land incidents.



## CALENDAR

- **Wednesday 10 April:** NZSAR Annual Training Plan meeting
- **Tuesday 7 May:** NZSAR Consultative Meeting  
NZSAR Awards
- **Tuesday 17 May:** NZSAR Council Meeting
- **Friday 31 May – Sunday 2 June:** Avalanche Workshop

## WEBSITES

[www.nzsar.org.nz](http://www.nzsar.org.nz) – New Zealand Search and Rescue Council.  
 This newsletter is available as a PDF on this website.

[www.adventuresmart.org.nz](http://www.adventuresmart.org.nz) – Safety information and tips for the public planning outdoor activities as well as links to organisations with specific safety information about their chosen pursuit.

[www.beacons.org.nz](http://www.beacons.org.nz) – Information about 406 Beacons, including where to purchase, rent and register a distress beacon

[www.metservice.com](http://www.metservice.com) – Comprehensive weather reports

[www.police.govt.nz/service/maritime](http://www.police.govt.nz/service/maritime) – Police Maritime Unit

[www.slsnz.org.nz](http://www.slsnz.org.nz) – Surf Life Saving New Zealand

[www.tec.govt.nz](http://www.tec.govt.nz) – Tertiary Education Commission

[www.uscg.mil/hq/cg5/cg534/default.asp](http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg5/cg534/default.asp) – U.S. Coastguard SAR