

Gold Award Operational Activity

The NZSAR Gold Award for Operational Activity is awarded for a very significant contribution to search and rescue in the New Zealand Search and Rescue Region during 2014.

Tai Kahn

From Surf Life Saving Northern Region

Peter Baltus

Lincoln Baltus

Tane Moore

Mark Goodhew

From Muriwai Lifeguard Service

For the rescue of a surfer from the gannet colony cliffs at Muriwai Beach on 29 September 2014

A surfer was trapped in a small cave around the gannet colony cliffs at Muriwai Beach, where he was clinging to the rocks fighting from being washed off by 2.5 metre waves. The sea was churning with extremely strong currents and rips swirling through the area. The surfer was hard to find and was not visible from land. The gannets and the rotor wash meant it wasn't possible to use a rescue helicopter to winch the surfer out.

The Muriwai Surf Life Saving Callout Squad was activated. Lincoln Baltus assumed command and communications from a vantage point and Tai Kahn monitored the situation from the air. An IRB was launched with Tane Moore, rescue swimmer Peter Baltus, and IRB driver Mark Goodhew on board to assess the situation. Mark established they could not safely attempt a rescue.

Tai made the decision to jump into deeper water from the helicopter and get ferried closer to the scene on the IRB. Tai then entered the cave, sustaining minor injuries on the rocks, and helped the surfer out of immediate danger and into open water. The surfer was then towed to safer rocks for an initial assessment before being collected by the IRB and taken to safety. The IRB returned to collect the two rescue swimmers, Tai and Peter, still waiting in the water.

This rescue was conducted in extreme conditions, with sea conditions and the position of the surfer adding to the complexity and challenge of the operation for the IRB team and helicopter crews. The teamwork, bravery and skills demonstrated during this rescue ultimately led to a life being saved.

Rescue of a surfer from the gannet colony cliffs at Muriwai Beach on 29 September 2014



Rescue of a trapped motorist from Fuchsia Creek on 18 April 2014



Certificates of Achievement Operational Activity

*The NZSAR Certificates of Achievement for Operational Activity are awarded
for an important contribution to search and rescue in the New Zealand
Search and Rescue Region during 2014.*

Sergeant Peter Muldrew

From Oamaru Police

Robert Borst

For the rescue of a trapped motorist from Fuchsia Creek on 18 April 2014

On Easter Friday, with most of North Otago under siege from floodwaters, a motorist became trapped on the roof of her car in Fuchsia Creek. It was immediately apparent that her life was in danger; the car was being held in the flooded waters by a few strands of wire from a submerged fence. With the strong current and amount of river debris the vehicle could have moved at any time making the situation significantly worse for the woman.

The car was directly under power lines making a helicopter rescue difficult, if not impossible. Sergeant Peter Muldrew and local farmer Robert Borst were amongst fire, police, ambulance staff and others to arrive at the edge of the flooded creek. The initial idea to use Robert's tractor was quickly abandoned, demonstrating good risk management skills at the scene. Instead, a decision was made to try Robert's 14 ton digger for the rescue.

After testing the digger in the current, Robert picked up Peter and they made their way through deep and swift running floodwater to the car. When they were close, Peter climbed into the digger bucket. It took two attempts to position the digger and extend it to its full reach for Peter to be able to get hold of the trapped woman and pull her into the bucket.

Peter and Robert's quick thinking, local knowledge, practical approach, coupled with a good dose of courage, combined all the elements of good Incident and Risk Management to save a motorist from drowning.

Coastguard Houhora

Coastguard Northland Air Patrol

For the rescue of three fishermen in Rangaunu Harbour on 27 December 2014

In the early hours of 27 December 2014, Coastguard Houhora volunteers began the search for three fishermen who had not returned from a fishing expedition in the Rangaunu Harbour the previous afternoon. Conditions that day were described as horrible, with extreme easterly winds. The men had not left their intentions and repeated attempts to contact them proved unsuccessful.

As a relatively new unit, Coastguard Houhora is small and relies on volunteers using their own vessels to respond to calls for help. Without any information of the missing boat's whereabouts the volunteers consulted a local fisherman for a likely destination. Coastguard Northland Air Patrol joined the search at first light.

After extending their search area about an hour into the search, the air patrol spotted a partially submerged vessel and then located the three fishermen stranded on a small rocky island; a precarious place given the conditions.

Two coastguard volunteers' vessels arrived at the scene and, after checking the situation, deemed it would be unsafe to approach the island. The men, who at this point had been exposed to the elements for 16 hours, were all suffering varying stages of hypothermia and injuries. The smaller vessel did manage to get them food and clothing. One man was able to swim to the rescue vessel, while the other two were winched to safety by helicopter.

Both Coastguard Houhora and Coastguard Northland Air Patrol went above and beyond their routine work. The air patrol extended the search area and searched where others had not thought to, and the Coastguard Houhora volunteers used their skills as well as their own vessels in an excellent example of collaboration and coordination, which saved three lives at sea.





Mount Maunganui Lifeguard Service

For their efforts during the search for Jack Dixon, October 2014

When five year old Jack Dixon was swept into the water from Mauao base near North Rock, Mount Maunganui, on 1 October 2014, it sparked the largest search operation ever involving the Mount Maunganui Lifeguard Service (MMLS).

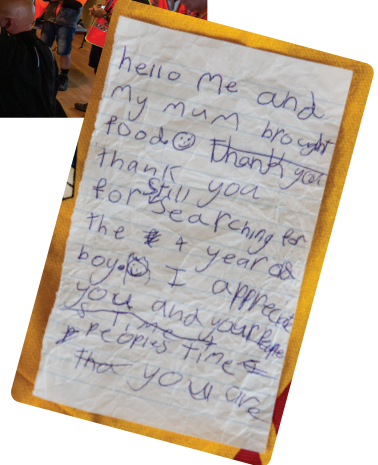
They were the first to be alerted to the incident, as off duty lifeguards were at the beach monitoring rough surf conditions, and they were the last group out performing coordinated searches, nearly two weeks after Jack's disappearance.

Approximately 1,500 volunteer hours of search were logged by MMLS with 20-30 people per day involved for the first seven days of the operation. MMLS personnel also carried out a number of other rescues during this time – seven on the first day of the operation alone.

Working alongside multiple agencies including the NZ Police, Coastguard, LandSAR and Rescue Helicopters, MMLS members controlled and managed the water searches. Due to the extremely difficult conditions only the strongest, fittest and most experienced lifeguards conducted searches in the water – illustrating excellent safety decision-making practice. Visibility in the water was very poor, but they searched in and around rocks close to shore as well as the entire base of Mauao, 100-200m offshore and further out to sea in a 3.5m easterly swell and strong winds. Simultaneously, lifeguards were involved in 'edge of the water' searches.

MMLS members also contributed to the significant media coverage during the operation, giving interviews and updates. They were a critical part of the search as they were the only service capable of searching the areas where there may have been an outcome.

MMLS would like to thank the Omanu and Papamoa SLSCs for the support they received from them during this large-scale operation.



Photographs taken by
Jamie Troughton

Her Majesty's New Zealand Ship Otago

For the rescue of the crew from the yacht *Django* on 8 July 2014

During the morning of 8 July 2014, approximately 200 nautical miles (nm) north of Cape Reinga and in heavy weather, the yacht *Django's* rudder broke below the water line and she lost steerageway. With the rudder uncontrollable and threatening to breach the hull, the crew of three made a mayday call.

Her Majesty's New Zealand Ship Otago (Otago) was 100nm west of the troubled yacht. She altered course and made best possible speed in the heavy seas to go to the aid of *Django's* crew. It positioned itself 40 metres from the distressed yacht and passed a gun line to start the rescue. The initial plan was to use the gun line to pull the life raft alongside Otago and haul the crew on board, but this was abandoned when Otago began to roll heavily in the large swell. The contingency plan was then put into action where a swimmer would enter the water and assist the crew in donning the rescue strop. Lieutenant Simon Wasley, a trained Navy diver, was in the water seven minutes after this decision was made. At personal risk to himself, he swam to the life raft and helped each crew member don the rescue strop, which was used to haul them on board by a number of Otago's crew.

This award recognises the professionalism, skill, teamwork, communication and determination shown by the crew of Otago, both during the transit to the stricken yacht, but especially during the rescue operation. The exceptional level of seamanship demonstrated by the crew in very difficult conditions saved three lives.



HMNZS Otago



Wanaka Alpine Cliff Rescue

For the rescue of climbers from the Quarterdeck, Mt Aspiring, on 10 September 2014

In response to a beacon activation late at night on 9 September 2014, a Wanaka Alpine Cliff Rescue (ACR) team was helicoptered into the vicinity of the Quarterdeck, Mt. Aspiring, at 1.30 in the morning. Dropped off just above the bush line with all their rescue gear, in order to be able to respond to the unknown incident, they had to climb 1,100 metres to reach the beacon's location.

It was wet and windy when they set off, but when they reached the French Ridge Hut on route, the rain had turned to snow and their wet gear had frozen. They traversed variable snow conditions underfoot, accompanied by consistent snowfall and minus 5-10 degree wind chill temperatures. At 6.30am the team found the patient and his two family members in a shallow crevasse where the patient had fallen while abseiling down from the Quarterdeck.

During the night four more Wanaka ACR members were called in. They planned contingencies for a slope lowering operation if the weather did not improve and were dropped off low on the mountain to walk into the site at 8.30am. Fortunately, the weather improved enough for the first ACR team to evacuate the patient and his wife by helicopter. The in-coming ACR team remained on the mountain with the patient's son until the helicopter returned.

This rescue was successfully conducted as a result of effective coordination and planning, and in particular, by the skills, bravery, and teamwork demonstrated by the Wanaka ACR team members. Their efforts reaching the patient in poor weather conditions, and in the dark, meant they could provide first aid and comfort to the climbing party, enabling the quick extraction of the patient as soon as the weather cleared.



Wanaka ACR in training



Gold Award Support Activity

The NZSAR Gold Award for Support Activity is awarded for a very significant contribution to search and rescue in the New Zealand Search and Rescue Region over an extended period.

Antony Groome

From LandSAR Palmerston North

For his services to search and rescue in New Zealand

Antony (Tony) has been involved in SAR since his teenage years. He is an active member in both land and marine SAR in the Manawatu, where the SAR community relies heavily on his unwavering support. This is on top of other volunteering commitments, which include the rural fire service and NZ Red Cross. Tony was also a voluntary crewman/winch operator on the local rescue helicopter for ten years.

He has contributed to saving many lives and is often at the forefront of the approximately 60 annual SAR operations across the Manawatu and Horowhenua districts. His experience means he takes on a myriad of roles in operations that are quite diverse, from the Erceg helicopter crash to finding a missing elderly farmer using handheld direction finding equipment.

Tony is an integral part of SAR management and continuous improvement projects throughout the region. Tony is also involved in numerous training and asset development initiatives and is frequently asked to instruct on SAR courses across the country. He has been instrumental in the design, mentoring, and debriefing of numerous land and marine search and rescue exercises (SAREX) and operations and is often used as a SAREX evaluator.

His flair for SAR technology, in particular radio communications, has seen the region benefit from vastly improved communication networks. Given his mapping, search planning and organisational skills, Tony has also assisted police on search operations relating to major crime.

He is usually the first port of call for the Manawatu on-call police SAR coordinator when seeking advice on a SAR response. Tony is being recognised for his exceptional contribution to the SAR sector in New Zealand.



Tony Groome, right



Brian Boyle – wandertrak device, hidden in an autistic boy's shoe



Certificates of Achievement Support Activity

The NZSAR Certificates of Achievement for Support Activity are awarded for an important contribution to search and rescue in the New Zealand Search and Rescue Region, either during 2014 or over an extended period.

Brian Boyle

From Coromandel Peninsula Search and Rescue

For his services to land search and rescue

Brian began his long standing commitment to SAR in Taranaki, before eventually settling in Thames, where he has made a significant difference since joining the local LandSAR group.

Brian became a Thames LandSAR committee member at the first opportunity and immediately started 'taking care of business'. Soon after he joined, Thames LandSAR formed a wider Coromandel Peninsula SAR (CPSAR) committee to align and steer the five local groups. Brian became their coordinator alongside his other SAR roles. Working over and above routine work and service Brian carried out the reporting for all five groups, networked at all levels, organised better equipment for the groups and streamlined the training for the members.

CPSAR has recognised the SAR issues relating to Coromandel's aging population. Brian has established and now leads the Coromandel Wander Search Charitable Trust. He personally organised the fundraising and purchase of three receiver units and numerous pendants. Brian and a small team take care of all the pendant hook-ups and replacements. Brian's changes have had a positive impact, making the Coromandel Peninsula a much safer environment with better outcomes for residents and tourists.



Senior Constable Peter Comer

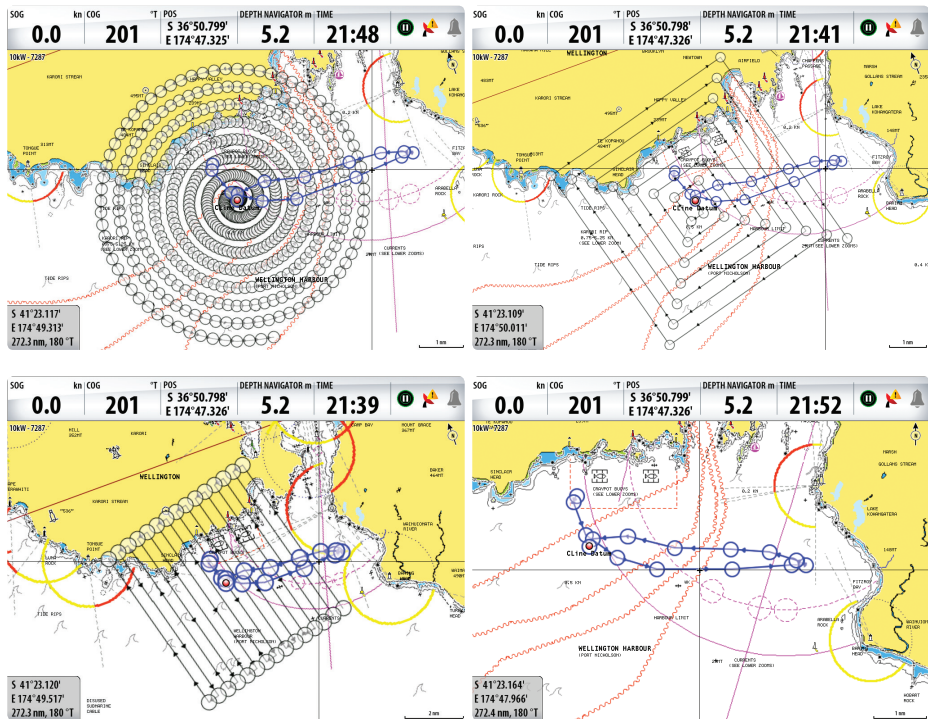
From Police Maritime Unit, Auckland

For technical innovation in marine search and rescue

Peter has designed, tested and developed a search and rescue coastal Datum computer programme. Based on NZSAR training modules – search area determination and search area coverage – it can be used by Incident Management Teams to provide a graphical presentation of the search area. The programme greatly assists Marine Search and Rescue Managers at New Zealand Police Maritime Units during operations.

Peter's programme is intuitive, easy to use, and significantly improves timeliness and response. It also eliminates human error and can be emailed to any on-scene resources. As more information is received, the programme can be modified quickly, which is another significant improvement.

In essence, Peter's programme can be up and running in minutes, saving on time and costs in identifying areas of interest, adding real value to marine search and rescue operations.



Screenshots from Peter's award winning computer programme

Rowan Leck

From Dunedin Marine SAR

For his services to marine search and rescue

Rowan began his life-long involvement with Surf Life Saving when he joined the Oreti club in 1958. Upon shifting to Dunedin in 1971 he joined the St. Kilda Surf Life Saving Club and served on its committee. In 1985 Rowan became Surf Life Saving's delegate to Dunedin Marine Search and Rescue (DMSAR). He still serves on that committee today.

Rowan saw a need for a specialist helicopter water rescue capability, in order to provide coverage to the 40 or so beaches with difficult access close to the city. He was instrumental in the formation of the Dunedin water rescue squad. This means DMSAR is able to respond effectively and efficiently to marine incidents in the Dunedin area.

The need for this squad and their skill was demonstrated in 2008 with the rescue of 10 French sailors from the yacht *Groupama 3*.

Among his other contributions Rowan has been involved in writing standards for training manuals and has organised several DMSAR public displays to raise awareness of safety messages. As a marine SAR adviser to Dunedin police for the past 25 years, Rowan has responded to about 750 Marine SAR emergencies.



Rowan Leck, centre of photo, carrying a woman ashore during the 1980 Taieri Floods



Heather McDonald

From Sumner Lifeboat

For her services to marine search and rescue

Heather has been a crew member of Coastguard's Sumner Lifeboat unit for 23 years, holding diverse volunteer roles that have made an immense contribution to SAR on the water. She is a vessel Senior Master, a SAR coordinator, a Duty Officer, a Practical Masters Course tutor, a regional instructor and has also evaluated a recent SAREX for Coastguard Bluff. In addition to this, Heather serves on the Sumner Lifeboat Board and is chair of their fundraising committee as well as chair of Coastguard Southern Region.

During 2014 Heather participated in 13 SAR operations and completed about 75 hours training with her unit. Her contribution extends beyond Sumner as she has given up weekends to run Practical Master Courses at five southern region units, while also assisting Masters to prepare for their practical evaluation through training and coaching. She has committed time to attaining higher level skills that benefit all Coastguard volunteers in the region, effectively assisting them to develop and increase skill levels.

Heather's immense knowledge and skills have been put into practice operationally, educationally and at management levels. Her experience of the many southern units provides an invaluable understanding at a regional level, helping the region build capacity in their units effectively.

Heather's dedication, drive and passion for Coastguard through her 'hands on' leadership, education and coaching roles makes her an invaluable asset to the organisation.



Heather McDonald, left

Geoff Wilkie

From Coastguard Northern Region

For his services to marine search and rescue

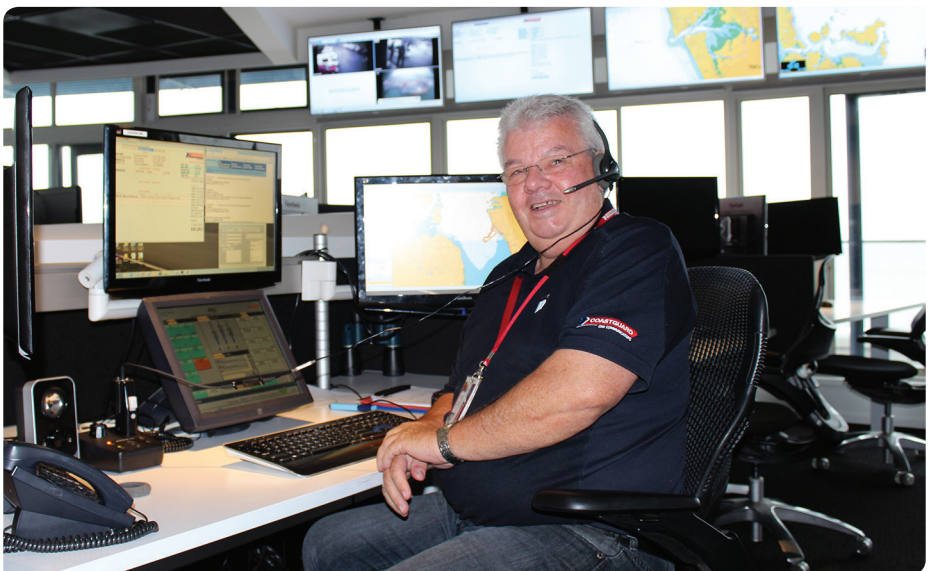
Geoff has been a quietly committed leader who, throughout his years at Coastguard Northern Region Communications (CNR Comms), has affected lasting change. He has helped to improve radio operators' skills by revitalising training programmes while making vast improvements to the volunteer experience and unit culture, and has brought new members on board in response to declining volunteer numbers.

Geoff joined CNR Comms in 2009 as a volunteer radio operator. Two years later he became the recruitment and retention officer with the aim of turning around the attrition rate – volunteer numbers were down by a third. Running a successful recruitment drive, Geoff has guided the group to a full complement of 64 radio operators for 2014/15.

Identifying a need for better training, he assumed the role of training officer. Working closely with tutors and the training coordinator to revamp the training programme, he and his team developed the Leading Radio Operator programme – a classroom-based programme with interactive learning. He is now developing follow-on programmes for operators who wish to progress to a senior level. He and his team are also presently adapting the programme for national use and to support the Coastguard New Zealand Radio Operator / training matrix.

Additionally, Geoff established a monthly Communications Unit Education evening, which combines information, training, off-site visits, guest speakers and opportunities for volunteers to socialise with the larger team and build camaraderie.

Geoff has identified weaknesses and taken a position of leadership to drive change, improving the services Coastguard provides to the boating public.



Certificate of Achievement Special Award

This NZSAR Certificate of Achievement – Special Award – is awarded for an important contribution to international search and rescue during 2014.

5 Squadron RNZAF

For their efforts during the search for MH370, March-April 2014

On 8 March 2014, Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 disappeared while on route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. Over the next 53 days a large multi-national search was conducted.

The New Zealand Defence Force provided a P-3K2 Orion from 5 Squadron to the international search effort. This was initially located in Penang, Malaysia, before moving to Perth, Australia.

During the search effort, the squadron flew 27 search missions, totalling 285 flying hours and covering 1.55 million square kilometres. This rate of effort meant aircrew flew close to aircraft type hours in as little as 3 weeks, which required aircrew to be rotated on a regular basis. Some aircrew cycled through the detachment twice, and flew the equivalent of 6 months' flying in 7 weeks. 5 Squadron was also required to activate some reserve aircrew to maintain the rate of effort this operation required.

On 26 April, the crew successfully coordinated the rescue of a passenger from a sinking sailing vessel 80 nautical miles off the coast of Perth. This occurred during the return leg of a search in the MH370 search area.

Unfortunately, no trace of MH370 has been found. While this search was conducted outside the New Zealand Search and Rescue Region, the NZSAR Council has decided to award 5 Squadron a Special Certificate of Achievement in recognition of their significant effort and contribution to this international search.

NZSAR

New Zealand Search
and Rescue Council



NEW ZEALAND SEARCH AND RESCUE REGION

McMURDO

The NZSAR Council and Secretariat congratulates all our 2014 winners

Do you know an organisation, a group, or an individual who you think should be acknowledged for their contribution to search and rescue? There are now two categories – operational activity and support activity.

More information about these two categories plus the simple nomination process can be found on our website www.nzsar.org.nz/awards. The 2015 Award nominations close 31 January 2016.