



# 2019 Awards



## OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY



# Gold award

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 2019.

**Kariaotahi Surf Life Saving Club,  
Coastguard Waiuku,  
Auckland Rescue Helicopter Trust,  
NZ Police Air Support Unit,  
Coastguard Papakura,  
Coastguard Northern Region Communications,  
Auckland Police Maritime Unit**

**For the rescue of three people from their flipped vessel,  
Port Waikato on 25 May 2019.**



Police received a distress call at dusk from a boat near the Waikato River mouth, battling 1.5 metre waves. The boat stalled and overturned shortly afterwards, tossing a seven-year-old boy, a woman and a man overboard.

In complete darkness, eleven responding lifeguards from Kariaotahi Surf Life Saving Club began a shoreline search, while two helicopters (Auckland Westpac Rescue and the NZ Police Air Support Unit Eagle) scoured the water by air. Using infrared heat-detection equipment, the Police Eagle spotted the trio huddling together, wearing lifejackets, about 600 metres offshore.

The Westpac Rescue crew tried to winch the trio to safety, but the darkness and sea spray made it extremely difficult. An attempt was made to lower an intensive care paramedic, but adverse conditions forced him back.

A risk assessment determined that it was not safe for the Coastguard vessels to cross the bar, so Kariaotahi lifeguards Nick Hornblow and Bradley Walters set out from shore to attempt an IRB rescue. The rescue helicopter's landing light, together with headlights from Police and surf club vehicles parked on the beach, guided their way.

Just four minutes later, despite intense buffeting from the helicopter, the three people in the water were rescued and back on land after nearly three hours in the water. The woman and child both needed immediate treatment by the St John ambulance team for hypothermia and shock. Once out of their wet clothing, the pair were warmed with blankets and heat pads, but were still not emanating any heat. The woman went into cardiac arrest as she was being loaded into the helicopter and CPR was performed several times during the flight to hospital.

All three lives were saved that night, thanks to the quick thinking, meticulous planning and coordination of all rescue services involved.

## SUPPORT ACTIVITY



# Gold award

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.

## **Seth McPhee**

*Otago Surf Life Saving Club*

**For his service and commitment to Surf Life Saving and search and rescue.**

Seth has made a huge contribution to Surf Life Saving – not only on the water, but also as a respected mentor and instructor. He is one of the highest qualified lifeguards in New Zealand and is passionate about passing this knowledge on to others. His credentials are such that we do not have enough space to cover them all.



A lifeguard since 1999, Seth is currently a member of the Otago SLS Callout Squad – a team that he has coordinated for eight years. He is a successful rescue swimmer, playing a key part in multiple sea and air rescues.

Seth sits on the SLSNZ National Lifesaving Advisory Committee and champions search and rescue training for the SLS membership wherever possible. He has been a SLS Instructor for over 15 years, helping surf lifeguards to achieve their Surf Lifeguard Award, IRB Operators and Rock Training qualifications.

Seth has coached many people through the Advanced Lifeguard Award course – the highest qualification in the SLS framework. For more than 12 years, he has instructed the Advanced IRB Skills, Helicopter Swimmer, CIMS and Search and Rescue units, working as Head Instructor at the National Lifeguard School for the past three years.

Seth trained as a CIMS Course Facilitator at Tai Poutini Polytechnic (TPP), delivered CIMS to surf lifeguards and went on to work as a CIMS Tutor at TPP for three years. He teaches his own innovative approach to Event Lifeguarding and is developing a framework for SLS to deliver Flood Water Rescue Services.

As a Coastguard-trained facilitator, Seth trains over 50 lifeguards each year in Marine VHF radio. His skills also extend to Workplace First Aid – in which he trains lifeguards, SAR volunteers and members of the public.



# Certificate of achievement

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 2019.

**Maritime Operations Centre,  
Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand,  
5 Squadron – Royal New Zealand Air Force,  
Auckland Rescue Helicopter Trust (ARHT),  
Coastguard Bay of Islands**

**For the rescue of four people from *SV Essence*, near the Bay of Islands on 14 October 2019.**

It was midday when Maritime radio received a distress call from the sailing vessel *Essence*, with four people on board, 20 nautical miles NNE of Cape Brett. The vessel was sinking, the life-raft had blown away and the group expected to be in the water shortly.



Given the stormy conditions, the Rescue Coordination Centre called on several assets to assist. Two ARHT helicopters, a P3K2 Orion from the Royal New Zealand Air Force, two Navy Sea Sprite helicopters, Coastguard Bay of Islands, a cargo vessel nearby, a Navy vessel and Police launch were all tasked to the location.

Kiwi Rescue departed Whenuapai within 50 minutes of tasking and found the four people huddled together in the water just 30 minutes later. The crew skilfully deployed a life raft, which two members of the stranded group managed to get into. Despite their best efforts, the remaining pair could only cling to the life-raft lines.

Meanwhile, Coastguard Bay of Islands Rescue II and other responders negotiated 50 knot winds and 6-metre swells as they headed to the location.

An ARHT helicopter arrived 55 minutes after the Orion and successfully extracted all four people within 25 minutes. Tragically, the 58-year-old skipper was not rescued alive.

Kiwi Rescue remained on site until all four people were plucked from the water, sending updates to RCCNZ and providing oversight and top cover for the helicopter crews.

The Coastguard crew were stood down approximately 9 nautical miles from the stricken vessel.

The combined teamwork, cooperation, support and communication between RCCNZ, 5 Squadron, the crew of the ARHT and Coastguard was crucial to the successful outcome.

# Certificate of achievement

**Shane Cleary, Dean Rozendaal and Grant Brown**

*Northland LandSAR – Cliff Rescue Team*

**For the rescue of a trapped climber at Piwhane / Spirits Bay, Northland on 19 December 2019.**

Whangarei Police were notified at 9pm of a 21-year-old man trapped on the sheer face of a seaside cliff. The Westpac helicopter was tasked to the scene, with Northland LandSAR Cliff Rescue onboard as back-up if the helicopter was unable to winch.

On arrival, the helicopter crew were concerned that buffeting from the rotor blades could cause the man to lose his footing and fall 50 metres to the ground. So instead the pilot skilfully set the machine down on a narrow slope to unload the Cliff Rescue team.





Team leader Shane discovered that the rock was too crumbly to rig a rope system. Due to safety concerns, the helicopter crew decided to wait until first light to attempt a winch. Meanwhile, Shane and his team would try to lower supplies to the trapped climber.

Using a counterweight belay system, with two people inland to counterweight one on the cliff face, Shane climbed down about 15 metres in howling wind. When he saw the man perched on a two-foot wide ledge, Shane knew that waiting for daybreak for the helicopter was not an option. Any wayward movement could cause him to fall.

Shane gave the man some warm clothes and secured him in a harness. They agreed on a plan to climb up while on self-belay. Attached together, they took their time finding hand and foot holds, making it to the top with just one minor slip.

The rescued man was hover-loaded into the helicopter and reunited with his family at the local campsite.

The training, professionalism and bravery of the Cliff Rescue Team in difficult circumstances was key to this operation's success.

# Certificate of achievement

## **Taylor's Mistake Surf Life Saving Club Sumner Beach Surf Life Saving Club**

### **For the rescue of a critical patient at Te Onepoto / Taylor's Mistake Beach, Christchurch on 3 January 2019.**

A medical emergency saw Police reach out to Taylor's Mistake SLSC on a Friday night for urgent assistance. A youth had fallen 20 metres from a seaside cliff and was in a critical condition.

Senior Lifeguard Mike Smith dispatched an IRB to determine the patient's exact location. He also contacted key members of the Taylor's Mistake SLSC emergency call out squad.

When the IRB arrived at the scene, the lifeguards identified that the patient was accessible via the rocks, but an incoming tide could present difficulties for the rescue. They stayed on the water, ready to assist if required.



Lifeguards Craig and Tisha arrived quickly on foot with first aid rapid response packs. They were joined soon after by colleagues Patrice and Mike. An off-duty paramedic, an orthopaedic theatre nurse and a rapid response team also arrived to assist.

A second emergency call out squad was dispatched from the nearby Sumner SLSC. The patient had multiple injuries to his head, face and limbs, and was struggling to breathe. Lifeguards stabilised the patient's head and neck while he was examined by the paramedics and treated for severe trauma. They also helped with a suspected fractured femur.

Back on the beach, lifeguards cleared a safe landing area for the Westpac Rescue Helicopter and managed onlookers.

Once stabilised, the patient was winched away from the rocks and on to the beach, before being airlifted to hospital. He went on to make a full recovery.

Police had high praise for the skills of the lifeguards who assisted with the patient and ensured the safety of the public during helicopter movements.

# Certificate of achievement

**Constable Rochelle Andrews**

*New Zealand Police, Wellington SAR Squad*

**For the rescue of six people trapped in the Hutt Gorge, 29-30 December 2019.**

At 6.30pm on 29 December, Police were alerted to a missing group of five children and one adult in Kaitoke Regional Park. The group were staying at the local campsite and had failed to meet family members at a nearby swimming hole.

Constable Rochelle Andrews was dispatched to the campsite to ensure the group had not simply made other plans without telling anyone. But their clothes, shoes and mobile phones were still in their tents.

LifeFlight Westpac Trust Helicopter found the missing group just before dark, trapped on a ledge above the river and surrounded by bluffs, which made winching difficult. The pilot tried to reach them but pushed the machine too far and needed to return to base.



Rochelle and a Dog Handler set off on foot. On arrival, Rochelle saw that the river was too deep for the group to navigate. The children were showing signs of hypothermia, dressed in only their togs with the air temperature dropping.

Rochelle decided to swim the 9 metres across the river with a dry-bag containing survival blankets and warm clothing. She made this swim twice to ferry all the gear, reassuring the group that more help was on the way.

Defence Joint Forces diverted its only operating NH90 helicopter crew, with long winch capacity, from Mahia to assist.

Rochelle volunteered to swim the stranded group across the river, one at a time, assisted by a colleague attached to a safety line. Altogether, she crossed the river 18 times, emerging cold and exhausted after a final crossing to recover the gear.

Shortly after 3am the NH90 arrived. All six members of the rescued party were winched into the helicopter and returned to elated family members.



# Certificate of achievement

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.

## **David Dittmer**

*Mackenzie Land Search and Rescue*

### **For his service and commitment to search and rescue.**

With 50 years of combined search and rescue service, David Dittmer is described by colleagues and friends as the 'go to' person for all things search and rescue.

His involvement in SAR began in the 1970s. He assisted Horowhenua Police with their SAR responsibilities for over 30 years – not only with his intimate knowledge of the local terrain, but also with his ability to get to the crux of lost person behaviour and the search techniques required to bring missing people home safely.



David held several voluntary roles for what was then known as Horowhenua Search and Rescue, including Incident Controller, Field Team Leader, Incident Management Team member and Chairman of the committee. He was involved in training the Police SAR Squad and his fellow volunteers in alpine skills.

In 2009 David moved to Aoraki/Mt Cook to work with the Department of Conservation, where he became a highly respected member of the local SAR management team. Moving on to Senior Ranger of the Alpine Rescue Team, David was praised for rebuilding systems and team culture after the tragic death of a colleague during a training exercise.

David's service to search and rescue in Horowhenua was acknowledged with a national LandSAR award in 2009. He has served on many national working groups, including the Safety Management Systems committee and the Constitution Review Committee.

Colleagues describe David as quiet and unassuming, with a depth of SAR knowledge and a quick, analytical mind. To quote one of Dave's former colleagues: "When Dave walks into a room, it is likely that you won't notice him as he is diminutive in stature and quietly spoken but [among] his peers he is a giant."

# Certificate of achievement

**Allan Turia**

*Coastguard Turangi*

**For his service and commitment to Coastguard Turangi and Iwi relationships.**

Allan Turia has been a well-respected member of Coastguard Turangi for over 17 years. On top of saving stricken boaties, he works hard to create opportunities for people to get involved with the organisation.

Allan's focus on inclusion has seen Coastguard Turangi's role stretch far beyond maritime assistance and search and rescue. He has built strong working relationships with the Department of Conservation and the Tūwharetoa Māori Trust Board, to ensure that protected areas such as Lake Taupō and nearby Motutaiko Island are looked after by the three groups.





Allan's work with the Tūwharetoa Māori Trust Board has led to a \$5k per annum commitment from the Iwi group towards a cadet programme that encourages people of Tūwharetoa descent to volunteer for Coastguard. This programme is beneficial for both parties as Tūwharetoa have the Kaitiaki (guardianship) of the lake. Coastguard Turangi supports Tūwharetoa by providing transport across the lake to access the marae and acts as a support boat during the Iwi groups' community events, such as waka ama races.

Allan and Coastguard Turangi also assist DoC with the upkeep of the protected Motutaiko Island, a place of spiritual significance to Māori. Every three months Allan transports DoC staff to and from the island to check on endangered species and to look after the land.

Allan ensures all volunteers have equal opportunities to build on their skills through training and mentoring. From getting more youth involved in Coastguard, to general maintenance on the rescue vessel or fundraising, Allan's commitment to Coastguard knows no bounds.

# Certificate of achievement

## **Brent MacDonald**

*New Zealand LandSAR Search Dogs*

### **For his service and commitment to LandSAR Search Dogs.**

Brent is the only LandSAR dog handler to have achieved operational status in all three disciplines of avalanche, tracking and area search.

His first dog Winnie (operational from 1995-2002) was known by Brent's colleagues as the "nose"; super methodical in her search and thorough.

Brent and his second dog, Ella, were called to around 30 searches over 10 years, including a remarkable rescue in September 2011. A missing trumper was believed to be overdue by four days but had actually been buried by an avalanche. What started as an area search became a



complicated find, due to the time delay from burial to search. But within just 10 minutes of being deployed, Ella located the point where the lost subject was found, saving many hours of probing into unstable snow.

Brent worked alongside his third dog Honi for four years from 2011-2015.

Between 2001 and 2007, the avalanche search dogs group went through a period of change. The leader of the group left and there was a disconnect between geographic teams, training and assessment. Brent was instrumental in bringing the group back together.

He served as Lead Assessor for the avalanche group for about 15 years, working closely with the NZ Police Dog Section. Brent consistently aimed to improve the standard of searches.

Brent was Lead Assessor for the whole LandSAR Search Dogs group from 2012-2013, creating an outstanding training pathway for his peers. He strived to improve both his own learning and the learning of countless volunteers who benefitted from his guidance to become seasoned operational handlers.

## **The NZSAR Council and Secretariat congratulates all our 2019 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 two categories – operational activity and support activity. More information about these two categories, the NZSAR Awards and the simple nomination process can be found on our website at [www.nzsar.govt.nz/nzsar-awards/about-the-awards/](http://www.nzsar.govt.nz/nzsar-awards/about-the-awards/). The 2020 Award nominations close on 31 January 2021.



TOKELAU

SAMOA

AMERICAN  
SAMOA

NIUE

TONGA

COOK IS

NORFOLK IS

KERMADEC IS

NEW ZEALAND

✦ CHATHAM IS

## New Zealand Search and Rescue Region

McMURDO