

Exercise Evaluation Report

SAREX Lochinver

Location: Lochinver Station, Taupo Area, Bay of Plenty Police District

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Report version: Final

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Executive Summary

The Taupo SAR area is part of the Bay of Plenty Police District and also part of the Central North Island Alliance. The alliance encompasses groups that would respond to an incident in an area that has considerable SAR vulnerability. This SAREX based on the previous year's model combined a 'drill' style exercise for the field teams with functional exercises for the IMT.

A number of observers attended as there is considerable interest from other districts in this style of SAREX. It is short in duration (24 hrs), refreshes skills, has the capacity to assess competencies, and exercises both management and field resources. All positively impacting on response readiness.

LandSAR Training was used to plan and execute the event in conjunction with an organising committee.

A number of recommendations have been made mostly relating to the IMT objectives. The intent of the recommendations is to make possible improvement on a model and plan that is already being delivered at a high standard.

The SAREX was well attended and provided many positive learning opportunities that were not always associated with the competencies.

1. Recommendations

1. Continue to provide SAREXs in the current format. However this should not be to the exclusion of considering other exercise types
2. Continue to provide opportunity for other groups to observe and participate
3. Develop a singular aim for the SAREX
4. Use SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time bound) as a model when developing objectives
5. Provide a short IMT refresher prior to the first scenario
6. Ensure adequate SME capacity in the planning phase to satisfy all the objectives
7. Consider tools to establish role clarity and lines of communication during the SAREX implementation
8. Consider streamlining processes for field team registration if using computer based systems such as SARTrack.

2. Introduction

Taupo SAR area is part of the Bay of Plenty Police District. It is also part of the Central North Island Alliance that encompasses groups that would respond to an incident in an area that has considerable SAR vulnerability – Central North Island backcountry. SAR activity in this area is across Police District boundaries. By necessity there needs to be close operability and cooperation between these groups. Taupo SAR facilitates this by including all these groups in its SAREXs.

They also extend invitations to other groups that may contribute to a response. Their philosophy for SAREXs is to provide learning opportunities for all groups and their members.

A key focus for the SAREX was to provide opportunity to assess competencies and refresh skills. An external trainer (LandSAR Training) was contracted to plan and conduct the SAREX.

A number of members from Taranaki, Wellington and other areas in the Bay of Plenty attended to observe and participate with the view of using this model for their own SAREXs.

The SAREX was undertaken during level 2 COVID restrictions.

3. Background

3.1 Background to the exercise

Taupo Police and others involved in the local SAR response have long felt that a Full Scale Exercise failed to meet their needs. Following a local tradition, a 'drill/ functional' exercise was conducted in 2019 using external trainers. This exercised the field teams including the IMT and enabled assessment of the LandSAR competencies. Based on the outcomes of 2019 a similar exercise was conducted in 2020. An organising committee in conjunction with LandSAR Training decided on the content that would be covered at each site in the field 'round robin'. The content was similar to 2019 except for the absence of a Track and Clue module. A number of recommendations were made in the 2019 SAREX report.

3.2 Dates, location, organising agency(s), key people

The exercise was conducted between Saturday 5th September and Sunday 6th September and located on Lochinver Station, Taupo.

It was organised by the personnel in the Taupo Police, the Taupo LandSAR group and LandSAR Training.

Key people were:

Exercise Controller: Barry Shepherd (Taupo Police SAR coordinator)

SAREX Facilitator and Lost Person Liaison: Ed Halson (Land SAR Training)

IMT Assessor/ instructor: Aaron Nicholson (LandSAR)

Field Assessors/instructor: Tony Wells (LandSAR), Johnny Franklin, Gary Clearwater

3.3 Participating organisations

NZ Police, Land SAR Training and members of the following groups, Taupo, Turangi, Ruapehu, Taranaki, Tauranga, Taihape, Hawkes Bay, Hamilton, Waihi, Wellington.

There were a total of 54 attendees (support staff, IMT 27, and 27 field participants)

3.4 Exercise aim (as in planning documents)

To exercise the IMT and field members, to upskill and assess abilities against the competencies and to provide training, skills assessment and/or feedback.

3.5 Exercise objectives

Six broad objectives were established

- To allow assessment against the competencies by SME's/Assessors of the Field Team Member competencies
- To give team members the opportunity to revise skills in search methods, tracking, navigation, VHF radio communications, first aid, stretcher and rope management.
- To give IMT members the opportunity to utilise SARTrack and establish an ICP.
- To allow IMT roles assessment against the current or future IMT competencies
- That the IMT is measured against NZSAR response guidelines
- Maximise skills uptake or reinforce learnings for field team members to maintain response readiness.

3.6 Exercise Scenarios

The design of the exercise was divided in to two components being the IMT and field teams. The IMT had three x three hour long scenarios that involved a lost person and three field teams to task. The subjects of the searches were a missing forestry worker, hunter and a despondent. These subject categories differed from the previous year.

The nine field teams were divided in to groupings of three (3 field teams of 3 people). An instructor/assessor led them through three modules (search methods, navigation and low angle stretcher carry) on the Saturday. Sunday morning these field teams processed a vehicle and a camp site.

4. Evaluation Methodology

4.1 The agreed outcomes of the evaluation activity

A report with recommendations based on the objectives and their KPIs. See appendix.

4.2 Evaluation scope

To measure how well the exercise meet the stated purpose and supporting objectives.

Excluded from scope:

Post SAREX follow up on assessment reporting to group and national databases

4.3 Aspects of the exercise observed, what was not observed

Observed: Initial briefing for all participants. The IMT reacting to all three scenarios and two debriefs. Field team instruction and assessment procedures for the Saturday modules in two of the three groups. Hot debrief of the field team leaders.

Not observed: The vehicle processing and campsite.

4.4 The process followed in preparing and submitting the report

The planning document was supplied prior to the SAREX from which KPIs were developed. The KPIs were submitted to the planners and agreed they would be used to help give measurement against the objectives and the SAREX purpose. Evidence was collected against these KPI's. A draft report was submitted for comment to the Taupo Police SAR Coordinator. The final version contains what the evaluator and Police SAR Coordinator consider appropriate.

4.5 Other information

Nil

5. Findings

To run an event of this nature requires implementing a detailed plan (see appendix). There is complexity in the program that requires a high level of coordination. LandSAR Training provided professional input that is probably beyond the resources of a SAR group. There were some glitches and unexpected mistakes in the planning documents and at times communication issues due to a lack of role clarity. While causing some individual frustration it needs to be noted they did not materially affect the outcomes.

The SAREX organisational structure formatted and socialised as a diagram would help clarify roles and lines of communication.

Field team related objectives 1, 2 and 6

Assessment against the Field Team Member competencies and provide opportunity to revise search methods, tracking, navigation, VHF radio communications, first aid, stretcher and rope management. Maximise skills uptake and maintain response readiness.

All assessors or SMEs were familiar with the competencies to be assessed. The field refresher and skills assessments appeared straight forward to implement. Assessments and revision were adequately resourced in time. Judgements per individual were recorded on templates that allowed post SAREX administration to input into group databases. There was a clear and known process by the organising committee to make this happen.

There was scope in the exercise for new field members to receive and embed useful training.

For the field teams needing to camp out overnight and the components of search skills refreshed gives confidence in their readiness for an incident response.

The field skills refreshed while similar and bounded by the competencies differed slightly from the previous year. It is the organising committee that decides on this focus.

IMT related objectives.

The IMT skills assessment was not as easy to implement. Many of the IMT were formally trained and experienced but for most that experience was not recent. While many of the objectives appeared aspirational they did not detract from the value given.

Objective 3 To give IMT members the opportunity to utilise SARTrack and establish an ICP.

The ICP was set up, resourced and functioned well.

Two SARTrack SMEs were available. One of the SMEs was less available as also having the role of providing witness statements to the IMT during the scenarios. The other was out of district and although not prearranged served a major role in mentoring others throughout the SAREX. The functionality used in SARTrack related mostly to the initial response and it appeared important to have SME's who were operationally experienced.

For the core group there was ample opportunity to utilise certain focal functions as to their role at the time e.g. inputting field teams and taskings.

There was some time delay during the start-up phase for scenario one caused by the need to input non Taupo field team members in to the data base.

Ensuring adequate SME capacity for the mentoring of SARTrack users should be built in to the SAREX planning phase. Database entry for out of group field team members prior to the start of the first scenario would avoid time delays.

Objective 4 To allow IMT roles assessment against the current or future IMT competencies

It was apparent in the first scenario, assessment was inappropriate. The scenarios took the form of a scaffolded practical refresher on the initiative of the SME. The positive difference in the IMT performance from the initial scenario to the final was significant.

Prior to the first scenario the evaluator suggests having a 15 minute search process refresher. This would follow the same model utilised in the field program.

The SME felt some competency judgments could be made by the end of the third scenario for a core group of 6. The first scenario involved 15 people in the IMT and the second 8 making extended observation and competency judgements incomplete. Difficulty also arose from having personnel changes and role rotation. With this type of exercise, its time constraints and format it may not be possible to assess fully all participants.

If assessment is to be the focus re-engineering the model may be appropriate that includes not only observation but also purposeful conversations by the assessor and participant.

Competencies for the operations function are fully developed and current. The template available would not have presented a recording problem. It was noted the Logistics function competency marking template was more suited to the Safety Officers role.

Assessing against future competencies is nonspecific as to what competencies they are. Some are in a less developed form or draft and obviously have less value for assessment purposes than those that are current.

While the full range of IMT competencies are being developed the objective and participant awareness would benefit from being more specific in the planning document as to which ones are being fully, partially or unable to be assessed.

Objective 5 That the IMT is measured against NZSAR response guidelines

The IMT processes improved over the 3 scenarios but it was unclear how this was to be measured against the Search Management Guidelines and how aware the IMTs were of this requirement.

The Search Management Guidelines (SMG) cover from the initial response to an extended search. Questions arise as to:

- what aspects of the SMG should be measured
- what format should the measurement be in and
- how the measurement should be used?

Displaying the Forms Flow Diagram and debriefing on that basis is one tool that would help answer some of these questions.

The evaluator feels further work is needed to give the right focus and outcomes. It should also be noted that with short, time referenced scenarios the IMT do not put in a forward planning function nor do they debrief field teams.

6. Conclusions

The SAREX provided valuable training and a positive environment for experiential learning.

The field team related objectives were satisfied. There were good processes around refreshing skills, judging competency and reporting.

The objectives relating to the Incident Management Team were less satisfied for a number of reasons including personnel changes between scenarios, a mix of experience levels and time constraints.

Given the format and the objectives this will remain a challenge.

Extending to a 36 hour SAREX would have benefit however the current time frame suits volunteers.

The SAREX was well planned and despite some minor clinches executed capably. Delivery staff were well chosen, briefed and knowledgeable.

7. Appendix

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Appendix 7.1

Agreed objectives and KPI's for SAREX	
Obj. 1	To allow assessment against the competencies by SMEs/Assessors of the Field Team Member competencies.
1.1	SMEs /assessors are familiar with the Field Team Member competencies
1.2	SMEs /assessors follow accepted LandSAR assessment procedures
1.3	Assessments are recorded
1.4	Assessments are adequately resourced in time, equipment and with assessors
1.5	Team members are aware of assessment procedures
Obj. 2	To give team members the opportunity to revise skills in search methods, tracking, navigation, VHF radio communications, first aid, Stretcher and Rope Management.
2.1	Appropriate time referenced revision plans are implemented for search methods
2.1.1	Search methods revised are agreed, appropriate and documented
2.2	Appropriate time referenced revision plans are implemented for tracking
2.2.1	Tracking skills revised are agreed, appropriate and documented
2.3	Appropriate time referenced revision plans are implemented for navigation
2.3.1	Navigation skills revised are agreed, appropriate and documented
2.4	Appropriate time referenced revision plans are implemented for VHF radio communications
2.4.1	Radio comms skills revised are agreed, appropriate and documented
2.5	Appropriate time referenced revision plans are implemented for first aid
2.5.1	First aid skills revised are agreed, appropriate and documented
2.6	Appropriate time referenced revision plans are implemented for Stretcher and Rope Management.
2.6.1	Stretcher and Rope Management skills revised are agreed, appropriate and documented
Obj. 3	To give IMT members the opportunity to utilise SARTrack and establish an ICP.
3.1	An ICP is established
3.2	SAR track is utilised
3.3	Appropriate time is allocated so opportunity is provided for IMT members
3.4	SME's are available to advise IMT members on SARTrack utilisation

Obj. 4	To allow IMT roles assessment against the current or future IMT competencies
4.1	SMEs /assessors are familiar with the IMT competencies that are being assessed
4.2	SMEs /assessors follow accepted LandSAR assessment procedures
4.3	Assessments are recorded
4.4	Assessments are adequately resourced in time, equipment and with assessors
4.5	IMT members are aware of assessment procedures and what competencies against which they are assessed.
Obj. 5	That the IMT is measured against NZSAR response guidelines
5.1	IMT members are familiar with the NZSAR response guidelines
5.2	NZSAR response guidelines are used appropriately as to the situation
5.3	Measurement takes place against the NZSAR response guidelines
Obj. 6	Maximise skills uptake or reinforce learnings for field team members to maintain response readiness
6.1	Appropriate techniques are used to maximise skills uptake for field team members
6.2	Appropriate techniques are used to reinforce learnings for field team members
6.3	Response readiness is maintained for field team members
6.4	Feedback is given to field team members

Evidence is available that support the recommendations.

Appendix 7.2

SAREX Program			
Fri.	Sept 4 th 2020		
1230	Instructors/Assessors convene and set up at Lochinver	Scope exercise area and instruction/facilitation sites	
1300	Assemble Taupo Station	Organise gear	
1400	Depart Taupo Station	Travel	
1530	Arrive Lochinver Station	Set up	
1800	ICP set up for occupancy	Available personnel to assist. Generator and computer equipment set up and running.	
1930	Briefing for DS/AU by LandSAR		
Sat.	Sept 5 th 2020		
Time	Event	Comment	
0700	Mini bus departs Taupo Station	Passengers to be at station by 0650	
0730-0830	SAREX participants arrive	Travel to the venue individuals' responsibility. All participants must complete Tcard on arrival. DS allocate to teams.	
0830	IMT Selected and given scenario		
0900	First Scenario to be set up by 0830 hrs	Subject placement to occur after safety briefing at 0900	
0900	Welcome, Exercise outline, Safety Briefing. Search teams established	Barry Shepherd LandSAR SAREX Manager attended by all exercise personnel	
0830	DS to have completed teams for the day.	Teams to be created and assigned using SARtrack	
0900	Briefing for Scenario Based Activities		
0930	Scenario Based Activities begin		
	Each activity will run for 3 hours, with 1/2 hour for changeover.		
	Each facilitator will have a VHF radio and be able to give directions for teams to find the way to the next activity location.		
	IMT to be selected and given scenario 1 hours before activity commencement.		
1600			
		0930-1100	1100-1230
	IMT	Scenario 1	
	Group A (field)	Scenario 1	
	Group B (field)	Nav	SM
	Group C (field)	SM	Nav
		1300-1430	1430-1600
	IMT	Scenario 2	
	Group A (field)	Nav	SM
	Group B (field)	Scenario 2	
	Group C (field)	TaC	SRM
	All Groups		

	SAREX Combined evening Meal		
1600 to 1730	SAREX early dinner	All regroup at ICP for early evening meal, refresh and socialise before recommencing final session at 1730.	
1730	Final Activities for evening		
		1700-1830	1830-2000
		IMT	Scenario 3
		Group A (field)	TaC
		Group B (field)	SRM
		TaC	
		Scenario 3	
2000 2045	Stand down for night Check in	DS – All teams redeployed to Final waypoint for overnight camp close to final finishing point DS - All participants to check in with DS on arrival at overnight camp	
Sun.	Sept 6 th 2020		
Time	Event	Comment	
0615	Briefing by radio	DS	
0715	Clue site processing scenarios	Clue site processing, 45 mins Tent site – whole group 45 mins Vehicle – whole group	
0900	All teams return to ICP	DS	
1000	Debrief and Brunch		
1130	Pack up and Depart	All	

Appendix 7.3

Overview of each scenario for the IMT.

Duration *3 hours total including brief and debrief*

Missing Woodsman out marking trees for future harvest. Dropped off by Crew boss at corner of location. Timing for pickup was not met by Missing Person. As no one was logging in the area missing person was seen putting earbuds in just as he set off on task.

Informant Joe Foreman
Age 39
Address: 13 Hukatea Place, Turangi
Cell 0220045791
Current Picture available on cell phone.
Number in party 1

Missing person details

Name: Buster Gangs
Age: 26
Wearing: As volunteer is wearing on day
Last seen 4 hours prior
Family At home – informed but worried.
Media: At Base inquiring and photographing
LKP To be provided but within Pine block and suitable deadfall.
Injuries/found state: Leg entrapment and concussion

Number: alone
Age 28
Medical conditions Hard of hearing from chainsaw use.
Fitness very fit
Experience None
Reliability reliable
Clothing As per the volunteer on the day.
Equipment Cell phone but no coverage
Weather Existing on day
Terrain Hazards As per area...
Length of time missing 3 hours

Other details.

Was last seen by Joe when Joe dropped him off to mark selected trees for thinning. He was wearing Hard Hat with Ear-defenders but was also wearing ear-buds listening to music.

Scenario 2 *3 hours total including brief and debrief*

Missing Hunter – possibly Poaching

Informant Hunting mate
Informant Name Michael S Hooter
Age 63
Address: 13 Houghton Bay Road, Wellington
Cell 027465109
Current Picture available on cell phone.
Number in party 1

Missing person details

Name: Phillip Dearsly
Age: 56
Wearing: As volunteer is wearing on day
Last seen 0700 at vehicle
Cell-phone Number To be provided
Family Wife
Media: At Base inquiring and photographing
LKP To be provided but within access to waterway with bush edge and 2m drop
Injuries/found state: Mild heart attack, concussion and dehydrated – has own medication for Angina

Number : alone
Age 28
Medical conditions Hard of hearing from chainsaw use.
Fitness very fit
Experience None
Reliability reliable
Clothing As per the volunteer on the day.
Equipment Cell phone but no coverage
Weather Existing on day
Terrain Hazards As per area...
Length of time missing 3 hours

Other details

Was carrying a rifle (243 win cartridge), small day pack and wearing camo possibly. Was looking for Sika
And has hunted here before.
Has previously had mild heart issues and carries own medication in form of Nitro pills which are administered orally. He also has had previous concussions from rugby and a car accident.

Scenario 3 *3 hours total including brief and debrief*

Despondent

Informant Partner
Informant Name Janice Vermecastki
Age 27
Address: 62 Wakeman Road, Acacia Bay, Taupo
Cell 021291581
Current Picture available on cell phone.
Number in party 1

Missing person details

Name: Chad Vermecastki
Age: 31
Wearing: As volunteer is wearing on day
Employment: Ceased...Duty Manager at Manuels Hotel, Taupo.
Last seen 0700
Family None – but friends looking
Media: At Base inquiring and photographing
LKP To be provided but within access to waterway with bush edge.
Injuries/found state: Concussion and broken wrist

Number:	alone
Age	31
Medical conditions	Depressed since losing job due to Covid
Fitness	Very fit
Experience	None
Reliability	normally reliable
Clothing	As per the volunteer on the day.
Equipment	Cell phone but no coverage
Weather	Existing on day
Terrain Hazards	As per area...
Length of time missing	3 hours

Other details

Knows the area well having worked on Lochinver. Worked here 4 years ago. Recently purchased house and he has felt the loss of job, relying on Janice's income and inability to find new work.

Appendix 7.4 Overview of field exercises

Navigation 1.5 hours

Plan using map GPS a route off track calculating distances and approximate times.
Identify hazards off map and contours
Create "Searchers" briefing for task
Identify throughout route position and mark on map
Navigate using GPS by setting waypoint, go to and using Trac-bac functions.
Project waypoint and go to.
Record and prepare communication for broadcast.
Provide 6 digit LOCSTAT or SITREP and communicate this.
Provide 14 digit grid reference for clue/item and communicate this
Save into GPS notarised clues, waypoints or POI's

Mobile Unresponsive Search Method demonstration 1.5 hours

"SEARCHERS" risk assessment completed
Instruction on RD (AROD)
Average Range of Detection in area to be searched
Conduct a search through bush area (minimum 3 sweeps) using Purposeful Wandering for 10 items placed in search area. These to be spread out.
Discuss boundary marking with Paper marking tape or Crepe paper** in 1 m lengths for visibility
Purposeful Wander through area and resets to get good coverage and used to boundary marking.

Sound Line, Sound Sweep (SL, SW) 1.5 hours

Receive task and brief Team on tasking
Searchers assessment and brief
Understand the intent of your task – S.E.T.
Relate Task to Missing Persons Matrix.
Brief Team on correct procedure for sound line.
Gear check before commencement – all have adequate whistle, compass (working) flagging tape.
Conduct 2km sound line.
Conduct 500m sound sweep in area with no response
Demonstrate sweep to responsive person.
Debrief and feedback.

Stretcher and Ropes 1.5 hours

Basic knot craft and low angle belay and backup
Loading a patient and making comfortable and secure for transport.
Carry over distance utilising full team with changes, side-swaps and various methods.
Use and demonstrate correct calls for lifting, lowering, uphill and downhill movement.
Stretcher attendants' roles assigned, calls made correctly and patient care with Obs completed
Appropriate materials and demonstration for Hypothermia burrito wrap

Clue-Site Processing - Tent site

Overnight group tent-sites to be packed and teams rotate to another groups site:

Group A to Group B site
Group B to Group C site
Group C to Group A site

Method:

Revise S.T.O.P.P.E.R. and contamination control process.

Assign overall leader for task.

Clue-Pro map to be created by Team.

Areas assigned and processed and information collated

Clues listed along with 14 digit location, full details and assumption recorded for relay by radio.

Notes should include assumptions on:

No of campers/occupants

Toileting site location and sexes??

Cooking area

Water Collection area and method(s)

Cleaning area

Personal hygiene area

D.O.T. to and from site

Other relevant information

Maximum time 45 minutes – 5 minute debrief

Clue Site Processing – Vehicle

IMT to organise 1 vehicle per team to be in-situ no later than 0745.

Method:

Revise S.T.O.P.P.E.R. and contamination control process.

Assign overall leader for task.

Approach vehicle from least likely angle and check vehicle for occupant(s)

Process vehicle for number of occupants.

Ascertain direction of travel from vehicle

Where possible ascertain purpose/activity subject was moving for

Clue-Pro map to be created by Team.

Areas assigned and processed and information collated

Clues listed along with 14-digit location, full details and assumption recorded for relay by radio.

**Drivers note*

Where possible take 2 or 3 passengers to site.

Congregate at boot/rear of vehicle and put different footwear on.

Revisit side doors and put footwear or other item inside vehicle.

All walk away from vehicle in same direction to common pathway or egress route.

Drop one receipt on route out 10-15m from vehicle.

Maximum time 45 minutes – 5 minute debrief