



CONNECTING THE SEARCH AND RESCUE SECTOR

NEWS

2015 NZSAR AWARDS



NZSAR Award recipients with Hon Craig Foss, Associate Minister for Transport

“You see yourselves as ordinary people simply doing what needs to be done. In fact, you’re ordinary people doing extraordinary things – sometimes at significant personal risk.”

The opening comments from the Hon Craig Foss, Associate Minister for Transport, set the scene honouring the recipients of the 2015 New Zealand Search and Rescue Awards at Parliament in May.

Craig Foss noted the inter-agency cooperation in a number of milestones over the past year, including the completion of the MEOSAR receiving station and the rollout of the Rauora mass exercises.

“The work of your sector is collaborative in nature – organisations coordinate responses and rely on information sharing to prepare for rescue operations. Because you know you can rely on each other, the rest of us know we can rely on you. (These awards) reflect some of the characteristics typical of the search and rescue sector: commitment, perseverance, determination,

tenacity and, in all of these, a strong sense of teamwork.”

Richard Walker, from LandSAR Nelson, acknowledged the dedication of his peers during his acceptance speech for the Gold Award in Operational Activity.

“It’s a great honour to get this award. It shows the commitment our group puts towards what we do in the field. It also shows the professional level of training that LandSAR provides which enables us to go out and do these jobs.”

Support Activity Gold Award winner Delanie Halton talked about the value of the WanderSearch tracking programme.



Gold Support Delanie Halton

“It’s very important across the country, especially for people living with a cognitive impairment who have the potential to wander – it’s just a faster way to find them.”

GOLD AWARD – OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY



Kathy Solly standing in for Mika Verheul, Richard Walker and Silvano Lorandi

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 2015.

- *Silvano Lorandi*
- *Mika Verheul*
- *Richard John Walker*

From *LandSAR Nelson*

For the rescue of two people from Robert Ridge, Nelson Lakes National Park on 5 September 2015

Two tourists, insufficiently equipped and inexperienced, were in dire need of rescue. These three volunteers, each highly skilled in alpine conditions, described the situation in one of their hourly reports as “atrocious... it doesn’t get any worse”.

The rescue team used great navigational skills to find the tourists in whiteout conditions at 3.15 in the morning. It took the team a further two hours to get to them.

The professional team work, with excellent role definition, was key to the successful outcome.

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.

- *Delanie Halton*

From *WanderSearch Auckland Charitable Trust*

For her services to WanderSearch and the WanderSearch programme in Auckland

Delanie Halton is the Administrator for WanderSearch Auckland Charitable Trust, involved in applying for and sourcing corporate and private funding. She has helped establish standards and comprehensively researched wanderers to establish patterns and determine wanderers’ needs within the community.

She has helped establish the WanderSearch programme at Auckland Hospital, liaises with rest homes, and actively promotes WanderSearch at public talks, promotions and displays.

Delanie also conducts WanderSearch training at SAREXs.



CERTIFICATES OF ACHIEVEMENT – OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY



Operation Lake Tekapo recipients

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 2015.

- *Clinton Miles*
- *Simon Turner*

Tekapo Helicopters

- *Coastguard Mackenzie Lakes*
- *LandSAR Mackenzie*
- *Lake Tekapo Volunteer Fire Brigade*

For the rescue of a group of kayakers on Lake Tekapo on 25 September 2015

Around 3.30pm the wind began gusting up to 30 knots, waves rose to around two metres – and eleven kayakers were in trouble. Both water and air temperatures were extremely cold, and two kayakers died.

The operation involved vessel and air search, and the subsequent rescue of hypothermic survivors. These rescuers’ quick actions saved three of the kayakers lives and prevented the rest from becoming seriously ill.



- *Emma Milburn and her dog Dart*

From *LandSAR Search Dogs*

For commitment in the search for a missing person near Balclutha beginning 23 July 2015

Emma Milburn searched for the 79-year-old with her dog Dart for more than 50 hours over five days – the last two when the search had been scaled down – eventually finding his body. They then located another deceased person two weeks later.

Emma was deployed for more than 360 hours on operations in 2015 – almost half of the total operational hours for all Search Dogs handlers nationwide.



Operation Redbeach Piha - These recipients are from four different units. The awards ceremony was the first time they had been together since the incident

- *Jackson Henry Smith*
From Red Beach Surf Life Saving Club
- *Duncan Clarke*
From Piha Surf Life Saving Club
- *Nicholas Tomkins*
From Orewa Surf Life Saving Club
- *Leilani Jesse Fuemana*
- *Simone Hollier*
From United North Piha Surf Life Saving Club

For the rescue of a swimmer on North Piha Beach on 24 November 2015

Five lifeguards from four different units worked together to save the life of a 19-year-old woman missing in rough conditions. Off duty lifeguard, Jackson Smith, was first on the scene.

There is no doubt this patient would not have survived if Jackson and the other lifeguards had not been around the Piha area at the time. The skills that all the lifeguards brought together is a credit to their training.



- *Greenlea Rescue Helicopter*
- *LandSAR Turangi*
- *New Zealand Police SAR*
- *Ruapehu Alpine Rescue Organisation (RARO)*
- *St John Ambulance Taupo*

For the rescue of four injured climbers from Mt Ngauruhoe on 17 June 2015

Falling several hundred metres at different times, four climbers lay injured and scattered down the mountainside.

Eleven sorties were made in challenging conditions, it was treacherous underfoot, but the team managed to expertly rescue the climbers from the ice-covered mountainside, at night.

Six St John Ambulance staff were on-site to assist with the patients. Had they not been rescued that night some, if not all, would have died from hypothermia.

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 2015 or over an extended period.

- *Shane William Beech*
From Coastguard Maketu

For his commitment and services to search and rescue

Shane founded the Maketu Volunteer Sea Rescue Service and helped establish Coastguard Maketu, where he is still President eight years on.

Shane is also a Senior Operational Crew member and Media Officer. He has managed projects to upgrade the unit's vessel and facilities in a community of just over 1000 people.

His continued passion for the betterment of the community carries into his involvement with Youth in Emergency Services (YES).

- *William John Funnell*

For his commitment and services to search and rescue in New Zealand for nearly 50 years

John has been involved in saving thousands of lives and promoting safety within the aviation and SAR sectors. He is a pioneer in using helicopters to rescue people in remote or difficult places. Before helicopters, John used fixed-wing aircraft.

He helped set up the Philips Search and Rescue Trust and has held senior aviation industry positions. John's knowledge and skills have also significantly assisted the Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand during searches.

- *Murray Miskelly*

From Coastguard Northland Air Patrol, for his leadership and services to search and rescue

Murray has been Northland Air Patrol's Unit President for three terms. An operational pilot, he has been involved in all but one of the callouts this year and participated in all unit activities.

Murray spends considerable time with the non-pilot members teaching them basic operations and was instrumental in transitioning to tablet-based navigation and planning.

He can be credited for the ongoing success of the unit where he motivates members and leads by example.

- *Lynn Stuart*

From Coastguard Wanaka Lakes, for his commitment and services to search and rescue

Lynn is the Principle Skipper, covering both Wanaka and Hawea Lakes. Lynn's hours of service exemplify his dedication and professionalism. He runs the new recruits' induction, developing an outstanding relationship that helps ensure all new recruits get maximum support, and stay.

As the Unit Safety Officer, he ensures that the Coastguard vessel and its equipment are fit for purpose, carrying out basic maintenance and repairs.

Lynn took part in the summer community awareness programme, and continues to be involved in unit fundraising activities. ●





Expectations and Perceptions of Search and Rescue. The research used qualitative semi-structured interviews with 79 participants across 9 sites. The report was primarily designed as exploratory research, setting out to describe and help better understand the expectations that the New Zealand public have.

People don't really have a strong understanding of which organisations undertake SAR,

and have even less understanding of the responsibilities of the different SAR organisations. While most understand that much of SAR work is volunteer-based, people overestimate both the amount of government funding SAR gets and the number of paid people used in SAR operations.

When respondents were asked about their responsibility in preventing a search and rescue operation, people generally

listed more than they actually carried out or had done. For example, although many people thought it was their responsibility to carry a beacon when walking and hiking in New Zealand's wilderness, they were not actually carrying a beacon on the trip they were doing.

While providing the starting point for insight into the public's expectations and perceptions, the report serves as a guide for more detailed quantitative research in key areas, such as the aforementioned disconnect between people's knowledge of what they should do versus what they actually do.

The full report is available on the NZSAR website. It makes for interesting reading as it canvases a wide and varied range of expectations and perceptions across land, sea and air activities. ●

If lost and/or hurt in the bush, the New Zealand public generally expect to be found within two to five hours. This timeframe reduces to between 20 minutes and 1.5 hours of contacting authorities on sea, while people generally expect a SAR response either immediately or within 30 minutes if they are at the beach – even if it is not patrolled.

These are just some of the findings outlined in NZSAR's research – Public

nzsar.org.nz/Publications/Research

SAR SQUAD TRAINING

The annual Police SAR training camp was held at Dip Flat, Wairau Valley, over the first two weeks of May. The programme covered a range of SAR skills, including navigation and route planning, communications, IMT roles and briefings, search techniques, and field skills. Twenty-nine Police participants were joined by two LandSAR, three DOC and two New Zealand Defence Force personnel, with senior experienced Police SAR staff as tutors. It culminated with a three-day SAR exercise. Participants have now returned to their districts to become active SAR personnel. ●



A FAREWELL NOTE FROM MARTIN

At 30 June I will step down from my role as Chair of the NZSAR Council, with the end of my term as Secretary for Transport. Peter Mersi (currently CEO of LINZ) will take up the position from 18 July and I am thrilled that Peter has been appointed. He is someone I know well, and will be great in the role.



As I reflect on nearly eight years as Chair of the Council, the one thing that I continue to be struck by is the commitment and expertise of thousands of paid and unpaid SAR professionals who make our SAR system work in New Zealand – a system where so many people do extra-ordinary things to support, search for or rescue others in distress. Without this commitment it would be very difficult to operate such a successful SAR system in our country (and SAR region).

One of the highlights for me in this regard has been the annual NZSAR Awards where we have been able to celebrate the significant contributions of at least a few people and organisations. Every year I have been left with an immense sense of respect and admiration for those we have been able to recognise. I know, of course, there are many more people who are making significant contributions that we have not been able to recognise in this way. So, I want to take this opportunity to thank you all for the significant contribution you make to serving your country, fellow citizens and visitors through SAR.

Finally, I want to also acknowledge the work and support provided by the SAR Secretariat, led by Duncan. The Secretariat is small and has limited funding, but plays a critical role in supporting the Council and providing the glue that holds much of our system together. I think they do a great job for us all.

Best wishes for the future.
Martin



Arthur's Pass, deployment of a LandSAR team

“I wanted an exercise that would engage people, making it worth their while, and test different skills and new equipment. And, of course, it gave us a chance to find answers for Peter’s family.”

Peter Crowther left home in 2013 and never returned. His car was found near the Hawdon Shelter, in Arthur’s Pass, about three weeks later. Aged 55, Peter was described as at risk from self-harm. However, nothing relating to him was found, despite an extensive search operation.

Canterbury SAR Coordinator Sergeant Phil Simmonds, looking for a way to “keep things fresh”, decided opening this cold case would be an ideal opportunity for the region’s annual search and rescue exercise (SAREX).

“I wanted an exercise that would engage people, making it worth their while, and test different skills and new equipment. And, of course, it gave us a chance to find answers for Peter’s family.

“Other benefits included a peer review of the original search, and the missing person files. We re-interviewed Peter’s family, friends and witnesses, and to keep it real, we also researched things like the condition of the body and clothes. All of this gave us additional information to use as we planned the SAREX.”

The SAREX was one of the largest ever held in the region, involving 80 LandSAR and 30 Police SAR squad personnel. Given

these numbers, the exercise’s focus was on the less tested aspects of the CIMS, Incident Management Team (IMT) and Search Management components.

“It also allowed us to mentor and train people in IMT roles. This was really important as there are very few chances to get people involved at this level.”

Two meetings prior to the exercise were held, with up to a dozen people representing all the Canterbury SAR groups. They fleshed out the information, gathering both old and new, considered scenarios and planned the search area. Due to the large numbers, initial tasking was completed before the exercise which prevented long delays in deploying teams on the day.

The exercise took place in mid-March at Hawdon Shelter.

“There were no clues placed in the field as this would detract from the object of the exercise, which was to locate Peter. Areas of higher probability were searched first with victim recovery dogs, followed by search teams covering the same segment.”

As the search tasks were completed, teams were debriefed and feedback collected. A hot debrief was held at the end of the SAREX. “Although nothing relating to Peter Crowther was found, it was a successful exercise as it gave us the

opportunity to train a large group with varying experience in a wide range of SAR skills.”

A number of things were learned, amongst them to allocate smaller segments for search teams in densely vegetated areas and to integrate the Police SAR squad with LandSAR field teams. The SAREX also tested the viability of the recently purchased mobile police station, in essence a large truck with computers, whiteboards and desk space.

The general consensus is that alternating between a rogaie style exercise and a cold case every year is a good balance. Phil notes that revisiting a cold case, while it wasn’t resolved, provided a greater level of engagement, motivating more to be involved.

“Such a vital element of a SAREX is the social connection – it has to be enjoyable. A lot of groups are bringing in younger people, so it’s also a chance for everyone to meet, chat, support, teach and learn from each other. Mixing it up gave us that opportunity.” ●

A FOCUS ON THE WORK OF RCCNZ, ITS POLICIES AND PEOPLE

SAROs

Andrew Parsons



Nick Burt



Deputy Manager Operations RCCNZ Operations Paul Craven, National List MP Chris Bishop, RCCNZ search and rescue mission coordinator and watch leader John Dickson, and the Minister for Transport Simon Bridges in our new Operations room

In May we proudly graduated two new Search and Rescue Officers (SAROs), Andrew Parsons and Nick Burt, after they completed the first SARO course we've needed since 2009. Andrew and Nick underwent 14 weeks of training, to international standards, in a wide range of skills associated with marine and aviation SAR. The training included visits to many of the SAR people we deal with.

SAROs work 24/7, on 12 hour shifts, from the RCCNZ operations room in Avalon. They are responsible for the coordination of Category II SAR Operations (and many other tasks) across the NZSRR, and also support Police in Category I SAR Operations.

Andrew's career is filled with maritime and aviation experience. He started as a sailmaker in Auckland before gaining a cadetship with a shipping line. He later disembarked to travel and pursue his commercial helicopter pilot's license. He then had a wide variety of crew and support roles, before heading back to sea, where his

previous role was skipper of a large private motor cruiser, operating in New Zealand and Fiji.

Nick joins us from a career as a radio operator at the Maritime Operations Centre (maritime radio). He has a very strong operational response and incident management background, having earlier worked in train control and as a volunteer with the Rural Fire Service and Ambulance.

Both will make great additions to our highly skilled and varied team.

The SAROs are part of the wider RCCNZ personnel who now work from a purpose built facility in the Avalon Studios next door to where we used to be. You are all very welcome to pop in for a visit - while a booked visit is generally easier for us, we can try and cope with the walk-ins and offer you a cuppa! ●

SUPPORTING SAR IN THE PACIFIC

The RCCNZ Pacific Programme is well underway. Over the next three years we will visit around seven Pacific Island countries to assist with training, support national SAR plans and exercise those plans. Scoping visits have been made to Kiribati, Cook Islands and Niue with a training visit set for Kiribati in July. Although Kiribati is outside of our SRR, MFAT has asked us to assist them due to New Zealand's special relationship with the country. We will also

discuss communications with each country, given we're responsible for New Zealand's maritime radio. In addition to this project we have been asked by the USA to visit American Samoa - also within our SRR - to support a SAR assessment of them. Over the next 12 months this work will be of great benefit when we host the April 2017 Pacific SAR conference in Auckland, which will be attended by Australia, France, Fiji, USA and 17 other Pacific nations. ●



We have reported before on the ongoing rise of beacon ownership. It's an encouraging trend that can lead to reducing the search in SAR, increase efficiency and reduce costs of search and rescue operations (SAROPs).

Of course the increase leads to an increase in beacon-related SAROPs. Over the past six years we've had more than 600 SAROPs from Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) alone (as opposed to ELTs and EPIRBs). We have analysed the data on inappropriate use of PLBs, to determine if there is any substance to the growing perception that PLBs are being activated for minor or trivial matters. We found that less than 3% of activations were inappropriate, and of that, only half had SAR assets deployed. Activating a beacon is subjective; it depends on the location, time of day, weather, food supplies, injury, people's perspectives, etc., and there are no hard and fast rules or set of circumstances beyond being 'in distress'.

Despite the growing beacon ownership, we still have around 30% 'unregistered'. This means when we detect an activation we have no ability to phone the owner or next-of-kin, or to do any screening to determine the circumstances and the best SAR asset to task. We ask that you continue to spread these messages to ensure a more effective response.

- Register your beacon before you go out
- Update your details as they change
- Dispose of your beacon correctly
- If you accidentally activate your beacon, call RCCNZ on 0508 472 269
- Wear your PLB – it's of no use inside a pack
- www.beacons.org.nz has all the information you need about using and registering beacons.

We treat every beacon activation seriously. If we can't speak with the registered owner, we will talk to another nominated person to assist with our screening and decision-making. We will always err on the side of caution and task a SAR asset to assist. ●

RCCNZ INSIGHT

FORMULATING PLAN B

RCCNZ's Manager Mike Hill happily acknowledges he is "a bit of a planning geek, which no doubt annoys the people who live and work with me". But, he says he is becoming increasingly aware of the value of a good plan backed up by that essential Plan B.

"We work with unpredictability, and we work across agencies, so Plan B – or contingency planning – needs to be robust enough to cope."

This is front of mind for Mike as he works his way through his 45-thousand-word thesis arguing for a greater use of a 'whole of government' emergency management planning process.

"I am looking at various discussions, as well as actual events, where the inter-agency planning within the response could have gone a bit better – such as the 2009 Victoria bushfires, 2005 London bombings, the Rena grounding, and the 2011 Christchurch earthquake. A lack of record keeping, gaps between what happened at Incident Management level, and what was happening on the ground are just some of the issues that could have been solved with effective planning."

RCCNZ staff are often working on Plan B as they think through the options. "We may be responding to a land-based beacon alert where we task a helicopter, but often due to weather, we are also preparing for a land-based team to deploy as well. Search

and rescue by its nature is fluid: weather, variants to environment, variants in skills at certain junctures, intel collected that alters the tasks, plus the list of what can change during an operation is long, so we must prepare for all manner of scenarios. It's what the public expect of us as professionals."

Mike says developing a communications plan is one example. "We can't always be reliant on one form of communication so RCC plans what will be used, and when and how, to ensure we can continue to communicate with resources in the field as the situation changes when new information comes in and vice versa."

Operations involve more than just one organisation. Inter-agency joint planning adds another dimension. It requires a high level of understanding, relationship building and trust, and it isn't always easy due to the various differing process and cultures – but it is very important.

"Because information can be scant, breaking the problem down into smaller parts to fix it requires a combined plan that leverages off the unique skills and

capabilities that the individual SAR organisations have – RCC skills and expertise are different from Coastguard, for example. The stakes are high, there are risks involved, but effective planning uses the best expertise available and gives us the best chance at success."

Mike says he is more than happy to discuss the value of planning with anyone interested, but in the meantime he encourages SAR people to have a look at the December 2015 Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management publication "Response Planning in CDEM". ●

For Response Planning in CDEM hard copy:
www.civildefence.govt.nz/cdem-sector/cdem-framework/guidelines/response-planning-cdem

INSIGHTS

- **Break the problem down into component parts to avoid leaping to a flawed solution**
- **Engage with the relevant agency experts to construct the robust response**
- **Keep comprehensive records – they show the decision-making processes**

Remember – planning mitigates risk

CALENDAR

SAREXs and SAR training see:

nzsar.org.nz/Calendar/Events

**LandSAR Conference, 29 – 31 July,
New Plymouth**

**Health and Safety Seminar,
17 – 18 September, Wellington**

**NZSAR Consultative Committee Meeting,
25 August, Wellington**

**NZSAR Council Meeting, 13 September,
Wellington**

**Coastguard Conference, 15 – 16 October,
Taupo**

**More information available soon at:
www.sarscene.ca/2016/index_e.asp**

WEBSITES

**New Zealand Search and Rescue Council.
This newsletter is available as a PDF on
this website: www.nzsar.org.nz**

**Safety information and tips for the public
planning outdoor activities:
www.adventuresmart.org.nz**

**Information about 406 Beacons, including
where to purchase, rent and register a
distress beacon: www.beacons.org.nz**

Avalanche Advisory – www.avalanche.net.nz

**Australia New Zealand SAR Conference
Podcasts – sar.anzdmc.com.au/**

**Public Expectations and Perceptions'
Research – [nzsar.org.nz/Publications/
Research](http://nzsar.org.nz/Publications/Research)**

DUNCAN'S DESK



Perhaps it's not popular with everyone, but I'm excited that winter is here. For those of us into alpine activities, we like to see a bit of snow on the mountains – although there can be too much of a good thing. A DOC/NZSAR Council partnership is helping fund the Mountain Safety Council's Avalanche Advisory. For anyone contemplating going near the snowline this winter, it's worth taking a look at **www.avalanche.net.nz** ahead of time. Given our renewed focus on health and safety, the Avalanche Advisory is there to be consulted before the deployment of any SAR teams or assets into areas of potential avalanche hazard.

I recently had the privilege of attending and addressing the second Australia New Zealand SAR Conference in Queensland. Around 200 delegates attended this conference including a few from our side of the Tasman. The one-day conference included six keynote and over 20 individual presentations on a wide range of land/sea/air search and rescue topics. I came away from the conference with a much broader appreciation of the challenges Australian SAR people have to contend with (e.g. hyperthermia & salt water crocodiles) but

also the conviction that we can do much better at learning from each other. If you want to follow up, most of the presentations will be made available as podcasts shortly at **sar.anzdmc.com.au**

I'd also recommend you take a look at our 'Public Expectations and Perceptions' research discussed on page 4. We're not aware of any other SAR research of this type worldwide and it gives a good basis to be better informed about what people think of us. The full research report is available on our website. I'm looking forward to building upon this in the coming months and years.

This winter is also a time of change and renewal. RCCNZ is undertaking acceptance testing of a new distress beacon ground station, has moved to a new and improved premises and welcomed in two new Search and Rescue Officers (more on page 7). Martin Matthews concludes his term as Chair of the NZSAR Council at the end of June, having given our sector nearly eight years of outstanding leadership and service. As you can read on page 4. Rhett and I visited the Police search and rescue training course at Dip Flat in May. We were very impressed by the enthusiasm of the students and the willingness of the hugely experienced instructors who are passing along their knowledge. Looking at these things collectively, I have great confidence that our organisations, structures and systems have matured to the level where, despite the occasional loss of highly experienced people, knowledge is effectively passed on between SAR 'generations' and that the 'system' is learning, improving and becoming increasingly robust.

Stay safe.
Duncan Ferner
d.ferner@transport.govt.nz

Queen's Birthday Honours

Congratulations to:

John Karman, of Tauranga who became a Member of The New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM) For services to surf life saving.

NZSAR AWARDS

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.org.nz/awards.

The 2016 Awards nominations close 31 January 2017.



Link is produced by New Zealand Search and Rescue Council

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