

SAROP REVIEW

Operation Mohi

Location: Maketu Bay of Plenty

Date: 11th to 16th February 2019

Report version: Final

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on behalf of
NZSAR Secretariat

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Executive Summary

The New Zealand Police is responsible for all Category I Search and Rescue Incidents.

On Monday 11th February 2019, at about 2039hrs, New Zealand Police were notified that Mr John Mohi, aged 77 years and suffering from onset dementia, had gone missing in Maketu, Te Puke, Bay of Plenty.

Mr Mohi had gone for his usual walk after lunch and not returned home. When it was realized Mr Mohi was missing, family and members of the Maketu community conducted their own search which proved unsuccessful. Police were then contacted.

On receipt of the call, a senior member of Police attended. Shortly afterwards the on-call Search and Rescue (SAR) member was notified, a SAR operation was initiated with the first SAR Team briefed and deployed into the field by 2330hrs.

Search efforts were suspended at 0400hrs and at 0730hrs on Tuesday 12th February 2019 they were resumed. The search continued through the week and concluded early Saturday evening, the 16th February 2019 when Mr Mohi was located deceased, down a steep bank, in bush between Arawa Ave and Wilson Road North, Maketu.

A central tenet of a Search and Rescue Operation is that, "it is an intelligence driven and evidence based operation".

Adherence to this was an important feature of the operation as Media exposure of Mr Mohi's plight generated a number of sightings. There were numerous sightings in Maketu and possible sightings in Rotorua and Mt Maunganui, each had to be investigated and evaluated.

The area surrounding the cluster of confirmed sightings, plotted on a timeline, rightly became the focus of initial search activity. Search efforts broadened as the week progressed, along with areas already searched being revisited. Searchers were challenged by dense vegetation throughout the search.

New information further enhanced Mr Mohi's likely behaviour profile which together with additional resources, shaped further search efforts.

An additional feature of the search was the large numbers of family and community members involved on the ground, assisting Police and LandSAR volunteers. On Friday 15th February 2019 there were 76 recorded, family and community volunteers searching.

It was the application of Incident Management Procedures, proven Search Management techniques, the tenacity of the Incident Management Team and searchers on the ground that brought this search to a conclusion.

1. Recommendations

1. Recognise that a correctly functioning, sustainable, Incident Management Team (IMT) requires each position to be filled with staff who are familiar with the Coordinated Management System.
2. Consider seeking early assistance from neighbouring Police Areas / Districts for CIMS qualified personnel, to support local staff.
3. That during the “Appreciation Process” of the search operation planning, seek support from the Criminal Investigation Branch to conduct an Investigation Phase in parallel with the search operation.
4. Ensure there is good cohesion between the search IMT and the Investigation Team to avoid duplication of effort and information.
5. Ensure that if the IMT consider moving from their dedicated site at the Tauranga Police Station, there is sufficient technology to support the move and staff have the ability to access that technology.
6. Ensure that if the IMT consider moving from their dedicated site at the Tauranga Police Station, there is a degree of separation from the IMT and other responders.
7. When there are a large number of spontaneous search volunteers, early consideration is given to seeking trained search personnel from neighbouring Police Areas / Districts to provide guidance and maintain the effectiveness of the search teams.
8. The Police District, Subject Matter Expert (SME) on SAR Search Dogs should be consulted, early, for an opinion on deployment options.

2. Introduction

On Monday 11th February 2019, at about 1300hrs, Mr John MOHI , left his home address for his daily walk. His usual walk is about a 40 minute circuit around Church Road to Wilson Road and back home to Church Road. About 3 months earlier Mr Mohi had been diagnosed with the onset of dementia.

He was expected back at home at about 1400hrs. When it was realized Mr Mohi had failed to return home, family posted on the Maketu Facebook , advising Mr Mohi was not home from his walk.

Family and members of the Maketu community spent the remainder of the afternoon and early evening searching for Mr Mohi.

Mr Mohi had been seen by a nephew walking along Wilson Road North , from Church Road , in a southerly direction, towards SH2, at about 1430hrs.

A granddaughter reported Mr Mohi missing to the Police at about 2039hrs. Mr Mohi was not reported missing earlier because family mistakenly thought they had to wait 48 hours.

A senior member of Police attended in the first instance. The ON Call SAR member was advised at 2120hrs. A search and rescue operation was instigated with the first SAR Team briefed and deployed into the field by 2330hrs.

Searchers continued on into the early hours of Tuesday morning . Search efforts were suspended at 0400hrs and resumed at 07.30hrs .

There was a large turnout of community volunteers and family to assist Police and LandSAR with the search. The large turnout of community and family searchers was a feature of the search endeavours over the following days.

Initial search efforts were focussed on the environs of Mr Mohi's home and usual walking circuit. There were a cluster of confirmed sightings in this area.

As the week progressed the search area expanded and initial search areas were revisited.

Search efforts were peer reviewed on Thursday, with additional resources being injected on Friday and Saturday from neighbouring areas.

Mr Mohi was located late Saturday afternoon , in the bottom of a steep overgrown gully ,near an area that had been searched previously.

Mr Mohi was attended by Police personnel and then with the help of family, removed from the area.

3. Background

3.1 Background to the Search

Mr John Mohi was reported missing by his granddaughter at 2039hrs on Monday 11 February 2019. He had gone for his usual 40 minute afternoon walk at 1300hrs and had not returned. Mr Mohi suffered from onset dementia and other mental health issues. Despite extensive searching by family and Maketu community members, Mr Mohi remained unlocated.

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

DATE:

- Monday 11th February to Saturday 16th February 2019

LOCATION:

- Maketu – Bay of Plenty

ORGANISING AGENCY:

- NZ Police (Western Bay of Plenty Area)

KEY PEOPLE:

- Senior Constable [REDACTED]
- Constable [REDACTED]
- Sergeant [REDACTED]

3.3 Participating organisations

New Zealand Police

NZ LandSAR

NZ Surf Life Saving

3.4 Aim

To gain an understanding of the sequence, times of events and key decisions relating to the Search and Rescue Operation (SAROP) of dementia suffered John Mohi, who went missing in Maketu on 11 February 2019

3.5 Review objectives

- a. The IMT tools and arrangements including search tools, planning, investigation, intelligence, information flow and information analysis used and applied during this SAROP.
- b. The positions and sizes of areas to be searched and the capabilities, teams, skills and equipment applied to those search areas, given the information available at the time.
- c. The ability to scale, resource and support the operation with appropriately trained personnel throughout the SAROP.

- d. Search conclusion and transition to the recovery phase (exclude the conduct of the recovery phase itself).
- e. Family and Iwi liaison and support arrangements.
- f. The management of family and other spontaneous search volunteers.
- g. The SAR capabilities, skills and equipment of SAR personnel involved.
- h. Media relations.
- i. The use and tasking of any air and/or marine assets.
- j. Identify any skill , equipment , technology document, process or procedure that may contribute to a significant information and / or performance improvement for this SAROP or a SAROP of this nature

3.6 Search Scenario

Initial Reflex Taskings for Mr Mohi included;

- The cemetery where his wife was buried.
- In the area of the Kaumatua Flats where he used to live.

The scenarios considered a priority where;

- In the Bush
- Lying near to his home address injured
- In the area near to his home address

An additional scenario , considered to be of low likelihood was;

- Taken by the sea (the sea was rough at the time)

With the progression of time further scenarios considered were;

- Uplifted by a motorist to a destination away from Maketu
- The wider rural area proximate to Maketu.

4. Review Methodology

4.1 The agreed outcomes of the Review activity

Make recommendations as appropriate to the New Zealand Search and Rescue Council relevant to improving New Zealand's SAR system , its people, equipment , documentation, skills, processes and procedures.

Develop a 20 – 30 minute case study presentation of the SAROP including recommendations.

4.2 Review scope

Review and consider the appropriateness and / or utility of the following specific aspects of the SAROP with a view to confirming, improving and/or refining SAR documentation , systems , processes , skills , equipment and technology:

The IMT tools and arrangements including search tools, planning, investigation, intelligence, information flow and information analysis used and applied during this SAROP.

The positions and sizes of the areas to be searched and the capabilities , teams, skills and equipment applied to those search areas, given the information available at the time.

The ability to scale, resource and support the operation with appropriately trained personnel throughout the SAROP.

Search conclusion and transition to the recovery phase (exclude the conduct of the recovery phase itself)

Family and Iwi liaison and support arrangements.

The management of family and other support arrangements.

The SAR capabilities , skills and equipment of SAR personnel involved.

Media arrangements

The use and tasking of any air and/or marine assets.

Identify any skill, equipment , technology, document process or procedure that may contribute to a significant information and / or performance improvement for this SAROP or a SAROP of this nature.

4.3 Information Collection

Spoke with the Police member who Peer Reviewed the search.

Viewed electronic search effort documentation

Viewed the Search Debrief notes

Spoke with the person who presented as the Family spokesperson during the search.

4.4 The process followed in preparing and submitting the report

Spoke with the local Police SAR Co-ordinator.

Free access to search documentation was provided.

A copy of the Terms of Reference was provided and discussed.

View File at the Coroner's Office

4.5 Other information

There was a strong interest from senior members of the WBOP Area Police and NZ LandSAR, during the search.

5. Findings

The IMT tools and arrangements including search tools, planning, investigation, intelligence, information flow and information analysis used and applied during this SAROP.

Upon notification of Mr Mohi's absence, a senior member of Police was dispatched to Maketu, the on call Police Search and Rescue member was notified. The on call SAR member, attended the SAR Ops Room at the Tauranga Police Station, assumed the role of Incident Controller, arranged for additional staff and set about coordinating the reflex taskings, planning an initial response and associated activity for the following operational period.

On Tuesday the IMT was moved from the Tauranga Police Station to the Community Centre at Maketu. There was a depreciation in the IT capability with this move combined with a skeleton staffing of the IMT. The positive in this move was the sense of confidence it gave the family and community, that something was being done and not being dealt with remotely.

Later in the week the IMT moved to the nearby Fire Brigade premise's which gave an appropriate degree of separation and improved the ability to manage the security and privacy of information.

On Wednesday, the third day the search, a Police investigation team was assigned to the search, their activity ran parallel to the Search phase and in support of the Planning / Intel Cell of the IMT.

As a consequence of the media exposure, intense local and family interest, there were a number of sightings of Mr Mohi. Each of these sightings were accessed and validated. Those considered confirmed sightings, were then reconfirmed and re-evaluated.

A Search Urgency document was completed at the outset.

Incident Action Plans were completed for each Operation Period

The LandSAR Response Guidelines were considered and implemented.

Personnel familiar with CIMS could have been accessed from neighbouring Police Areas / Districts to spell local IMT responders.

The positions and sizes of the areas to be searched and the capabilities, teams, skills and equipment applied to those search areas, given the information available at the time.

The locations and size of the search areas were appropriate. Maketu is a small coastal community, with the coast as one boundary and surrounded by farmland for the remainder. The topography appears to be relatively benign. However it is not without its challenges, there is more than one thickly overgrown gully and pockets of thick growth in the residential areas. (Appendix page 15 -19)

Search efforts were applied to lineal features and the areas of confirmed sightings. There was an intensity of search effort, in the area of the cluster of confirmed sightings. (Appendix page 18)

There were an extraordinary number of spontaneous volunteers from the community and extended family, which in the early stages of the search, whilst greatly appreciated, created some additional challenges for the IMT. It is of great credit to the Family spokeswoman that these people were organised into groups to help with the search.

The ability to scale, resource and support the operation with appropriately trained personnel throughout the SAROP.

Initial deployment of trained personnel was adequate. There was a steady injection of trained personnel as the search progressed, particularly as the search effort extended into the week. However, earlier consideration of staff numbers required for an extended search would have been beneficial and assisted in maintaining the effectiveness of the search teams.

Search conclusion and transition to the recovery phase (exclude the conduct of the recovery phase itself)

Once located, Mr Mohi was quickly and discreetly attended to by trained personnel. Family were involved at the appropriate time with the removal of Mr Mohi from the gully, supported by the Iwi Liaison Officer.

Family and Iwi liaison and support arrangements.

Strong throughout. The IMT recognised the importance of this role early in the search, given the large numbers of family and community members who arrived to assist in the search. The Police Iwi Liaison Officer in conjunction with the Family spokesperson became the link between the IMT and family

The management of family and other support arrangements.

A significant number of family and community members responded to assist in the search, thought to be close to 100 in the first two days. Whilst the number in the field, lessened as the search extended into the week, overall there were large numbers involved on each day. Spontaneous volunteers were also utilised in logistic roles and food preparation.

The Police Iwi Liaison Officer, Community Constable and Family Spokesperson worked together to achieve success in this area.

In most cases a Search Team, consisted of a member of Police, a member of LandSAR and 5 or more Family members. There were some teams, comprised solely of Family, these were assisted by a roving member of Police.

The SAR capabilities, skills and equipment of SAR personnel involved.

No issues, appropriate for response. Support from neighbouring Police Areas / Districts, sooner, would have assisted local staff, manage the large numbers of family / community volunteers in the field.

Media arrangements

There was good local and regional Media exposure for the search, however the scenario of Mr Mohi being “uplifted” by a motorist, didn’t come through strongly enough. It was hoped that there would have been greater exposure, of this scenario, on national TV News.

The use and tasking of any air and/or marine assets.

Air assets – Eagle was utilised on Tuesday night; the local airframe was unavailable on Monday night. A Drone was considered but Mr Mohi was found before it was utilised.

Marine Assets – IRB utilised on Tuesday, whilst the weather had been fine, the sea had been particularly rough from a previous storm and there were high tides. It was considered, that had Mr Mohi wandered down to the beach he could have been swept out – this was not a strong scenario however it couldn’t be discounted completely, therefore the IRB was dispatched.

Identify any skill, equipment, technology, document process or procedure that may contribute to a significant information and / or performance improvement for this SAROP or a SAROP of this nature.

Most often, Planning / Intell seek an opinion on survivability. Whilst this was sought, in addition, a Medical Profile was obtained. This assisted greatly with the Lost Person Behaviour (LPB) considerations.

Having the software, capable of downloading the electronic data, from outside agencies, would have been of great assistance to the Planning / Intell Cell.

Irrespective of whether the IMT considers the search area to have been contaminated, the District, Subject Matter Expert (SME) on SAR Search Dogs should be consulted, early, for an opinion on deployment.

The IMT, need to ensure they have mechanisms in place, to improve the communication, between the Investigation Team and the IMT. Communication was disjointed at times.

In recent times the majority of searches have been run from the SAR Op Room at the Tauranga Police Station – this search started off there but then migrated down to Maketu. If this occurs in the future, consideration needs to be given to ensuring there is some separation from the IMT / Enquiry Team and the Searchers Assembly Area.

The IMT also needs to ensure there are enough IT assets to support the operation in the new location and staff have the capability of accessing them.

6. Conclusions

Mr Mohi was last seen at about 1.30pm on Monday 11th February 2019. Once it was realized Mr Mohi was missing, family endeavoured to find him without success.

Police were notified about 9pm. A senior member of Police attended as the first responder, the Search and Rescue "On Call" was contacted, whereupon IMT members were alerted and the wider SAR organisation activated.

Significant numbers of family and members of the local community, responded in the following days to assist Police and LandSAR volunteers in the search for Mr Mohi.

Whilst the broader environs of the Maketu area were searched early on, the main focus of search endeavours was in the area of the 25th percentile. This was an area where there were a cluster of confirmed sightings.

Terrain searched varied from domestic sections with homes and outbuildings, to large areas of dense undergrowth, bush, maize paddocks and rural farmland. There was also a close inshore search, of the Maketu peninsular.

To the frustration of some search volunteers, but in accordance with best practice, search segments were searched in several different directions.

There was a strong physical involvement, of senior ranking Police Officers throughout.

On Thursday, the third full day of the search, a senior member of the Western Bay of Plenty SAR Squad returned to duty. He operated in the capacity of "fresh eyes", conducted an evaluation of search effort thus far and gave direction to future efforts.

A concentrated effort was made on Friday and Saturday, the 4th and 5th full days of the search respectively, utilising Search and Rescue members from neighbouring areas, alongside family members and community volunteers.

Mr Mohi was located early on Saturday evening, near an area which had been searched earlier in the week.

7. Appendix

Statistical Circles





Sightings



Vegetation Challenges



Vegetation Challenges



Vegetation Challenges

Close in GPS Tracks

Saturday 16th February 2019

