

SAREX Operations Sounds

18th and 19th June 2016



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Operations Sounds was a scenario based Cat 1 Police led SAREX held over a weekend 18th and 19th June 2016 as a multi agencies search and rescue exercise (SAREX) in the Marlborough Sounds area.

The exercise was planned and set up by a multi-agency working group convened by Pete Corbett from LandSAR. Alan Hendrickson NZ Police and Rob McLean were the Exercise Coordinators and Hamish Reid from Outward Bound was the Safety Advisor.

The Incident Management Team (IMT) participants arrived and were briefed at 0700hrs on Saturday 18th which gave them time to shake out into an IMT and plan the initial response. Tactical personnel from the various agencies arrived around 0900hrs and were briefed about the exercise and tasked according to the planned initial response into the exercise area.

The exercise ran for a period of 28 hours and all agencies were stood down on the Saturday night and redeployed Sunday morning .

The operational search area was in the land and marine areas in the vicinity of Kumatoto and Kaipakirikiri Bays in Queen Charlotte Sound

The overall aim or goal of the exercise was to enhance interagency operability between the search and rescue and other emergency response agencies in Marlborough.

KEY FINDINGS

- 1 This exercise was well planned and provided a true test and value for everyone involved and importantly depicted an event that could happen.
- 2 This was the first time a multi agencies exercise had been run in the area.
- 3 All agencies performed really well throughout the exercise in their own area of expertise and importantly they also worked well together to achieve the overall objectives of the exercise'
- 4 All agencies now have a far better understanding and overview on how other agencies work and the challenges and capabilities they have.
- 5 Safety throughout the exercise was taken very seriously and having a designated external Safety Advisor for the whole exercise proved to be a great success.
- 6 The Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) also known as the Incident Control Point (ICP) chosen (St John and Coastguard building) was an excellent facility to use, Initially as expected it took a while to set up but when established it was fully functional.
- 7 The computers used at the EOC were all slow and clunky and in desperate need of updating and modernising to run IMT software

- 8 SARNET set up as texting Pods worked really well to help manage the incident, it is simple to set up, needs no training can be managed centrally and viewed by multiple users. During a multi agency operation its important to not confuse matters by having a number of systems running ie. IMAN/GMAN and SARNET
- 9 An excellent Incident Action Plan (IAP) was set using GOSA (Goal, Objectives, Strategies and Assignments) and all objectives were SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound) for the first operational period, there was initially confusion around the initial actions and when the first operational period would start but this was overcome.
- 10 All agencies work differently and at different paces for numerous reasons, this exercise showed how apparent this was. All agencies now have a clear understanding on how each other works.
- 11 The Operations Manager did an excellent job throughout the exercise and was at times overwhelmed. This could have been mitigated if an Operations team had been set up and sectorised off. ie. A designated person to manage operationally the marine side, land side and if used air side. The Operations manager would have overall control but agencies could command their own assets and agencies.
- 12 Setting up an 'On Scene Command' person was a sound move worked really well. This appointment enabled a good communications plan to be put into place.
- 13 The IMT did not complete a marine plot and search area determination, because they did not have the skills sets to perform this function, instead they relied on information given to them by RCCNZ
- 15 SAR agencies need to use a common coded message to be sent over the VHF network so everyone knows the status of casualties, this needs to be worked out and briefed to all participants
- 16 A safety issue was raised by LandSAR teams that there not given a adequate safety brief when passengers on a Coastguard vessel
- 17 LandSAR teams did not have a lost communications procedure in case all communications when down.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 As this was the first of the kind in the area, priority now must be given to build on this and conduct another exercise in the next couple of months. This exercise should be a Desktop exercise with no assets deployed so all the lessons learnt from this exercise can be put into place and tested by the IMT.
- 2 The Computers in the EOC need an overall so they can run IMT software etc. Another projector / large TV should also be sourced and used to project Tracplus and later potentially SAR track. (The single projector in the EOC was used to project SARNET)
- 3 All agencies need to look at training more personnel to take on roles in the IMT. If this operation had run on for longer more trained personnel would be needed.

Coastguard and the Harbour Master need more trained marine focussed personnel in the IMT who can advise and on various marine aspects of the operation, plot a search area determination and also act as a marine sector supervisor to manage marine assets.
- 4 Police working with St John need to come up with a series of coded messages to be used by all agencies when dealing with casualties.
- 5 Coastguard need to address the issue of passengers not receiving a adequate safety brief when on-board their vessels
- 6 LandSAR teams need to have a lost communications SOP in place. – establish comms redundancy through HF or cell phone

The Marlborough Sounds and surrounding areas attract outdoor recreationalists from all around New Zealand, and from overseas, for both land and marine based activities. Together with a changing demographic and an aging population this creates a significant vulnerability for search and rescue agencies in the region.

In addition the growing popularity of Picton as a stop-over for increasingly larger cruise ships coupled with the existing rail ferry traffic across Cook Strait also highlights the vulnerability for further mass casualty type incidents such as the Mikhail Lermontov sinking which would require a whole of community response.

The New Zealand Police have mandated authority for all category 1 search and rescue operations and they together with all other designated emergency response agencies in Marlborough have responsibilities to maintain an effective and efficient incident management and response capability.

To attain the desired levels of capability and inter-agency operability, particularly in the absence of regular operational exposure, practitioners need to refresh and practice the skills and knowledge previously learnt so they are ready to respond effectively at a moment's notice often under trying conditions in a multi-agency environment. One way to achieve this is through simulated scenario based learning which requires the participants to use their knowledge to analyse, make decisions and complete tasks in a real life context. It is a powerful way to educate, as it mirrors the way we learn naturally as humans – by doing.

Towards the end of 2015 a multi-agency working group was formed to investigate ways in which the various search and rescue and other emergency response agencies could train together to develop closer working relationships, to get to know each other at individual and organisational levels and better understand each other's capabilities and limitations.

As a result of that a combined agency search and rescue exercise (SAREX) named Operation Sounds will be conducted over the weekend of 18-19 June 2016 in the Queen Charlotte Sound.

Participating agencies

The following agencies or organisations are participating in the exercise:

- NZ Police - Marlborough
- Land Search and Rescue (LandSAR) – Marlborough and Kaikoura
- Coastguard - Picton
- Surf Lifesaving – Rarangi
- St John Ambulance
- Civil Defence
- Amateur Radio Emergency Corps (AREC)
- Picton Harbour Master
- Department of Conservation
- Picton Waka Ama Club
- Outward Bound

OBJECTIVES FOR THE EXERCISE

The overall aim or goal of the exercise is to enhance interagency operability between the search and rescue and other emergency response agencies in Marlborough.

LandSAR	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To practice general field skills including:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Man tracking in a bush environment○ Shore line search techniques○ Investigative interviewing○ Stretcher carrying and patient management – including land transfer to marine ambulance• General SAR IMT participation
Coastguard	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct marine transport support for self and other agencies• Practice shore line and maritime search techniques• Undertake patient management and transfer• Test Picton EOC as an ICP (including comms and catering)
Civil Defence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To provide opportunity for response team/s to practice:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Casualty evacuation○ Field communications○ Welfare capabilities• To work with other agencies to increase/expand capabilities• Participate in a multiagency SAR IMT
Harbour Master	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore ways to provide tactical support with vessels, local knowledge and communications• Clarify role in a Cat I SAR operation• Practice traffic management on water for emergency response• Provide marine transport (as a means of support for other agencies and to free-up Coastguard for SAR tasks)• As above – explore support capabilities and determine how best to deploy/apply resources and capabilities• To work with and familiarise themselves with other agencies and build relationships• Consider on-scene coordination• Provide technical support and advice to incident

OBSERVATION

Observations for the evaluation were made at the designated Incident Control Point which was situated at the EOC at the joint Coastguard and St John building in Picton on the Saturday and also on the Coastguard vessel Blue Ridge rescue on the Sunday.

The principal purpose of the evaluation is to assess, and provide feedback, on the attainment of the learning objectives for the exercise and any lessons learnt to improve future performance.

General feedback was given at the hot de-brief and this is the written report which will be shared between all participating agencies and organisations.

Overview – setting the scene – training that that goes seriously wrong

The vessel

In the late afternoon on Friday 17 June 2016 two ocean going waka ama (outrigger canoes) are racing alongside each other in a north easterly direction in the inner Queen Charlotte Sound – navigating from Anikiwa at the head of Grove Arm to a campsite in Ruakaka Bay.

The waka ama each have a mixed gender crew of six paddlers (with one steering) and they are comprised of [TBD], all aged between [TBD] coming from all parts of Marlborough with 3 exchange students from Germany. They belong to a local multi-sport club which is affiliated to some of the local high schools in the area.

This is part of a weekend training activity in preparation for a longer ocean paddling event in the Bay of Islands later in the year. Their intention is to camp at Ruakaka Bay that night and then continue training in the outer Queen Charlotte over the weekend returning mid-afternoon on the Sunday – their intended campsite on the Saturday night is at Cannibal Cove (weather and sea conditions pending).

The waka ama are accompanied by a small launch with 2 coaches on board and all of the camping gear and food required for the weekend.

When in the vicinity of Ngatawhetawheta Point (between Double Cove and Torea Bay) the launch is advised that one of the female crew member's parents have been involved in a serious motor vehicle accident and have been taken to hospital in a critical condition – the prognosis is not good. The family has requested that the crew member be removed from the trip immediately and driven home so she can be with her parents and other family members.

The crew member is taken off one of the waka ama and she is replaced by one of the coaches along with sufficient camping gear and food for that night. The remaining coach in the launch arranges to rendezvous the following morning at 0900 hrs in the vicinity of Golden Point (between Kaipara Bay and Blackwood Bay). Due to the time delay it was now their intention to find a campsite somewhere between their current position at Ngatawhetawheta Point and Golden Bay. They were going to try and avoid designated public camping areas – this was intended to be another challenge and team building exercise for both crews.

After the launch leaves the waka ama crews decide to make their way into Kaipakirikiri Bay to find a campsite either there or in the neighbouring Kumatoto Bay. They continue racing alongside each other as they proceed.

The jetski

Earlier that day two young males aged launch a high performance jetski from the boat ramp at Momorangi Bay and head out into the sounds intending to visit friends who have a batch in Kumatoto Bay.

These two guys from Dunedin are on an extended holiday freedom camping around the South Island to recce an attempt at a non-stop around the South Island jetski trip, so are mixing a bit of business with pleasure and catching up with friends and family along the way.

They leave their vehicle and trailer [description] at the boat ramp intending to return that night and freedom camp in the vicinity of Havelock – they do not tell anyone of their intentions apart from their friends at Kumatoto.

The leave the batch in Kumatoto at dusk after having consumed a large amount of alcohol each – they would certainly have exceeded the land transport breath alcohol limits – and quickly accelerate up to full speed with the last remnants of the dying sun in their eyes.

The incident – where it all goes wrong

At dusk when the waka amas are about 100 metres off Kaipakirikiri Point which separates that bay from Kumatoto Bay, the high performance jetski rounds the point at speed and collides with them both.

The jetski hits one of the waka ama amidsthips cutting it in two before rebounding into the other – the crews of the waka ama have very little time to react and only those in the bow and the stern are able to fling themselves into the water to avoid serious injury.

The two on the jetski are flung off colliding with parts of the waka ama and some of the crew along the way – the jet-ski quickly sinks and the two overturned outrigger canoes slowly drift away from the survivors – the general carnage is summarised as follows:

Category	location	SAREX objectives	Subsequent action
2 x persons deceased (1 x jet-skier and a paddler)	In water	Marine search, body recovery, reconciliation	Dummies with tracking gear to be left in water on drift line as per wind and current/tide on the night
1 x person deceased	Shoreline – on rocks or in bush fringe	Marine and land search, body recovery, reconciliation	Dummy to be left in a position to be found by a shoreline search – either marine or land
1 x person alive and injured	In water – perhaps clinging to overturned waka ama	Marine search, patient care and recovery/transport, interview and reconciliation	As above with the dummies – to be left in water to be found by marine search after marine search area determination (SAD)
3 x seriously injured	Shoreline – on rocks or in bush fringe	Marine and land search, patient care, land to marine transfer, transport, interview and reconciliation	1 x obvious victim along shoreline to be managed – 2 x others requiring a land or marine search to be located

3 x survivors uninjured	Shoreline – on rocks or in bush fringe	Marine and land search, preliminary interview and transport, reconciliation	Left on shoreline in vicinity of incident – 1 x obvious, others requiring a little more effort
4 x survivors uninjured	Mobile in bush	Land search, mantracking, search techniques, interview and recovery	1 x survivor (the coach) makes it up the hill and over to Portage to raise the alarm 1 x survivor makes it up the hill and heads east along the Queen Charlotte walkway (confused) 2 x survivors concussed and confused wander around in the bush taking shelter from the elements and become hypothermic

Notifications

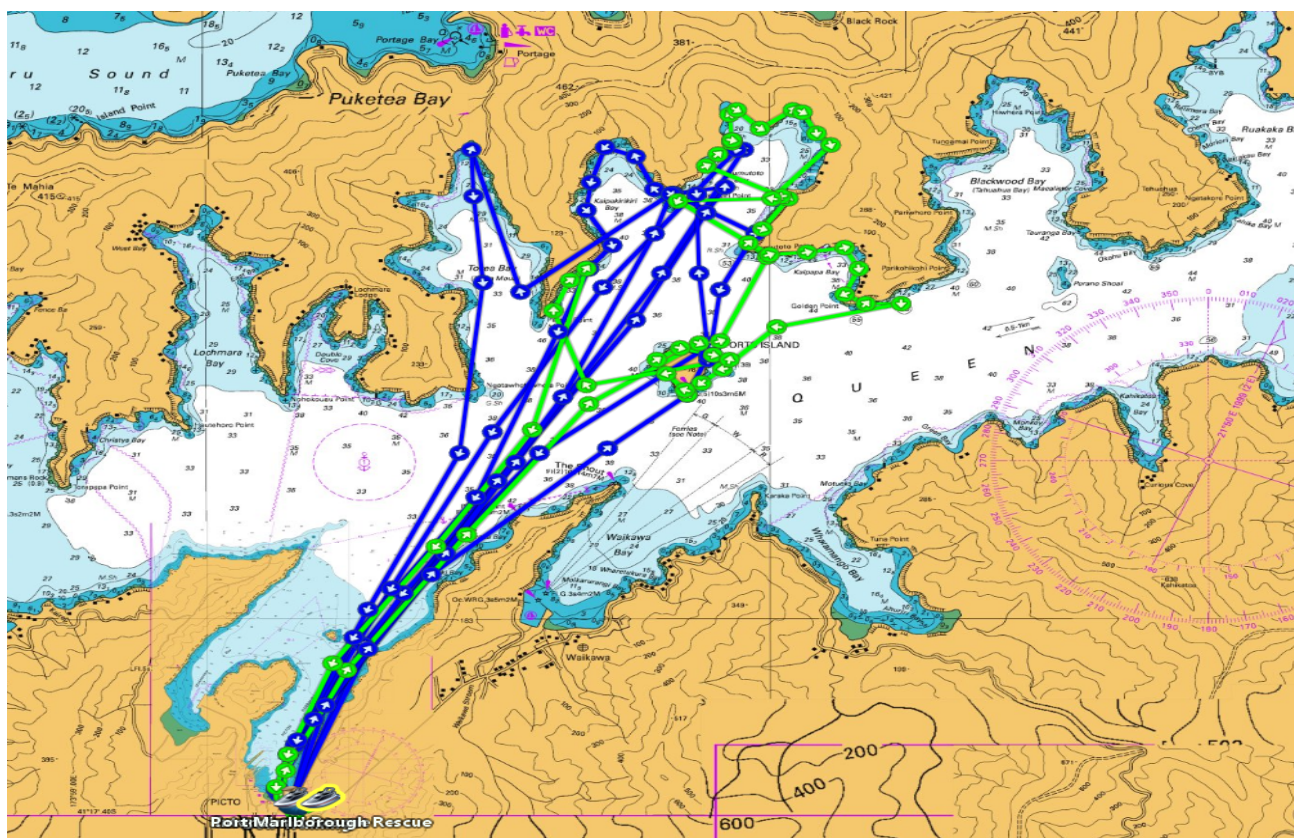
Following the collision all persons fend for themselves – the coach who was in one of the waka ama managed to avoid injury and is able to assemble the other 3 uninjured survivors on shore and instruct them to seek shelter, huddle together for warmth and stay put. He conducts a hasty shoreline search and being unable to find any other persons decides to head up and over the hill to Portage to raise the alarm. He manages to do this by 0630 hrs on the Saturday morning – IMT briefing commences at 0700 hrs.

Mid morning a local resident at Momorangi Bay reports the jetskiers vehicle and trailer blocking their driveway and an investigation begins

Alternative notifications

- Coach makes his way to Anikiwa – OB raise the alarm
- Other survivor who heads uphill is spoken to by an early morning tramper on the Queen Charlotte walkway who uses cell phone to advise authorities

Tracks from Coastguards Blue Ridge Rescue (in Blue) and Port Marlborough Rescue (in Green) for Saturday 18th June



SUMMARY

To summarise this was a well thought out and planned exercise that fully tested all the agencies involved. As always there are some issues and problems identified which is why we carry out these types of exercises in a controlled environment.

Moving forward all agencies need to continue working together and participate in more desktop exercises so the momentum of improvement of systems and understanding is embedded. Observing the exercise it was obvious that each agency could do their own individual job very well, but more work is needed in the IMT to manage multi agency operations.

Mark Whitehouse

Dated Sunday, 26 June 2016