

Exercise Evaluation Report

Tasman 2024 SAREX

OPERATION MOSQUITO

Location: Abel Tasman National Park, Tasman District

Date: 16th to 17th March 2024

Report version: Final

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NZ Police Search and Rescue, Wellington

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1. Executive Summary

The annual Tasman District Search and Rescue Exercise (SAREX) was held on the 16th and 17th of March 2024 in the Abel Tasman National Park. With the SAREX management based at the Motueka Land Search and Rescue base.

A list of objectives was created for the SAREX which allowed for testing of general Search and Rescue (SAR) skills with a multi-agency response while also allowing for readiness plans to be tested. The area had been identified as a risk for a SAR event and the SAREX allowed for communications in the area to be tested.

Overall the SAREX was a success with the aim of the exercise being achieved. All participants gained knowledge and experience throughout the SAREX. This was clearly obvious within the camaraderie between all the agencies involved.

1. Recommendations

- Ensure communications between field and IMT are dealt with efficiently and timely.
- Keep SAREX planning team members to exercise direction.
- Further training for Coastguard in TASEX use.
- To further develop a relationship with local Iwi.
- Continue to build on the multi-agency relationships for future SAROPS.
- Develop a communications plan for multi-agency operations.
- Ensure any Readiness Plans are available and known to all IMT members.

2. Introduction

Operation MOSQUITO was the annual Tasman District SAREX utilizing a multi-agency response including the Tasman District Police SAR squad, Land Search and Rescue, Coastguard, Surf Life Saving, Tasman and Nelson Harbourmasters, MPI and Department of Conservation. All responding to a real time incident in the Abel Tasman National Park between Falls River and Awaroa Head.

The incident involved multiple missing persons after a weather bomb hit a school group of adults and students sea kayaking in the Abel Tasman National Park area. During the second day of the SAREX a further incident of an overturned vessel was injected to the Incident Management Team (IMT). The SAREX covered marine, shoreline and bush areas. A need was identified to test a multi-agency response to a water incident in the National Park utilizing the Abel Tasman National Park readiness Plan. Planning for the SAREX started early and I was engaged as an evaluator early allowing for comprehensive planning.

3. Background

3.1. Background to the Exercise

It had been identified that from 2015 to December 2023 there had been 78 SAR related incidents in the Abel Tasman National Park with 14 incidents related to recreational boating. In New Zealand drowning is the leading cause of recreational deaths and of those 31% are craft related.

A joint marine and land SAREX was seen as necessary to practice a response to a major marine/land incident.

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

Date: 16th and 17th March 2024
Location: Abel Tasman National Park
Incident Control Point: Motueka Land SAR base
Staging Area: Mosquito Bay, Abel Tasman National Park

Organising agencies and key people:
NZ Police, Jonathan Evans exercise director
Tasman DSARAC, Leeanne Macdonald
NZ Police, Jude Yeoman
Land SAR, Stefan Lerbs
Land SAR, Tobias Schmidt
Land SAR, Fiona Davies
Nelson Harbourmaster, Stuart Whitehouse
Tasman Harbourmaster, Peter Renshaw
Surf Lifesaving, Jayd Cosmatos
Coastguard, Rosie Musters
Coastguard, Andrew Murray
Coastguard, Geoff Eban

3.3. Participating organisations

NZ Police
Land Search and Rescue
Coastguard
Surf Lifesaving
Nelson City Council
Tasman City Council
Ministry for Primary Industries
Department of Conservation
Fire and Emergency NZ

3.4. Exercise aim

To test and evaluate the Abel Tasman National Park readiness plan along with the readiness and response of attending agencies including the Incident Management Team and multi-agency Search and Rescue teams practically and safely.

3.5. Exercise objectives

- Continue to develop interoperability between SAR partner agencies.
- Information is effectively managed and communicated during the response.
- SAR operational personnel refresh and practice search and rescue skills.
- Test a communications infrastructure in a SAR environment.
- To increase cultural awareness and requirements of operating in the Abel Tasman National Park for SAR responders.
- Risks are identified, removed minimised or managed.

3.6. Exercise Scenario

A party of 17 students, 2 teachers, 1 parent and 2 tutors from NMIT had planned to Kayak from Awaroa Beach around Awaroa Head and head south along the coast on 15 March. The group were reportedly hit by a weather bomb and became separated.

Early on 16th March a mixture of Land SAR and Surf Lifesaving volunteers were dropped at various locations within the SAREX area to act as the missing persons. Several dummies were also dropped into the water and labelled with details of who they were supposed to be and their status of injured or deceased. This would allow for rescues, patient management and Disaster Victim Identification procedures to be carried out.

The initial call had come from a mother of a student. She had received a text from her son that she did not see till the morning of 16th March. The message read: *Mun our group got into trouble in a massive storm last night kayaking from Awaroa I got on the rocks I have bad coverage everyone else is missing I don't know where they are. We all got tipped into the water I done know where the teachers are Can U please help.*

The mother advised her son was on a school trip and gave some basic details for Greymouth Grammar School.

On the 17th March the IMT were give details of a reported overdue charter vessel "Presto" from a 10 day trip. Surf Lifesaving volunteers and dummies were again utilized in this scenario and placed into the search area. A local aircraft reported they had seen an overturned vessel with a person clinging to the hull.

The IMT were then advised by RCCNZ they had received 2 beacon activations on land near Mosquito Bay which was within the initial search area from the previous day. 2 Land SAR volunteers were used for the beacon activations and had sustained injuries requiring patient management and a stretcher carry.

4. Evaluation Methodology

4.1. The agreed outcomes of the evaluation activity

The evaluator was contacted early and asked to observe the SAREX as a whole and produce an evidence based report comparing the objectives to what was observed.

4.2. Evaluation scope

The objectives for the SAREX:

- Continue to develop interoperability between SAR partner agencies.
- Information is effectively managed and communicated during the response.
- SAR operational personnel refresh and practice search and rescue skills.
- Test a communications infrastructure in a SAR environment.
- To increase cultural awareness and requirements of operating in the Abel Tasman National Park for SAR responders.
- Risks are identified, removed, minimised or managed.

Several key performance indicators were linked to each objective which assisted in being able to assess if the objectives were met.

4.3. Aspects of the exercise observed, what was not observed

Evaluator observed:

IMT progress during the SAREX.

Radio communication from the SAR base.

Not observed:

Activities at the staging area.

Teams and vessels in the field.

4.4. The process followed in preparing and submitting the report

The evaluator and exercise controller agreed on the objectives to be tested and reported on prior to the SAREX. The evaluator was able to attend the SAREX for the entire weekend.

A draft of the evaluation report was sent to Leeanne MacDonald for dissemination and consultation with the planning team prior to the final report being submitted.

After a SAREX debrief and receiving some feedback from the draft some minor changes were made to the final report.

4.5. Other information

5. Findings

Objective: Continue to develop interoperability between SAR partner agencies.

KPI's: Working in a multi-agency IMT (based on CIMS roles and functions).

Multi period hand over.

Transport of teams, supplies and missing person via water (load/unload).

Field support and field search coordination.

Extended operational period/night search/change of crew and IMT members.

A CIMS structure was used throughout the SAREX with participants easily identified as to their roles. The use of CIMS bibs and the command structure was posted on a whiteboard. There were obvious differing needs in the IMT with land and marine searching required. Operations were separated to cater to these needs with an overall Operations manager. This appeared to work well with good communications between them to achieve their objectives.

A staging area was set up at Mosquito Bay. This acted as a site for field support with equipment and communications with the IMT. The staging area was also used as part of the DVI component as a human remains holding area.

During the SAREX the function of a Response Manager was tried for the first time. Although an understanding of the role was known putting it into practice further developed their position as the SAREX continued. For the initial operational period the Response Manager was also part of the SAREX directing and planning team. Keeping the directing and planning team separate from the IMT functions would help keep direction of the SAREX. Having separated the IMT from the planning would allow for full immersion into the CIMS role without being distracted by making injects to the SAREX.

The IMT were aware of the need for a handover for the next operational period and started the planning early. The planning team had roles already prepared for the IMT members for participants to gain skill in different roles. During the handover there were only a few new members to the IMT and the briefing was kept short with the separate functions having their own handover period before the new IC called for a meeting. Regular IMT manager meetings were held throughout the SAREX. This enabled everyone to be situationally aware and assist in building on their Incident Action Plan with smart objectives.

Arrangements had been made to transport Land SAR personnel and equipment via boat into the Able Tasman National Park. This worked well for the initial deployment. During the SAREX vessels were pulled away from their searching to assist in moving Land SAR teams. This enabled the teams to be moved but left the marine search a little disjointed and areas having to be searched with fewer vessels or the vessel having to return to the area to continue their search.

Overall, this objective has been met with a greater understanding between all the agencies as to their abilities and limits being gained. I saw that all the agencies involved enjoyed the SAREX and were all keen to work together in the future for more training and operationally.

Objective: Information is effectively managed and communicated during the response.

KPI's: Multi-agency comms.

Use of broader intelligence opportunities (for example social media, interviews, hut books/wardens)

Issues with communications seems to be a common theme in SAREX and SAR operations. It was no stranger to this SAREX either. Having a multi-agency SAREX also brings multiple ways of operating. There were difficulties with the information flow from IMT to the Coastguard radio comms team. Initially this was a paper-based system where messages were delayed or miscommunicated. At one point this did result in marine assets self-tasking in the field because of delays while IMT were having a manager meeting. This situation greatly improved as it was identified with attention to detail and the introduction of electronic based transfer of information using TASEX. Tasman have developed their own electronic format Tasman SAR Exchange (TASEX) for handling information and data which works similarly to SARtrack. Coastguard recognized that TASEX added value and kept a time stamped log of all communications and mentioned that further training in TASEX is needed.

The Abel Tasman National Park Readiness Plan had been prepared prior to the SAREX. The IMT did not seek to find out if there was indeed a plan. The plan was utilized when the IMT were made aware of its existence by the SAREX directing team. The plan contains contacts for all the agencies involved in the SAEX along with other important points of contact. The plan also contains details for communications in the area.

I could see that Intelligence were working well. They gained a lot of information through interviewing and contacting DOC staff at the Huts in the National Park. The planning team had given what type of information was to be gathered from each of the missing persons when located. This was not always passed on to IMT in the format requested. An area for improvement with the large number of missing persons would be to ensure consistency in the status of the missing person and their details.

Overall this objective has been met. When issues were identified a remedy was sorted and information flows and communications improved.

Objective: SAR operational personnel refresh and practice search and rescue skills.

KPI's: Tracking, Search techniques, First Aid, Stretcher management including low angle, shoreline searching in tidal areas, Searching at sea, overnight self-sufficiency, Transfer of body from water to land (DVI related).

Overall this objective has been met. Although I did not observe activities in the field I did hear via the radio and observe from taskings that the various search methods and activities were undertaken during the SAREX with several personnel staying overnight at Mosquito Bay.

Objective: Test communication infrastructure in a SAR environment.

There were no separate KPI's to measure for this objective. With a multi-agency response a number of issues arose with communications between Marine/Land and IMT. Without a common channel available not all assets were aware of what others were up to. There were periods of marine vessels having to relay messages between marine and land for messages to be passed on. A work around was tried with LandSAR portable radios issued to Marine assets to aid in communication.

It was identified there is a gap in Marine communications in the area. Coastguard did not have any issues communicating with IMT as they are using a digital network, but analogue systems were not communicating well with IMT. I spoke with Land SAR teams after the SAREX and they did not seem to have any issues with communications with IMT utilising DOC repeaters.

Overall the objective was met but a communications plan needs to be in place to aid in setting up an operation in the area with a multi-agency response.

Objective: To increase cultural awareness and requirements of operating in the Abel Tasman National Park for SAR responders.

KPI's: To include iwi as mana whenua for the area of the operation as key stakeholders and active participants in the planning and execution of the operation.

Establish processes with iwi to protect the whenua (land) and ngā tangata (the people) and ensure tikanga is upheld and overlays any other processes. For example, if any fatalities occur, items of cultural significance are found or kōiwi (human bones) are located.

Incorporate tikanga process in to BAU activities for the operation (for example start and end of day karakia).

Include iwi kōrero / brief regarding area of operation and any key significant locations of history, activity.

This objective has not been met. The planning team made several attempts to contact and include the Police Iwi Liaison person for this. It was made clear to the planning team not to contact the local Iwi directly but to communicate through the liaison person. There was a lack of communication on behalf of the liaison person and this was recognised by the planning team as a loss of opportunity to develop a relationship with local Iwi. The issue is being dealt with internally by Police management.

There is a positive aspect to this where Mark Pirikahu from PNHQ was observing the SAREX and has seen the lack of support given and offered his support for their needs going forward.

Objective: Risks are identified, removed minimised or managed.

KPI's: Dealing with fatigue policy. (17 hour rule)

Health, Safety and the wellbeing procedures around vessels.

On signing into the SAEX all participants had to state when they last had a 9 hour rest period. This gave a guide to the IMT for planning fatigue management. There was a comprehensive safety plan for the filed available at the SAR base and readily available to be seen by all. Attention was brought to it at briefings to keep a track of any issues. There was a separate plan for the IMT and a safety officer was appointed by the IC.

I did not observe the procedures around vessels but would be confident to say procedures should have been adhered to. From what I had observed and heard all participants were aware of and kept safety front and foremost.

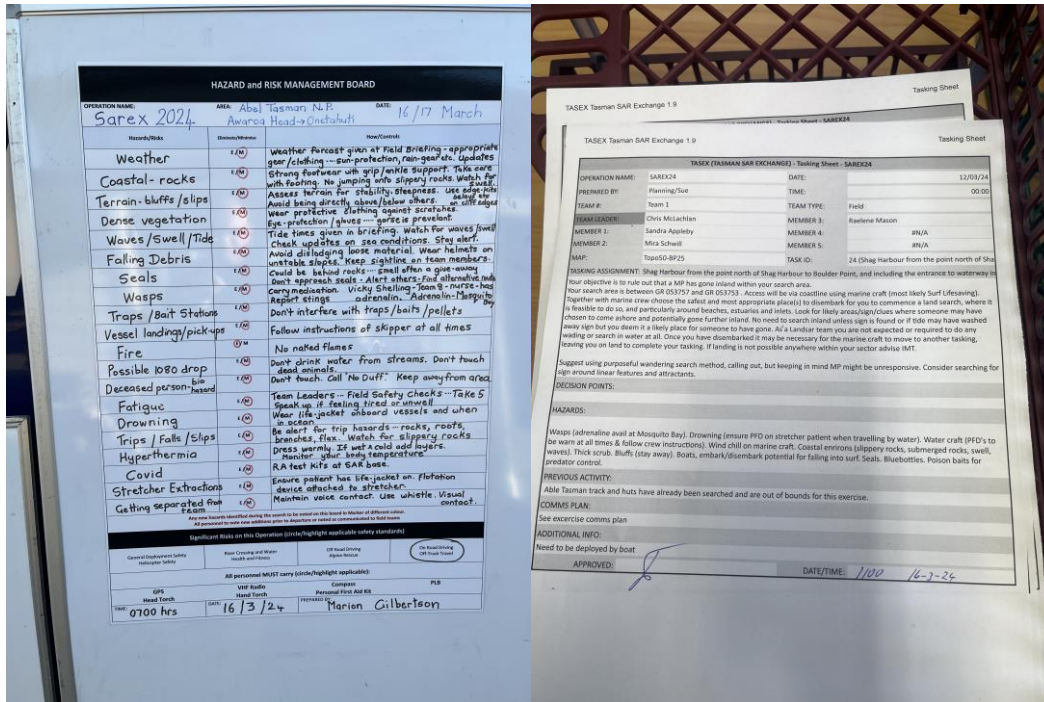
This objective has been met.

6. Conclusions

Overall the SAREX was a success allowing for the Aim to be met: To test and evaluate the Abel Tasman National Park readiness plan along with the readiness and response of attending agencies including the Incident Management Team and multi-agency Search and Rescue teams practically and safely.

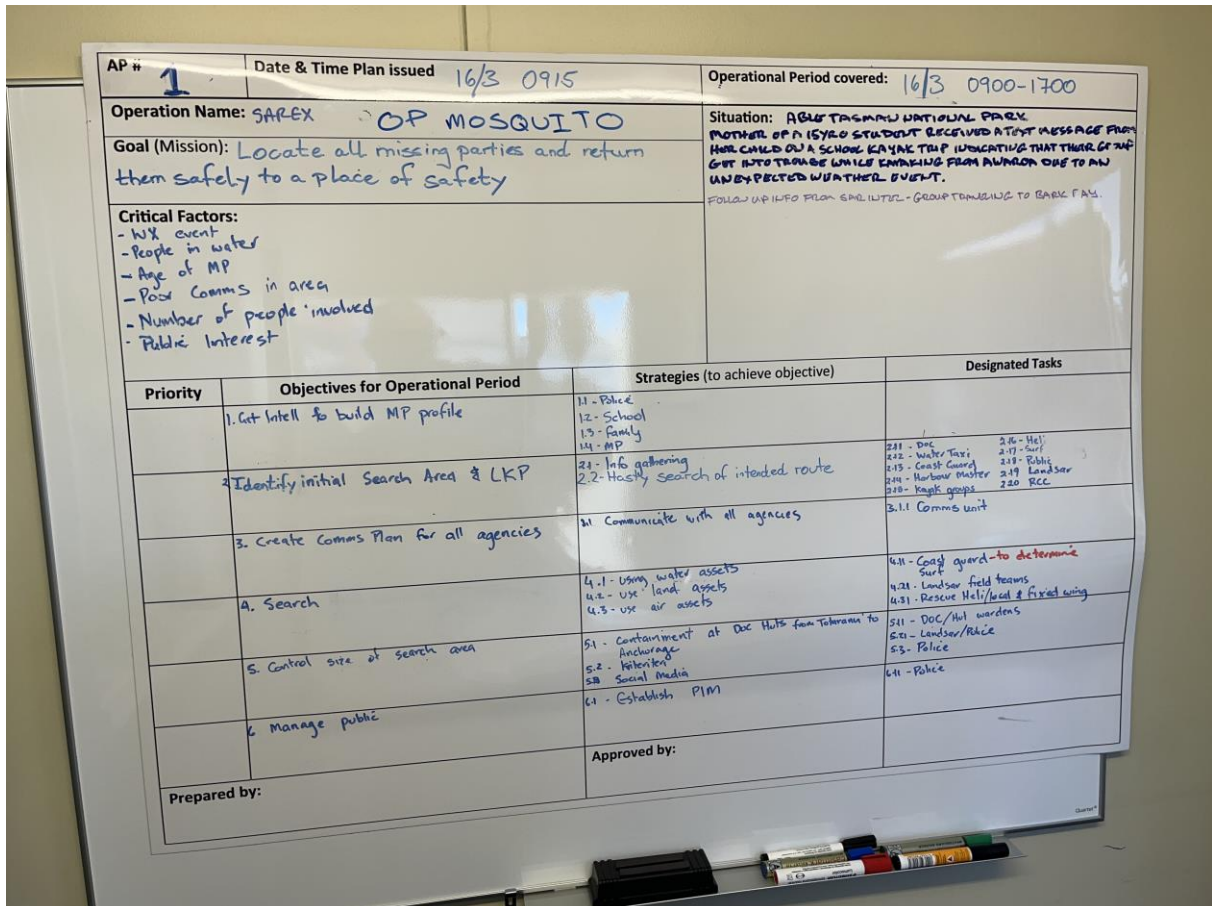
The objectives and KPI's were mostly met with some recommendations for developing future training. It was a good learning environment for those that had not performed in particular roles previously alongside other agencies. There is an obvious healthy relationship between all the groups involved. This resulted in good teamwork and the missing parties being located.

7. Appendix



Hazard board utilised.

Tasking sheet



IAP prepared by planning team

Completed

- CCP @ Mosquito including 'Bod'
- FLO
- All stations
- PNHB + DVI adv
- PIM
- Search Area plans
- Containment ests
- Comms
- Rescue Plan
- Names etc for all MPs
- est welfare hubs

AP #	Date & Time Plan issued	Operational Period covered:	
A	16/3 1530	16/3 1700-1900	
Operation Name: SAFEX OP MOSQUITO Goal (Mission): Locate all missing parties and return them safely to a place of safety		Situation: School party potentially capsized in Area, area following weather event Underway 20th on land & water 15 Persons / located 7 5 Persons deceased.	
Critical Factors: - People in water - Poor Comms in area - Number of people involved - Public Interest - Searchability No Duff scenario - Plan → IC Reconciliation update. Fatigue of Searchers / assets.			
Priority	Objectives for Operational Period	Strategies (to achieve objective)	Designated Tasks
	Continue to evaluate / determine search area	- Manual Plot - RCE SAD - LandSAR Plan - Interview located people	
	Gather Intel re MP's	Contact SME (e.g. Charmine WMS)	
	Ascertain survivability of PIW		4.1 - Cont'd search - to determine surf 4.2 - LandSAR field teams 4.3 - Rescue Helo / land if fixed wing
	Complete search of areas as per SAD / Land Plan	4.1 - using water assets 4.2 - use land assets 4.3 - use air assets	
	End of day movement plan	Confirm location of all pers in field Confirm pers to come out by field	
	Plan for next operational period	Ascertain / confirm search assets available Confirm EROBEX Plan	
Prepared by: Planning		Approved by: James Mathew	

Updated IAP after IMT meetings

WEATHER

TIDES

INFO

17 Kids (15 + 16 yrs)

2 Teachers
1 Parents
2 NMIT instructors

INTELLIGENCE

AWAROA to Bark Bay
Sleep / Base is at Awaroa

CONTRACTS

Total Section (4/monitor) 023226323
NMIT - 023234459 Todd Inao
Police Coast (RCC) - 023233459
John Lamberton (DVI) - 02119224310
John Bretherton (DVI/PIW) - 021215132

SAFETY

2 NMIT INSTRUCTORS EACH HAVE A PLB - MARINE VHF RADIO

FLO

John Bretherton (DVI)
Meeting Team members @ 5/minute, College or Seelcan

@ College

MARINE SERVICES (Police Welfare)
Victim Support
Red Cross

Decreased 141

Alive 141

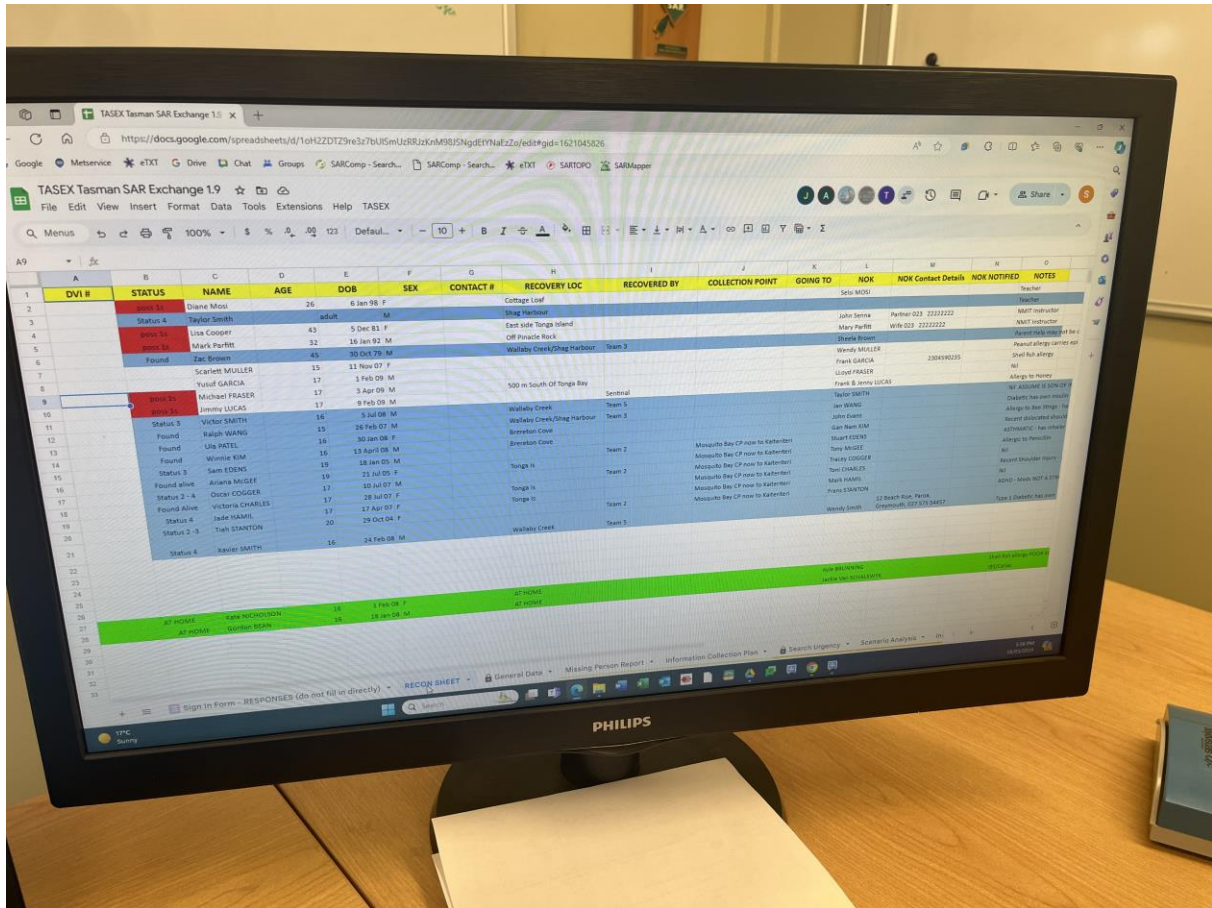
Timeline:

- LKP NOT LONG BEFORE
- 1500: Heading out towards Awaroa Head
- 1500: Harlequin Swans similar to those towards Island approx. 20 miles from GLEN
- 2300: Distress Tel from Xavier Smith stranded on rocks Separated from group
- 0600: Call from Mother Xavier Smith
- 0700: Dec. Ranger check of AWAROA that group not there
- 0900: Weather update Visibility poor Sea State 2-3 calm Skies clear
- 1103: 3 Decreased Male 141-142 Located by SAR IRB I
- 1143: Dec: 141-142 seen small build approx 15-16 Black wetsuit Black boots (Blue jacket and yellow pack)
- 1552: 141-142 Located by Seminal Dec: 141-142 seen small build approx 15-16 Black wetsuit Black boots (Blue jacket and yellow pack)

Other notes:

- Dec: 141-142 Located by Seminal
- Dec: 141-142 seen small build approx 15-16 Black wetsuit Black boots (Blue jacket and yellow pack)
- Dec: 141-142 Located by Seminal
- Dec: 141-142 seen small build approx 15-16 Black wetsuit Black boots (Blue jacket and yellow pack)
- Dec: 141-142 Located by Seminal
- Dec: 141-142 seen small build approx 15-16 Black wetsuit Black boots (Blue jacket and yellow pack)

Intel utilising their space with information collected.



TASEX tracking of missing parties.



Happy participants at the end of day 2.