



# New Zealand Search and Rescue System Strategic Plan

2025 - 2028

*Long line alpine rescue, Aoraki / Mt Cook region*

# Understanding New Zealand Search and Rescue



*Inshore rescue, Coastguard Tautiaki Moana*

# We find and rescue people in distress

We provide search and rescue services for people in New Zealand's Search and Rescue Region so that they can come home safely.

## What do we do?

### Our core role is search and rescue.

Search and rescue involves government, volunteer, community organisations, partners and capabilities working together to prepare for, respond to, locate and assist people in distress, and return them to a place of safety.

### Our services include

Distress monitoring, communications, and the coordination and delivery of search and rescue, including medical advice, initial medical assistance, or medical evacuation.

## Where do we work?

**New Zealand's Search and Rescue Region (NZSRR) is one of the largest in the world, covering over 30 million square kilometres.**

Our search and rescue region extends from the mid-Tasman Sea, halfway to Chile, and from the South Pole, almost up to the Equator.

### Our services range across:

- Responding to distress calls in remote corners of our Search and Rescue Region.
- Finding people in our remote back country.
- Urban search and rescue during extreme weather events.
- Finding a person who goes missing in their locale.

## Our system provides:

- Coordinated land, sea and air SAR operations 24 hours a day, seven days a week provided by two NZSAR Coordinating Authorities: New Zealand Police, and Maritime New Zealand's Rescue Coordination Centre.
- Appropriately located and trained, land, sea, air and urban search and rescue teams and assets available to conduct SAR operations on request by the Coordinating Authorities.
- SAR operational infrastructure and long-range SAR assets able to conduct operations throughout the NZSRR and in support of neighbouring SAR regions.



New Zealand's Search and Rescue Region is a twelfth of the Earth's surface.

# Our Search and Rescue System

New Zealand's Search and Rescue System is supported by dedicated people who work across a vast and challenging region to provide search and rescue services.



Maritime New Zealand's Rescue Coordination Centre



Coastal rescue, Surf Life Saving New Zealand



Land Search and Rescue volunteers alongside Police

**Our Search and Rescue System requires a high degree of both capacity and capability to service the New Zealand Search and Rescue Region (NZSRR).**

Despite our relatively compact land mass, New Zealand is home to vast remote areas with varied terrain and changeable weather. The specialised capability required to service this region requires ongoing investment. At one twelfth of the earth's surface, our search and rescue responsibilities also extend well beyond our domestic terrain.

**Crucial to the delivery of New Zealand Search and Rescue services are the people who work within the NZSAR System on both a paid and unpaid basis, and the capabilities they bring.**



**~ 12,800 SAR People**

Are highly skilled and directly involved in NZSAR operations. They operate a range of assets including vehicles, vessels, aircraft, communication and other supporting technology.



**95%**

of SAR people are non-paid volunteer professionals.



**Key assets are often dispersed across the country**

They're often owned by different providers, and SAR may be a secondary aim.

# NZSAR System Strategic Plan

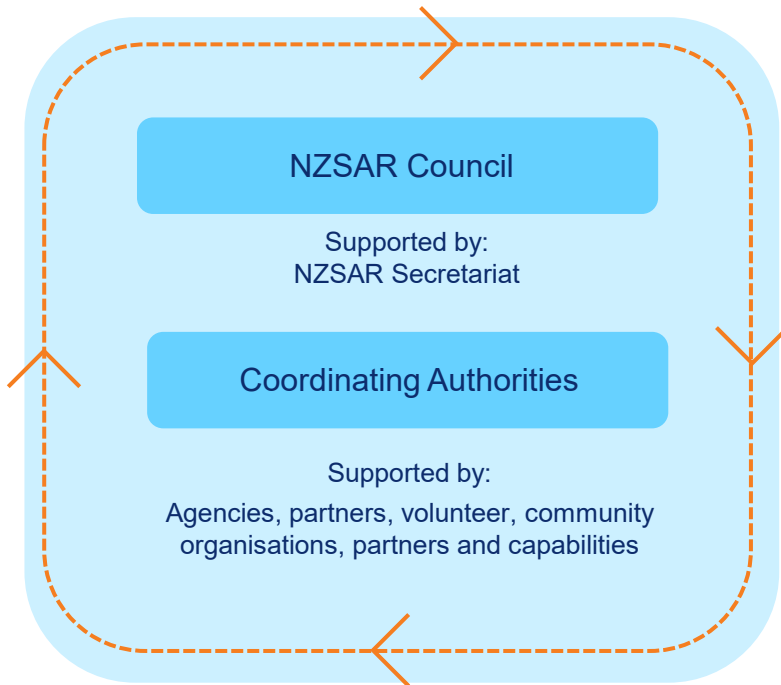


*P-8A Poseidon, New Zealand Defence Force*

# What does this System Strategic Plan cover?

The refreshed Strategic Plan purposely focuses on readiness and response as its core functions in the NZSAR System.

## This is the NZSAR System



### The NZSAR System

The assembly of government, volunteer, and community organisations, partners and capabilities working together to prepare for, respond to, locate and assist people in distress.

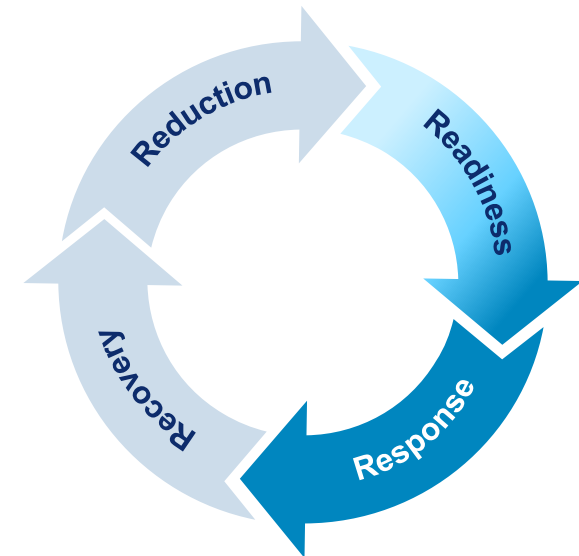
### NZSAR Council

Leads and governs the NZSAR System.

### Coordinating Authorities

Have overall responsibility for the conduct of the search and rescue operations.

## The NZSAR System Strategic Plan focuses on



# The NZSAR System Strategic Plan

## Mission

To find and rescue people in distress throughout New Zealand's Search and Rescue Region so that they can come home safely.

## Vision

An effective Search and Rescue System built to respond to those in distress today and tomorrow.

## Strategic & intermediate outcomes

### **A Search and Rescue System with clear expectations aligned in a unified direction.**

- Leadership and governance mechanisms provide a system view and set the direction for the NZSAR System.
- The NZSAR Council, agencies and NGOs have a shared view of investment needs and priorities.
- Evidence and insights inform our understanding of NZSAR System performance, guide direction and improvements.

### **A capable response system with the right tools and people to adapt to changing circumstances.**

- Our capabilities are optimised, adaptable and integrated where appropriate.
- We have consistent operational frameworks and procedures to improve SAR outcomes.
- Our people are ready to respond and supported to succeed and recover.

### **A cohesive system where partners collaborate and leverage their strengths for greater impact**

- We understand each other's roles and responsibilities within the NZSAR System and utilise our strengths.
- We leverage and collaborate with national and international SAR networks to support SAR across our Search and Rescue Region.

## How we work



We are unified and aligned in our efforts to achieve better search and rescue outcomes.



We make evidence-based investment choices which enable the NZSAR System to succeed.



We have clear and transparent ways of working together.



We stand by our commitment to embed Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations into the NZSAR System.

## Strategic outcomes (10+ years)

The strategic outcomes are created to be enduring and provide a direction forward which supports the mission and vision.

### System Leadership

A Search and Rescue System with clear expectations aligned in a unified direction.

#### Description of intent

The NZSAR Council leads and governs the Search and Rescue System. The NZSAR Council prescribes what the system needs to do and enables it to deliver in a manner which is responsive, agile and equitable.

We know that having the right governance and decision-making structures in place throughout the system is essential for being able to make strategic decisions that represent the varied needs of the NZSAR System.

### System Capability

A capable response system with the right tools and people to adapt to changing circumstances.

#### Description of intent

We continue to invest in the capacity and capability of people and assets so that we can scale our response at the right time and can adapt to changing conditions.

We have an integrated view of all capabilities available for search and rescue and proactively invest in the strategic capabilities required to respond. By striving towards shared operating procedures, we can also strive towards a consistent system response when an incident occurs.

### System Partnership

A cohesive system where partners collaborate and leverage their strengths for greater impact.

#### Description of intent

We know effective and coordinated partnership is key for a successful Search and Rescue System. This requires the system to collaborate and play to each others' strengths to deliver value. We also need the right interfaces to support emergency management when those incidents occur.

Our work with national and international partners ensures we remain up to date with global trends and can leverage our intelligence to improve the NZSAR System.



# Intermediate outcomes

The intermediate outcomes outline the interim steps required to deliver on the strategic outcomes.

## We are always striving towards

## Intermediate outcomes (3-5 years)

System Leadership	A Search and Rescue System with clear expectations aligned in a unified direction.	1	Leadership and governance mechanisms provide a system view and set the direction for the NZSAR System.
		2	The NZSAR Council, agencies and NGOs have a shared view of investment needs and priorities.
		3	Evidence and insights inform our understanding of NZSAR System performance, guide direction and improvements.
System Capability	A capable response system with the right tools and people to adapt to changing circumstances.	4	Our capabilities are optimised, adaptable and integrated where appropriate.
		5	We have consistent operational frameworks and procedures to improve SAR outcomes.
		6	Our people are ready to respond and supported to succeed and recover.
System Partnership	A cohesive system where partners collaborate and leverage their strengths for greater impact.	7	We understand each other's roles and responsibilities within the NZSAR System and utilise our strengths.
		8	We leverage and collaborate with national and international SAR networks to support SAR across our Search and Rescue Region.

# The Strategic Plan including shifts (1/3)

The shifts associated with each strategic outcome articulate what we need to do differently as a system to achieve our long-term goals

Strategic Outcome	Intermediate Outcomes	Key shifts
<p><b>System Leadership</b></p> <p>A Search and Rescue System with clear expectations aligned in a unified direction.</p>	<p>1 Leadership and governance mechanisms provide a-system view and set the direction for the NZSAR System.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Our governance structures and engagement forums enable decision-making which is informed by the right inputs from the right people at the right time.</li> <li>2. Governance practices and policies incorporate tikanga and Te ao Māori.</li> </ol>
	<p>2 The NZSAR Council, agencies and NGOs have a shared view of investment needs and priorities.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The NZSAR Council coordinates NZSAR agencies and NGOs to address identified system gaps, risks and priorities to ensure a sustainable Search and Rescue System.</li> <li>2. Funding allocation decisions are made based on NZSAR System priorities, ensuring that hard choices reflect what will deliver the greatest impact for search and rescue outcomes.</li> <li>3. The NZSAR Council provides a collective system view to influence and advise Government on NZSAR System risks.</li> </ol>
	<p>3 Evidence and insights inform our understanding of NZSAR System performance, guide direction and improvements.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Relevant strategic risks and issues are shared within the NZSAR System to inform system priorities.</li> <li>2. Insights, data and lessons learnt are shared within the NZSAR System to improve search and rescue outcomes, system performance, resilience, and inform prevention activities.</li> <li>3. We generate evidence and insights to help improve search and rescue outcomes for the most at-risk communities.</li> </ol>

# The Strategic Plan including shifts (2/3)

The shifts associated with each strategic outcome articulate what we need to do differently as a system to achieve our long-term goals.

Strategic Outcome	Intermediate Outcomes	Key shifts
<p><b>System Capability</b></p> <p>A capable response system with the right tools and people to adapt to changing circumstances.</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Our capabilities are optimised, adaptable and integrated where appropriate.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Regularly review and define our system capability requirements ensuring compatibility between NZSAR agencies and NGOs where needed.</li> <li>2. Ensure agencies and NGOs have a mixture of capability, capacity and competency to be able to respond to the full range of SAR operations.</li> <li>3. Actively engage in understanding the capabilities of third-party service providers and have efficient contracting arrangements.</li> <li>4. Invest in systems, infrastructure, training and tools to deliver a collaborative and consistent approach where feasible.</li> </ol>
	<p>5</p> <p>We have consistent operational frameworks and procedures to improve SAR outcomes.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agree system operating procedures which are implemented and utilised across the NZSAR System.</li> <li>2. Refresh operational frameworks which reflect the efficiencies we are trying to achieve.</li> <li>3. Recognise Te Tiriti in the NZSAR System and integrate Tikanga into SAR response.</li> </ol>
	<p>6</p> <p>Our people are ready to respond and supported to succeed and recover.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clear expectations are provided to all people who work within the NZSAR System.</li> <li>2. Our people are trained and appropriately equipped to do their job effectively.</li> <li>3. Iwi, Hapū and whānau are actively involved and resourced effectively for search and rescue efforts.</li> </ol>

# The Strategic Plan including shifts (3/3)

The shifts associated with each strategic outcome articulate what we need to do differently as a system to achieve our long-term goals.

Strategic Outcome	Intermediate Outcomes	Key shifts
<p><b>System Partnership</b></p> <p>A cohesive system where partners collaborate and leverage their strengths for greater impact.</p>	<p>7</p> <p>We understand each other's roles and responsibilities within the NZSAR System and utilise our strengths.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Open channels of communication within the NZSAR System so we understand each other's capabilities and limits.</li> <li>2. A unified capability framework which encourages shared use of infrastructure, assets and specialist people to reduce duplication of effort.</li> <li>3. Agreed minimum service levels with NGO's and clear MOUs between NZSAR agencies.</li> <li>4. It is clear who is responsible for maintaining the full operational picture during a response including deployed assets and people.</li> <li>5. There is mutual understanding between the NZSAR System and Emergency Management on when and how they provide support to each others core work.</li> </ol>
	<p>8</p> <p>We leverage and collaborate with national and international SAR networks to support SAR across our Search and Rescue Region.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Monitor and evaluate emerging trends, technologies and issues to remain at the forefront of best practice.</li> <li>2. We are intentional about how we build and strengthen relationships between SAR national and international organisations to build capability.</li> <li>3. We are clear about when we support search and rescue outside of our region and when we draw on international resources.</li> </ol>

A helicopter is shown in flight, hovering over a rocky riverbed. The helicopter is white with blue and red accents. In the foreground, several people wearing high-visibility yellow and red jackets are sitting on large rocks along the riverbank, preparing a patient for rescue. The background features a steep, forested mountain slope under a cloudy sky.

# Appendix

*Land Search and Rescue volunteers prepare a patient for helicopter rescue.*

# Defining the elements of the NZSAR System Strategic Plan

Below we have a description capturing the essence of what we are trying to achieve at each level of the Strategic Plan.

## Strategic Plan Framework



# How we will work as a system

These principles guide how both the NZSAR System and NZSAR Council will work.



We are unified and aligned in our efforts to achieve better search and rescue outcomes



We make evidence-based investment choices which enable the NZSAR System to succeed



We have clear and transparent ways of working together



We stand by our commitment to embed Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations into the NZSAR System.

## Success might look like

- SAR agencies and NGOs know what is expected of them in core SAR and in broader emergency management events.
- Sharing information on risks, trends, successes and failures to support the agencies and NGOs to improve their response and prevention efforts.
- No matter the communication channel used for distress notification, the same response will be provided.
- A culture and commitment to continuous improvement within the NZSAR System.

## Success might look like

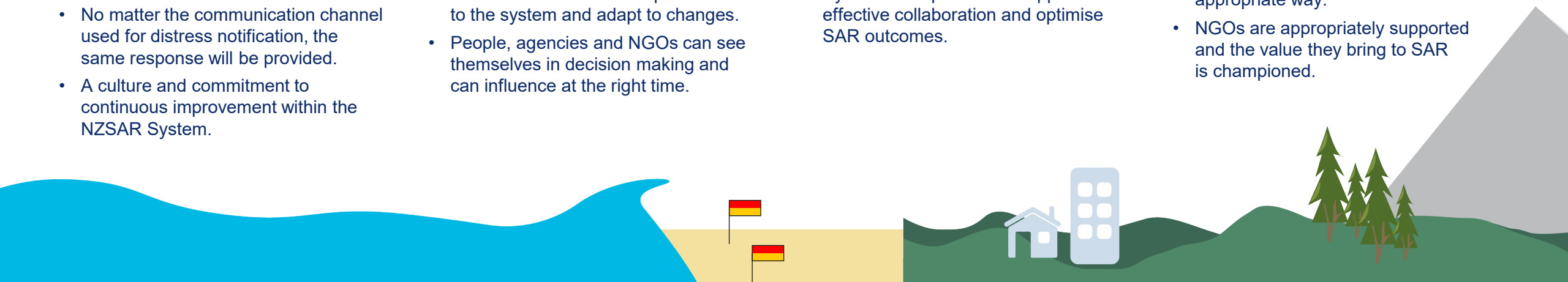
- Agencies and NGOs have a clear picture of strategic drivers and can invest accordingly.
- An NZSAR Council work programme which is aligned to the NZSAR System Strategic Plan.
- Evidence and insights are used to understand and inform improvements to the system and adapt to changes.
- People, agencies and NGOs can see themselves in decision making and can influence at the right time.

## Success might look like

- Agencies and NGOs understand the value and capability each other brings and can leverage each other's strengths, resources and skills.
- Trust in each other to deliver on SAR responsibilities and legislative expectations of search and rescue.
- Systems and processes support effective collaboration and optimise SAR outcomes.

## Success might look like

- An inclusive system which represents and reflects the communities we serve.
- Our people striving towards growing in their cultural capability.
- Iwi, Hapū, whānau, Māori feel valued and included in the NZSAR System.
- We are trusted to work in a culturally appropriate way.
- NGOs are appropriately supported and the value they bring to SAR is championed.



# Indication of priorities

The intermediate outcomes were prioritised at the Out-of-Cycle NZSAR Council Session, as shown below.

## We are always striving towards

## Intermediate outcomes (3-5 years)

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### Priority areas

<span style="color: red;">■</span>	High
<span style="color: yellow;">■</span>	Medium
<span style="color: lightblue;">■</span>	Low



# Definitions

Key terms used throughout the Strategic Plan

Key word	Definition
Agencies	Civil Aviation Authority, Department of Conservation, Fire and Emergency New Zealand, Maritime New Zealand, Ministry of Transport, New Zealand Defence Force, New Zealand Police, and the Rescue Coordination Centre.
Adjacent systems	Inclusive of recreational safety, transport and emergency management sectors.
Capability	An effect delivered through people, equipment, systems, information and training.
Capability framework	Outlines the skills, resources, and processes needed to effectively respond. It defines the tools and training necessary to ensure efficient and coordinated operations during a rescue.
Coordinating Authority	The agency or body responsible for the overall conduct of a Search and Rescue Operation. The Coordinating Authority will lead and manage the operation. New Zealand has two Coordinating Authorities: the New Zealand Police and the Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand (RCCNZ).
Distress	Someone in distress may be lost, missing, in a situation of peril, injured, in need of medical care or other assistance.
Governance	The formal framework of rules, structures, and processes which a system is directed, controlled and held accountable.
governance	A broader term to described the general practice and process of managing and directing.
Key assets	The essential resources, infrastructure, and capabilities that directly enable the execution of search and rescue operations. These assets are vital to ensuring the readiness, safety, and effectiveness of SAR responses across New Zealand's diverse environments.
NZSRR	New Zealand Search and Rescue Region.
NZSAR System	The assembly of government, volunteer, and community organisations, partners and capabilities working together to prepare for, respond to, locate and assist people in distress.
People	Used broadly to describe everyone who works in the NZSAR System whether people are paid or volunteers.



