

NZSAR Gold Award

Awarded to Surf Life Saving New Zealand lifeguards Lilah Foote, Rebekah Gee and Briar Macken for a rescue at Pukehina Beach in the Bay of Plenty on 11 January 2007.

On 11 January 2007, at Pukehina Beach in the Bay of Plenty, lifeguards Lilah Foote, Rebekah Gee and Briar Macken saw a boat capsize attempting to cross the Pukehina Bar. While Briar supervised from shore, maintaining radio contact with rescue services, Lilah and Rebekah launched their Inflatable Rescue Boat and navigated their way through choppy surf to the overturned boat. Only one of the occupants of the boat had managed to get free, while another four people, including two small children, remained trapped underneath in the boat's cabin. Lilah and Rebekah both dived under the boat to attempt a rescue, but as visibility was poor and the occupants were firmly trapped in the cabin, they quickly reassessed the situation and decided to spin the boat around and co-ordinate themselves and two volunteers to lift one side of the boat using the force of the waves.

When the next wave came in the boat was able to be lifted high enough to drag everyone clear. Thanks to the efforts of these young women all five occupants of the boat made it to shore with only minor injuries after being trapped for a terrifying 20 minutes. This rescue was possible because of the skill, teamwork and leadership displayed by Lilah, Rebekah and Briar. Each lifeguard had to make quick decisions under pressure with no margin for error. Their dedication to their jobs and commitment to their training served them well. If they had not responded in the way they did there could have been four lives lost.

NZSAR Certificate of Achievement

Awarded for the first time to the team of 'Operation Brewer'. 'Operation Brewer' involved the rescue of Dr Michael Brewer from the Middle Earth Caving System in Takaka in August 2007.

Dr Brewer was 3km inside the system when a rock fall threw him from the rock face he was climbing, leaving him with head injuries and a fractured pelvis and ribs.

The technical skill required to rescue Dr Brewer was extraordinary given the combination of his injuries, the constricted space of the cave system, and the distance he was from the surface when he fell. Added to the complications were the artificial lighting and communications systems that had to be set up before the rescue could even begin. In short, this rescue certainly gave new meaning to the term 'caught between a rock and a hard place'!

The rescue itself, led by Police, lasted 70 hours, included 29 hours of stretcher carrying and required the co-ordination of 98 rescue personnel. The mission included members from the Speleological Society, Land Search and Rescue NZ, the Fire Brigade and the New Zealand Army.

This was a very successful, large scale search and rescue operation conducted in a hard to access location.

International Maritime Organisation Bravery Award

The International Maritime Organisation 'International Bravery Award' is conferred on individuals who perform acts of bravery to save a life at sea and in its inaugural year it has gone to a New Zealander.

In April 2007, while fishing off Cape Palliser on the Wairarapa coast, commercial fisherman Brett Churcher and his crew picked up the words "May Day" and "Lake Ferry" on his marine radio. Using his local knowledge, Brett and his crew quickly filled in the gaps in the information and made for the entrance to the lake 15 nautical miles away. They soon came across an upturned dingy, but discovered no signs of life.

Using the skills he had learnt at a recent Search and Rescue training day, Brett began an expanding box search, and with the assistance of his crew, found Scott Tulloch and his four-year-old daughter Lucy drifting in the sea. The crew plucked the pair out of the water and looked after them until they were airlifted to hospital. Scott and Lucy had been in the water for over an hour. If they had been in the sea much longer, their chances of survival would have been very slim. Thanks to the quick actions and initiative of Brett and his crew, two lives were saved.

As Brett was unable to travel to London for this award, it was accepted on his behalf by the NZ High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, It was re-presented by Hon King at the 2007 NZSAR awards.