

Exercise Evaluation Report

WAIKATO DISTRICT SAREX 2023

EAGLE

Location: Scout Hut, Kaimai Range, Te Poi

Date: 10 March to 12 March 2023

Report version: FINAL

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Executive Summary

The 2023 Waikato District SAREX was originally planned as a larger scale multi agency approach.

As a consequence of Cyclone Gabrielle and a low number of attendees, the exercise was significantly downsized in the week preceding the exercise to what it was.

While consideration was made to cancel or postpone the event, it was considered important to continue with the exercise for this year.

It did highlight the significant LandSAR membership numbers on their books against the active members actually attending operations, training and SAREX's.

Despite that this exercise was very successful, with all participants gaining knowledge and experience throughout the SAREX.

The presentation on the Saturday night by David Galbraith was very well received and most of the participants gained value from that presentation.

Recommendations

- (1) To plan a large-scale scenario based SAREX over a wide area to test the communication infrastructure.

See findings, objective 3.

- (2) To liaise with Waikato SAR groups to consider the reduction of members to numbers that reflect those who regularly attend trainings, operations and SAREX's.

See Findings, general.

- (3) To encourage Police District leadership team to attend the SAREX and show support and appreciation to Police SAR squads and the wider volunteer SAR community within their district.

See findings, general.

Introduction

The Waikato District land SAREX has been planned for the dates it was held and advertised to Landsar groups across the district for several months.

The plan was always to run a series of workshop-based exercises with teams rotating through these workshops, followed by a small lost person scenario nearby to imbed the learnings from the workshops.

The purpose of the SAREX was always a learning opportunity for field team members with a very small component exercising an IMT during the lost person scenario.

The original plan was to have other agencies, including FENZ and St John and RCCNZ to run some of the workshops.

Cyclone Gabrielle impacted on this SAREX.

Firstly, the personnel from FENZ and St John were deployed to Gisborne and Hawkes Bay to support the cyclone response and were unable to be replaced.

Secondly, some of the SAR groups were personally impacted with the cyclone, or had been deployed to the cyclone response, particularly in the coromandel area.

Consequently, the SAREX required last minute modifications, reducing the number of workshops, and scaling down the scenario-based exercise.

The SAREX was very successful with 6 workshops run over the first day, The subjects of the workshops included.

SAR dogs

River Crossings

Firearm safety

Scene Processing

Directional searching equipment

Navigation.

In addition, the SAREX included a speaker for the Saturday evening. That speaker was David Galbraith who spoke on motivations for high performance, both in SAR and personal context.

Background

The evaluator was contacted early by the Waikato SAR coordinator and engaged to complete this evaluation. The original plan and the subsequent modified one were forwarded as they became available. The evaluation was of the whole exercise and included observations and comments by the participants.

Background to the Exercise

The Waikato Police recognize that in the event of a major SAR incident within the district a multiple SAR agency response would be required.

To meet this challenge NZSAR and the NZ Police are actively encouraging multi-agency interaction and training.

There is a need to provide an opportunity for Police and LandSAR personnel to test their ability to effectively work together as part of an effective SAR sector that has a well-equipped and enabled workforce available to deploy into operational environments.

In order to promote and foster the development of both field skills, leadership and interoperability between LandSAR groups and Police, given the recent cancellations of SAREX due to Covid-19, this relationship building and training opportunity is overdue.

Fatigue management is becoming better understood by the sector and measures to mitigate this risk will likely require a district wide response as groups will need to be rotated in and out of prolonged operations.

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

The Planning team for this SAREX included.

Sgt Sean KEELEY, Police SAR Coordinator. Waikato

Det. Alton TREML, incoming SAR Coordinator, Waikato

Kip MANDENO, Landsar Senior member Hamilton Group

The exercise held between the 10 and 12 March 2023 at the Scout Hut, Kaimai ranges, Te Poi.

Participating organisations

Attending agencies included LandSAR groups, Hamilton, Waitomo and 1 from the Paeroa Group.

Waikato Police SAR squad

Other agencies assisting included RCCNZ.

In total

23 LandSAR participants

11 Police SAR participants

1 RCCNZ participant

Includes the SAREX management team in those numbers.

Exercise aim

The exercise aim has been defined in its purpose.

“To provide a realistic training environment for SAR groups to enhance field skills, leadership and teamwork.”

Exercise objectives

The objectives set.

SAR operational personnel refresh and practice search and rescue skills.

Information is effectively managed and communicated during the response.

Test communication infrastructure in a SAR environment.

Risks are identified, minimized, and managed. Scenario: second operational period - OP RAPID 12/03/2023

Exercise Scenario

Informant Joshua Richardson notifies Police on 11 March 2023 that he has lost (%) neurologically diverse children whilst they were on a short bushwalk off SH29. They were on a school road trip and decided to stop at the Kaimai summit and do the short loop along the 'North-South' track to stretch their legs as the children were becoming restless.

Joshua and the other carer, Jim Morrison took all 8 children and became separated from () of the children as they became distracted by one who began to have an asthma attack. This was whilst they were about 200m along the track.

Joshua, Jim and the remaining (4) children continued the loop walk and called out for the outstanding children. They assumed they would have continued the walk and meet up back at the minivan however when they returned, they found they were not there.

Jim went back around the loop walk and called out again however could not find any of the (4) children missing children.

Joshua called Police at 1900hrs and Waikato Police SAR were notified at 1940hrs.

ASAROP was initiated overnight with teams deployed into the search area. Containment was established at the following three locations:

- Intersection of Henderson's Tramline (West branch) Track and Old Kaimai Road, 1859525E, 5806672N.
- Intersection of North - South track and Henderson's Tramline (North Branch) Track, 1857232E, 5808781N.
- Intersection of North- South track and SH29, 1857653E, 5804363N

For the purposes of this exercise the containment forms the absolute outer limits of the defined search area- see map.

A number of 'hasty' taskings were actioned by SAR members overnight and the following clues were located which taskings have been prepared for by the overnight MIT members.

These 'clues' have been engineered so that each team will be tasked to a high probability area which, if completed correctly will result in a successful find.

The overnight taskings have been completed and those members are now resting.

Assets:

(.4) LSAR teams

Nil other SAR assets or tactics are available.

Evaluation Methodology

The agreed outcomes of the evaluation activity.

The evaluator was contacted early in the planning process with an agreed outcome to evaluate the exercise as a whole.

Evaluation scope

The whole of the exercise forms the evaluation of this SAREX.

Aspects of the exercise observed, what was not observed.

Each of the workshops were observed by the evaluator and is included in this report.

The scenario based exercise was observed from the IMT.

The evaluation also includes some comments made by participants.

The process followed in preparing and submitting the report.

The evaluator had no direct input into the planning of this exercise, however, was in contact with the District SAR Coordinator during the planning process.

The evaluator attended the SAREX in full, completed a draft report based on observations and comments by participants.

The draft report was forwarded to the District SAR Coordinator to endorse with any comments prior to submitting the final report with any necessary modifications.

The draft report was returned by the SAR coordinator with no changes required.

The final report is completed.

Other information.

The SAREX is based primarily on direct observations by the evaluator, with the exception of the scenario-based activity, during which the evaluator was based with the IMT.

Findings

- i) SAR operational Personnel refresh and practice search and rescue skills

KPIs set for this objective included.

Teams provide regular sitreps.

The safety of search team members is maintained during the exercise.

SAR field team members apply appropriate search techniques.

This first objective was achieved with the six workshop-based activities run during the Saturday and tested on the second day with the scenario-based exercise.

The workshops included.

SAR Dogs

This was achieved with a presentation by 2 landSAR dog handlers and focused on what landSAR team members need to be aware of when working with and around SAR dog teams.

It included a description of what the dogs are capable of and finished with a demonstration an area search and tracking dog skills.

River Crossing

This was achieved with some river crossing instruction from a landSAR expert followed by a practical exercise of river crossing as individuals and as a team.

The workshop culminated in a practical search of a river system, locating and rescuing a victim (life like mannikin).

Firearms

This was achieved with instruction and demonstration by Police SAR personnel with firearms experience. It included the identification of different styles and models of firearms, making each firearm safe, and a discussion of firearms in a SAR environment. i.e how to deal with firearms when locating a lost hunter.

The workshop concluded with target shooting with air guns.

Scene processing

This was achieved with instruction and demonstration by experience Police SAR members. It included an observation exercise and culminated in a team exercise processing a campsite.

Directional finding

This was achieved with instruction, demonstration by RCCNZ personnel with the district based directional finding equipment with exercises locating PLB's and epirbs.

It also included the use of wander search equipment with instruction by a LandSAR member.

Navigation

This was achieved with instruction by an experienced Police SAR member and was based on navigation using GPS followed with map and compass.

The workshop was largely based on a navigation exercise, Navigating around a number of waypoints around the SAREX base.

These KPIs were all met to address this objective.

Regular Sitreps were achieved primarily through the scenario-based activities, with teams reporting back to the IMT.

Safety was maintained throughout the exercise, with all briefings emphasizing safety and with team leaders using the Take 5 safety briefings prior to being deployed on the scenario-based exercise.

Team members applying appropriate search techniques was demonstrated during the scene processing activity and the scenario-based exercise.

ii) Information is effectively managed and communicated during the response.

This objective was achieved during the scenario-based exercise with teams reporting back findings during their searches, the IMT recording that information on "Found Clue" boards and the Information Collection Plan.

Information obtained by the IMT through search teams were analyzed and tasks relayed to teams based on that new information.

iii) Test communication infrastructure in a SAR environment.

This objective was achieved during the scenario-based exercise.

Communication within the IMT was well managed by the Incident controllers during the scenario-based exercise. The Incident controllers were identified as experienced Police SAR squad members with limited incident control experience, however both incident controllers who were used managed that communication very well.

However, to fully achieve this objective will require an exercise over a wider area and involve the use of linking repeaters.

The communication between the IMT and field team members included the use of repeaters. A team was tasked to set the repeater up early so that the communication could be achieved. The new Police repeater was used.

iv) Risks are identified Minimized and managed.

A safety plan was developed for this exercise. It was displayed throughout the exercise and referred to in all the briefings.

The take 5 version of the safety plan was used by team leaders during the scenario-based exercise.

General findings

In addition to the workshop-based activities and the scenario-based exercise was an evening presentation from David Galbraith, a clinical psychologist and expert of teamwork and personal development.

His presentation was based largely on personal development and the barriers to higher achievement as an individual.

This presentation was very well received by the SAREX participants and while it didn't add to the objectives of the SAREX, it certainly added value to the participants and to the SAR groups that had attended.

While it was accepted that some of the Waikato SAR groups and some organisations were unable to attend as a result of the effects of Cyclone Gabrielle, the general turnout across the Waikato SAR groups was poor.

Waitomo group is a small group of which 4 attended.

Hamilton is a large group with numbers around 50 volunteers, however only 14 attended, including those who ran the workshops.

Only 1 attended from the Paeroa group, the closest group to the venue.

The 4 remaining groups had no participants.

A SAREX offers an opportune time for Police District Leadership Teams to demonstrate their support for their police SAR squads and to demonstrate their appreciation of SAR volunteer groups and other organisations in the SAR community. This would be simply achieved by a visit by the District Operations Manager or at least the on-duty district inspector.

This did not occur during this SAREX, although it has been made aware to the evaluator that the Police SAR squad is generally well supported.

Conclusions

Objective 1

SAR operational personnel refresh and practice search and rescue skills.

Objective MET

Objective 2

Information is effectively managed and communicated during the response.

Objective MET

Objective 3

Test communication infrastructure in a SAR environment

Objective MET

Objective 4

Risks are identified minimized and managed.

Objective MET

Appendix