



2024 Awards



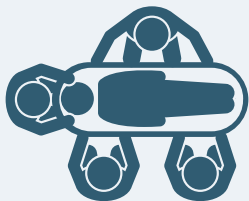
***The New Zealand Search and Rescue Council and Secretariat
warmly congratulate our 2024 Award winners.***

***Whakataka te hau ki te uru
Whakataka te hau ki te tonga
Kia mākinakina ki uta
Kia mātaratara ki tai
E hī ake ana te atākura
He tio, he huka, he hauhū
Tihei mauri ora!***

***Cease the winds from the west
Cease the winds from the south
Bring calm breezes over the land
Bring calm breezes over the sea
Let the red tipped dawn come
With a touch of frost
A sharpened air
And promise of a glorious day
Behold we live!***

2024 SAR Snapshot

For the year ending 31 December 2024



3,472

SAR incidents



138

Lives saved



777

People rescued



928

People assisted



63,211

Operational people hours



2,683

Operational asset hours



Gold Award

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY

He iti hoki te mokoroa, nāna i kakati te kahikatea.

While the mokoroa grub is small, it cuts through the white pine.

The NZ Search and Rescue Gold Award (Operational) honours the people, groups or organisations who have performed at the very highest level during a search and rescue operation in 2024. The recipients of the Gold Award have made a very significant contribution, going above and beyond their normal duties.



Raglan Surf Lifesaving Club

For the rescue of three people from a boat overturned on the Raglan Bar.

On the afternoon of 1 December 2024, Police were informed that a small fishing boat carrying a family of three had capsized crossing the Raglan Bar.

Although the son had been thrown clear and the mother was able to get out of the boat, the father remained trapped in the upturned hull, breathing from a small air pocket.

Members of the Raglan Surf Life Saving Club were training nearby with Inflatable Rescue Boats (IRB). They responded immediately and only four minutes after being notified by Police, the first IRB pulled the mother and son from the water. A second IRB soon arrived and began to search for the father.

Unable to locate him in the waves, a Surf Lifeguard entered the water to check the boat. However, there was a lot of fishing line in the water, and the Surf Lifeguard had to cut his way through.

After banging on the hull and hearing a response from the forward cabin, the Surf Lifeguard tried to coach the man to exit the boat but ended up having to forced open the cabin hatch and pull the man free.

These swift actions almost certainly saved the man's life.

All three family members were met on the beach by Hato Hone St John and taken to Waikato Hospital with minor injuries.

As the second IRB was returning to base, they noticed a swimmer in a rip and rescued them also. Meanwhile, two body boarders had been caught in another rip, and were assisted by other Surf Lifeguards on patrol.

Coastguard Raglan were also tasked by Police to assist with this operation, arriving minutes after all the family members had been rescued. In difficult conditions, the Coastguard Raglan crew were able to reach the upturned vessel to tow it off the bar, so it was no longer a hazard to the public.



Gold Award

SUPPORT ACTIVITY

He kōtuku rerenga tahi.

A white heron flies once.

The NZ Search and Rescue Gold Award (Support) honours the individual who has made a very significant contribution through their work over a sustained period. The recipient of the Gold Award (Support) has performed at the highest level to deliver a marked impact on the search and rescue sector.



Ian Trethowen is pictured with his wife Victoria.

Ian Trethowen

For the development and ongoing support of WanderSearch.

Ian Trethowen has made a profound impact on the effectiveness of search and rescue for people with cognitive impairments. He was the original developer of the WanderSearch technology, with support from Ken Simpson and others from the search and rescue sector.



A WanderSearch device is a small, radio frequency transmitter that can be worn by individuals with cognitive impairment who are at risk of going missing or becoming lost. The devices are produced in several different forms and are designed to be worn continuously, with safeguards against accidental deactivation by the wearers.

Should a person go missing, these devices can be tracked by trained responders using specialised equipment. By quickly narrowing down the search area, WanderSearch technology significantly increases the chances of a successful search and rescue operation.

Ian developed and manufactured the first devices, which were issued in Nelson in 2006 and quickly showed their value. The news spread quickly, and now devices are issued by volunteers nationwide.

Over the years, Ian has made significant improvements to the wearable devices and the tracking equipment. WanderSearch has proved to be an invaluable technology, providing peace of mind to whānau and caregivers, and a reliable tool for search and rescue responders.

WanderSearch has set a benchmark as a safeguarding resource for those with cognitive impairments. Ian's efforts have inspired further research and development in New Zealand and overseas on both safeguarding and enabling resources.

Ian's ongoing dedication and commitment to improving the technology has profoundly improved the safety and well-being of many vulnerable individuals and the effectiveness of search and rescue for people with cognitive impairment.



Certificate of Achievement

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY

Coastguard South Taranaki

For the search for a missing diver near Pātea Bar, South Taranaki.

On 10 March 2024, a man failed to return from a SCUBA dive, approximately five nautical miles off the coast near the Pātea Bar, in South Taranaki.

Coastguard South Taranaki was alerted first by radio and responded quickly to the scene. Conditions soon deteriorated and remained poor for the majority of the SAR Operation.

Over the next six days, the members of Coastguard South Taranaki conducted marine searches in collaboration with other vessels, helicopters and aircraft as well as supporting the operations of the Police National Dive Squad.

When sea conditions meant they could not safely cross the Pātea Bar to join the day's marine search, members of Coastguard South Taranaki continued to contribute, by conducting shoreline searches on foot and by all-terrain-vehicle as well as providing local knowledge and advice to incident managers.

The missing person was known to many members of Coastguard South Taranaki, who displayed the utmost determination, professionalism and tenacity during this operation, which continued for nine days before being formally suspended. The diver was unfortunately not recovered.



The NZSAR Council would like to acknowledge the tragic loss of life and the impact on whānau, friends and the local community.

The following agencies and organisations also contributed to this SAR Operation:
Land Search and Rescue Horowhenua and Whanganui, Taranaki and Taranaki
Surf Life Saving New Zealand SAR Squads, Police Central District, Manawātū and
Whanganui/Ruapehu SAR Squads, Police National Dive Squad, No.3 Squadron
Royal New Zealand Air Force, Cape Egmont Sea Rescue Trust, Search and Rescue
Services Limited – New Plymouth.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY



Zack Armstrong and Hernan Holliday, GCH Aviation – Greymouth team members

For the rescue of a tramper trapped between boulders in the Taipo River.

On 14 July 2024, a tramper's foot became trapped between boulders in the Taipo River. The woman's companion activated a personal locator beacon. Maritime New Zealand's Rescue Coordination Centre tasked the GCH Aviation – Greymouth helicopter to respond.

At the scene, the helicopter crew did not receive any homing signal from the beacon, so they used a visual search to locate the party in distress.

It was a clear and frosty mid-winter's day. By the time Zack and Hernan reached her, the tramper had been trapped in fast flowing chest-deep water for approximately 40 minutes and was becoming unconscious due to the cold.

Her foot was firmly wedged between two boulders and held there by the strong current. The two crewmen began to try to free the woman and Zack had to submerge himself several times to see the nature of the entrapment. Freeing her required coordinated and intense physical effort, which took more than five minutes of exposure to the very cold and swift waters.

After freeing the woman, the crewmen pulled her to shore and began re-warming treatment and other medical assessments. She was soon raised by winch to the helicopter along with her companion and flown to hospital to be treated for hypothermia and a leg injury.



Far North Surf Rescue

[For the rescue of fishermen swept from rocks near Tapotupotu Bay.](#)

Around 4.30pm on 19 July 2024, reports were received of four fishermen being swept off the rocks into rough seas at Tapotupotu Bay, near Cape Reinga. Local Iwi began an effort to assist the fishermen, who were at risk of being blown out to sea by the winds from a southerly storm.

Volunteers from Far North Surf Rescue began the 125km journey to the scene, with sunset fast approaching.

At Tapotupotu Beach they met with Police and Iwi to coordinate their next moves. Two of the fisherman had reached safety. A third fisherman with a leg injury and one Iwi responder had become stranded on rocks by the rough seas.

An Inflatable Rescue Boat (IRB) crew deployed into the surf to locate the fourth fisherman who was last seen drifting away from shore, whilst the Northern Rescue Helicopter – Whangārei recovered the fisherman and Iwi responder that were stranded nearby.

The IRB crew located the fourth fisherman 200 metres away, on rocks being pounded by large waves. They were able to reach him by navigating a maze of rocks to find a safer landing position nearby. They had just reached the relative safety of open water as it got dark and navigated back to the Tapotupotu estuary using spotlights.



Certificate of Achievement

SUPPORT ACTIVITY



Bart Kindt

For the development of SARTrack Incident Management Software.

Bart Kindt's effort to develop SARTrack has made a significant improvement to the management of Category 1 SAR Operations in New Zealand.

Around 2008, Bart used his software development and amateur radio skills to realise the vision of a volunteer search dog handler to track dogs during an operation. It soon became apparent that SARTrack had much more potential, and it began to evolve into search and rescue Incident Management Software.

Tracking hardware was developed for SAR teams as well as digital repeaters to relay the data to the incident control point.

In 2016, SARTrack was first used in a major exercise during the Southern District SAR Exercise on Stewart Island. Police trialled the live tracking of field teams for the first time, and the successful trial led to the program being recognised widely as the default Incident Management Software for Category 1 SAR Operations. A majority of Land Search and Rescue groups now use the system for tracking teams, managing clues, incorporating lost person behaviour analysis, determining search area coverage and many other operational needs.

Although Bart has received some funding from time to time to develop SARTrack, he has made an ongoing commitment to the system. He has devoted many hundreds of volunteer hours to making changes and upgrades to improve SARTrack's functionality and usefulness to responders.



Graeme Hill

For his service and commitment to New Zealand Land Search and Rescue Dogs and SAR in the Waikato region.

Over the past 15 years, Graeme Hill has made an outstanding contribution to search and rescue in the Waikato region, across New Zealand and to Search and Rescue Dog capability in Victoria, Australia.

As an operational dog handler for Land Search and Rescue Hamilton, he has deployed to over 120 SAR operations. Graeme's dog team have been directly responsible for finding 23 missing persons.

Graeme has made extensive contributions to developing the Search and Rescue Dog resources in New Zealand as a Lead Trainer during courses and as an assessor of both the Area Search and the Tracking disciplines. He played a pivotal role in developing standard operating procedures and workshops for combined tracking teams, which has significantly improved the effectiveness of the search and rescue dog teams across the nation.

Graeme has also served for more than five years in leadership and governance roles within New Zealand Land Search and Rescue Dogs.

He has extended his contributions internationally, as a valued mentor, collaborator, trainer and assessor to Australian Search and Rescue K9 as their dog capability was established.

Graeme is regarded as an inspiration by all those he works with, for his dedication, leadership and expertise.

SUPPORT ACTIVITY



Don Robertson

For his service and commitment to AREC.

Don Robertson joined Amateur Radio Emergency Communications (AREC) in 1979 and has demonstrated excellent commitment during more than 40 years of service.

As his experience developed, Don stepped into leadership roles, and championed numerous training courses in the wider Wellington region to upskill and grow AREC membership.

He served as Wellington Group Leader for two years, then Central Area manager and in 2019, took on the National Director role in a voluntary capacity. He had a vision to raise the standards of training, governance and capability for the organisation, and developed a business case for Government funding for paid staff positions and projects to modernise the organisation.

Don became the AREC Chief Executive Officer and got to work on the projects he envisioned, such as back-end membership and IT systems, policies and procedures. Through effective communications with his members, training needs were identified and online resources developed to fill those gaps. New recruitment initiatives led to a growth in membership across the country.

Don has given many decades of service, and his contributions have strengthened the organisation at a local, regional and now national level. Throughout, he has maintained very high standards and shown exemplary dedication and commitment to Amateur Radio Emergency Communications.



Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro – Tūwharetoa

For Iwi support to Police SAR in
the Central North Island.

For more than eight years, the contributions of Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro – Tūwharetoa have been hugely beneficial to SAR Operations and community cohesion in the region.

Their relationship with regional Police SAR Squads is built on mutual respect and cooperation, which began during a lengthy SAR Operation in the Central North Island in 2017. Spanning more than three weeks and involving over 250 responders, the operation involved searching for two individuals who were alleged to have committed criminal offences and were possibly carrying weapons.

Throughout the complex operation, Iwi and Hapū were crucial in building trust and maintaining good relationships between Police and local communities. They provided an outstanding example of support to Police and SAR volunteers, improving communications and sharing of information. This operation paved the way for many collaborative procedures which have become standard practice during SAR Operations since then.

Tyrone (Bubs) Smith and Te Ngaehe Wanikau are acknowledged and thanked as key individuals at the forefront of building and maintaining these strong relationships.

The exemplary working relationships between Police SAR and Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro – Tūwharetoa have significantly improved the effectiveness of the SAR capability in the region.



Do you know an organisation, group or individual who you think should be acknowledged for their contribution to search and rescue?

There are two categories – operational activity and support activity. More information about each category, the NZSAR Awards and the nomination process can be found at nzsar.govt.nz/awards.

The 2025 Award nominations close on 31 January 2026.