

Exercise Evaluation Report

Bay Of Plenty District SAREX 2025

Location: Ngatuhoa, Kaimai Mamaku Park

Date: 28th to 30th March 2025

**Report
version:** FINAL

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Executive Summary

The 2025 Bay of Plenty District SAREX was held at the Ngatuhua area of the Kaimai-Mamaku Forest Park.

This was a good facility, with good access, good area for accommodation and a shelter to set up and Incident Control Point for the main scenario and to manage the exercise from.

The area was chosen because it is an area of increasing calls for service, and an area that the SAR groups needed to understand,

Only 2 Police SAR squad members attended from outside the local Tauranga group.

LandSAR groups from Tauranga, Rotorua and Whakatane attended.

AREC did not attend, advising their unavailability only the week beforehand.

The exercise was a combination of workshop-based activities with a main scenario.

It was a particularly successful exercise, appreciated by all those who attended and identified a number of subjects to consider as recommendations.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

In-Depth communication and I.T training for District SAR groups to develop communication and I.T expertise.

See findings and conclusions for Objective 1

Recommendation 2

Encourage further training and experience to the Police Incident Controllers

See findings and conclusions Objective 2

Recommendation 3

Bay of Plenty Police District adopt a common SAR management platform across the whole district to gain a consistent means of managing SAR events and train to that platform.

See findings and conclusions Objective 3

Recommendation 4

To resource the Management Platform with laptops, screens and in some cases hard copy A0 size forms, to allow for key Information to be displayed in the ICP for all IMT members.

See findings and conclusions Objective 3

Recommendation 5

To engage with the LandSAR Maori Advisor, rather than Police Iwi Liaison to develop a relationship between Iwi and Western Bay of Plenty SAR groups.

See findings and conclusions objective 4

Recommendation 6

To encourage potential and actual Police Incident Controllers to attend SAR Management training and exercises to enhance their skill levels.

See General Findings

Recommendation 7

To encourage all Bay of Plenty Police SAR squad members to attend District SAR exercises.

See Findings Objective 2 and General findings

Recommendation 8

The Police District Leadership Team to support the Area SAR groups by attending District Exercises and having the Area SAR coordinators involved in the planning and managing of these District Exercises.

See General Findings.

Introduction

The Bay Of Plenty Police District is divided into 4 areas, each area having its own SAR group within it.

The annual Land SAREX is shared between the districts. The 2025 SAREX was for the Tauranga Group to organize.

The invites are sent out to each of the areas to attend.

The SAREX began with invitees arriving on the Friday night for a meet and greet time. The SAREX proper started on the Saturday morning with a series of workshops until Mid Afternoon, followed by a scenario-based exercise running into the night, and concluding on Sunday morning..

This SAREX was designed with the purpose of learning and testing.

The learning covered 4 topics and were run as separate workshops. Teams rotated through these workshops during the day.

Those workshops included River Crossing, Radios and communications, GPS and Navigation and tracking.

Management teams spent that time learning the D4H management system, which the Tauranga SAR group have adopted as their SAR management system.

The scenario was designed to test field team members of their SAR skills and to test the SAR Management Team using the D4H system to manage a search operation.

Background to the Exercise

The Tauranga Police SAR squad has had significant staff turnover recently. The identified need is to expose the new staff to SAR management in a safe environment.

The Tauranga SAR group has recently chosen the D4H system as their SAR management platform.

The identified need to enhance shared experience with neighboring groups and partner agencies

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

28th to 30th March 2025

Ngatuhoa, Kaimai -Mamaku Park

SAREX Planning team includes LandSAR and Police SAR personnel

Participating organisations

Participating organisations include Police and LandSAR. AREC had been invited but did not attend.

Other stakeholders include the department of Conservation, Ngatuhoa Lodge, Iwi landholders.

Exercise aim

Test IMT capability and to develop strong relationship with partner agencies and neighboring Landsat groups.

Exercise objectives

Objective 1

Test the Western Bay Of Plenty (WBOP) SAR communications

KPI

Test the call-out system

Set up repeater

Communications plan available and utilized

Common terminology

Appropriate SITREPs

Objective 2

Test the IMT response of WBOP SAR personnel with the focus on completion of appropriate SAR documentation.

KPI's

Good IAP and Safety plans

Appropriate initial briefings

Management of resource and time in accordance with CIMs

Event Log maintained

Situational awareness gained and maintained

Health, safety and welfare maintained

Objective 3

Learn and Test WBOP SAR capability in D4H

KPI's

Tasking documented appropriately

All communication recorded appropriately

Improve understanding of capability of D4H system for SAR.

Objective 4

Strengthen relationship between WBOP SAR and Iwi

KPI's

Iwi representatives are engaged during the exercise planning

Iwi participants and key WBOP SAR engage positively

Exercise Scenario

The main scenario was based on a missing person who had left the Ngatuhoa Lodge(adjacent to the SAREX location) to locate and look at waterfalls. He had not returned by a prescribed time.

A family member had gone looking for him and had also failed to return.

Many of the local waterfalls are not displayed on the Topo50 maps, so local intel was required by the IMT.

6 landsar teams were Deployed in the mid-afternoon to locate both missing parties.

One was found later afternoon and stretcher carried out.

The second has located during the night and was recovered the following morning.

All SAR teams were required to camp out during the night.

Evaluation Methodology

The agreed outcomes of the evaluation activity

It was agreed that the evaluator will report on the whole SAREX through observations or comments by the participants.

Evaluation scope

The scope of the evaluation was of the whole exercise

Aspects of the exercise observed, what was not observed

All the workshop activities and all of the IMT roles within the scenario activity was observed by the evaluator.

Any comments made in respect of field activities have been made based on comments made by participants

The process followed in preparing and submitting the report

This report has been submitted in draft, forwarded to the area SAR coordinator for any comments, prior to submitting as a final report

Other information

Findings

This was a successful SAREX where many of the objectives were met, however did identify some shortcomings to work with.

The workshop activities were valuable to the field teams.

The river crossing workshop outlined the basic requirements for river crossing and refreshed participants with knowledge to cross rivers safely.

The session focused on the team supported river crossing process but did not include the individual crossing process.

The location of the practical exercise was in a calm area, so it was difficult to demonstrate a higher level of river crossing, or to identify holes, eddies, strainers etc.

The location was the best available for this area, close to where the exercise took place.

The workshop was in accordance with SAR best practice.

The GPS session was a valuable session and focused on the Garmin 62 to 66 series. The session identified the capabilities of the GPS units, going through the menu and identifying key functions within the GPS units.

This workshop was in accordance with SAR best practice.

The radio and communication session was a basic comms set up workshop. Focused on setting up the repeaters and linking repeaters, with some discussion on other technologies that currently exist, in particular the portable Star-link units the Tauranga group had recently obtained.

This workshop was in accordance with SAR best practice

The tracking workshop was a practical exercise, identifying tracks laid by the workshop facilitator.

Each participant was required to identify the follow these tracks.

This workshop was in accordance with SAR best practice.

The D4H IMT session was delivered to identify the available functions in the D4H system.

All these workshops were facilitated by experienced practitioners and all participants refreshed and/or learnt skills from the workshops.

The scenario-based activity was held from the Midafternoon on the Saturday through to Sunday morning. The scenario was of an overdue day walker as previously identified in this report, with an overdue family member went searching.

Objective 1

Test the WBOP SAR Communications.

KPI. Test the callout system

The call-out system through D4H was used and tested and worked very well. This is one of the strengths of the D4H system

KPI. Set up the repeater.

The repeater was set up with the scenario search area covered by repeaters and a linking repeater. However, comms were still limiting with some bad reception. There was insufficient expertise within the SAR groups to identify and rectify these limitations. Despite the invite, AREC did not attend this SAREX and did not advise of their nonattendance until late in the planning stage. (within 1 week of the SAREX itself).

KPI. Communications plan available and utilized.

The communication plan was identified by the IMT utilizing the repeater channels. Additionally, 3 of the teams utilized the portable Starlink units. This being the first time they have been used in this areas. Those teams, along with the IMT learnt the value of these units, with good comms using this system. Using the portable Star-link comms also added value to the D4H system, allowing direct link through this system from field teams to the IMT.

KPI. Common terminology.

Cims terminology was used during this exercise

KPI. Appropriate Sit-Rep.

Status reports were required from each team at the hourly radio sched.

However, the contents of these Status reports were not condensed into a Situation Report by the IMT. This is the function of the Intelligence function of the IMT.

The only Situation report was that of the D4H mapping in which team locations and other relevant information was manually inputted.

This was the only information that was displayed with the ICP, from the D4H system.

The only other displayed information was the IAP, and after some delay, a form of team deployment form.

Objective 2

Test the IMT response of the WBOP SAR personnel.

KPI. Good IAP and Safety Plans.

During the Scenario a safety manager and a Welfare Manager were assigned. Both were focused on the safety and Welfare of the responding personnel. That focus for the Welfare Manager, while not strictly in accordance with the responsibilities identified in the Cims sense, certainly worked in this scenario. The safety plan was initiated and worked with.

The IAP was slow in being developed, with tasks started without consideration of a plan. Therefore, the IMT became task driven, not objective driven.

The IAP was ultimately completed and displayed on the trailer side. However, there was little reference to the IAP during the scenario and some updated objectives were poor ones.

However, the IMT members achieved a lot through this experience.

The IMT were very inexperienced. And that is the nature, in particular, of the Police Incident Controllers. The Tauranga Police SAR Squad has gone through a period of sudden personnel change, exposing this area to a number of inexperienced staff.

KPI. Appropriate Initial Briefings.

The scenario Incident Controller was one of these inexperienced SAR practitioners.

Despite that, to his credit, he gave a very sound initial briefing to the IMT staff. He set tasks for functions to achieve.

He delivered subsequent updated briefings throughout the scenario and maintained good control of the IMT.

KPI. Management of resources and times in accordance with CIMs

CIMs is a process of managing an event. Resources and time should be managed in accordance with SAR best practice.

By and large these resources were managed in accordance with SAR best practice.

KPI. Event Log Managed.

The event log was maintained within the D4H system and is one of the strengths of this system.

KPI. Situational awareness gained and maintained.

Situational awareness was lost within the IMT leading to times where functions were duplicating what others were doing.

Primarily this was caused from members of the IMT not having visibility through D4H on updated information.

The only consistent information displayed though D4H was the map with some information of search team locations.

Information that was not displayed included the missing person summary, profiling information, information collection plan, Situation Report.

The action plan was displayed on the side of the trailer where it was not readily seen or referred to.

KPI. Health and Safety and Welfare monitored.

As previously mentioned, this was well managed with 1 person assigned to safety and 1 to staff welfare throughout the scenario.

Objective 3

Learn and Test WBOP SAR capability in D4H.

KPI. Tasking documented appropriately.

Initial delays in developing tasks because of initial delays in setting objectives.

Delays compounded by the perceived need to write tasks in the D4H system. This was overcome by manually preparing taskings and entering them subsequently.

Tasks were appropriate to the scenario, but the risk was of becoming task orientated instead of objective orientated. Particularly after the initial tasks were delivered that tasks were developed with little reference to the IAP.

KPI. All communications recorded appropriately.

All messages were recorded in the D4H system but needed to be displayed all the time. See previous comments re event log in objective 2.

KPI. Improve understanding of capability of D4H system for SAR.

Many of the issues that were faced by the IMT were as a consequence of our limited knowledge and experience with using D4H system in the SAR environment. This knowledge and experience has been significantly improved as a consequence of this SAREX.

Objective 4.

Strengthen the relationship between WBOP SAR and Iwi.

KPI. Iwi representatives are engaged during the exerciser Planning.

There was no engagement with Iwi during this exercise. The only contact to any Māori organisation was through the Landowners to approve access to the SAREX area.

KPI. Iwi participants and key WBOP SAR engage positively.

There has been no engagement between WBOP SAR and Iwi demonstrated during this exercise.

General Findings.

The Police SAR Coordinator for the Western Bay Of Plenty had no input into this District SAR Exercise at any time during the planning or running of the exercise.

There was no evidence of support for Search and Rescue by Police, other than members of the local Police Search and rescue Squad,

Other than the Tauranga Police SAR Squad, only 2 other Police SAR squad member attended this District exercise.

This inhibits the ability of the District Police SAR squads to work together

Conclusions

Objective 1

Test the Western Bay of Plenty SAR Communications

Objective PARTIALLY MET.

Western Bay Of Plenty rely on AREC to supply the expertise and operators for the Communications.

AREC did not attend this exercise. This exposed some good knowledge, but lack of expertise on communications within the District SAR personnel.

Objective 2

Test the IMT response of Western Bay Of Plenty SAR personnel

Objective MET

The opportunity during this exercise was to develop the IMT experience. Generally, the incident control Pool with the Police is small, with the necessity to expose inexperienced Incident Controllers, with mentors.

This was achieved but identified the need of further training and exposure to this role.

Key information was not displayed throughout the IMT, although most was available within the D4H management platform. Not having all the information displayed lead to the lack of situational awareness by some IMT personnel.

Objective 3

To learn and Test Western Bay Of Plenty SAR capability in D4H

Objective MET

The Tauranga group has recently moved to D4H as their SAR Management platform, to manage SAR events. This exercise identified the need for further training in the use of D4H. Other SAR groups and Police areas in the Bay Of Plenty Police District do not use this platform. This hampered the ability of the whole district to work collaboratively.

Objective 4

Strengthen Relationship between Western Bay Of Plenty SAR and IWI.

Objective NOT MET

There was no evidence to identify any relationship between Western Bay Of Plenty SAR and IWI.

No Iwi representatives were evident during the Exercise Planning Stage, nor the exercise itself.

The Police Area SAR planning representative tried to establish a relationship through the district Iwi Liaison team. That ultimately failed at that level.