

Exercise Evaluation Report

NORTHLAND DISTRICT SAREX

Location: Tangihua Forest
Northland

Date: 14th-15th June 2025

**Report
version:** FINAL

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Executive Summary

The Northland District SAREX was a very successful SAREX with all the objectives that were set having been met.

The key to this SAREX was exposing the less experienced SAR practitioners, both in the IMT and in field teams, to their respective roles.

The exercise began with a series of workshop activities, to learn and refresh on basic SAR skills, followed by a scenario-based activity through the afternoon, overnight and into the second day.

The SAREX Planning team identified the need to expose the less experienced IMT staff to the roles, procedures and processes of search. Management. This was achieved with the assistance of a team of experienced SAR managers as mentors.

The exercise identified the needs of the district to have the ability to display the workings of each of the CIMs functions within the IMT to maximize the situational awareness of all IMT members. It also highlighted the need to maintain training for search managers, in particular the attendance at the Managing the Initial response and the Extended Search Planning courses. In addition, the need to maintain district training with IMT specific training. Both these form part of the recommendations.

The exercise highlighted the strong bond between the Northland LandSAR groups and the Northland Police SAR squad.

It also demonstrated the support that the Northland SAR community receives from the Police District.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

That the Police SAR squad members and experienced LandSAR members as they become competent, attend the Manage the Initial Response course and the Extended Search Planning course.

See general findings

Recommendation 2

That the Northland SAR groups apply through LandSAR for a 2-day IMT course for the Northland District.

See findings Objective 1.

Recommendation 3

That the Northland SAR be provided with 4 large monitors to display the forms of each of the management functions, i.e. Planning, Intel, Logistics and operations.

See findings objective 1

Recommendation 4

That the Northland SAR source a set of 4 A1 size Lost Person Summary form and an A1 size Situation Report form. (NZSAR form set.)

See findings objective 1

Introduction

The Northland District SAREX for 2025 was based on the need to focus on the working relationship with the Northland Police SAR squad with their two LandSAR groups, Whangarei and Far North.

This relationship historically has been very strong, however, not to be taken for granted.

The exercise was based in the Tangihua Forest area which is an area of native bush within a short drive from Whangarei city. The Tangihua forest lodge is a popular destination for school and other groups and was an ideal base for the SAREX. The SAREX focused solely on land-based activities involving the LandSAR groups and Policed SAR squad.

There were approximately 50 attendees of Police and LandSAR personnel for this SAREX.

It was started with a series of workshops covering subjects of

Basic IMT and CIMS

Search Techniques

Stretcher and Ropes

First Aid

Tracking

These workshops ran for 45 minutes each and were designed for experience SAR practitioners to refresh their knowledge and skills and for new members to be exposed to these subjects for future training.

The workshops were followed by a scenario based exercise with lost parties inserted during the morning activities.

This exercise was planned to start in the early afternoon and conclude the following morning. Search teams were expected to overnight in the field. Field team members then had the opportunity to test their search techniques and SAR skills. It also gave them the opportunity to test their equipment and preparedness for overnight deployments.

The IMT for this exercise was set up at the Tangihua Lodge. The exercise was planned to test the value of D4H as a SAR management platform to manage searches.

Secondly was to expose the less experienced Police and LandSAR IMT members while being mentored by experienced practitioners.

This exercise concluded at about mid-day after demobilization of teams, followed by the hot debrief of all involved.

Comments made during the de-brief were all very positive in respect to the exercise.

Background

The previous district SAREX identified that not all SAR personnel were suitably prepared for overnight searching and staying out.

The planning team identified the need to maintain the relationship with SAR partners, in particular the Police SAR squad and LandSAR groups.

The planning team identified the need to expose the less experienced IMT personnel to the roles within the IMT.

The area of the Tangihua Forest is close to Whangarei city and is popular for group activities and day walkers.

This SAREX was held between the 13th and 15th June 2025, based at the Tangihua lodge and with the main scenario throughout the Tangihua Forest.

The exercise was restricted to Land operations and as such involved the Northland Police SAR squad and the LandSAR groups from Whangarei and the far North. Each of these were involved in the SAREX planning.

Agencies participating include the two landSAR groups, and the Northland Police SAR Squad

The focus of this year's SAREX was centered around workshops on the Saturday morning, targeted at refreshing essential SAR skills, followed by a scenario in the afternoon, running through overnight and into Sunday morning. The purpose of the scenario was to practice some areas identified as weakness for the agencies attending and improve the skills of those teams while working together collaboratively.

Exercise objectives

SAREX Objective 1:

1. The effective implementation of an IMT and successful management of the search exercise.

KPI's to achieve objective 1:

- Appropriate structure established
- IMT roles and responsibilities are in accordance with CIMS
- Agency response is coordinated and communications are effective in maintaining situational awareness
- Reflex tasking is undertaken
- Briefings and debriefings are conducted
- IMT records location and status of all field resources

SAREX Objective 2:

2. Demonstrate SAR field response teams' preparedness and response for up to 24 hours.

KPI's to achieve objective 2:

- SAR personnel carry out a search to locate the missing party
- Field support resources perform to the standard of their speciality.
- SAR personnel have the appropriate gear and equipment needed for an overnight search up to 24 hours.
- Radio communications are maintained
- The safety of search team members is maintained during recovery
- Missing party is located

SAREX Objective 3:

3. SAR Partner Agencies collaborate effectively to achieve an integrated response.

KPI's to achieve objective 3:

- Appropriate agencies are selected for and participate in the SAR exercise
- All SAR agencies operate within the CIMS model and principles
- All agencies participating collaborate effectively
- Agencies work under common structures, roles and responsibilities

- Agency response is coordinated
- Agencies use common terminology.

Exercise Scenario

- **Time:** 08:00 – Midday

Station Run By:	SAR Skill:	Location:
Ryan Cooper Mike Mooney	1. First Aid	Outside Hall / Grass Area
Ian Ruddell	2. IMT Essentials/ CIMS	Dining Hall
Dean Rozendaal	3. Stretcher & Ropes	Lower Field
Rob Galley / Martin Gvardijancic	4. Track & Clue Processing	Lower Field
Jenny Calder	5. Search Methods	Lower Field
Name:	Supportive Roles	
Cliff Metcalfe/ Paul Overton	• In charge of rotations/ timing	ALL

- There are 5x different workstations.
- **Each station will be run by an expert in that SAREX essential skill.**
 1. *First Aid*
 2. *IMT Essentials/ CIMS*
 3. *Stretcher & Rope*
 4. *Track & Clue Processing*
 5. *Search Methods*
- **Time: 45 mins at each station**

Instructions:

- MC to split everyone into groups of 9 – 10 people
- Number each group 1 – 5
- Ask teams to break off into their respective stations (see below)
- *At the timer of 45 mins, each team is to move to their next station (as below)*
- *At the conclusion of the stations, please assist packing up your last station*

Time:	Group	1 st Station	2 nd Station	3 rd Station	4 th Station	5 th Station
08:00				START		

08:00	1	First Aid	IMT	Strechr & Rope	Track & Clue	Search Mthds
08:45	2	IMT	Strechr & Rope	Track & Clue	Search Mthds	First Aid
09:30	3	Strechr & Rope	Track & Clue	Search Mthds	First Aid	IMT
10:15	4	Track & Clue	Search Mthds	First Aid	IMT	Strechr & Rope
11:00	5	Search Mthds	First Aid	IMT	Strechr & Rope	Track & Clue
11:45				END		

Starting information to phone holder given at approx. 1230hrs:

Scenario:

A group of families had booked the lodge for the weekend. They arrived late Friday morning. The four male children had planned to camp on the grass area down the track from the lodge. Their plan was to cook their own dinner and join their parents for breakfast the next morning.

About 1400 hours they were in the covered area behind the kitchen and told one for the parents that they were going to explore some of the tracks and would see them for breakfast at 0800 hours.

The alarm was raised when they failed to arrive for breakfast. The parents checked their camp and found that they hadn't slept there and their food was untouched.

Possible Expectations:

- Start to form an IMT
- Seek further information from the parents on exactly who saw them last, who checked the campsite this morning and what were they wearing.
- Maybe as we are out there get an initial team formed to go carry out a scene examination of camp site.
- Assess staffing numbers available for deployment

Injections

If/when IMT seeks further information the following is verbally said to them. A quick question and answer from Grant BRUCE the last parent to see them and where he saw them. This is verbal and not given in writing. This checks IMT's recording of information.

Clues

On and off the track *disturbed vegetation* maybe found. It is expected the IMT be notified and make a decision. If it is the hastie team that locates a note and then they carry on with task with the view a later team come back to investigate. *Footprints*, again report back and the IMT make a decision.

Cell phone – confirmation that it is or is not the cell phone of the missing person.

Camera – confirmation that it is or is not from the lost party. An expectation is that it is turned on and the photos on there are looked at and sent back to IMT. IMT may decide to show parents to confirm its there's.

If *food wrappers and scraps* are found, then they should refer tot eh statements as it will be in there if its there's or not.

Evaluation Methodology

The agreed outcomes of the evaluation activity

It was agreed that the evaluator would be based at the IMT base and that any observations recorded of field teams would be based on comments made to the evaluator by field team members directly or at the debrief.

Evaluation scope

It was agreed that the whole of the SAREX would be evaluated

Aspects of the exercise observed, what was not observed

All the workshops were observed by the evaluator. The evaluator attended all the workshops

The evaluator observed all the IMT and took part in some of the discussions within the IMT.

The evaluator did not observe any field teams during the scenario. Any comments made by the evaluator about field teams are based on discussions with field team members and comments made during the debrief.

The process followed in preparing and submitting the report

The evaluator was engaged early in the planning process through the District SAR Assistant Coordinator. Advice was given for the planning team to form the objectives they required.

It was agreed that a draft report will be presented to the District SAR Coordinator for any comments, prior to the final report being submitted.

Other information

As previously mentioned, SAR field teams for the scenario activity were not observed

Findings

Objective 1

Implementation of IMT and successful management of the search

KPI 1

Appropriate structure

The IMT was set up in accordance with the CIM's management structure and identified functions.

KPI 2

Roles and responsibilities in line with CIM's.

Roles and responsibilities were identified, however at times some of those function roles were confused. At times all the IMT members gathered around the live tracking screen and involved in operations functions.

This led to task driven management, as opposed to objective driven Management. This was identified with tasks being developed with no reference to the action plan that had been prepared.

However mentors within the room were able to identify this shortfall and reset the IMT into their functions.

The scenario was managed with the view of testing the D4H platform. However, there is no live tracking on that system.

D4H was used to manage the log and that was very successful.

SarTrack was used to display the live tracking of field teams.

Paper based systems were used for initial taskings and recording subsequent taskings and all the other recording of IMT outputs.

Only the IAP and field team deployment were readily displayed during the exercise. Not having those displayed risks the situational awareness of all the IMT.

KPI 3

Initial tasking underway

While it took some time, the process of developing the initial taskings were sound and effective

KPI 4

Briefings and de-briefings.

Briefings to teams was sound. There was a well delivered general briefing to all teams. Subsequent individual team briefings were well managed and delivered timely with all information.

KPI 5

Recording location of teams

Sartrack was used to live track teams during the scenario

The management of the Scenario was primarily paper based

The teams were managed using the field team deployment form. Generally, the IMT had a reasonable awareness of the locations of teams.

Objective 2

Demonstrate SAR field response teams' preparedness and response for 24 hour period.

KPI 1

Carry out search

The evaluator observed through the IMT that SAR field teams carried out their search as tasked

KPI 2

Perform to the standard of SAR good practice.

While not observed, comments made by field team members indicated a good level of SAR good practice while carrying out their tasks. This was primarily demonstrated by more experienced SAR personnel mentoring the less experienced of their teams.

KPI 3

Have appropriate gear for overnight.

All response personnel had the right gear for overnight activities. Some of the less experienced response personnel learnt more about what they didn't need, rather than what they did need. i.e. carrying too much.

KPI 4

Safety maintained.

Safety was well managed by the IMT and field teams. No injuries were identified. No risks were taken.

Teams were required to be camped up early to minimize risks and to manage fatigue.

KPI 5

Missing party located.

The missing party was split into two teams of two.

One of those teams were located in the early evening of the first day.

While the second team wasn't located by teams, they were within 1 hour of their current taskings to locate them. Exercise timer dictated the end of the exercise before they were located.

Objective 3

SAR partner agencies collaborate.

KPI 1

Appropriate agencies.

Agencies involved were appropriate for a land based SAREX and included Police and LandSAR groups in the Northland Police District.

KPI 2

Operate under a CIMs Structure.

As previously mentioned CIM's structure followed

KPI 3

Participate and collaborate

The exercise confirmed the strong relationship between LandSAR groups and Police in the Northland District

KPI 4

Common structure, roles and responsibilities

The management structure was set up in accordance with the Cims principles. At times during the exercise the roles and responsibilities became blurred, however the mentors were able to pull the IMT back to their individual roles. The IMT as a whole learnt how to manage those roles and responsibilities.

KPI 5

Response is coordinated

The IMT was well briefed from the beginning of the exercise. Throughout the exercise regular IMT meetings were held. Decisions were made as a team and as a whole the IMT maintained their situational awareness.

KPI 6

Common terminology.

The staff of the IMT, both Police and LandSAR have all been part of SAR for some time and as such were well versed in the terminology used in the SAR environment.

General Finding

The SAR community is well supported by the Northland Police District. This was identified by the equipment that is available, with general discussions with key SAR personnel and by the attendance of the District Operations Manager to the exercise.

This SAREX was used to expose less experienced IMT personnel to the roles within the SAR management environment. They were well mentored by senior SAR practitioners.

It identified additional training and experience is needed to support these less experienced staff.

Conclusions

Objective 1

Implementation of IMT and successful management of the search

Objective MET

The IMT was staffed by the less experienced SAR practitioners, deliberately to expose them to the IMT roles. They were well supported by a team of experienced SAR practitioners as mentors.

It created a very sound learning and testing environment for the IMT personnel.

Objective 2

Demonstrate SAR field response, team preparedness and response for 24 hours.

Objective MET

The SAR field teams were not observed by the evaluator; however, Status reports were heard, team debriefings were observed and field team members spoken to.

The field teams demonstrated SAR best practice during the SAREX. The teams were well managed with new members exposed to the SAR environment with experienced team members.

Those less experienced identified the need to seek additional SAR training through the basic courses.

Objective 3

SAR Partner agencies collaborate

Objective MET

The SAREX demonstrated the strong relationship between the Northland Police SAR squad and the two Northland LandSAR groups, Far North and Whangarei.

It also demonstrated the skills that exist within these agencies and the real will to expose the less experienced to the SAR world.

The SAR community is well supported in the Northland Police District.