

Exercise Evaluation Report

TAMAKI MAKURAU 2025 SAREX

Location: Riverhead Forest, Tamaki Makaurau

Date: 4th to 5th April 2025

Report version: Final

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NZ Police Search and Rescue, Wellington

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1. Executive Summary

The Tamaki Makaurau District Search and Rescue Exercise (SAREX) was held on the 4th and 5th of April 2025 in the Riverhead Forest Auckland. With the SAREX management based within the forest.

A list of objectives was created for the SAREX which allowed for testing of general Search and Rescue (SAR) skills with a multi-agency response while also allowing for readiness plans to be created for the area. The area had been identified as a risk for a SAR event and the SAREX allowed for communications in the area to be tested.

Overall the SAREX was a success with the aim of the exercise being achieved. All participants gained knowledge and experience throughout the SAREX. This was clearly obvious within the camaraderie between all the agencies involved.

1. Recommendations

- To further develop skills and experience in using D4H as a management tool.
- Ensure timely communication between IMT and field teams.
- Ensure a safety plan is developed and informed to all persons involved.
- Have the safety plan form available in D4H.
- Develop a method to record, monitor and manage fatigue.
- Continue to develop and mentor IMT members for succession planning.
- Use the SAREX experience to develop a readiness plan for Riverhead Forest area.
- Utilise pack antenna (floppy jim) for better field communication via VHF radio.
- Ensure equipment is fit for purpose specially printer link up to computers.

2. Introduction

Tamaki Makaurau SAREX was an annual event utilizing a multi-agency response including Tamaki Makaurau Police SAR Squad, Auckland Land SAR, Amateur Radio Emergency Corp (AREC), St John Specialist Emergency Response Team (SERT), RNZAF Civil Defense Response Group, and Auckland City Council Civil Defence.

A morning session with a round robin of skills stations was undertaken, unfortunately due to poor weather the planned winch training with RNZAF was cancelled. A reported injured dog walker activated a SAR response in the afternoon of the first day. A second incident of two trail runners in the Riverhead Forest who had become separated after one was injured was injected to the Incident Management Team (IMT).

The area of Riverhead Forest was identified by the planning team as an area that did not have a readiness plan and there was a need to test communications in the area to assist with development of a future readiness plan. Planning for the SAREX started early and I was engaged early allowing for comprehensive planning.

3. Background

3.1. Background to the exercise

It was identified that a land based SAREX was required to practice a response to a land incident in the Tamaki Makaurau area with a multi-agency response to a time critical incident.

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

Date: 4th to 5th April 2025

Location: Riverhead Forest

Incident Control Point: Riverhead Forest trail bike club building

Organizing agency and key people:

NZ Police Alex Midgelow-Marsden, Matt Tailby, Evan Ingle, Steven Shaskey

3.3. Participating organisations

NZ Police

Auckland Land SAR

AREC

RNZAF

Auckland City Council

St John

3.4. Exercise aim

To practically and safely, conduct winch training, test and evaluate a multi-agency SAR response in the Riverhead Forest.

3.5. Exercise objectives

- Continue to develop interoperability between SAR partner agencies.
- Information is effectively managed and communicated during the response.
- SAR operational personnel refresh and practice search and rescue skills.
- Test communication infrastructure in a SAR environment.
- Risks are identified, removed, minimized or managed.

3.6. Exercise Scenario

The round robin of kills stations for the Friday morning included, setting up a repeater radio, campsite processing, vehicle search, First Aid and low angle rope work. The rope work was added due to the unavailability of RNZAF NH90 for winch training at short notice.

At about 1330 hours on the Friday a dog walker had called saying he had fallen down a bank and possibly broken a leg. He did not know where he was other than in Riverhead Forest. Further communication was not able to be made with him. A vehicle belonging to the missing person was at a carpark entrance to Riverhead Forest.

Late afternoon on Friday the IMT were advised of a pair of trail runners in the Riverhead Forest. One of the party had called their partner saying one of them had an broken ankle and he had to leave his friend to get phone coverage. He did not know where he was or which track his friend was on. The partner called Police 2 hours later as they were unable to make contact. The missing party's vehicle was located at a carpark entrance to Riverhead Forest. The partner said that they often run in the area and were becoming more adventurous and going off the gravel roads onto tracks and had taken a map that another friend had given them.

4. Evaluation Methodology

4.1. The agreed outcomes of the evaluation activity

The evaluator was contacted early and asked to observe the SAREX as a whole and produce an evidence based report comparing the objective to what was observed.

4.2. Evaluation scope

Objectives for the SAREX:

- Continue to develop interoperability between SAR partner agencies.
- Information is effectively managed and communicated during the response.
- SAR operational personnel refresh and practice search and rescue skills.
- Test communication infrastructure in a SAR environment.
- Risks are identified, removed, minimized or managed.

Several key performance indicators were linked to each objective which assisted in being able to assess if the objectives were being met.

4.3. Aspects of the exercise observed, what was not observed

Evaluator observed:

IMT progress during the SAREX.

Radio communications from the incident control point.

Tracking of teams during the skill stations.

Not observed:

Due to there only being one evaluator teams in the field were not observed.

4.4. The process followed in preparing and submitting the report

The evaluator and exercise controller agreed on the objectives to be tested and reported on prior to the SAREX. The evaluator was able to attend the SAREX for the entire time.

A draft report was sent to Steven Shaskey for dissemination and consultation with the planning team for feedback and any corrections prior to a final report being submitted. No changes have been made to the report after this consultation.

The final report is forwarded to Steven Shaskey and NZSAR.

5. Findings

On the Friday field teams were assigned and a roster was established to complete the round robin of skill stations taking 1 hour at each station. This appeared to be run well with teams moving between the stations and monitored by one of the SAREX coordinators keeping situational awareness of where the teams were at any one time.

Objective, SAR operational personnel refresh and practice search and rescue skills.

KPI's: Tracking, search techniques, first aid, stretcher management, overnight sufficiency and technical ropes rescue recovery.

The round robin covered most this objective. Other parts to the objective were seen to be completed during the SAREX missing persons scenarios.

St John were utilized during the first aid and stretcher management with feedback given to the teams at the completion of each exercise. The rope skills station was a last minute addition to the SAREX due to the unavailability to complete winch training as planned. Several team members made comments that it was good to refresh on the ropes use and other SAR skills prior to the scenarios. Teams utilized the other skills throughout the SAREX although not observed in the field the IMT were monitoring activities and what methods were being utilized by the field teams. All field teams spent the night camped in the forest.

This objective has been achieved.

Objective, continue to develop interoperability between SAR partner agencies.

KPI's: working in a multi-agency IMT (based on CIMS roles and functions), field support and field search coordination and extended operational period/overnight.

In the afternoon of the Friday the dog walker scenario was given to an IMT of Police and Land SAR with AREC in a communications support role. This consisted of newer members in the IMT with experienced SAR operators mentoring and giving guidance. CIMS roles were assigned and with their functions mostly adhered to. With 10 field teams and only a small IMT there were times where tasks were being written by several of the IMT to not have teams waiting too long.

Field teams were a mix of NZ Police SAR, LandSAR and RNZAF. There was good cohesion within the teams and all appeared to work well together and when I spoke with team members they could see the benefit of working with each other's skill and knowledge.

The Auckland City Council civil defence came to the SAREX to observe how communications was working in the field and gain an insight to how SAR works. This has been seen as a benefit to all agencies for possible future emergencies.

An incident action plan (IAP) was developed with smart objectives but there were no strategies on how they were to be achieved. For the second scenario late on the Friday afternoon the IAP again had smart objectives but only listed one strategy on how to achieve them, this is an area for improvement. Teams were monitored by the IMT and updated on a paper map and occasionally updated on a whiteboard of the teams list. There was no use of the field team deployment form which was laminated and available for the IMT to use. Good use of the teams was made by the IMT for the overnight camp placed teams into areas that could act as containment. Some planning was done by the IMT on the Friday night for the Saturday morning to have teams underway early.

This objective has been achieved.

Objective, Information is effectively managed and communicated during the response.

KPI's: Multi-agency comms, use of D4H.

All communications via radio were monitored by AREC and logged into D4H. AREC were also utilizing the ability to digitally record all voice radio communications. IMT were utilizing D4H as a management tool for the first time in a SAREX. For the first scenario most of the tasks were had written with the D4H log utilized to communicate the task to teams by AREC. It was recognized that some tasks were long winded therefore a shortened version was logged to D4H for AREC to communicate to the teams in a timely manner. There were occasions where teams were left for an extended period without a task. When most teams were at the SAR base for dinner on Friday a few teams in the field were left wondering what was happening and why any communication was taking time. The IMT and AREC worked together on this and identified the D4H log needed a second person to monitor to ensure all messages were actioned.

During the Saturday D4H was used extensively with the IMT having a better understanding how it worked with tasking and communications improving. This is still a work in progress and the IMT and EXCON can see its potential for the future with further training. A better use of Intel was used on the Saturday with areas for improvement noted by the IMT and exercise controller.

There was an issue with the printer being unable to connect to the computers. This was to be a hinderance to the IMT in to being unable to print documents when needed. This had been a previous issue for other operations but had not yet been resolved. The IMT were able to work around this with tasks being sent via radio and on occasions documents being emailed directly when connectivity allowed.

This objective has been achieved.

Objective, test communication is a SAR environment.

KPI's: Identify areas of comms difficulty and developing a comms plan for future operations.

During the round robin skill stations setting up of a VHF repeater was completed and tested by the teams. Two repeaters were then set up during the scenarios later of the Friday to enable coverage of the forest area. AREC identified that there were some areas of the forest which had poor coverage but identified that the use of a pack antenna (floppy Jim) would likely fix this issue.

Starlink was effectively used by the IMT to run D4H as it's a web-based platform. D4H can also show locations of teams that are using the D4H app on their phone. This did have limitations as it required cell phone coverage which was patchy in the forest. When there was phone coverage it appeared to work well giving accurate locations of the team allowing live monitoring by the IMT. With no electricity supply generators were successfully utilized to keep the IMT and communications systems up and running.

With the testing of this communications in the Riverhead Forest a readiness plan is to be developed as it had previously been identified as an area of need.

This objective has been achieved.

Objective, Risks are identified, removed, minimised or managed.

KPI: recording hazards and control methods.

I did miss the initial briefing at the SAREX for the skill stations due to travel time from the airport and am unsure if any safety issues were raised. For the scenarios run by the IMT a good GSMEAC briefing was given but there was no mention of safety aspects given. A no-duff scenario brief was given with a rescue plan on the IAP. Throughout the scenarios no safety plan was created. There was the ability to list some risks in D4H when the operation is entered creating a list of generic risks. The risks are listed on the tasking sheets, but no task sheets were given to the teams. A list of forms on D4H does not include a safety plan. As I was not able to see teams in the field, I'm unsure if team leaders utilized take 5, SEARCHERS field safety checks or raised other safety factors.

A no-duff situation occurred with a field team member sustaining wasp stings. This was dealt with swiftly and as a priority by the IMT with no further incident or other outside assistance required.

Fatigue management was discussed at the SAREX but there was no particular way to monitor or manage fatigue. At one point the SAREX controller had to tell the IMT they needed to finish for the night on the Friday as it could be seen fatigue was starting to affect their planning. It was identified during the IMT debrief that there were issues around fatigue management.

This objective has not been achieved.

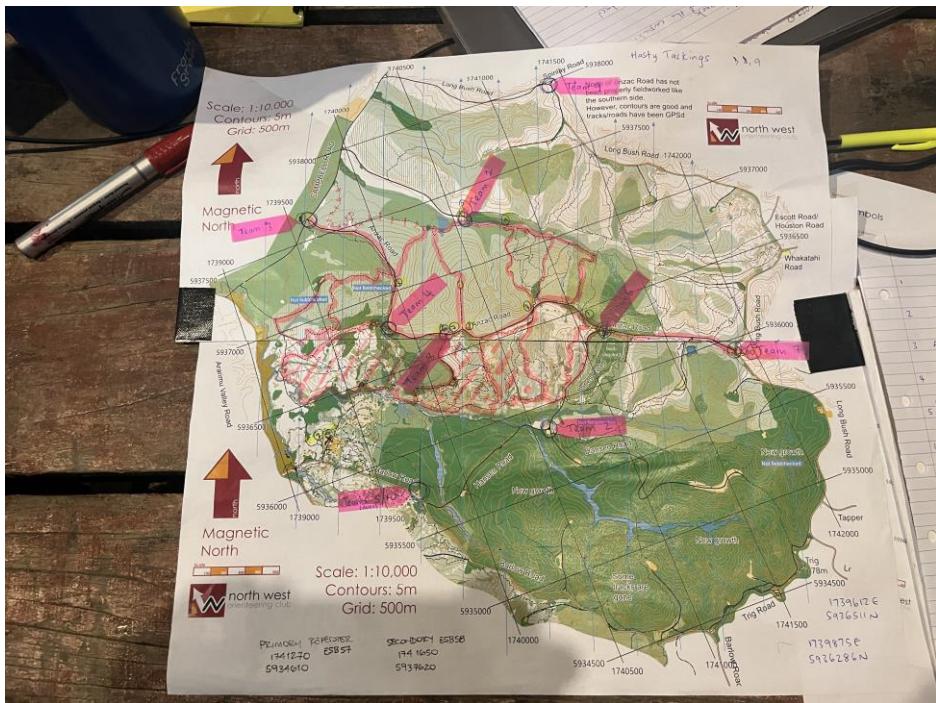
6. Conclusions

Overall, the SAREX was a success allowing for the aim to be mostly met. To practically and safely, conduct winch training, test and evaluate a multi-agency SAR response in the Riverhead Forest. Unfortunately, due to the weather the winch training was unable to be conducted.

The objectives and KPI's were mostly met with some recommendations for developing future training. It was a good learning environment for those that had not performed in the roles previously alongside other agencies. There is an obvious healthy relationship between all the groups involved. This resulted in good teamwork and ultimately the missing parties being located.

7. Appendix

Map utilized for SAREX



Round Robin

Time	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4	Team 5	Team 6	Team 7	Team 8	Team 9	Team 10
0900hrs	Repeater A	Repeater B	Camp process A	Camp process B	Vehicle search A	Vehicle search B	First Aid A	First Aid B	Line work A	Line work B
1000hrs			Camp process B	Camp process A	Vehicle search B	Vehicle search A	First Aid B	First Aid A	Repeater A	Repeater B
1100hrs	Vehicle search A	Vehicle search B	First Aid A	First Aid B	Line work A	Line work B	Repeater A	Repeater B	Camp process A	Camp process B
1200hrs	First Aid A	First Aid B	Line work A	Line work B	Repeater A	Repeater B	Camp process A	Camp process B	Vehicle search A	Vehicle search B
1300hrs	Line work A	Line work B	Repeater A	Repeater B	Camp process A	Camp process B	Vehicle search A	Vehicle search B	First Aid A	First Aid B

Task Location	Rotation A	Rotation B
Repeater	397368 (RA)	401363 (RB)
Camp process	396365 (CA)	401360 (CB)
Vehicle search	397358 (VA)	394359 (VB)
First Aid	391367 (FA)	397362 (FB)
Line work	398362 (LA)	398362 (LB)

IAP's

Riverhead KARA

Incident Control

Incident Action Plan

Situation: Injured Dog Walker - Samuel Kara, Fallen down bank, possible broken leg. Mission - Safely locate Sam Kara and bring to place of safety. Date/Time Missing: 4/4/25 1330 hrs		Objectives for Operational Period 1 ID primary search area by 1530hrs 2 Search primary search areas by 2100hrs - Anzac Road - Barlow/Aparimu Carpark. 3 Build MP Profile by 1800hrs 4 Search linear features by 2100hrs 5 Est. comms - Repeater setup - AREC setup by 1600hrs	
Missing Person and NOK Samuel Kara 16.02.94 (31) 021 1921		Phase/Operational Period 4/4/25 - 5/4/25 1000hrs - 0700hrs	
LKP: Anzac Road Survivability: MP is ex army very resourceful. However no over night gear Good survivability		Weather: Wind 15 kph NNE Gusts up to 24 kph High 22° Rain to continue through night. Reducing from midnight.	Safety/Hazards: Slippery clay tracks Steep terrain Very wet weather Swollen creeks / Fords
Command Structure Incident Controller: Ryan Thomas - 021 1921 733		Critical Elements/To do Est. IMT Set up repeaters Husky dog tracks Look vch	
RCCNZ Intel: Hazel George Planning: Nicole Stratford Operations: Paul Logistics: Grant		Rescue Plan: Located inimobile. Status 3/4 - Stretcher carry to nearest vch access If located status 1/2 - Request Helo extraction TERR Available for extraction if no Helo available Stretcher to vch access.	
		Media: Police media team TMDC	

INCIDENT ACTION PLAN

NZSAR
New Zealand Search and Rescue Authority

Situation: 2 x Trail runners missing and separated. 1x injured, potentially broken Ankle (Sam & Matt)		Phase / Operational Period: 4/4/25 - 5/4/25 1000hrs - 0700hrs	
Mission / Goal: Safety locate Sam & Matt and return to a place of safety.			
Date / Time Missing: 04/04/25		OBJECTIVES FOR OPERATIONAL PERIOD (Keep it SMART) 1 ID primary search area by 1000hrs 2 BUILD MP PROFILES 3 Search primary areas by 1800hrs 4 Est. COMMS - By 1800hrs Repeater, AREC	
Missing Person and NOK: SAM KARA MATT		STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE IT 1+ Day team multiple field teams	
LKP: VEHICLE BARLOW/APARIMU CARPARK		Comms Plan: ESB 57 ESB 58 ESX 07 1C 021 1921 733	
Survivability: WIND 15 kph NNE GUSTS UP TO 24 kph HIGH 22° RAIN TO CONTINUE THROUGH NIGHT REDUCING FROM MIDNIGHT		Weather: Safety / Hazards: SLIPPERY CLAY TRACKS STEEP TERRAIN WET WEATHER SWOLLEN CREEKS	Critical Elements / To do: Media Release Locate Vch. Eagle flyover
COMMAND STRUCTURE: RCCNZ CAT II INCIDENT: Intel: NICOLE Planning: LOUISE Operations: PAUL Logistics: GREG		Rescue Plan: IF INJURED: STRETCHER TEAMS TERR IF REQ EXTRICATE TO ROAD VEHICLE TRANSPORT IF UNINJURED: WALK OUT TO ROAD VEHICLE TRANSPORT	
		Media: POLICE MEDIA TEAM TMDC	

Safety records

01373 Operation Trailrunner - A1

HAZARD

Search MTB track I KNOW NOTHING south west of your location off skid road, down to bridge 396 364 then back track up and search track DE TROHOT ROOTS which is WEST of track just searched, back up to track start, then move down to ANZAC Read Dg 398 367. Use signs posted trails and use TRAILFORKS APP if possible.

DECISION POINTS

HAZARDS

-
Steep terrain,
Slippery surfaces.,
Waterways,
Dogs

PREVIOUS OR CURRENT SEARCHES IN AREA

-

COMMUNICATIONS (REFER COMMS PLAN FOR FURTHER INFORMATION)

SAR VHF CHANNEL: Ch 1 ESX07	SAR REPEATER CHANNEL: Ch 3 ESB57	POLICE CHANNEL: Waitamata 1	IC PHM:
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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION EQ TRANSPORT

MORE INFO

TASKED BY

TASKED BY

DATE & TIME TASKED

Name	Form type	Last modified
AK IMT Communications Plan	AK IMT Communications Plan	Apr 4, 2025 19:55
AK IMT Debrief	AK IMT Debrief	Apr 4, 2025 19:55
AK IMT End of Day Report	AK IMT End of Day Report	Apr 4, 2025 19:55
AK IMT IAP	AK IMT Initial IAP	Apr 4, 2025 19:55
AK IMT SAR Incident Action Plan	AK IMT SAR Incident Action Plan	Apr 4, 2025 19:55
AK IMT Search Urgency	AK IMT Search Urgency	Apr 4, 2025 19:55
AK IMT Sign in sheet	AK IMT Sign in sheet	Apr 4, 2025 19:55
AK IMT Urban Search Log	ICS Form 216 SAR - Urban Search Log	Apr 4, 2025 19:55
AK SAR Info Collection Plan	AK SAR Info Collection Plan	Apr 4, 2025 19:55