

# **Exercise Evaluation Report**

## **Tasman District SAREX 2026**

Location: Charleston, West Coast

Date: 22 – 24 May 2026

Report version: FINAL

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# 1. Executive Summary

The evaluation for this SAREX highlights the success of the exercise and identifies several areas for improvement.

Overall, this was a well-run exercise with participants gaining valuable experience, especially with the introduction of more partner agencies, namely Coastguard, AREC and Surf.

Hopefully each organisation goes away with things to work on in their own sphere, as well as new ways of connecting with those agencies they work collaboratively with.

High level safety and risks were identified for the exercise, but input should be sought from partner agencies to ensure all risks are considered during an exercise or response.

Participants had the chance to refresh some of their core skills, strengthen partnerships, and learn some new skills or information.

The value of including information and informal interaction around cultural awareness cannot be understated; it was excellent to have this included in the exercise and hopefully the sector can continue to build knowledge in this space.

Feedback from participants was positive, many were appreciative of learning new skills and information, and stepping into a new environment with the introduction of a marine element.

Most of the exercise objectives were achieved, and the recommendations identified will lead to future training opportunities and will aid in continuous improvement in the overall response to an event.

## 2. Recommendations

The following recommendations are taken from the supporting information within this report.

1. Consider setting up small exercises for the water response teams to test the functionality and increase Police awareness of capability.
2. Provide an aide-memoire for debriefing so that a standard robust format is used each time.
3. Ensure a robust process is available to gather information regarding any risks identified by support agencies. Practicing this will ensure it is completed in any 'real world' scenario.
4. Consider putting together a simple information sheet detailing the cultural protocols that any SAR team member from any agency may encounter so that those who are just starting to become more culturally aware will not be afraid to speak up. Include details for the best people to contact for advice.
5. Consider setting up exercises to focus on communication and the use of AREC resources in the area.
6. When setting up future exercises consider reaching out to partner agencies to discuss technological advances that could be shared with the sector and practiced with during the exercise.

### **3. Introduction**

The Tasman District is split into 3 SAR areas, the West Coast, Nelson and Marlborough. The District SAREX runs in a cyclical pattern, with each area organising and hosting the exercise every 3 years. 2026 was the turn of the West Coast team.

The SAREX was planned and executed by Snr Sgt Mark Kirkwood and his SAR group.

The exercise was a modular event consisting of 4 modules on the first day and 2 on the second. The exercise participants were split into teams for the first day and rotated through the different modules, while on the second day the modules were attended by the whole group.

Each of the modules were run by members of the Police SAR squad and tried to cover the exercise objectives in various ways.

This was the first time that Coastguard, AREC and Surf Lifesaving had been involved in the SAREX, exposing all participants to the capabilities of these teams.

The SAREX overall was very much set up and run like a learning event for multiple agencies and participants at different stages in the learning journey.

## 4. Background

### 4.1. Background to the Exercise

The purpose of the exercise was to refresh search and rescue skills and strengthen multi-agency capability, with an end state being for participants to complete the exercise safely, refresh skills, strengthen partnerships, and identify lessons for future improvement.

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

The exercise was held from 22-24 May 2026 in the Charleston Township and surrounds, located on State Highway 6, approximately 26 kilometres south of Westport in the Buller District.

The exercise was organised by Police with the key contact being Snr Sgt Mark Kirkwood.

### 4.3. Participating organisations

NZ Police, Tasman District  
RCCNZ

Support Agencies: LandSAR, Coastguard, Surf Lifesaving, AREC, St John, helicopter from Greymouth

### 4.4. Exercise aim

To refresh perishable Search and Rescue skills and strengthen multi-agency capability.

### 4.5. Exercise objectives

The intent of the exercise was to:

1. Strengthen **multi-agency collaboration** between NZ Police and SAR partners
2. Improve **field team competency** in navigation, tracking, search and rescue techniques
3. **Test communications** between field teams and HQ
4. Apply robust **risk management** to ensure personnel safety
5. Enable **continuous improvement** through structured debriefs
6. Increase **cultural awareness**
7. Build **organisational capacity** by exposing members to SAREX planning and management
8. Improve **technology awareness** within the evolving SAR environment

### 4.6. Exercise Scenario

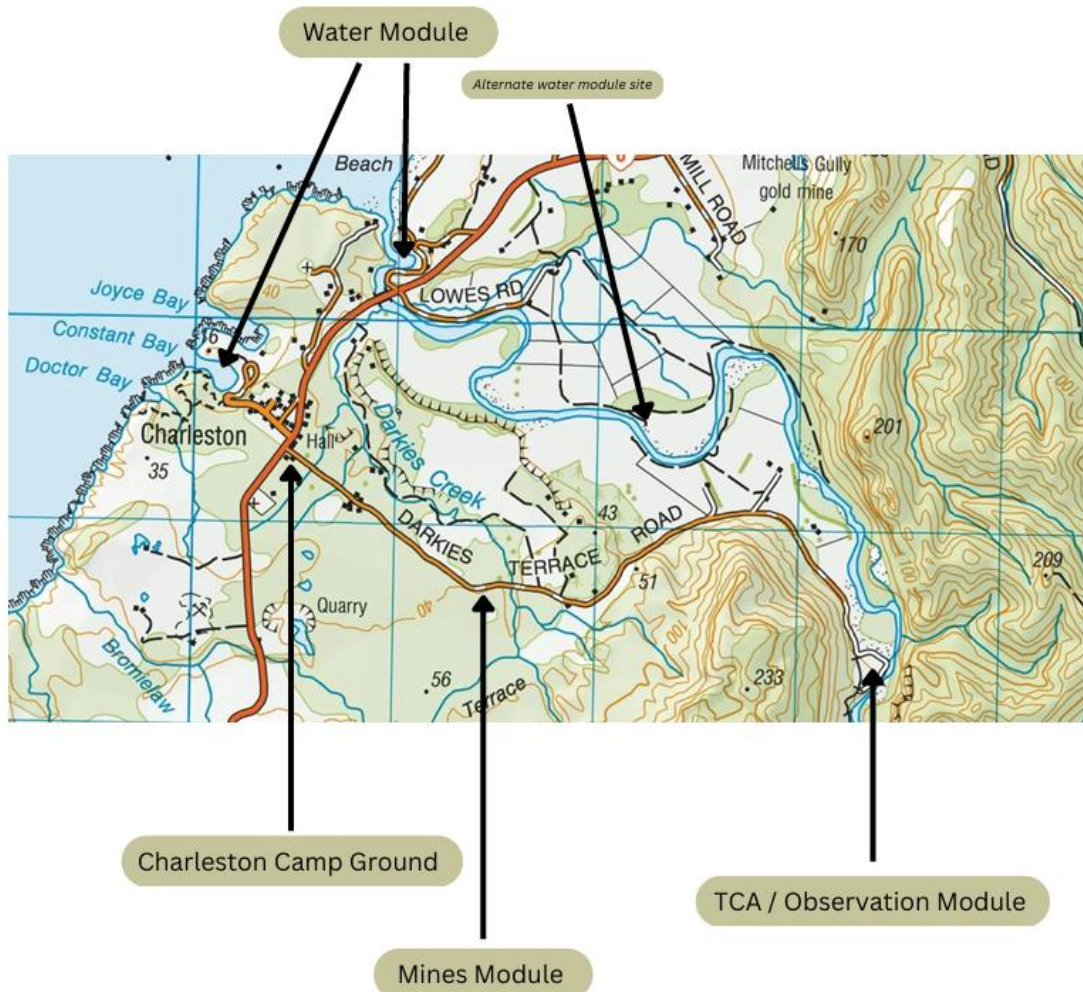
The exercise was not run as a specific scenario, rather it was a round robin of four key modules that each participating team rotated around throughout the day on Saturday, with two further modules undertaken for the full group on Sunday.

The SAREX Base was maintained at the Charleston Motor Camp and Holiday Park.

## Modules

1. **Water Rescue:** Lower Nile River
2. **Track & Clue Awareness / Observation:** Festival site, eastern end of Darkies Terrace Road
3. **Cognitive / Teamwork:** Charleston Campground & Nile River Walking Track
4. **Mine / Cave:** Argyle Track off Darkies Terrace Road

These modules were each supported by members of the West Coast Police SAR Squad, along with an AREC communications set up at the SAREX Base.



5. **Technology - Direction Finder / RECCO / RCC:** Charleston Hall & Darkies Terrace Road
6. **Helicopter:** #7293 SH6 Coast Road, Charleston – Quarry

## **5. Evaluation Methodology**

### **5.1. The agreed outcomes of the evaluation activity**

Due to the modular nature of the exercise it was agreed that the evaluator would look at as much of the activity as possible to draw conclusions for the exercise objectives.

### **5.2. Evaluation scope**

The scope included the majority of the objectives, although it was difficult to observe building organisational capacity around SAREX planning.

### **5.3. Aspects of the exercise observed, what was not observed**

As there was not one specific scenario to evaluate, the methodology employed was to attend as many of the modules as possible and observe the team participation, in particular debriefings of the activity, SAR partner interaction and communications.

For aspects unobserved, comments made by, and informal conversations held with participants were used.

### **5.4. The process followed in preparing and submitting the report**

The evaluator received the SAREX Operation Order approximately 2 weeks prior to the exercise and met with the Exercise planner the day before to finalise the observation methodology.

Post the evaluation, all evidence was collated into a draft report which was submitted for comment. A finalised report was then completed and submitted.

### **5.5. Other information**

Not all aspects of each module were observed due to time and distance constraints.

## 6. Findings

There were no specific KPIs related to each objective so the findings from the evaluation are quite broad and determined from evaluator observations.

### **Objective 1: Strengthen multi-agency collaboration between NZ Police and SAR partners**

**This objective was met.**

This was the first time some of the SAR partners had attended an exercise, in particular Coastguard, Surf and AREC, so any interaction was going to be beneficial.

The Water Rescue module specifically introduced the LandSAR teams and Police to the use and benefits of the Coastguard Rescue Water Craft (RWC) and Surf IRBs, while the AREC team were able to establish communications and set up repeaters to maintain contact with all teams.

Setting up further small exercises to test the functionality of the water response would be beneficial to all parties.

### **Objective 2: Improve field team competency in navigation, tracking, search and rescue techniques**

**This objective was met.**

The Track and Clue Awareness/Observation module was set up to work on this objective. The scenario involved a camp scene and vehicle that the teams used for sign detection, sign cutting and clue management. The module facilitator spent time discussing techniques prior to the team undertaking them and conducted a clear and concise debrief at the conclusion of the exercise.

From observation this module was a good refresher for the various teams and gave a chance to practice skills that may not have been used for some time.

### **Objective 3: Test communications between field teams and HQ**

**This objective was partially met.**

The AREC team set up communications to each of the module sites, adding in repeaters when communication was found to be poor. This system was found to be good, although more interaction could have been worked into the modules to test the system further.

### **Objective 4: Apply robust risk management to ensure personnel safety**

**This objective was met.**

A risk assessment for the whole weekend was prepared by the Exercise Planner (Appendix 1).

In addition to this a briefing was given on the first morning that included a health and safety aspect, while at the various modules safety briefings were given that were relevant to the exercise being undertaken.

A robust briefing was given at the exercise involving the helicopter, including how to secure bags and how to enter and exit the machine.

Specific equipment was provided where required e.g. lifejackets for participants at the Water Rescue module.

A sign in/out sheet was provided on the first morning to keep track of the number of participants attending the exercise.

A record of the risk assessments done by each supporting agency would have rounded out the risk management for the exercise.

### **Objective 5: Enable continuous improvement through structured debriefs**

**This objective was met.**

The debriefs that were observed were well run and included input from each team member. An aide-memoire for debriefing may have been useful to hand out to participants, so they knew what to expect from a debrief, as well as then being able to use it at other debriefs in the future.

### **Objective 6: Increase cultural awareness**

**This objective was met.**

A karakia was delivered at the start of the exercise to set the tone for the event and support everyone to learn and to acknowledge the spiritual, cultural, and environmental connections that were important for the day.

During each session of the Water Rescue module Insp Tracey Wharehoka discussed with the team different cultural aspects to consider, particularly around the protocols or procedures to expect when dealing with a sudden death. This was an interesting and informal session which was informed by the level of knowledge of the people present. Emphasis was placed on the meaning behind placing a rahui on an area and the importance of such.

A handout detailing the protocols in simple terms would have been beneficial, particularly for those who are just starting to become more culturally aware.

### **Objective 7: Build organisational capacity by exposing members to SAREX planning and management**

**This objective was unable to be effectively observed.**

This objective was difficult to evaluate without having clear measurables but it was obvious from the well planned and executed exercise that the Police team had put a lot of time and effort into pulling the exercise together.

It was unclear just from observation exactly what was planned by who, but during the weekend each of the Police team took over management of the various modules and activities, and these were run to a high standard.

**Objective 8: Improve technology awareness within the evolving SAR environment**

**This objective was partially met.**

One module was mostly dedicated to technology, in particular the RECCO system used for finding people in avalanches or the bush and the use of direction-finding equipment.

Although there were some time constraints this session could have been expanded to include other technology advances such as the use of drones, the tracking system used by the Coastguard vessels and rescue helicopters, and the communication system that Surf uses and how that could be used in conjunction with AREC. This would have made the session more multi-agency focused and showed where the crossover between agencies could be explored and exploited further.

## 7. Conclusions

When looking at the purpose of the exercise the following conclusions can be drawn.

Introducing agencies that had previously not attended gave the Police SAR team the chance to see the capability available and start to strengthen relationships with key members of these organisations.

Refreshing core skills is always a sound objective and using a simple, yet engaging scenario is a good way to do this, particularly with teams of people who don't necessarily work together all the time.

Communication is always a work on in exercises and in real situations, so the chance to work on those networks and introduce a new organisation into the mix was well taken and could have been extended further.

It was great to see that strengthening cultural awareness was a key objective for the exercise and having the District Māori Responsiveness Manager come along and make this learning so simple and inclusive was an excellent use of time and resources.

Similarly putting risk management at the forefront was key to having everyone complete the exercise safely. Including risk assessments from other agencies will only work to evolve the system and make it more robust in the future.

It was evident by the well-run exercise that organisational capacity was being built within the Police SAR team by including them in exercise planning and management. This will not only ensure that partner agencies can rely on Police when called upon but also strengthen the professional development of those Police involved.

This ties well into the objective of having structured debriefs which were run by the same group of Police, building their capacity in this space.

The evaluator comments should be seen as very positive, and the exercise should be seen as a success overall.

## 8. Appendix

### Appendix 1: Risk Assessment



### Risk Assessment Form

<b>Task:</b> SAR Exercise	<b>Start Date:</b> 22/05/26	<b>START TIME:</b> 0800	<b>DURATION:</b> 3 days
<b>Risk Assessment Performed by:</b> JMZ741 <small>(List all participants – name, position, QID)</small>			

#	RISK FACTOR (WHAT IS THE HAZARD?)	POTENTIAL INJURY/ILLNESS (WHAT HARM COULD OCCUR TO WHOM?)	INHERENT RISK <sup>1</sup>			CONTROL METHOD	RESIDUAL RISK			COMMENTS (e.g. responsibility & frequency of monitoring controls)
			CONSEQUENCE <sup>1</sup>	LIKELIHOOD <sup>1</sup>	INHERENT RISK <sup>1</sup>		CONSEQUENCE	LIKELIHOOD	RESIDUAL RISK	
1	Driving to/from event	Death / Serious Injury Crash	Severe	Possible	High	Drivers are rested and vehicles in good condition, Pre Vehicle deployment record completed	Major	Possible	High	Individuals to monitor
2	Walking on tracks	Possibility of ankle / leg injuries	Moderate	Possible	Low	Staff wear appropriate tramping boots (no gym shoes)	Moderate	Possible	High	Individual to monitor/peer support
3	Hypothermia	Death / requiring hospital treatment	Severe	Rare	High	Team leaders to monitor group and team to monitor each other	Moderate	Rare	Medium	Team leaders, team members check in on each other
4	Getting lost	Death / Injury	Severe	Rare	High	Team leaders to monitor own group and navigation for their group. No one to go off by themselves	Moderate	Rare	Medium	Team leaders to monitor group and stay together

<sup>1</sup> Inherent Risk = consequence and likelihood without controls applied

#	RISK FACTOR (WHAT IS THE HAZARD?)	POTENTIAL INJURY/ILLNESS (WHAT HARM COULD OCCUR TO WHOM?)	CONSEQUENCE <sup>1</sup>	LIKELIHOOD <sup>1</sup>	INHERENT RISK <sup>1</sup>	CONTROL METHOD	CONSEQUENCE	LIKELIHOOD	RESIDUAL RISK	COMMENTS (e.g. responsibility & frequency of monitoring controls)
5	River tasks	Possibility of drowning	Severe	Rare	High	Wear life jacket, follow direction of skipper/driver	Major	Rare	Medium	Skipper/driver
6	Mines/Caves	Death / Injury	Severe	Rare	High	Follow the <u>leaders</u> directions and stay in a safe designated area	Major	Rare	Medium	Team leaders to monitor and establish safe area
7	Medical event	Death /injury	Severe	Possible	High	First aid kits, trained staff, No Duff call on radio, Comms in place	Major	Possible	High	First aid trained personnel