

Exercise Evaluation Report

Exercise Op Oasis

Location: Lake Tekapo area

Date: Friday 20 March to Sunday 22 March 2026

Report version: FINAL

Evaluator(s): Aaron Halstead, for NZSAR



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1. Executive Summary

Operation OASIS was a Canterbury Police District led multi agency SAREX based in the Lake Tekapo area over the period Friday 20th to Sunday 22nd March 2026. The SAREX was a complex, multi-scenario exercise involving land/alpine, air and marine events. The intent was to exercise unified IMT operations, deliver aviation/marine integration, and provide teams with exposure to care/triage in a dynamic extended operational environment.

NZ Police - Canterbury District - coordinated a multi-agency group (LandSAR, Coastguard, Surf Rescue, AREC, St John and helicopter operators) to develop and plan the exercise. Over 230 people were involved from 14 different agencies, with multiple subgroups attending from across the wider Canterbury region and some from further afield.

The scenario anchor was based around the 'McKenzie Basin Challenge'. A training camp for up to 40 participants with a mission to 'transform amateur endurance athletes into contenders for the professional stage' and had a tagline that reads 'Pain is temporary, bragging rights last forever'. The training camp runs into difficulty and reaches out for help when an intense weather event strikes. Beyond the initial scenario phase of lost runners and kayakers, additional scenario phase injects included missing/injured hunters, trampers who encountered difficulty, and a research group requiring assistance.

The key objectives were designed to practically and safely test unified IMT performance and multi-agency field integration in complex, dynamic conditions, delivering timely care and extraction of multiple missing/injured parties while maintaining safety, communications discipline, and effective logistics.

Functional CIMS team units were established by Police (Incident Control) as an Incident Management Team (IMT) at the Tekapo Army Camp base, and delivered briefings, an Action Plan, taskings, and Situation Reports over a 2-day period. Exercise Control (EXCON) was led by NZ Police (Canterbury).

Participants were highly engaged throughout the exercise, and the tempo remained generally high once a 'battle rhythm' had been established. There were key learnings that predominantly self-identified through the cold debrief process, however a hot-debrief at the conclusion of the exercise did not occur and this opportunity could have been beneficial to provide immediate feedback and learnings to the wider exercise group. The IMT had clearly identified good opportunities to learn out of this exercise.

Participants commonly described the exercise as realistic and relevant to their operational environment, reinforcing the value of regular SAREX activity.

Key recommendations from the exercise include: Continue to build on the effective integration within IMT across future exercises; Enhance situational awareness and briefings through continual forward planning and briefings at all levels across the SAREX; and Ensure future exercises continue to focus on fatigue management processes and incorporation of feedback from all teams participating.

The outcome of the emergency exercise scenario was successful in line with the stated objectives and identified KPI's.

2. Recommendations

INTEGRATION WITHIN IMT

- Continue to build on the strong cooperation between SAR units and partner agencies that occurred during this exercise.
- Create more frequent IMTEX opportunities so the Police and support agencies can cross train and maintain relationships as a critical component of future exercises.
- Prior to exercise, ensure key personnel from respective agencies that could be developed in the IMT environment are well versed in familiarity with roles and expectations during a response and how to enact escalation protocols.
- Building on the success of this exercise, fatigue management processes should be planned and rehearsed as a critical component of future exercises.
- Explore opportunities to speed up process transfer; of gathering/obtaining intel, reporting, review/verification, decision of action, flow of decision back to field parties or dispatch of to task. Noting it was a very large and complex SAREX with many teams, groups and assets.
- Consider including a Chief of staff (Response Manager) role as a valuable addition in IMT to assist the IC enacting the plan.
- Need to socialise what the various liaison officer capabilities are for input.
- Ensure a single person leads each functional area. Where deficiencies in knowledge exist pull an expert into the room as a sub function of intell and planning.
- All contributors to the SITREP should state whether they can meet the command aim; what they have achieved since the previous SITREP, what they are doing until the next SITREP, what additional resources/support they require to achieve the aim.
- Identify a plan for key timings – initial briefing, IAP, status reports, SITREP, rescue/evac plan, shift handover.

ENHANCE SITUATIONAL AWARENESS AND BRIEFINGS

- Utilize graphics/visuals to project a SITREP to field teams to ensure they have good situation awareness before deploying into the field.
- Continued emphasis on safety culture is encouraged in future exercises.
- Establishing an IAP early helps to manage the IMT for maximize situational awareness and alignment to the wider response.
- Ensure field teams are well versed in the fatigue policy and self-identify fatigue or limitations within their teams to enhance IMT's safety management of fatigue across the operation.
- Ensure resources that are tasked directly to a site (without potentially liaising via base camp) such as rescue helicopters and ACR get thorough briefings prior to task to ensure they integrate into the wider plan.
- Field teams should continue to ensure their personnel are well trained in exposure and hypothermia management, including thorough handovers to the major incident support team (MIST).

EXTENDED OPERATIONAL EXERCISE ENVIRONMENT

- Future exercises should continue to incorporate thorough fatigue management processes and ensure policy adherence by field teams. Consider appointing a Safety function into IMT early to assist in directly managing fatigue for individuals and teams and advising Ops.
- Forecast need and resources for patient/lost person reconciliation, potential temporary mortuary, medical events/accidents, welfare, handovers, additional resources, safety, catering.

- Consider using a forward operating base (FOB), sending teams early if long transit times and brief enroute or at the FOB, maximising downtime of teams who are wanting to get going and get established. The FOB can then also operate as a casualty clearing point also for transport options by air or road.
- Consider what other resources may be needed; tasking sheets, hard copy maps for field teams, aerial overlays, more comms channels. Ensure EXCON has a dedicated line to IMT to replicate external comms.
- Ensure a hot debrief is conducted at end-exercise to capture key learnings immediately while fresh. This may just be one person representing each group in the interests of time. Cold debrief notes from the current exercise were detailed and invaluable to understanding the broad 'picture' of how the weekend played out.
- Continue to plan and conduct multi agency exercises to test integration and coordination. The current exercise was complex in planning and delivery. Teams should turn up prepared to use their training to help test a multi-agency end to end response and recovery operation. Exercises such as this are not considered 'upskill' training opportunities or for activities such as rogaine's, they are designed to test specific elements of a wider multi agency response.
- Ensure all teams are briefed prior about exercise intent and why the exercise is important - from a regional response perspective to a large event.
- Continue to ensure future exercises reinforce SAR fundamentals such as communication discipline, tasking, and safety practices.

3. Introduction

The Canterbury District has been identified as an area of concern for a large and/or complex land and water-based emergency event. Whilst there are a range of assets available across the wider Canterbury region, the inland mountainous area of Lake Tekapo is relatively remote and is a large area. Coordinating all the key agencies to ensure a focused and effective response to an emergency requires practice through exercising.

Exercise Op Oasis was designed by the Canterbury Police District in combination with a range of other agencies (LandSAR, Coastguard, Surf Rescue, AREC, St John and helicopter operators) to provide an inter-agency response to a complex and evolving search and rescue situation that would require air, water and land assets and teams in a coordinated response.

The exercise was played out in real-time and allowed for a range of issues to be practiced by participants. Role-players were used during the exercise to simulate real patients in the field, and there was a large number of 'injects' providing challenges to the IMT that replicated realistic situations. Specifics of the scenario and its timeline were held in confidence by the exercise planning team in order to allow participants to enjoy the most realistic experience possible, within the constraints of the exercise. Scenario injects were provided to players to simulate real-life information and their actions to this information.

The primary geographic focus of the scenario was the Lake Tekapo region in South Canterbury and surrounding valleys, rivers and mountain ranges. The scenario centered around the 'McKenzie Basin Challenge' – a training camp for up to 40 participants who encounter difficulty when an intense weather bomb strikes and reach out for help. Additional phases included lost or injured groups of hunters, trampers and research scientists.

The situation required coordination across the SAR coordinating authority (NZ Police), SAR agencies and supporting organisations; and created a significant strain on local resources given the large-scale nature of the exercise. Additionally, the scenario included complexities that created a highly coordinated response across air, land and water assets as well as response and medical agencies.

4. Background to the Exercise

The Canterbury Police District identified that an annual SAREX required to be conducted in order to bring multiple agencies and groups together and provide a dual IMT-field operational testing component. Objectives would be focused on three key areas; Fatigue management, Field skills – expose care and triage, and Multi-agency integration.

Operation OASIS was a complex, multi-scenario SAREX incorporating land/alpine and marine events in the greater Lake Tekapo area. Key elements were exercising unified IMT operations, aviation/marine integration, and exposure to care/triage in a dynamic extended operational environment.

The scenario anchor was based around the 'McKenzie Basin Challenge'. A training camp for up to 40 participants with a mission to 'transform amateur endurance athletes into contenders for the professional stage' and has a tagline that reads 'Pain is temporary, bragging rights last forever'.

The training camp runs into difficulty and reaches out for help when an intense weather bomb strikes.

The exercise officially commenced on Friday, 20th March at 19:00hrs and concluded midday on Sunday 22nd March following brunch and a SAREX group photo. An overview of the planning schedule follows:

Thursday - 19 March 2026

EXCON (Exercise Control) deployment to Tekapo; scenario set up, communications testing and operational planning.

Friday - 20 March 2026

An Exercise Brief will be held at 19:00hrs for those present, followed by a handover briefing from the outgoing IMT to the incoming live IMT (Team 1); initial tasking and the operational period begins. Police staff will receive the handover; partner agency IMT representatives who are available are also invited to attend.

Participants arriving Friday evening after 19:00hrs will be absorbed into the live operation (note, exercise activity continues to escalate on Saturday morning). There is no expectation that participants arrive by 19:00hrs and a staggered start is expected.

The scenario will present opportunities for a range of SAR operations in varied environments, including alpine, lake and river.

Saturday - 21 March 2026

07:00hrs - IMT handover to Team 2.

08:00hrs - Exercise Brief for participants (given the rolling start a further briefing will be provided for teams arriving after this time).

18:00hrs - IMT Handover to Team 1.

Sunday - 22 March 2026

The exercise concludes by 08:00hrs or earlier depending on the outcome of the search (without sharing too much detail around what is planned). EXCON are aware of the requirements around managing fatigue and will ensure participants are not placed in situations of risk.

Down time following the conclusion of exercise for minimum rest break will be required.

A time will be set on the conclusion of the exercise around the commencement on Sunday for agency hot debriefs; a team brunch and SAREX group photo (please bring your team shirt to reflect the multi-agency partnership).

Demobilization and travel home early afternoon.

The exercise will have commenced with 17 mountain runners, 15 kayakers and 15 mountain bikers missing from the Mackenzie Basin Adventure Race pre-training camp. Initial action will prevail and recover 15 mountain bikers and 2 kayakers at the time of IMT handover. This will leave 13 kayakers and 17 mountain runners missing.

The intention was to conduct an operational-level functional exercise of the Police-led integrated IMT in order to ensure a CAT I SAROP was identified, responded to effectively, and multiple agencies working together for a common mission.

An IMT was established in 'The Swamp' – a large operating space - facility at Tekapo Army Camp, with Exercise Control (EXCON) staged in a separate room adjacent. This was a combined functional and desktop exercise. Players were expected to follow their plans and procedures as they would in a real situation, except where informed otherwise.

The exercise was played in relative real-time, and the scenario allowed for a range of issues to be practiced by participants.

4.1 Dates, Location, Organizing Agency(s)

The SAREX was run from Friday 20 March 2026 to Sunday at Tekapo Military Camp. NZ Police developed and planned the exercise and coordinated EXCON. Over 230 people were involved from 14 different agencies/groups.

4.2 Participating Organizations

NZ Police, Canterbury District (Lead Agency)
LandSAR field teams, IMT and ACR (Alpine Rescue Canterbury, Aoraki Alpine Rescue)
Coastguard
Surf Lifesaving
Harbour Master
Hato Hone St John
AREC
RECCO
Helicopters Otago
Garden City Helicopters
The Helicopter Line
RCCNZ
DoC

Christchurch City Council (Observer)

4.3 Exercise Aim

To practically and safely test unified IMT performance and multi-agency field integration in complex, dynamic conditions, delivering timely care and extraction of multiple missing/injured parties while maintaining safety, communications discipline, and effective logistics.

4.4 Exercise Objectives

The overarching objectives for this exercise were:

1. Validate that fatigue management is aligned with the fatigue policy /17-hour rule.
2. Operate safely and effectively in a dynamic and extended operational environment.

Evaluate field skills – Exposure and Triage
- Exposure and Hypothermia management,

- Remote first aid,
 - Decision-making under pressure.
3. Multi-Agency Integration
- Unified IMT operations,
 - Inter-agency tasking,
 - Communications discipline,
 - Demonstrated SAR partnership cohesion.

4.5 Exercise Scenario

Following a severe weather event across the Mackenzie Basin, multiple endurance athletes are overdue or in distress resulting in marine, alpine, and remote-casualty rescues that will test triage, extraction and inter-agency coordination. This will involve a multi-agency response to time-critical incidents.

Annex P1 – Phase 1 (Motuariki Island – 2 role players) Friday night

2 x kayakers have managed to get to the island to seek shelter. Although they have minimal gear, they will have covered up to try and get warm.

Annex P2 – Phase 2 (Cass Valley – 5 role players; RECCO context) Saturday

5 x hunters were dropped at Waterfall Hut by heli to go Tahr hunting on Tuesday and missed their scheduled pick-up by a friend at the main road on Thursday.

Annex P3 – Phase 3 (Lake Tekapo shoreline – 6 role players) Saturday

8 kayakers have been blown down the lake, 2 have rolled out into the water (2 x BOB) and the other 6 have made land on opposite sides of the lake (3 x each side). They have left the kayaks and sought shelter on land in various locations.

Annex P4 – Phase 4 (Lake Tekapo) Saturday

2 x jet skis will collide on the lake near town and 2 x BOB in the water. Coastguard will deploy and recover one from the water and a heli will look to recover the other. The BOB for the rescue from the vessel may be swapped with a live person. BOB only restriction in water immersion.

Annex P5 – Phase 5 (potential inject only)

2 x trampers have sought shelter for the weather event on Thursday night at Red Stag Hut and were making their way out down the Godley when they called communications advising they were stuck between 2 rivers near Charles knob. While on the phone they are washed down the river and the call goes dead.

Annex P6 – Phase 6 (Macaulay & Godley Rivers – 8 role players) Saturday night

An 8-person research team studying river morphology and braided river ecology have struck a number of challenges in the Godley and Macaulay River areas and reach out for help.

4.6 Exercise Scope

This exercise focused on the following components:

Police-led Integrated IMT coordinated SAR operation, including:

Escalation and establishment of Police-led Integrated IMT;

Activation, integration and liaison with supporting agencies (e.g. St John, LandSAR, AREC, Coastguard, Surf Lifesaving, search dogs, ACR, helicopter operators, RCCNZ, DoC);

Providing exposure and hypothermia management of patients in a dynamic and extended operational environment; and

Ensuring fatigue management is aligned with the fatigue policy and adhered to.

4.7 Execution Overview

IMT

IMT will consist of two teams that will operate for up to 12 hours, this includes the handover. IMT1 will start the Late Shift at 19:00hrs on Friday, 20 March and handover to IMT2 at 07:00hrs, the Early Shift on Saturday, 21 March. IMT1 will resume control again for the second operational period following at handover at 19:00hrs on Saturday, 21 March. Requirements beyond this timeframe will be determined as the exercise progresses.

Field & Marine

Tasked in operational period phases. Expect alpine terrain, broad lake searches, braided-river crossings, shoreline searches, drone/dog integration, potential helicopter insertion and extraction and marine searches of rivers and Lake Tekapo.

Aviation

Air coordination to support search and extractions; timing of night injects subject to weather conditions. Expected tasks include: RECCO searching, water winching, longline (HEC), land winching, night winching, and hover loading.

4.8 Reference Documents

- Op Oasis – Health and Safety Risk Management Plan
- Canterbury District Multi-agency Land/Marine SAREX (Operation Oasis) - Joining Instructions.
- Operation Oasis Multi-Agency SAREX 2026 – EXCON Role Play Plan
- Op Oasis – Phase Annexes (Role Player Safety)
- Participants Health and Safety Brief
- Role Players Health and Safety Brief
- SAREX Participant Agreement Form
- Specific Plans for each Operational Phase
- Tekapo Military Camp Map
- Missing Persons List of Roleplayers
- Greater Lake Tekapo Area: Readiness Plan (Search and Rescue)

5. Evaluation Methodology

5.1 The agreed outcomes of the evaluation activity

Carry out observation of the IMT and its function in an emergency exercise scenario. Observe actions to develop and enhance functional team methodology within the IMT environment and to practice and refine plan development.

Observe field teams regarding search methodology, patient initial contact/treatment, and extraction techniques and handover. Additional observation of patient handover to MIST (Major Incident Support Team) at the Tekapo Army Camp.

To ensure value is delivered for all personnel involved.

A report to be written outlining observations of the SAREX in relation to the stated objectives and the KPIs.

Recommendations to be made based on those observations.

5.2 Evaluation scope

The evaluation scope was primarily focused on the Police-led District IMT, including evaluating:

Handover of local area Police SAR;

Escalation and set up of district IMT;

IMT support and coordination of local SAR and support agencies; and

Management of search, rescue and reconciliation of patients including:

Initial response, treatment and care of patients found;

Transfer to an appropriate asset for transport;

Handover and triage to advanced care (MIST) facility;

Validate that fatigue management is aligned with the fatigue policy; and

Ensuring all rescuers operated in a safe and professional manner.

5.3 Aspects of the exercise observed, what was not observed

Noting there was only capacity for one evaluator who is unable to witness all aspects of the SAREX, hence why feedback and further discussions with teams and role players were essential to understanding a broader 'picture'.

All aspects of the IMT exercise were observed. The evaluator did not evaluate EXCON operating in a separate space.

The evaluator was present from the time the exercise commenced till the time it ended and had access to every area appropriate – particularly all briefings and SITREP handover - with a high level of cooperation and consultation around the evaluation.

A 'hot debrief' did not occur so the evaluator relied on feedback via the 'cold debrief' process which was very detailed from a range of agencies and individuals involved in the exercise.

Evidence was collected via observations, discussions, photos and notes taken at the time.

5.4 The process followed in preparing and submitting the report

Once the notes, photographs, feedback and documents were all collated the evaluator report was completed in draft format and submitted for comments. This was then finalised and submitted.

5.5 Other information

Reviewing documents as listed in Section 4.8 above.

6. Findings

Comments made in this section are observations made based on the key objectives, and in relation to general observations across the SAREX in relation to IMT and field ops.

6.1 Validate IMT Activation, integration and liaison with supporting agencies

IMT led by the Police was established early and request for two LandSAR pers indicated a desire to have different perspectives and experience in the IMT. Very good initiative to ensure there wasn't just a Police staffed IMT.

Be flexible with IMT and prepared to scale up/down depending on tasks and need. E.g. welfare, safety, recovery (chief of staff) roles.

Split Intell and planning if required to ensuring planning focuses on the next 12-24 period. Ensure a single person leads each function, not 2 or more. Put vests on the leads of each function and they can then run their own sub-group on a table nearby.

Where deficiencies in knowledge exist (such as how to effectively use Surf for searching), pull an expert into the room early as a sub function of intell and planning.

One lead, with sub function pers in that function group. Each group should have been represented in the sub-IMT groups (Coastguard, LandSAR, Surf, AREC, dogs, ACR, RECCO, Drone, etc).

Speed up ability capability assessment to tasking.

IMT group – good discussions, at time there could have been more of a directive briefing.

Where was the Welfare function to focus on the needs of the patients and wider teams.

IMT handover using GSMEAC was thorough.

Confusion over who is in IMT leadership group at one point.

Very good participant brief to all field pers observed.

Appoint a safety officer, this role could have then taken over fatigue management, freeing up operations to deliver to task in consultation with safety.

The IAP was already in place – need IC's plan to fall out of this.

2130hrs - IAP needs updated objectives, all currently from IMT 1 (all met). Add new objectives and taskings (including intell transfer from previous shift).

2245hrs – Detailed planning occurring, POA/POD search methods being utilised.

Be flexible with IMT, and prepared to scale up/down depending on tasks and need. E.g. anticipate scenario potential and pull additional resources in early if required.

Surf lifesaving – wants intell on launch sites – no handover as two different units. Ensure key elements are handed over either verbally or in briefing notes – such as intell on launch sites.

Need clock on wall to keep things on track and as a reference point.

IC keeps giving planning tasks that should be ops (e.g. contacting heli and retasking).

IC exerting his authority with group – good.

Ensure document handover occurs (e.g. debrief notes, overlays, etc).

0915hrs – director asking to hurry up taskings. Utilise all 5 vehicles.

0930hrs – IC states; 1 hourly meetings – good cadence.

Recovery (chief of staff) role would really help the IC – can then focus on strategic concept.

Noting it was a large and complex SAREX with many teams, groups and assets.

6.2 Unified IMT operations and Inter agency tasking

Common operating picture was done well throughout with good visuals and briefings.

At one point Ops lead started doing an overall handover briefing but luckily IC stepped in and started afresh.

Very good brief and did mention forward operating base (FOB) should be set up.

EXCON needed a dedicated line to IMT to replicate external comms. EXCON could also have more dedicated resource to provide timely and accurate scenario prompts.

Planning for wider search footprint utilising an array of assets – very good.

Need briefing cadence and task the functions - get them to back brief the IC.
Response manager (chief of staff) needed to corral teams and keep things on track.
IC says – Team Leaders to monitor their teams for fatigue, etc.
2310hrs – Confusion in IMT over what has been found on the island (2 kayaks, 2 pers).
IMT achieved effective liaison with RCCNZ early and provided a comprehensive SITREP.
Command and control was well exercised, with the IC keeping briefings regular and low key (cascade effect of calmness).
The briefings were led by the IC with input from all key functional areas.
Good operating space which allowed for a collaborative interagency environment. Sub functions could have utilised the space to have breakout areas for their function – esp ops.
The IAP, although at times slightly delayed, was thorough and updated during the exercise.
Place Liaison Officers together as a sub-function of Operations.
Need to ensure all terminology and acronyms used are understood by the different agencies operating in the IMT.
Media statement request, and spokesperson identified.
Interagency coordination and communications was good and well run.
Verbal communications/liaison were effective and appropriate to CIMS procedures.
When RCCNZ is engaged their plan needs to be displayed visually so all IMT functions can reference and refer to this in order to enhance situation awareness throughout the exercise.
Roles and responsibilities were established early in the Incident Management Team (IMT) with representatives from most key agencies present.
Scenario, process, and regular update briefings were held to help guide all functions.

6.3 Practice Exposure and Hypothermia management

St Johns request – due to potential and remote locations near Tekapo, MIST set up, and focused on hypothermic/exposure risk (in addition to managing injuries).
Observed field teams did a very good job of recognising patients exposure conditions and general situational awareness of how long in the environment, also including temperature, water exposure, and other injuries.
Field teams appeared well trained in exposure signs to look for in patients and responded appropriately and diligently.
Noting that hypothermic people need to be moved carefully (not stretched to boat, then transferred to a boat, then another stretcher. Ideally 'burrito wrapped' and kept on a transferable stretcher).
IMT focused on 'What is the priority for patients' – how long in the field?
Patients (x2) debrief – island, very good patient assessment (burrito wrap), got to his phone fast – emergency contact, a bit obsessed with obs rather than looking at the patient for signs.
Focus on the patient – stretcher carry, remembering back up will be required to move more than a short distance.
Coastguard and landSAR conflict (Coastguard wanted to strap patient on backboard on water transfer, and LandSAR didn't think this was a good idea).
Command and control for patient focus was well exercised.
Consider how to get additional warming tools/equipment and relocate these to field teams.

6.4 Triage and efficient extraction to advanced care

Triage at the MIST tent was very well coordinated and managed.
MIST had their own internal assessments going on during the exercise.
Extraction methods were generally very efficient and timely.
Well-coordinated handovers to water and air assets occurred from those observed.
St John (MIST) didn't appear to listen well to a SAR team handover for one patient.
Very good handover by surf lifesaving.
Focus on mechanism of injury – e.g. for a gunshot wound. Patient prompted distal capillary refill. This patient was prioritised well for triage to MIST and advanced care.

Documentation by MIST appeared well organized for mass casualty situations. Skills appropriate to various levels of responders appeared to be best practice for patients observed (i.e. field teams transfer to medevac, transferring to MIST). Observation for one patient - only Team leader intro (no team), needed a dedicated 'head' person to chat to him. Handover was good. Records and information were well collated, in a concise and logical format such that command/handover can walk in and understand the situation. IMT managed extraction resources well and prioritised the most appropriate transport resource for the specific severity of each patient. Field teams used professional judgement for most efficient method to extract patients (e.g. longline vs hoverload, or winch vs landing nearby, or Coastguard vessel vs Surf RIB).

6.5 Validate that fatigue management is aligned with the fatigue policy

First night of the exercise was particularly important to have a well thought plan given that most teams had been awake all day and travelling (some after work). The first night also showed that fatigue management is very nuanced – lots of examples where it may not have worked depending on tasks and expected duration in the field. Consider a Safety function role in IMT early on. Safety in IMT should be predominantly focused on the safety of personnel (particularly in the field) so they could solely focus on this aspect and run the fatigue management table accounting for each person. This would incorporate their previous hours/duties with time-to-task, risk assessment of task and expected duration. There was too much time taken by Ops/Planning/IC in dealing with this aspect, and it would have helped them immensely if a safety function managed this and advised accordingly when tasks were allocated. 0135hrs – all pers directive to return to base with 2 patients (noting that pers needed rest before the next day's tasks). Some teams sent to bed early in anticipation of the following days tasks at 0700hrs. Hasty debrief to ensure rest period is targeted to what they have been doing and when. Consider fatigue – 17hrs discretionary, can we extend? Not unless critical to return to a place of safety. (task, rest). Definitely no driving after this period. Send others to collect them. Fatigue discussion about three teams out last night – not being available until 10am – good. Shift handover briefings always had a fatigue management element.

6.6 Operate safely and effectively in a dynamic and extended operational environment

Consider setting up a forward operating base (FOB) early on, especially given the long transit times to the head of the lake, and at night. Teams could then get under way and get briefed enroute or at the FOB. The FOB can then become a triage and logistics hub. Noting the usual tensions of exercises/operations; 'teams are keen to get going into the field and get established', meanwhile 'IMT are working very hard to digest the information and formulate a plan, and then task resources to deliver on the plan'. Drift modelling requested from RCCNZ for the patients in the lake – good. 0055hrs – containment in place (3 locations) – good, in case patients walk out overnight. Resources needed; tasking sheets, hard copy maps for field teams, aerial overlays, more comms channels. Whiteboarding the next 6-12hrs as a potential for field teams to prep to. Very efficient use of helicopters on final night – moving resources, patients, and coordination. AREC identifies repeater request on high point. Repeater put in wrong spot – doesn't work. There was no common digital operating platform that all agencies could access. Input from some agencies (e.g. Surf, ACR, Dogs) could have been of great benefit early in the exercise for search methodology. However, managed well throughout the exercise. Very effective use of visuals in IMT such as maps, asset locations and reconciliation tables. Any misinformation was generally interrogated well for accuracy and cross referenced via other functions or external sources.

7 Conclusions

The Op Oasis SAREX delivered as a complex, multi-scenario exercise involving integrated land/alpine/air/marine events, with unified IMT operations, and providing teams with exposure to care/triage in a dynamic extended operational environment.

There was an excellent turnout with over 230 people involved from 14 different agencies, with multiple subgroups attending from across the wider Canterbury region and further afield.

The key objectives were designed to practically and safely test unified IMT performance and multi-agency field integration in complex, dynamic conditions, delivering timely care and extraction of multiple missing/injured parties while maintaining safety, communications discipline, and effective logistics.

Participants were highly engaged throughout the exercise, and the tempo remained generally high once a 'battle rhythm' had been established, even though at times mid-exercise it may have appeared relaxed. There were key learnings that predominantly self-identified through the cold debrief process, however a hot-debrief at the conclusion of the exercise did not occur and this opportunity could have been beneficial to provide immediate feedback and learnings to the wider exercise group. Cold debrief notes were detailed and invaluable to understanding the broad 'picture' of how the weekend played out. The IMT had clearly identified good opportunities to learn out of this exercise.

The overall SAREX participant feedback indicates a strongly positive exercise experience, delivering meaningful learning and reinforcing effective SAR practices. Participants valued the opportunity to train collaboratively and have provided practical, actionable suggestions to further refine future exercises. Participants commonly described the exercise as realistic and relevant to their operational environment, reinforcing the value of regular SAREX activity. Opportunities for improvement from overall participant feedback included; improved communications, some reference to timing issues (e.g. pace of events or downtime between tasks), and some interest in greater scenario complexity or evolving injects to better reflect real-world uncertainty.

Key recommendations from the exercise include: Continue to build on the effective integration within IMT across future exercises; Enhance situational awareness and briefings through continual forward planning and briefings at all levels across the SAREX; and ensure future exercises continue to focus on fatigue management processes and incorporation of feedback from all teams participating.

The outcome of the SAREX was successful in line with the stated objectives and KPI's.

AI Summary Analysis:

Overview

This page summarises participant feedback from the online SurveyPlanet survey for the SAREX. The intent is to capture key themes, strengths, and improvement opportunities identified by participants, based strictly on the content provided in the survey export document.

Overall Experience

General sentiment was positive, with most participants indicating that the exercise was worthwhile and contributed to:

- Improved confidence in SAR processes
- Better understanding of inter-team coordination
- Increased familiarity with roles and expectations during a response

Participants commonly described the exercise as realistic and relevant to their operational environment, reinforcing the value of regular SAREX activity.

What Worked Well (Strengths)

Key strengths consistently highlighted include:

Planning and Organisation

- Clear pre-exercise briefings helped participants understand objectives.
- Exercise structure supported progressive learning and information flow.

Teamwork and Collaboration

- Strong cooperation between SAR units and partner agencies.
- Effective use of teamwork at both field and coordination levels.

Learning and Skill Development

- Participants reported improved situational awareness.
 - The exercise reinforced SAR fundamentals such as communication discipline, tasking, and safety practices.
-

Opportunities for Improvement

While overall feedback was positive, participants also identified areas for enhancement:

Communications

- Occasional information delays or inconsistencies were noted.
- Suggestions included clearer channels, standardised message formats, and improved radio discipline.

Realism and Complexity

- Some participants expressed interest in greater scenario complexity or evolving injects to better reflect real-world uncertainty.

Time Management

- A small number of responses referenced timing issues (e.g., pace of events or downtime between tasks).

These points represent constructive feedback intended to strengthen future SAREX design and delivery.

Safety and Welfare Observations

- Safety was generally viewed as well managed throughout the exercise.

- Participants appreciated attention to fatigue, briefings, and welfare considerations. Continued emphasis on safety culture was encouraged in future exercises.

Visual Insights (Current State)

The survey document includes embedded charts (e.g., satisfaction ratings, agreement scales), which visually indicate:

- High levels of agreement that exercise objectives were met
 - Strong participant satisfaction with exercise value
 - Lower but still constructive variation in responses related to communications and logistics
-

Summary

The SAREX participant feedback indicates a strongly positive exercise experience, delivering meaningful learning and reinforcing effective SAR practices. Participants value the opportunity to train collaboratively and have provided practical, actionable suggestions to further refine future exercises.

Appendix B - Timeline of Exercise Events (indicative in some areas rather than exhaustive)

Time	Action
D-1	EXCON set up and activates
1900	Exercise commences
1930	IMT established, starting work on IAP
1945	Teams all converge
2245	Detailed planning, probability of area/detection being analysed
0020 D+1	First patient found in the middle of the island (unresponsive, hypothermic)
0029 D+1	Second patient found
0055 D+1	Containment in place (3 locations – roads)
0135 D+1	Directive - all pers to return to base with 2 patients
0245 D+1	Pause exercise for the evening
0705	Briefing and handover. Kayakers and runners still outstanding
0955	Phase 2 task about to be rung through from EXCON
1020	15 runners found
1030	IC states 1 hourly SITREP meetings from this point
1100	0925 – director asking to hurry up taskings
1215	CAT2 – RCC identified for beacon activation
1045 D+1	IMT briefing. Considering drones, repeater, operational teams, deceased protocol, tasking patterns, phasing
1135 D+1	THL machine searching with recco, one pt longlined down valley
1215 D+1	2 Patients found at Waterfall Hut
1230 D+1	A number of items found at various locations of the Lake
1430 D+1	Gunshot patient and water BOB
1900 D+1	Handover to incoming IMT shift team change – including task continuation and additional night tasks. Full team briefings
0150 (approx.)D+2	End ex called
0900 D+2	Group photo and end-ex summary
0945 D+2	Brunch for all in Army Mess
1030-1230 D+2	Final pack up and participants depart

Appendix C – Evidence of IMT and Field Teams in Action

INCIDENT ACTION PLAN				NZSAR New Zealand Search and Rescue
Situation: MACKENZIE BASIN CHALLENGE - OVERDUE MOUNTAIN RUNNERS AND KAYAKERS		Mission/Goal: LOCATE AND SAFELY RECOVER ADVENTURE RACERS OPERATION OASIS		Phase/Operational Period: OPERATIONAL PERIOD: 2 21/03/26 0700 - 1900 (213326)
Date/Time Missing: 20TH MARCH 2026 PHE BACK 0800hrs	OBJECTIVES FOR OPERATIONAL PERIOD (Keep it SMART)		STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE	Comms Plan: LOCAL SAR ESB 60 TEKAPU SAR REPEATER CG/Surf - MG Heli - 60mm - ESX 39
Missing Person and NOK: 15 MOUNTAIN RUNNERS 8 KAYAKERS AS PER WHITE BULLOCKS	1 Establish IMT - OP3		Police + landSAR	
LKP: KAYAKERS - LAKE TEKAPU MOUNTAIN RUNNERS - FORK STREAM	2 Refine search area lake Tekapo		Scenario analysis Containment.	
Survivability: WAITING REVIEW DR DEAN PRICE 027 4333505	3 Search Fork Stream, Fork Stream down		Heli + ground work team	
	4 Search Lake Tekapo + shore line		Heli + Coastguard + Surf	
	5 Miss release		Disseminate information about missing parties via social media	Rescue Plan: LAND AMBULANCE - ST JOHN LAND POLICE MACKENZIE HELICOPTERS 021 477225 ST JOHN - Rescue Helicopter Coastguard / Surf Life Saving
Weather: Rain starting clearing, expect variable wind capabilities LOW CLOUD EASING WIND 6-10° C Slightly increasing to 10°C 0100 21/03/26		Safety/Hazards: WINDFALL SLIPPERY TRACKS OTHER VEHICLES LIVE STOCK HYPOTHERMIA HELI COLD WATER LAKE		Critical Elements/To do:
COMMAND STRUCTURE				Media: POLICE MEDIA TEAM 04 2385111 ex. Pan 021 1911347
RCCNZ CAT II INCIDENT: Incident Controller Mike Jackson				
Intel	Planning CRANFIELD	Operations PAUL BONNY	Logistics Jodie Hawke	

IMT IAP.



IC Briefing.



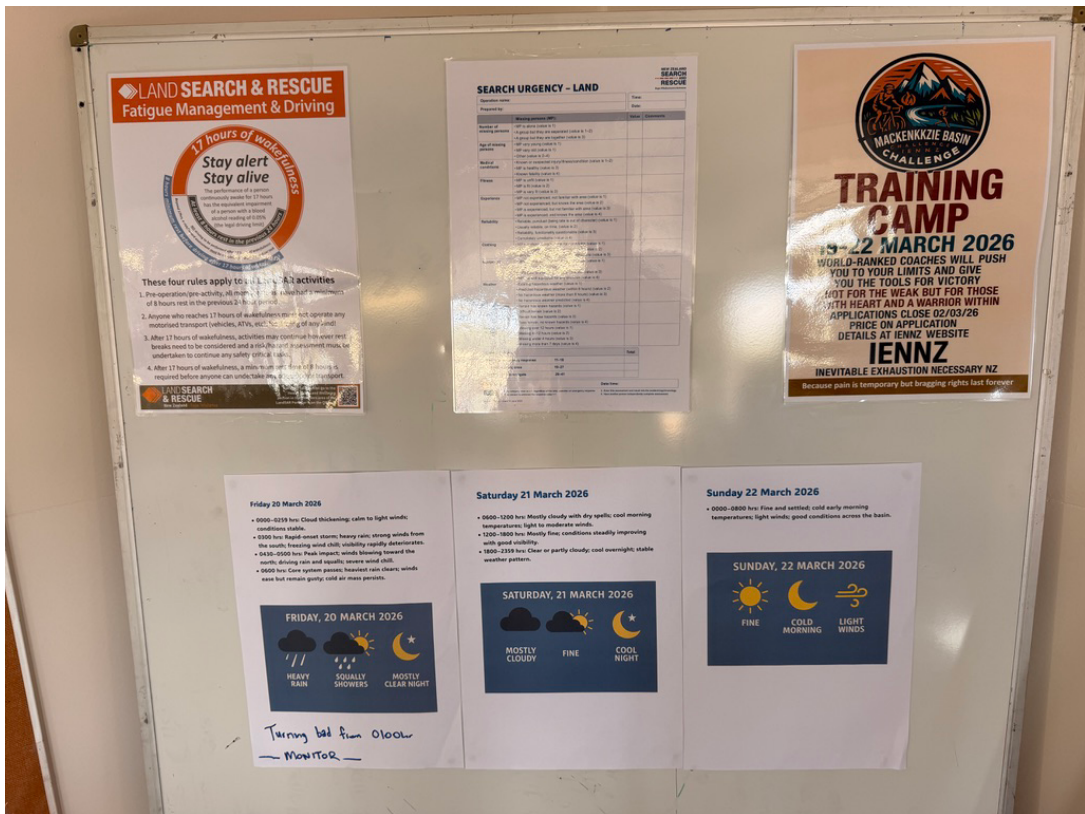
IMT on first night.



Marine Search Assets.



Missing Persons Boards.



Weather Forecast and Background documents.



Operations Lead Briefing the IMT.

Status	No.	Date	Time	#/T	Reference	RadioCh	Type	Summary	Operator	Sender
Done	27	20/03/2026	21:33:40	FROM	Mackenzie Re...		Standard	Radio Check on Marine 65	Richard S...	Radio Ma...
Done	28	20/03/2026	21:34:46	FROM	Nth Canby Re...		Standard	Radio check	Ross Bos...	ZKSEAC...
Done	41	21/03/2026	10:37:31	FROM	Tracker Mess...		Standard	Radio Message from Radio Management to AREC-01 (OK): Can we ...	Richard S...	Radio Ma...
Done	46	20/03/2026	21:38:30	FROM	T101 Ellesmere		Team	Heading to search along shoreline to E1403500 N5131800	Richard S...	Radio Ma...
Done	47	20/03/2026	21:43:17	TO	T104 CG Nort...		Team	New Team Setup (People assignment change):	Tekapo S...	Oxford L...
Done	48	20/03/2026	21:43:22	TO	T104 CG Nort...		Team	New Team Setup (People assignment change):	Tekapo S...	Oxford L...
Done	52	20/03/2026	21:47:07	TO	T106 CG Mac...		Team	New Team Setup (People assignment change):	Tekapo S...	Oxford L...
Done	59	20/03/2026	21:52:23	FROM	T105 Drone T...		Standard	Drone Team - Radio check OK	Richard S...	Radio Ma...
Done	57	20/03/2026	21:52:44	TO	T107 Mackenzie		Team	New Team Setup (People assignment change):	Tekapo S...	Oxford L...
Done	64	20/03/2026	21:54:12	TO	T107 Mackenzie		Task	NEW TASK ASSIGNED: T107 Mackenzie: Backup for T101	Tekapo S...	Oxford L...
Done	65	21/03/2026	10:54:39	FROM	Tracker Mess...		Standard	Radio Message from Radio Management to AREC-01 (OK): Test Mes...	Richard S...	Radio Ma...
Done	69	20/03/2026	21:57:32	FROM	T104 CG Nort...		Task	TASK OPEN : Motuariki Drone	Tekapo S...	Oxford L...
Done	71	20/03/2026	21:57:42	TO	T105 Drone T...		Task	NEW TASK ASSIGNED: T105 Drone Team: Motuariki Drone	Tekapo S...	Oxford L...
Done	72	20/03/2026	21:58:35	FROM	T107 Mackenzie		Standard	Radio Check OK	Richard S...	Radio Ma...
Done	75	20/03/2026	22:01:44	FROM	T102 South C...		Standard	Leaving vehicle heading to start location	Richard S...	Radio Ma...
Done	79	20/03/2026	22:03:03	TO	T104 CG Nort...		Task	NEW TASK ASSIGNED: T104 CG North Cant: Shoreline search support	Tekapo S...	Oxford L...
Done	82	20/03/2026	22:07:38	TO	T106 CG Mac...		Task	NEW TASK ASSIGNED: T106 CG Mackenzie: Kayakers search	Tekapo S...	Oxford L...
Done	83	20/03/2026	22:09:23	FROM	T106 CG Mac...		Standard	Launched on water, heading to island to drop Drone operators	Tekapo S...	Oxford L...
Done	89	20/03/2026	22:15:26	FROM	T104 CG Nort...		Standard	Clue information Updated:	Richard S...	Radio Ma...
Done	90	20/03/2026	22:17:45	FROM	T101 Ellesmere		Standard	on Lilybank Road have seen a ligh on the lake bearing 275 degrees	Paul Proctor	Radio Ma...
Done	92	20/03/2026	22:21:02	FROM	T102 South C...		Team	Item of interest, a dome tent tent that has blown apart, continuing...	Don Mac...	Don Mac...
Done	93	20/03/2026	22:23:02	TO	T101 Ellesmere		Standard	Two coastguard vessels on the water using search lights in scanning...	Don Mac...	Don Mac...
Done	94	20/03/2026	22:25:04	FROM	T104 CG Nort...		Standard	Confirmed by boat that lights seen are a LandSAR team searching...	Raehel W...	ChCh Poli...
Done	107	20/03/2026	22:25:30	TO	T101 Ellesmere		Standard	Coastguard heading to Motuariki island	Paul Proctor	Radio Ma...
Done	108	20/03/2026	22:33:39	FROM	T102 South C...		Standard	Started tasking proceeded across rocky terrain.	Raehel W...	ChCh Poli...
Done	111	20/03/2026	22:36:42	FROM	T102 South C...		Standard	Rugged shoreline, unable to get visual on shoreline, request coastg...	Paul Proctor	Radio Ma...
Done	113	20/03/2026	22:38:26	FROM	T105 Drone T...		Team	Radio check	Paul Proctor	Radio Ma...
Done	119	20/03/2026	22:40:19	FROM	T106 CG Mac...		Standard	Placed Drone operators on Island, now heading from search area	Paul Proctor	Radio Ma...
Done	119	20/03/2026	22:49:30	TO	T102 South C...		Standard	Confirmed Coastguard to assist with search at coordinates provided in l	Paul Proctor	Radio Ma...

Example of timeline recording to Task via AREC (time/team/type/task summary).



Field team briefing.



Field team briefing.



Water assets in action.



Heli landing zone and MIST facility.



MIST Facility at basecamp.



MIST assessing a patient.



Water winching a patient with GCH.

MISSING KAYAKERS

<p>997 ✓</p> <p>MACKENZIE BASIN CHALLENGE HINZ Training Camp Registration Form</p> <p>Participant Details</p> <p>Start 2 - 10/2 Boat ramp On shore ✓</p>	<p>510 ✓</p> <p>MACKENZIE BASIN CHALLENGE HINZ Training Camp Registration Form</p> <p>Participant Details</p> <p>Start 2 - 10/2 Boat ramp On shore ✓</p>	<p>660 ✓</p> <p>MACKENZIE BASIN CHALLENGE HINZ Training Camp Registration Form</p> <p>Participant Details</p>	<p>675 ✓</p> <p>MACKENZIE BASIN CHALLENGE HINZ Training Camp Registration Form</p> <p>Participant Details</p> <p>Team 210</p> <p>Stretcher @ road</p>
<p>662 ✓</p> <p>MACKENZIE BASIN CHALLENGE HINZ Training Camp Registration Form</p> <p>Participant Details</p>	<p>866 ✓</p> <p>MACKENZIE BASIN CHALLENGE HINZ Training Camp Registration Form</p> <p>Participant Details</p> <p>202</p>	<p>811 ✓</p> <p>MACKENZIE BASIN CHALLENGE HINZ Training Camp Registration Form</p> <p>Participant Details</p> <p>Bull Helo ✓</p>	<p>991 ✓</p> <p>MACKENZIE BASIN CHALLENGE HINZ Training Camp Registration Form</p> <p>Participant Details</p> <p>202</p>

West side lake extractions

Patients → Heather & Ben Stat 3 ✓
Police ute 10/2 1730hrs (Julian C)
+ T201 Alex + T203-Pete.
→ Ned Stat 3 ✓
Police van 10/2 1700 hrs.

Teams - T210 - 6 pax
T201 - 3 pax } 12 total
T208 - 3 pax } Drivers 10/2
Drone - Graeme } Phil Vink (ute+trailer)
Polaris - Zeb. } Sarah (ute)

Constward Mackenzie & Blackwell
+ IRB 1/3 + 4+5

East side lake extractions

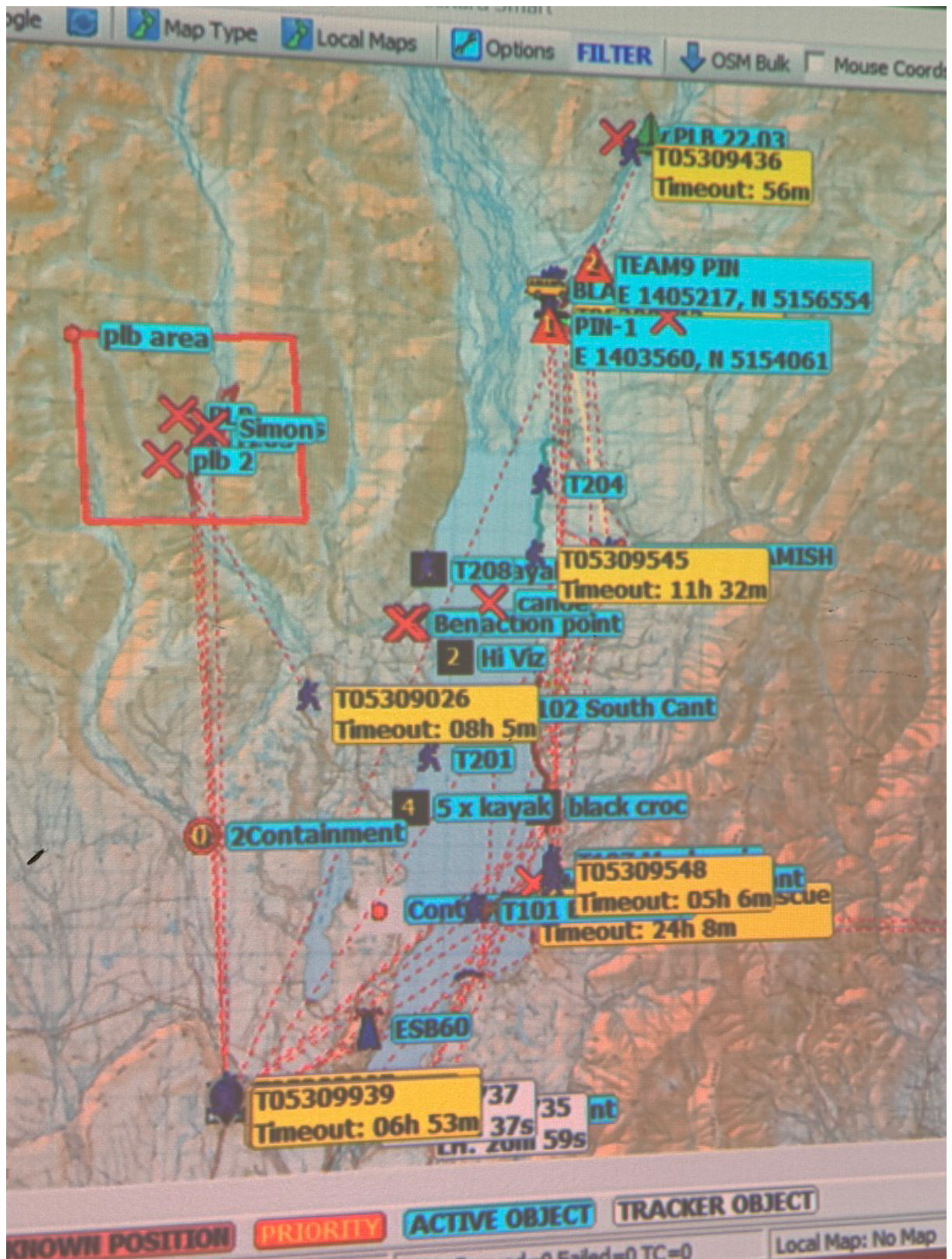
Patients → Hamish Wallace (w/ T202) } NOT DONE
Tasked hob medivac Roundhill Ski Rd.
→ Hamish & Adam (w/ T202) ✓
Tasked Police transport (Sarah + 1 landsar)

Teams → T202 - 4
T203 - 4 } 1 landsar
T204 - 4 } w/ Sarah to confirm team

Kiha - Driver 1 (ute)
Surf ute?

All tasked to RTB (boat ramp)

Missing persons profiles and tracking.



Tracking Map on last night of the exercise.

Appendix D – Exercise Basecamp Location and EXCON Structure



Tekapo Military Camp Map



Exercise Control

Facilitators

- Manage injects
- Monitor player progress
- Review overall cadence of the exercise
- Overall safety

Role Players

- Role play Police
- Role play RCCNZ
- Role play local SAR Coordinator
- Role play other local agencies

Excon Logistics

- Admin
- Catering
- ICT
- Transport management

Evaluator

- Assess the processes and plans against Key Objectives and general SAREX criteria
- Selection of IMT sessions
- Selection of field taskings
- Overall construct

EXCON Structure