

# **Exercise Evaluation Report**

## **WAIKATO SAREX 2026**

**Location:** Pirongia

**Date:** 7th March to 8<sup>th</sup> March 2026

**Report  
version:** FINAL

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## Executive Summary

**The 2026 Police District SAREX was held in Pirongia on the weekend of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> March 2026.**

**The focus of the SAREX was urban searching.**

**The SAREX was well supported by all the landSAR groups in the Waikato District attending, with a total of 81 participants.**

**AREC also attended this SAREX and furthered the growing relationship between them, the Police SAR squad and landSAR.**

**The SAREX included a number of workshops during the first day, followed with a scenario based urban search around the Pirongia village.**

**The workshops included Stretcher carry with the mule stretcher, radios, urban Search theory and the use of wandersearch.**

**These workshops were facilitated by experienced practitioners from within the Waikato SAR community, with 1 external facilitator from landSAR training.**

**The workshops were targeted to field team members.**

**Contemporaneously a full day IMT workshop was facilitated covering the initial planning. This included some theory-based presentations followed by scenario-based desk top exercises.**

**19 members from throughout the district attended the IMT workshop.**

**The exercise was particularly successful as a whole, with three recommendations made for the district to consider.**

**Overall, the exercise demonstrated the healthy state of the SAR community across the district.**

## Recommendations

## **RECOMMENDATION 1**

**Use the NZSAR SAREX planning guideline as the standard planning document.**

**See comments in Introduction “No purpose or aim of SAREX identified”.**

## **RECOMMENDATION 2**

**Workshop activities are prepared to include a lesson plan for each activity to avoid confusion between exercise planners and workshop facilitators.**

**See findings in objective 4 and objective 5**

## **RECOMMENDATION 3**

**That the Waikato Police District Leadership Team representative attend key moments of the Waikato SAREX**

**See finding’s objective 1. Develop and maintain relationships between organizations.**

**Note that this has been a previous recommendations in previous SAREX evaluation reports for this district.**

**See finding’s objective 4 and 5**



**The Waikato Land SAREX 2026 was held at the Pirongia Rugby club rooms and grounds on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> March 2026.**

**In total there were 81 attendees to this SAREX. Each of the 7 volunteer groups within the Waikato had representation. 19 of those who attended took part in the day long IMT session.**

**The SAREX was largely focused on urban searching but also included a number of workshop-based activities throughout the first day. These activities included urban searches, Wander search, stretcher carry with Mule stretcher system and radio and comms.**

**All these workshops were targeted at field teams.**

**The focus and objectives were decided and set by a planning team made up of Police and landSAR personnel.**

**While no specific purpose was identified in the planning documents, it was clear from the objectives, subjects of workshops and subjects of IMT scenarios, that this SAREX was focused on learning and testing the response and abilities of Waikato SAR groups to respond to a search in an urban environments in a coordinated fashion.**

**During the evaluation process, members of the planning team identified that there had been no urban search exercises within the Waikato Police District since 2021. It was perceived by the planning group that there was a need to learn and test the ability of the Waikato SAR community to respond to an urban search.**

**The workshops were facilitated by experienced SAR practitioners in the subject of the workshop. The Radio session was facilitated by experienced AREC practitioners, and the urban search workshop was facilitated by an experienced landSAR tutor.**

**Contemporaneously a full day Incident management Team workshop was undertaken with a combination of presentations and desk top exercises.**

**The IMT session was facilitated by experienced Police and LandSAR search managers.**

**The evening time was focused on testing, learning and practicing the use of night vision equipment and an introduction to drone capabilities.**

**The second day was taken up by a traditional search exercise activity focused in the Pirongia village. This exercise progressed the activities learnt and refreshed from the workshop activities from the previous day.**

## Background

## Background to the Exercise

**Nationally and within the Waikato Police District there has been significant increase in urban search operations.**

**The exercise planning group identified this trend and identified that the last SAR exercise focused on urban searching was in 2021.**

**The planning group felt the need to reinforce the. Urban search processes as a district SAREX.**

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

**The SAREX was held within the Pirongia village, using the rugby club as a base to run all the workshop activities and as an incident Control Point for the scenario activity.**

**Pre the exercise, the Planning group advertised their activities to the Pirongia through pamphlet drops and in media releases.**

**The community were whole-heartedly in support of this exercise.**

Participating organisations

**The key organizations included**

**Police SAR group**

**Waikato LandSAR groups**

**Waikato AREC group**

**The exercise was supported by the Pirongia Rugby club and the Pirongia community as a whole.**

Exercise aim

**While there was no aim identified in the Planning documents, it was clear through the planning documents and in particular the objectives that the Aim was to learn and test the ability of Waikato SAR community to respond to an urban search.**

Exercise objectives

### **OBJECTIVE 1**

**SAR Partners Collaborate Effectively**

### **Contributing Objective**

**Appropriate agencies selected for and participated in the exercise.**

#### **KPI's**

**All agencies required for the exercise participate (LandSAR, Police, AREC)**

**All agencies participating collaborate effectively**

**Liaison arrangements for inter-agency engagement are maintained**

### **OBJECTIVE 2**

**Strengthen inter-agency relationships**

**Contributing objective.**

**Relationships between Police, LandSAR groups and AREC are strengthened**

#### **KPI's**

**LandSAR groups are engaged during the exercise planning.**

**All agencies and key Police and SAR group personnel engaged positively**

**All agencies understand and are given appropriate responsibilities within the response structure**

### **OBJECTIVE 3**

**Risks are identified, removed, minimized or managed**

**Contributing Objective**

**Risk management systems and processes are defined and communicated by each activity**

#### **KPI's**

**Operational risks are analyzed**

**Risk management systems and processes appropriate to the nature and complexity of the situation are defined**

**Briefing information appropriately addresses identified risks**

**Contributing objective**

**Risk awareness and management is demonstrated by all exercise participants**

**KPI's**

**All participants understand their personal responsibilities in regard to risk.**

**Risk management systems and processes appropriate to the nature and complexity of the situation are defined.**

**Briefing information appropriately addresses identified risk.**

#### **OBJECTIVE 4**

**SAR personnel refresh and practice communication techniques to be utilized in a Search and rescue operation.**

**Contributing objective**

**SAR personnel to review the functional use of communication equipment and functionality.**

**KPI**

**Participants understand the use of In-Reach devices, starlink and satellite phone communications**

**Participants understand the set-up and use of repeaters and linking radios.**

**Develop an understanding and ability of AREC emergency communications.**

#### **OBJECTIVE 5**

**SAR operational personnel refresh and practice Search and Rescue skills**

**Contributing Objective**

**SAR personnel to carry out a functional scenario using wander search to locate a missing person.**

**KPI**

**Participants develop and understanding of the people who wear wander search devices**

**Participants understand the range the devices have**

**Participants develop confidence in using the tracking equipment.**

**Contributing Objective.**

**SAR personnel carry out a functional scenario using directional finding equipment to locate a missing person**

**KPI**

**Participants understand the range of the device and develop confidence in using the tracking equipment.**

**Contributing Objective**

**SAR personnel to carry out a functional scenario working with SAR dogs**

**KPI**

**Participants understand the ability and limitations of SAR search dogs**

**Develop confidence and knowledge with assisting SAR dog teams as a secondary member.**

## **OBJECTIVE 6**

**SAR IMT personnel refresh IMT roles and duties and effectively manage the scenario.**

**Contributing objective**

**IMT personnel to refresh roles within the IMT**

**KPI**

**Participants develop and understanding of the various roles within an IMT**

**Participants can effectively carry out duties of the various roles within the IMT**

**Contributing objective**

**The IMT responds to the demands of the functional scenario.**

**KPI**

**IMT in accordance with CIMS**

**Briefings follow GSMEAC format**

**ICPO is established for the initial operational period**

**IAP is established for the initial operational period**

**IAOP is updated for the subsequent operational periods**

## **Contributing objective**

**IMT maintains situational awareness**

**KPI**

**Briefings and de-briefings are conducted**

**Information received within the IMT is analyzed**

**Information is collated and disseminated within the IMT as appropriate**

**IMT planning meetings are conducted on a regular basis**

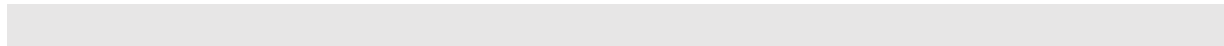
**Information for the next operational period is established**

**IMT is continually aware of resource progress welfare and activities**

Exercise Scenario







**It was agreed between the evaluator and the DSAREX Controller that the evaluation will be of the whole SAREX, including field activities and IMT activities**

Evaluation scope

**The whole SAREX is included in the evaluation**

Aspects of the exercise observed, what was not observed

**All of the workshops were at least partially observed by the evaluator, sufficiently to make comments of objectives.**

**Both field activities and IMT were observed during the main scenario**

The process followed in preparing and submitting the report

**The search planners decided on the objectives to be achieved during the SAREX. The objectives set were in line with the NZSAR objective suggestions**

**It was agreed that a draft report will be sent for approval to the Waikato District SAR Coordinator prior to as final report being delivered**

Other information

All of the SAREX activities were observed

## Findings

## **OBJECTIVE 1**

### **SAR Partners Collaborate Effectively**

#### **Contributing Objective**

**Appropriate agencies selected for and participated in the exercise**

**This exercise combined the key land search and rescue agencies of Police, LandSAR and AREC.**

**These groups were appropriately selected for this SAREX.**

**Liaison between these groups are strong and all participated in facilitating workshops and participating in the training.**

## **OBJECTIVE 2**

### **Strengthen inter-agency relationships**

#### **Contributing objective.**

**Relationships between Police, LandSAR groups and AREC are strengthened**

**The participants demonstrated a very strong relationship between the Police SAR Squad and landSAR groups throughout the Waikato police district.**

**The relationship between AREC and the other two agencies has been developed recently, that is over the last 2 years.**

**Prior to that the AREC organization within the Waikato district was dysfunctional and not available for the SAR community.**

**To their credit, AREC within the Waikato has aligned itself more closely with their national body and consequently with the SAR community in that district.**

**That relationship is strong and growing with time.**

**While these relationships exist with the Police SAR squad, that relationship doesn't exist with the Police organization as a whole.**

**Despite invitations, there were no representatives from the Police district leadership team to enhance the relationship between the Police organization and the SAR community.**

### **OBJECTIVE 3**

**Risks are identified, removed, minimized or managed**

#### **Contributing Objective**

**Risk management systems and processes are defined and communicated by each activity**

**Risk awareness and management is demonstrated by all exercise participants**

**Risks were managed throughout the exercise.**

**A full safety plan was completed as part of the overall SAREX plan, which identified all the known risks throughout the exercise.**

**The safety plan was relayed to the participants as part of the overall briefing at the beginning of the exercise.**

**The safety plan was displayed in the buildings, where teams were individually briefed.**

**Each subsequently briefing for the workshop activities and scenarios included safety briefings specific to that activity or tasking.**

**During the scenario activity, team members demonstrated their responsibilities by completing the “take 5” risk analysis for their tasks and demonstrated risk identification processes throughout their tasks by continually questioning the teams safety.**

### **OBJECTIVE 4**

**SAR personnel refresh and practice communication techniques to be utilized in a Search and rescue operation.**

#### **Contributing objective**

**SAR personnel to review the functional use of communication equipment and functionality.**

**This objective primarily was demonstrated through the workshop activity on radios but also practiced during the main scenario.**

**During that workshop the participants were taught or refreshed and then practiced setting up repeaters and linking repeaters.**

**The workshop was facilitated by AREC subject matter experts.**

**They then practiced sending and receiving messages.**

**They did not discuss or cover the in-reach, star-link or satellite phone systems.**

**There were no other discussions on the AREC emergency communications.**

**.**

## **OBJECTIVE 5**

**SAR operational personnel refresh and practice Search and Rescue skills**

**Contributing Objective**

**SAR personnel to carry out a functional scenario using wander search to locate a missing person.**

**SAR personnel carry out a functional scenario using directional finding equipment to locate a missing person**

**SAR personnel to carry out a functional scenario working with SAR dogs.**

**This objective was primarily demonstrated through the workshop activity and then followed up with a practical application in the main scenario.**

**Ther workshop was facilitated by a police SAR squad member and the wander search coordinator. Both experienced practitioners in the use of wander search equipment.**

**They did not cover the directional finding equipment**

**They did not cover a functional activity using SAR dogs**

**While not part of the KPI's, participants also attended a workshop specifically of the use of the mule stretcher system with s small exercise carrying a patient down a small track with some some obstacles.**

**This workshop was valuable to learn and practice with the mule system that up to recently had not been available to all groups. It weas facilitated by experienced users of this equipotent from LandSAR and a Police SAR squad member.**

**They also attended a workshop on urban searching. This was a classroom style workshop and covered a number of topics relating to urban search.**

**This workshop was facilitated by an experienced landSAR tutor on this topic. The workshop covered topics contained in the full 2-day urban search course.**

## **OBJECTIVE 6**

**SAR IMT personnel refresh IMT roles and duties and effectively manage the scenario.**

**Contributing objective**

**IMT personnel to refresh roles within the IMT**

**The IMT responds to the demands of the functional scenario.**

**IMT maintains situational awareness**

**These objectives were achieved during the 1 full day of theory with desk top scenario activities and with the main scenario.**

**The IMT session was facilitated by experienced Police SAR squad members along with experienced LandSAR IMT members.**

**It began with theory-based discussion on basic IMT practices and followed through to the completion in initial action plans.**

**19 participants attended this workshop ranging from experienced and competent practitioners through to members who have shown interest in IMT but had no experience.**

**All of the participants gained knowledge and experience through this workshop and the main scenario.**

**The workshops were well facilitated and the IMT was well mentored throughout the scenario activities, including the main scenario.**

**It demonstrated a good level of commitment by landSAR and Police SAR to search management.**

## Conclusions



## **OBJECTIVE 1**

### **SAR Partners Collaborate Effectively**

#### **Contributing Objective**

**Appropriate agencies selected for and participated in the exercise**

**All KPI's of these objectives were met**

**Objective MET**

## **OBJECTIVE 2**

### **Strengthen inter-agency relationships**

#### **Contributing objective.**

**Relationships between Police, LandSAR groups and AREC are strengthened**

**All KPIs of these objectives were met, however could be improved to include the Police organization as a whole, by attendance of a representative of the Waikato Police District leadership Team**

**Objective MET**

### **OBJECTIVE 3**

**Risks are identified, removed, minimized or managed**

**Contributing Objective**

**Risk management systems and processes are defined and communicated by each activity**

**Risk awareness and management is demonstrated by all exercise participants**

**All KPI's of these objectives were met**

**Objective MET**

## **OBJECTIVE 4**

**SAR personnel refresh and practice communication techniques to be utilized in a Search and rescue operation.**

**Contributing objective**

**SAR personnel to review the functional use of communication equipment and functionality.**

**KPI relating to set up of repeaters was met**

**KPI relating to understanding in-reach, starlink and satellite phones was not covered and not met.**

**KPI relating to understanding AREC emergency communications was SAR communications only. Partially met.**

**Objective PARTIALLY MET**

## **OBJECTIVE 5**

**SAR operational personnel refresh and practice Search and Rescue skills**

**Contributing Objective**

**SAR personnel to carry out a functional scenario using wander search to locate a missing person.**

**SAR personnel carry out a functional scenario using directional finding equipment to locate a missing person**

**SAR personnel to carry out a functional scenario working with SAR dogs.**

**As a whole this SAREX exposed participants to a variety of field search and rescue skills**

**The KPI's relating to wander search was met**

**The KPI's relating to directional finding equipment was not covered and not met**

**The KPI's relating to search dogs were not met.**

**Objective PARTIALLY MET**

## **OBJECTIVE 6**

**SAR IMT personnel refresh IMT roles and duties and effectively manage the scenario.**

**Contributing objective**

**IMT personnel to refresh roles within the IMT**

**The IMT responds to the demands of the functional scenario.**

**IMT maintains situational awareness**

**All the KPI's relating to the IMT were met through the workshop and main scenario**

**Objective MET**

## Appendix

**<Specifically include evidence to substantiate Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations. Number the Appendices in order, title or caption each piece of information.>**