

SAREX Final Evaluation Report

Operation Go Fish



Exercise	Operation Go Fish
Exercise type	Tabletop / Incident Management Team exercise
Location	Kapiti Coastguard Base
Date	Tuesday 12 May 2026
Lead agency	NZ Police - Wellington Police Maritime Unit
Evaluator	David Houston
Participating agencies	NZ Police and Kapiti Coastguard

Report prepared following evaluation of the exercise.

1. Executive summary

Operation Go Fish was a tabletop Search and Rescue Exercise designed to test whether trainee SAR Managers and an Incident Management Team could establish and manage a Police-led marine SAR response from Kapiti Coastguard Base. The exercise scenario involved an overdue fishing vessel near the south-west side of Kapiti Island.

The exercise achieved its stated objectives. The Incident Controller quickly established an IMT using a Police member and two Coastguard members. Roles were identified, IMT members wore appropriate vests, an Incident Action Plan was developed, and key information was recorded on the whiteboard and in the relevant SAR forms. Appropriate marine search assets were identified and tasked, including two Coastguard vessels and two Surf Life Saving vessels. Air assets were considered but were not available.

Kapiti Coastguard Base was suitable for the size and type of exercise conducted. With four IMT members there was sufficient space, the environment was quiet, and the team was able to hold meetings and carry out its tasks. Some limitations were noted, including initial difficulty accessing the Police network, small whiteboards, and the likelihood that space may become tight if an operation extended into multiple operational periods.

The main improvement areas are to ensure SAROP classification is explicitly clarified and recorded at the start of the operation, particularly between Police and RCCNZ; to consider use of a Pan-Pan broadcast rather than relying only on an all-ships broadcast in an overdue vessel scenario where urgency may justify a higher level of attention; and to build further training around second operational period planning.

2. Recommendations

No.	Recommendation	Rationale	Suggested lead	Priority
1	Confirm and record SAROP classification at the start of the operation.	The exercise was treated as a Class 1 SAR operation, but this should be clearly confirmed between Police and RCCNZ and recorded in the IAP / log.	NZ Police / RCCNZ	High
2	Use an appropriate urgency broadcast where the circumstances justify it.	An all-ships broadcast was made, but in the circumstances a Pan-Pan may have been more suitable because it would likely attract greater attention from vessels in the area.	Incident Controller	High
3	Include second operational period planning in future trainee SAR Manager exercises.	The team began to struggle when planning the second period after the vessel had not been found. This is expected for new members and provides a useful training focus.	WPMU / SAR training lead	Medium
4	Include Police IMT requirements in the Kapiti Coastguard Base refurbishment planning.	The base was suitable for this exercise, but improvements to whiteboard space, display areas, network access and operational layout would strengthen remote IMT capability.	NZ Police / Kapiti Coastguard	Medium
5	Maintain a remote IMT go-kit for Kapiti operations.	Police brought NZSAR forms and laptop computers, which supported the exercise. A standardised go-kit would help ensure consistency during real incidents.	WPMU	Medium

3. Introduction and background

Operation Go Fish was developed to test the ability of trainee SAR Managers to establish and operate an IMT for a marine SAR incident on the Kapiti Coast. The exercise also tested whether Kapiti Coastguard Base has the resources and physical setup required to support a remote IMT.

The scenario involved Ava Jones and her father Peter, who departed from the beach at Kapiti Boating Club at approximately 0500 hours for an early morning fishing trip. They intended to fish near the south-west side of Kapiti Island. Ava failed to arrive at work at 0830 hours, Peter's car and empty boat trailer were located at the beach, and neither person could be contacted by phone.

The exercise focused on initial SAR management, including role allocation, appreciation, Incident Action Plan development, resource tasking, communications, documentation, and remote IMT operation.

4. Evaluation methodology

The evaluation was based on direct observation of the tabletop exercise, review of completed SAR forms and whiteboard information, observation of briefings and IMT activity, and assessment against the exercise objectives and KPIs.

5. Objective assessment

Area assessed	Assessment	Key evidence	Issues / improvement points
Objective 1 - Timely IMT establishment and role clarity	Achieved	The Incident Controller established an Incident Management Team quickly using a Police member and two Coastguard members. Roles were identified, the operation was categorised in the IAP and on the whiteboard, and IMT members wore appropriate vests.	The operation was classified as a Class 1 SAR operation, but this should have been explicitly clarified between Police and RCCNZ and recorded at the start.
Objective 2 - Resource activation and management	Achieved	The IMT activated and managed appropriate resources. Two Coastguard vessels and two Surf Life Saving vessels were tasked. Air assets were considered, although none were available. Assets were used appropriately to search the area.	An all-ships broadcast was completed asking vessels to look out for the overdue boat. Given the circumstances, a Pan-Pan would probably have been more suitable as it would likely have attracted greater attention from other vessels in the area.
Objective 3 - Kapiti Coastguard Base suitability	Achieved	With four IMT members, there was sufficient room. The location was quiet and the team was able to hold meetings and carry out its tasks. The base was suitable for the tabletop exercise.	Members initially struggled to access the Police network, although this appeared to be rectified. If an operation continued over multiple operational periods, space may become tight. The base is due for refurbishment and Police should be involved in planning the operations room.

6. KPI assessment

Area assessed	Assessment	Key evidence	Issues / improvement points
KPI 1 - IMT skills and role knowledge	Achieved	Members performed in their allocated roles and understood each other's roles. The Planning Officer identified a search area and conveyed this to the operations team.	No significant gap identified. Continued mentoring of trainee SAR Managers should be maintained.
KPI 2 - Readiness plan, SOPs, records and briefings	Achieved	An Incident Action Plan was completed. Relevant paperwork was completed, including search urgency, tracking of search assets, situation report, incident	This was an ideal opportunity to explicitly discuss and record whether the incident was a Class 1 or Class 2 operation.

Area assessed	Assessment	Key evidence	Issues / improvement points
		objectives and register of sightings. The Police team spoke with RCCNZ to obtain a search area and discussed the operation.	
KPI 3 - Resource coordination and communications	Achieved	The IMT knew where assets were and what was available. This was demonstrated through completion of the Marine Search and Rescue Units form and related tracking.	The team began to struggle with planning the second operational period after the overdue boat had still not been found. This is a useful training point for new members, as later operational phases require experience and structured planning.
KPI 4 - Remote IMT operation	Achieved	The IMT operated effectively from Kapiti Coastguard Base. Police brought NZSAR forms and laptop computers, and there were sufficient resources for the size of the exercise.	The whiteboards were small but still usable. The planned refurbishment provides an opportunity to improve whiteboard space, display areas and the operations room layout.

7. Findings

Finding 1 - IMT establishment was timely and structured

The Incident Controller quickly established the IMT, allocated roles, and used both Police and Coastguard members effectively. Appropriate role vests were worn, and the team operated with a clear structure.

Finding 2 - Documentation and incident management processes were strong

The team completed an Incident Action Plan and a range of relevant SAR documentation, including search urgency, situation report, incident objectives, search asset tracking and a register of sightings. This supported accountability and shared situational awareness.

Finding 3 - Resource use was appropriate

The IMT identified and tasked relevant marine search resources, including Coastguard and Surf Life Saving vessels. Air assets were also considered, although none were available.

Finding 4 - SAROP classification should be made more explicit

Although the operation was treated as a Class 1 SAR operation, the classification should be deliberately discussed between Police and RCCNZ, agreed where necessary, and clearly recorded in the IAP or decision log.

Finding 5 - Broadcast urgency should match the scenario risk

The all-ships broadcast was useful, but the circumstances of an overdue boat with two persons missing near Kapiti Island may have justified a Pan-Pan to attract more attention from vessels in the area.

Finding 6 - Kapiti Coastguard Base is suitable but can be improved

The base was suitable for a small tabletop IMT and provided a quiet working environment. However, improvements to whiteboards, display space, Police network access and operational layout should be considered during refurbishment.

Finding 7 - Second period planning is a useful future training focus

The team began to find second operational period planning more challenging when the overdue vessel had not been located. This is an important learning area for trainee SAR Managers and should be developed in future exercises.

8. Conclusion

Operation Go Fish achieved its stated objectives and provided a useful training opportunity for developing SAR Managers and IMT members. The exercise demonstrated that a remote IMT can be established at Kapiti Coastguard Base and that Police and Coastguard personnel can work together effectively in the initial phase of a marine SAR incident.

The exercise also identified practical improvement areas. The most important are explicit confirmation and recording of SAROP classification, consideration of an appropriate urgency broadcast such as Pan-Pan where the circumstances justify it, and further training around second operational period planning.

Kapiti Coastguard Base was suitable for the exercise conducted. With planned refurbishment, there is an opportunity to strengthen the base as a remote IMT location by improving whiteboard space, display capability, network access and overall operations room layout.

9. Lessons identified

- A remote IMT can be established quickly at Kapiti Coastguard Base for a Police-led marine SAR incident.
- Clear role allocation and visible role identification assisted the IMT to operate effectively.
- Completion of the IAP and supporting SAR forms helped maintain structure and accountability.
- SAROP classification should be deliberately discussed and recorded early.
- For overdue vessel scenarios with possible distress, the level of broadcast urgency should be carefully considered.
- Second operational period planning should be practised with trainee SAR Managers.
- The planned refurbishment of Kapiti Coastguard Base should include Police IMT requirements.

10. Action plan

No.	Action	Lead	Priority	Timeframe
1	Add SAROP classification confirmation to initial IMT checklist and IAP process.	NZ Police / WPMU	High	Before next SAREX or real operation review
2	Review guidance on when to use all-ships, Pan-Pan or other urgency broadcasts in marine SAR incidents.	WPMU / SAR training lead	High	Short term
3	Run a future training session focused on second operational period planning.	WPMU	Medium	Next training cycle
4	Provide Police input into Kapiti Coastguard Base operations room refurbishment.	NZ Police / Kapiti Coastguard	Medium	During refurbishment planning
5	Maintain and test a remote IMT kit for Kapiti Coast incidents.	WPMU	Medium	Short to medium term

Appendix A - Evidence notes

IMT establishment: Incident Controller established an IMT quickly using a Police member and two Coastguard members. Roles were recorded in the IAP and on the whiteboard. IMT members wore appropriate vests.

Resources: Two Coastguard vessels and two Surf Life Saving vessels were tasked. Air assets were considered but not available.

Documentation: IAP, search urgency, search asset tracking, situation report, incident objectives and register of sightings were completed.

Facility: Kapiti Coastguard Base was quiet and suitable for four IMT members. Network access was initially difficult. Whiteboards were small but usable.

Evaluator sign-off: David Houston

Date: 2 June 2026

NEW ZEALAND SEARCH AND RESCUE
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SAR INCIDENT ACTION PLAN (INITIAL)

Initial Response Period

Operation name: <i>Kapiti</i>		Date: <i>2/5/26</i>	Situation summary: (brief circumstances and action taken)	
Subject's name: <i>Peter & Ava</i>		Time from: <i>0930</i> Time to:	<i>- SM Cabin Cabin overdue</i> <i>- Peter (55) - Ava (25) Father - daughter</i> <i>- LKP</i>	
Incident Control <i>Chris Cameron</i>		Liaison: Info: Safety:		
Planning/Intelligence <i>Colin</i>		Goal: <i>To locate SM vessel and Peter & Ava</i>		
Operations <i>Mark</i>		Logistics <i>Murray</i>		
Factors: (that you need to consider when formulating a plan)	Priorities	Incident objectives (what you want to achieve during this operational period - make them SMART objectives)	Strategies (methodologies to achieve your objectives)	Resources needs (what you need to do the job)
<i>- Tide</i>		<i>locate Peter & Ava</i>	<i>Shoreline search</i>	<i>Coast guard = 2 Boats</i>
<i>Weather</i>		<i>locate Cabin Cabin</i>	<i>Grid search</i>	<i>Surf</i>
<i>- Peter's medical condition</i>		<i>Transport vessel & people to safety.</i>	<i>Air search</i>	<i>Helicopter / plane</i>
				<i>Police shore line SAR</i>

Consider: Confinement Communications Hasty Teams Decision Points Sign Cutting LKP 300m Circle Attraction
 Investigation Linear Features Dogs NVG FLIR LPB Hot Spots



NEW ZEALAND SEARCH AND RESCUE
 Te Kaitiaki Takekōwhiri

INCIDENT OBJECTIVES

Operation name: <i>Kapiti</i>	Time: <i>400</i>
Prepared by: <i>Coba 59</i>	Date: <i>12/5/2026</i>

Operational Period

From: *12/5/2026* To: _____

Goal: *To locate Peter and Ava Jones. Return them to a place of safety.*

Incident objectives for specified operational period (what you want to achieve during this operational period - make them SMART)

- *Cover as much of the search area as possible.*
- *Expand & plan search for longer.*


Strategies - Take the time to determine the most effective and efficient way of achieving the above objectives - consider all tactical options available, either singularly or collectively e.g. tracking and dog teams collaborating to process the LKP.

- *More vessels to join larger search area.*
- *What is the weather going to do over the next two days.*
- *Hours of day left*

Completed by (name): _____	Date/time: _____
Signed: _____	Date/time: _____

SAR Incident Action Plan (Multi-Period) 15 June 2023 Page 4 of 8

SAR SITUATION REPORT



Operation name: Kapiti Time: 1140
 Prepared by: COCAST Date: 12/5/26

Location: Paraparaumu Beach Map/chart ref: _____

Situation: Peter & Ava Jones overdue on 5m Cuddy Cabin vessel. left home at 0430hrs, poss sighting at 0630hrs

Action taken by responders and others:
Shore line search of Kapiti Island and Kapiti coast.


Factors impacting on planning:
 - Time/darkness
 - Peter's medical condition
 - No cell phones
 - No Police vessels
 - No Air support.

Contingencies and long term planning:
 - Widen search
 - Air support.

Approved: _____ Date/time: _____

SAR Situation Report 15 June 2023

SCENARIO WEIGHTING WORKSHEET



Operation name: _____ Time: _____
 Prepared by: _____ Date: _____

1. As a Group examine, discuss and analyse the available evidence as proof for or against possible Scenarios. This discussion should include what has happened, where it happened and how it happened. Then using collective knowledge and experience identify the various scenarios that are considered plausible

Scenario	
A	<u>Boat breakdown, drifting</u>
B	<u>Medical event, drifting</u>
C	<u>Boat takes on water, boards ship</u>
D	<u>Snapper feet</u>
E	<u>Walk on Island</u>
F	

2. Each participant independently selects the Scenario they believe is the most likely and assigns it the reference value of 100

3. Each participant then independently ranks the other Scenarios against the most likely Scenario by assigning values between 10 and 100 – this is a proportion based process so if you assign a Scenario the value of 50, what you are saying is, that Scenario is only half as likely as the most likely Scenario, to which you assigned the reference value of 100

4. The value of 100 can be assigned to more than one Scenario – if you believe that those Scenarios are equally the most likely

5. Once each participant has ranked the Scenarios and their scores have been entered in the table below – add the column totals and then add the column totals across to the sum of column totals

Participant's Name	Scenario A	Scenario B	Scenario C	Scenario D	Scenario E	Scenario F	Sum of column totals below
<u>Angus</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>		
<u>Cobba</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>70</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>10</u>		
Column Totals	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

6. Divide each 'Column total' by the 'Sum of Column Totals' and multiply it by 100 to give a weighted percentage ranking for each Scenario

Ranking: _____ %

Approved: _____ Date/time: _____

Scenario Weighting Worksheet 15 June 2023

