



NATIONAL SEARCH AND RESCUE COUNCIL

Forty-eighth meeting of the Australian National Search and Rescue Council

16 – 18 October 2024

Australian Institute of Police Management (AIPM) Manly, NSW



Figure 1: Helicopter winch during the 'Geehi Search' in the Snowy Mountains, NSW.

Figure 2: SAR personnel searching for missing person during the 'Geehi Search' in the Snowy Mountains, NSW.

Figure 3: The NSW Police SAR vessel, 'Nemesis' in action, during an incident in 2024.



Executive Summary

Australia's National Search and Rescue (NATSAR) Council met for their 48th annual meeting from the 16 – 18 October 2024, at the Australian Institute for Police Management (AIPM) in Sydney, hosted by the New South Wales Police (NSW) Force. The meeting was formally opened by NSW Police Commander Joseph McNulty and was chaired by Mark Morrow, Executive Director Response Division, Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA).

The meeting had 31 participants from the 10 SAR Authorities who are responsible for the Australian SAR system, which covers more than 53 million square kilometres. The SAR authorities represent each of the eight state and territory police forces, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and AMSA. Observers from the National Volunteer Marine SAR Committee, our trans-Tasman partners New Zealand Search and Rescue Council (NZ SAR Council) and NZ Police also attended the meeting.

The meeting focused on the strategic reform of the Council by welcoming senior police agency representatives, who joined day 1 of the meeting via Microsoft Teams. This discussion resulted in a mutual interest of introducing a senior, strategic decision-making body to the NATSAR Council in 2025. The importance of a national search and rescue (SAR) database was also reiterated as data analysis becomes a critical factor in enabling insights to inform future capability and capacity of SAR in Australia. This initiative will be led by the SAR Data Working Group throughout 2025.

The meeting also discussed standing agenda items including national training, jurisdictional updates and endorsing amendments to the National Search and Rescue Manual. Additionally, the Council welcomed presentations from several SAR professionals, on issues including trends in emergency communications, climate change as an integrated risk for emergency response, psychological factors impacting successful rescues, and the professionalisation of search and rescue.

Each year the Council recognises outstanding contributions to search and rescue through the Australian SAR Awards Program. The national awards event was held at the Manly Pavilion in Sydney where recipients were presented their national awards on behalf of the Council from four award categories; professional SAR, professional volunteer, non-professional SAR and long-standing contributions to SAR.



Figure 4: The National Search and Rescue Council at their 48th annual meeting at the Australian Institute of Police Management (AIPM) in Manly, NSW.

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List of Attendees

AMSA Staff		
1. Mark Morrow	Executive Director, Response (Chair)	AMSA
2. Kevin McEvoy	Manager, AMSA Response Centre	AMSA
3. Mike Wytcherley	Manager, Asset Management & Prep	AMSA
4. Jo Fisher	Principal Advisor, Response Planning	AMSA
5. Lucena Gill	NATSAR Council Secretariat	AMSA
6. Gen Cody	NATSAR Council Secretariat	AMSA
NATSAR Council Members		
7. Paul Carpenter	GPCAPT	Australian Defence Force
8. Alison Hart	Joint Personnel Recovery	Australian Defence Force
9. Glen Linton-Smith	Acting OIC Specialist Response	Australian Federal Police
10. Ashley Childs	Leading Senior Constable	Australian Federal Police
11. Neal Griffiths	Senior Constable	Australian Federal Police
12. Joseph McNulty	Superintendent and Commander, Marine Area Command	New South Wales Police
13. Tony Brazzill	Chief Inspector, Marine Area Command (MAC)	New South Wales Police
14. Michael Morris	Senior Sergeant, Director of NATSARMC	New South Wales Police
15. Ryan Spong	Sergeant, Search & Rescue Coordinator, MAC	New South Wales Police
16. Ray Busby	Chair, SAR Dive Working Group	New South Wales Police
17. Jakson Evans	Superintendent, Specialist Response Division	Northern Territory Police
18. Gary Worrell	Senior Sergeant	Queensland Police
19. Graeme Pettigrew	Senior Sergeant, SAR Coordinator & Training Officer	Queensland Police
20. Kevin Brown	Inspector, OIC of Special Tasks and Rescue, Operations Section	South Australia Police
21. Andrew Suter	Senior Sergeant, A/g Operations Manager, Water Division	South Australia Police
22. Bernard Peters	Sergeant, Marine Rescue	Tasmania Police
23. James Dalton	Inspector Water Police Search and Rescue Victoria	Victoria Police
24. Dominic Wood	Superintendent, Divisional Officer	Western Australia Police
25. Brian Bancilhon	Acting Inspector	Western Australia Police
26. Diana Flint	Acting Senior Sergeant	Western Australia Police
Observers		
27. Duncan Ferner	Director	NZ SAR Secretariat
28. Craig Rendel	Inspector, Operations & Emergency Management	NZ Police
29. Alex Barrell	Deputy Commissioner, Marine Rescue	NVMSARC

Meeting Agenda

DAY ONE – WEDNESDAY 16 OCTOBER

Time (AEDT)	Topic	Speaker
1200 - 1300	Lunch (optional)	
1300 - 1315	Formal Opening of NATSAR 48 Commander Joseph McNulty	NSW Police
1315 – 1330	Agenda Item 1. Welcome 1.1 Welcome and apologies 1.2 Adoption of agenda	Chair Chair
1330 - 1430	Agenda Item 2. NATSAR Council reform 2.1 Discussion led by Council Chair with formal invitation extended to senior police representatives 2.2 Council structure 2.3 National SAR database 2.4 SAR Awards hosting	Chair/all Chair Chair Chair
1430 – 1500	Afternoon tea & meeting photo	
1500 - 1510	Agenda Item 3. Actions from previous meetings 3.1 Actions from previous meetings	Secretariat
1510 – 1620	Agenda Item 4. Operational Matters 4.1 Integration of SAR Coordination Arrangements within Aerodrome Emergency Plans 4.2 SAR Asset Capability Equipment update 4.3 Non Cospas-Sarsat alerting devices 4.4 National Plan for Maritime Environmental Emergencies	AMSA AMSA AMSA AMSA (presentation)
1620 – 1630	Day One Wrap Up	

DAY TWO – THURSDAY 17 OCTOBER

Time (AEDT)	Topic	Speaker
0830 – 0840	Recap of Day One	Secretariat
0840 – 1000	Agenda Item 5. SAR Operations	
	5.1 SAR Activity Reports Items of note/lessons	All
1000 - 1030	Morning tea	
1030 – 1100	Agenda Item 5 continued	
	5.2 Observer Reports & implications for Council – for discussion:	
	- National Volunteer Marine SAR Committee Report	NVMSARC
	- New Zealand SAR Annual Report	NZSAR Council
	5.3 Coronial findings & recommendations	All (verbal)
	5.4 National analysis of SAR Activity	Chair, Data WG
1100 – 1155	Agenda Item 6. Governance	
	6.1 Proposed governance structure	Chair
	6.2 Business Plan & Work Plan	Chair
	6.3 Governance arrangements (formerly Council Charter)	Secretariat
	6.4 Performance Report	Secretariat
1155 – 1200	Agenda Item 7. SAR Award Recipients	
	7.1 Announcement of award recipients	Secretariat
1200 - 1300	Lunch	
1300 – 1345	Presentation	
	Craig Anderson, Chair National Emergency Communications Working Group	
1345 – 1500	Presentation	
	The Bureau of Meteorology	
1500 - 1530	Afternoon tea	
1530 – 1550	Agenda Item 8. Changing SAR environment	
	8.1 Mass casualty/evacuation & managing SAR surge – for discussion	Chair/all
1550 – 1615	Agenda Item 9. Case study	
	9.1 Mantawai Ferry fire presentation	NT Police & AMSA
1615 – 1620	Agenda Item 10. 2025 meeting dates	
	10.1 Telecon 1 2024 & 49 th Annual Meeting	Secretariat
1620 – 1630	Day Two Wrap Up	Secretariat
1830 – 2230	SAR Award Night	Order of Proceedings
	Manly Pavilion, West Esplanade, Manly	

DAY THREE – FRIDAY 18 OCTOBER

Time (AEDT)	Topic	Speaker
0830 – 0840	Recap of Day Two	Secretariat
0840 – 0900	Agenda Item 11. Working Group Reports	
	11.1 Dive Working Group	NSW Police
	11.2 Technology Working Group	SA Police
0900 – 1000	Presentation Matthew Mitchell, Director of Global Search and Rescue	
1000 – 1030	Morning tea	
1030 – 1100	Presentation Matthew Mitchell, Director of Global Search and Rescue	
1100 – 1110	Agenda Item 11 continued. Working Group Reports	
	11.3 Data Working Group	AMSA
1110 – 1140	Agenda Item 12. SAR Training	
	12.1 Training Working Group	NSW Police
	12.2 Managers Course	NSW Police
	12.3 RTO Agreement	QLD Police
	12.4 NATSAR Manual	
	i. Amendments Schedule	NSW Police
	ii. Proposed amendments	NSW Police
	iii. Manual Review Team	NSW Police
1140 – 1150	Agenda Item 13. Any other business	All
1150 – 1200	Agenda Item 14. Meeting close	
	13.1 Wrap up and summary of actions	Secretariat
	13.2 Meeting close	Chair

48th NATSAR Council Annual Meeting Outcomes

Formal opening of NATSAR 48

1. NSW Police Commander, Joseph McNulty, Marine Area Command welcomed members and observers to the Australian Institute of Police Management (AIPM) at Manly, NSW, and officially opened the 48th meeting of the National Search and Rescue (NATSAR) Council.
2. Commander McNulty acknowledged the many challenges facing search and rescue (SAR) agencies and noted the collective need to look ahead and manage change proactively and collaboratively.
3. Commander McNulty noted the *2023 Environmental Scan of Search and Rescue in Australia* (the Environmental Scan) and asked Council to consider whether its existing operating model is fit-for-purpose.
4. Commander McNulty acknowledged emergency management and SAR are at the core of policing, and recognised resource constraints across governments and communities.
5. Commander McNulty also acknowledged the professionalism of those involved in the SAR sector, and the importance of the NATSAR Council Managers Course in ensuring continued capability among SAR leaders. Commander McNulty also acknowledged the importance of data in maximising resources and efficiencies.
6. Commander McNulty emphasised the importance of the NATSAR Council and encouraged constructive and productive discussions during the meeting.

Agenda Item 1. Welcome

Agenda Item 1.1. Welcome and apologies

7. The Chair of NATSAR Council and Executive Director of the Response Division at AMSA, Mark Morrow, also welcomed members and observers to the meeting.
8. The Chair acknowledged the Gayemagal people, Traditional Custodians of the land on which the meeting was held, and paid respects to elders past and present, and to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participating in the meeting.
9. Attendees are listed above under, *List of Attendees*.

Agenda Item 1.2: Adoption of agenda

10. The agenda was adopted without amendment.

Agenda Item 2. NATSAR Council reform

Agenda Item 2.1. Discussion of NATSAR Council reform

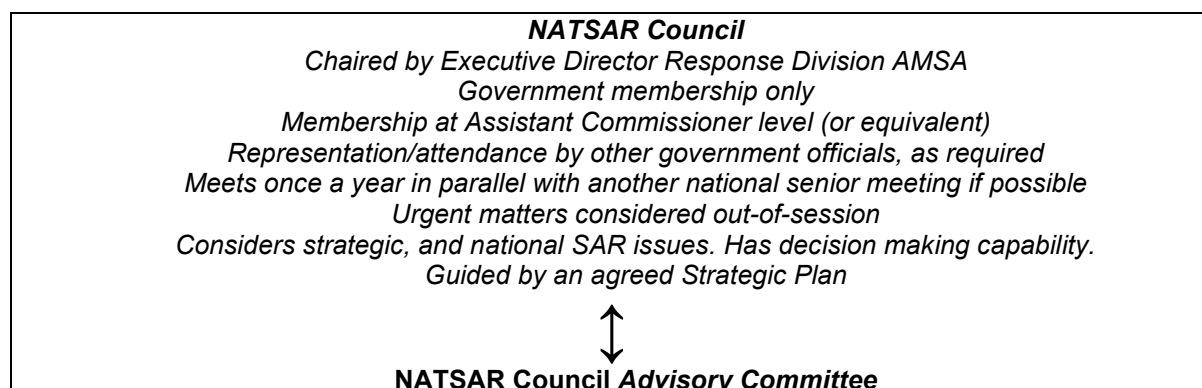
11. The meeting recalled the 2023 Environmental Scan, which has been endorsed by Council, and noted the five priority areas:
 - a. Review the 2017 *Inter-Governmental Agreement on National Search and Rescue Response Arrangements* (IGA)
 - b. Review the NATSAR structure to ensure it's capable of operating at a strategic level
 - c. Elevate the profile of SAR to ensure the value to stakeholders is fully recognised
 - d. Build strategic partnerships to leverage jurisdictions/national perspectives
 - e. Improve engagement with industry and providers

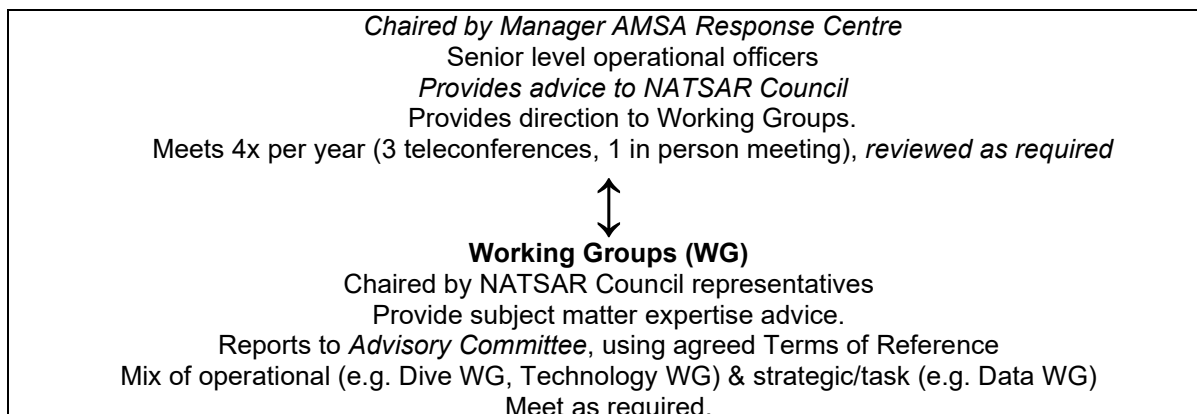
12. The meeting reaffirmed that SAR capability needs to keep pace with emerging and complex environmental factors.
13. The Chair noted that while there is a need to ensure the IGA is fit for purpose, review of the IGA cannot be progressed currently because of competing priorities within the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communication and the Arts (DITRDCA).
14. The meeting noted the following:
 - a. the SAR operating environment is continually changing
 - b. SAR technology is continually changing, and is challenging to keep up to date
 - c. need to consider accountability if/when things go wrong
 - d. need to consider a national SAR funding model, particularly noting the high cost of some technology and assets
 - e. the value of national standards and processes, such as the NATSAR Managers Course and associated qualifications, which can support funding proposals
 - f. the value of a SAR database to develop a national picture.

Agenda Item 2.2. Council structure

15. The meeting noted that the 2023 Environmental Scan, identifies review of NATSAR structures as a priority:

The NATSAR structures should be reviewed to ensure that membership provides the required authorising environment for strategic considerations as well as operational decision-making. This may require an elevation of the level of representation. ...
16. The meeting noted recent out-of-session discussions between Council Chair and police counterparts nationally identified support for amendment to the Council structure to include a new strategic, decision-making body.
17. The meeting agreed a strategic committee will:
 - a. facilitate access to senior levels in NATSAR member organisations
 - b. provide opportunity for senior consideration of key national SAR issues
 - c. ensure Council's workplan represents tangible benefit to SAR services nationally.
18. The meeting recognised the value of the existing Council group, particularly at an operational level, and agreed the importance of retaining this group.
19. The meeting agreed to restructure NATSAR Council as follows, noting the text in italics will be a change from existing arrangements:





20. The meeting agreed there is benefit in the new NATSAR Council meeting adjacent to other senior level police meetings, noting the appropriate forum needs to be identified.
21. The meeting agreed the new arrangements would commence in 2025, pending Secretariat resourcing and possible alignment with another senior level police meeting.

Agenda Item 2.3. National SAR database

22. National SAR data collection has been an initiative of Council since 2014, through the introduction of standardised reporting, now known as SAR Activity Reports.
23. In 2021, Council reinvigorated development of a national SAR database, by establishing the Data Working Group. The Working Group agreed 16 data definitions. However, when reporting against these definitions in 2023, not all jurisdictions' data aligned with the agreed definitions, and collected data could not be compiled as a national database.
24. In early 2024, the Data WG informed Council that development of a national SAR database cannot be achieved with the current resources.
25. In recent out-of-session discussions between Council Chair and police agency counterparts, there was broad agreement for continued progression towards a national database to facilitate national data analysis, resourcing and decision making around search and rescue. These discussions also identified the need to demonstrate the value of national reporting, recognising resourcing challenges facing all jurisdictions.
26. The meeting agreed the importance of progressing the national SAR database, noting the 2023 Environmental Scan, discusses data and identifies sharing of data and information as a key issue (refer Priority 4: Build Strategic Partnerships), and supported the benefits of such a database, as identified in Agenda Paper 2.
27. Collection of this type of data will allow identification of national trends and potential efficiencies.
28. The meeting agreed the Data Working Group would review the 16 data definitions, to identify an initial two to three definitions for focus. AMSA, as the Chair of the Data Working Group, and the Secretariat will then continue progression towards a national database, as resources allow. This work will be progressed one jurisdiction at a time, to identify alignment, gaps and work required to rectify these gaps.

Agenda Item 2.4. SAR Awards hosting

29. Council's annual meeting is typically held over three days: Wednesday to Friday in mid-October each year. The annual meeting is hosted by Council members on a rotational arrangement, with each jurisdiction hosting approximately every eight years. The SAR

Awards ceremony is typically held as a sit-down dinner on the Thursday night of the annual meeting and is funded by AMSA.

30. The meeting agreed a shorter ceremony would achieve very similar outcomes and agreed to move the SAR Awards from a sit-down dinner to a two-to-three-hour ceremony, on the Thursday evening of the annual Council meeting.
31. The meeting discussed whether there is an opportunity to broaden awareness of the annual SAR Awards by sharing the hosting arrangements, in a similar way to rotation of the annual meeting.
32. Some members of Council noted the resourcing involved in hosting the annual meeting, and that also organising the SAR Awards event could create a significant burden on jurisdictions.
33. The meeting agreed AMSA would continue organisation of the SAR awards ceremony and would also explore the ceremony being held at state/Northern Territory/federal Parliament House.

Agenda Item 3. Actions from previous meetings

Agenda Item 3.1 Actions from previous meetings

34. The meeting noted actions from previous meetings, and noted the following outstanding actions:
 - a. NATSAR 47, Teleconference 2: Secretariat to research and approach the National SES Operations Committee to see if they would be viable for observer representation on the NATSAR Council. Members to determine the most appropriate national volunteer group within the land emergency services sector to approach for potential NATSAR representation in future. **Secretariat to progress.**
 - b. NATSAR 47 Annual Meeting: With support from the Secretariat and the AFP, Mark Morrow (Chair) to contact the convenors of the AFP's Annual National Missing Persons Conference to better understand any overlap between the Conference and the work of NATSAR Council. **Secretariat to progress.**
 - c. NATSAR 48, Teleconference 3: Secretariat to contact the Australia-New Zealand Safe Boating Education Group (ANZSBEG) and discuss the issue of yachts travelling across multiple jurisdictions and the currently limited ability to track/monitor these vessels nationally. Note there is a possible opportunity for cross jurisdictional awareness of vessels. **Secretariat to progress.**
 - d. NATSAR 48, Teleconference 3: AMSA to follow up on volunteer communication with NECWG. **AMSA & Secretariat to progress.**

Agenda Item 4. Operational matters

Agenda Item 4.1 Integration of SAR Coordination Arrangements within Aerodrome Emergency Plans

35. AMSA presented on integration of SAR coordination arrangements within Aerodrome Emergency Plans (AEPs), noting that the purpose of the discussion is to discuss:
 - a. whether current emergency response plans fulfil Australia's international and national obligations of ensuring national SAR coordination arrangements are

integrated with AEPs for aircraft accidents in the vicinity of aerodromes including areas of water; and

- b. possible amendment to the NATSAR SAR Manual to address these arrangements.
36. Mr Constable noted the NATSAR Manual currently has no reference to AEP arrangements, and that inclusion of suitable text would address the current gap, and provide clear guidance.
37. The Council agreed to amend the NATSAR Manual to address the identified gap in these arrangements with the inclusion of suitable text within Appendix B – National SAR Responsibilities to mitigate the identified noncompliance.

Action 1: AMSA to prepare draft text for the NATSAR Manual that refers to the Aerodrome Emergency Plans (AEP) arrangements, for consideration in the 2025 Manual review.

38. Mr Constable also noted the need to ensure a clear understanding of responsibility for coordination of emergency response to aircraft accidents, and that a brief review of state and territory emergency disaster plans regarding SAR coordination arrangements for aircraft accidents, identified variations and inconsistencies.

Action 2: NATSAR Council Chair to write to the Chair of each jurisdictional Emergency Management Committee, identifying the need to review their emergency management plan to ensure it is consistent with Australia's obligations and guidance, including national SAR arrangements.

Agenda Item 4.2 SAR Asset Capability Equipment

39. AMSA provided an update on AMSA's SAR asset capability, including:
- a. successful completion of a stores drop to French Antarctic station at Dumont D'Urville, which was used to demonstrate greater aircraft coverage into the Southern Ocean, Antarctic fringe, western part of Australia's Search and Rescue Region (SRR).
 - b. a new contract for updated Switlik SAR-6 droppable life rafts which are air charged and inflate faster than the CO2 charged model; as the new rafts come into service, the old rafts can be made available for SAR training exercises.
 - c. investigation of a new non-metal sea anchor kit.
 - d. an upcoming approach to market to replace self-locating datum marker buoys (SLDMB).
40. AMSA noted the recent ICAO audit found that Australia does not have regulated and independent oversight of its aeronautical SAR service. AMSA is working with DITRDCA to determine appropriate corrective action.

Agenda Item 4.3 Non Cospas-Sarsat alerting devices

41. The Manager, AMSA Response Centre provided a verbal update on statistics and trends in distress alerting from non-Cospas-Sarsat devices.
42. The meeting noted a 20% annual increase in distress alerting from non-Cospas-Sarsat devices over the past four years, and that currently three of the four alerting posts

send received distress alerts to the AMSA Response Centre, which then contacts the relevant jurisdiction.

43. The meeting noted AMSA's arrangement where Intrado sends 'Apple Emergency SOS via Satellite' alerts directly to the relevant jurisdiction. Given the efficiencies in the direct alerting arrangement, AMSA intends to explore similar partnerships with the other three alerting posts.

Action 3: AMSA to keep NATSAR Council informed of any changes/developments to arrangements with alerting posts for non Cospas-Sarsat alerting devices.

Agenda Item 4.4 National Plan for Maritime Environmental Emergencies

44. AMSA presented an update on the review of the National Plan for Maritime Environmental Emergencies.
45. AMSA noted the increasing competition for ocean space, increasing extreme weather events resulting from climate change, decarbonisation of the shipping industry and changing incident types, for example a decrease in oil spill incidents and an increase in maritime fires.
46. AMSA also noted the future is complex and new industry practice is yet to be fully identified.
47. AMSA noted the National Plan for Maritime Environmental Emergencies is being reviewed, with 11 recommendations recently approved by the national Infrastructure and Transport Senior Officials Committee (ITSOC). AMSA, as the National Plan Secretariat, will lead on implementation of many of the recommendations.
48. Council thanked AMSA and agreed much of what was presented is consistent with the 2023 Environmental Scan.

Agenda Item 5. SAR Operations

Agenda Item 5.1 SAR Activity Reports

49. The meeting discussed and noted the SAR activity reports from each jurisdiction.

Agenda Item 5.2 Observer reports – National Volunteer Marine SAR Committee

50. The meeting noted the report from the National Volunteer Marine SAR Committee in particular:
 - a. AMSA's recent review of [Exemption 24 - Marine Safety \(Emergency services vessels\)](#)
 - b. ongoing challenges to recruitment and retention of volunteers
 - c. the contribution of volunteers to SAR
 - d. national volunteer marine SAR statistics and notable incidents.
51. The meeting discussed increasing value of collaborating with volunteer organisations to develop awareness of capabilities, technology and opportunity for community engagement.

Agenda Item 5.2 Observer reports – New Zealand SAR Annual Report

52. The meeting noted the report from the New Zealand SAR Council in particular:
 - a. the statistics, trends and achievements presented

- b. New Zealand SAR Council's approach to collaboration with their national partners and volunteers, the NZSAR Consultative Committee, and across the Pacific region.
53. The meeting noted the value of New Zealand's national SAR data and the importance of developing a national SAR database.
54. The meeting noted the significant benefits of trans-Tasman cooperation between New Zealand and Australian SAR Authorities and thanked Mr Duncan Ferner, Director of New Zealand SAR Council for 19 years of service and contributions as the Ministry of Transport is making changes to the NZSAR Secretariat structure.

Agenda Item 5.3 Coronial findings and recommendations

55. No relevant coronial findings or recommendations were raised.

Agenda Item 5.4 National analysis of SAR activity

56. AMSA presented a thematic analysis of SAR activity from the past year, gathered from jurisdictional SAR Activity Reports.
57. The meeting noted the differences in how jurisdictions report data and agreed to continue to refine reporting to build national consistency in SAR data.
58. The meeting also noted:
- a. increased maritime SAR incidents across all jurisdictions, except QLD and AFP.
 - b. stable numbers of land SAR incidents nationally, with increases in WA and TAS, and a decrease in NSW where the definition added incidents previously categorised as "other"
 - c. a general increase in aviation SAR incidents
 - d. lives saved nationally exceeded 4,000, excluding lives assisted and evidentiary searches, which, based on the ABS statistical value of a life¹, represents a value of \$22 billion over the 2023-24 financial year.
59. Council also noted trends across the following areas:
- a. new and ongoing causative factors impacting SAR across most jurisdictions
 - b. enhancements to operational SAR capability across jurisdictions
 - c. collaboration with other national and international SAR agencies
 - d. safety programs, community awareness and social media
 - e. training programs, activities and exercises
 - f. technology advancements for SAR

Agenda Item 6. Governance

Agenda Item 6.1 Proposed governance structure

60. The meeting noted Council is governed and guided by several documents.
- a. The 2017 IGA, which puts in place arrangements between the Commonwealth and State/Territory SAR Authorities on the coordination of SAR in the Australian region.
 - b. The Business Plan, which defines priorities and actions for the next two years.

¹ Office of Impact Analysis publication: [Value of statistical life | The Office of Impact Analysis](#)

- c. The Performance Report, which provides a summary of the Council's key achievements during the previous year.
 - d. The Council Charter, which documents how Council operates, including key business processes.
 - e. The Council's Action Plan and Project Plan, which track progress of Council action items and detail the 12-month cycle of Council arrangements, and which are used primarily by the Secretariat.
61. The meeting agreed there is an opportunity to streamline governance arrangements, given the agreed changes to Council structure, and agreed to the following:
- a. a Strategic Plan, developed and reviewed by the new NATSAR Council with input from the Advisory Committee, which will provide the overarching intent and principles for Council. A Strategic Plan will define the strategic focus and include the recommendations identified in the Environmental Scan
 - b. combining the Business Plan and Work Plan. The Business Plan will identify specific priorities and provide a link with the Strategic Plan. The Work Plan will identify specific tasks for the two-year period.
 - c. Rebranding of the Council Charter to 'Governance Arrangements' as this title more accurately reflects the intent of the document.
 - d. An Annual Performance Report, which adopts S.M.A.R.T. methodology.

Agenda Item 6.2 Business Plan & Work Plan

62. The meeting noted the objective of the *Business Plan & Work Plan October 2024 –2026* is to define priorities and actions for the period October 2024 to October 2026, to align with the Advisory Committee annual meeting held in October each year.
63. The paper was endorsed, with amendment of Action iv, noting that the meeting had not supported rotational funding of the SAR awards, which was to have coincided with hosting responsibilities (refer Agenda Item 2.4).

Action 4: Secretariat to amend the joint NATSAR Council Business Plan and Work Plan to define priorities and actions for the period October 2024 to October 2026. The revised draft will be submitted to Teleconference 1 (February 2025) for Council endorsement.

64. The meeting recognised the value in a smaller group being established to develop the Business Plan and Work Plan, as well as the new Council level Strategic Plan.

Action 5: Secretariat to establish a Strategic Working Group to assist in the development and maintenance of NATSAR Council governance documents.

Agenda Item 6.3 Governance arrangements (formerly Council Charter)

65. The meeting noted proposed amendments to the current Council Charter to incorporate recent changes to Council arrangements and had been renamed Governance Arrangements.
66. The meeting agreed the Governance Arrangements required further work to incorporate agreed changes to Council structure.

Action 6: Secretariat to further amend the Governance Arrangements document (previous Charter), presented as Attachment 1, and provide the document to Teleconference 1 for endorsement.

Agenda Item 6.4 Performance Report

67. The meeting noted the following key achievements for Council during the 2023/24 financial year:
- a. Annual meeting, teleconferences and working group meetings were productive meetings that progressed national SAR issues.
 - b. The 2023 Environmental Scan was finalised and endorsed by the Council, and the five priorities within the Report were also endorsed.
 - c. Work was undertaken to progress towards a revised Council structure.
 - d. Progression towards a national SAR database.
 - e. A new category 'Professional Volunteer' was introduced to the SAR awards.
 - f. The online nomination process for the SAR awards was updated and improved.
 - g. Guidance was developed to assist in the award voting process, noting the increase in nominations over the last two years.
 - h. The Lost First Nations Persons data base, an initiative of the Northern Territory Police, was first considered.
 - i. A revised process for reviewing the NATSAR Manual was initiated, noting its importance in coronial enquiries.
 - j. QLD Police made significant progress in its role as a Recognised Training Organisation, providing the foundation for the accreditation of officers with the Advanced Diploma of Police Search and Rescue Management POL60421.
 - k. The NATSAR Managers Course was held in July 2023, with WA holding the role of Course Director.
 - l. The Council kept across EVDS developments in the Australian Standard, noting the Standard is yet to be finalised.
 - m. The Council held ongoing discussions about two-way communication within the 406 distress beacons system.
 - n. The Council discussed Apple's geo-spatial overlay to identify incidents within jurisdictional boundaries, and the redirection of these notifications to the relevant agency rather than coming through AMSA.

Agenda Item 7. SAR Award Recipients

Agenda Item 7.1 Announcement of award recipients

68. The 2024 SAR Awards ceremony was held on Thursday 17 Oct at the Manly Pavilion, and was opened by NSW Police Commander, Joseph McNulty. Guest speaker from Surf Life Saving NSW presented on the capabilities and successes of SLSNSW from the past year.
69. The 2024 SAR Award & Commendation recipients are on page 26.

Agenda Item 8. Changing SAR environment

70. The meeting noted, as raised by Mr Storrie in his presentation on the National Plan for Maritime Environmental Emergencies, in July 2024 a serious collision occurred between two bulk carriers at anchorage off Hay Point.
71. A tank used for storing liquefied natural gas (LNG) on the vessel HL Eco took a direct hit in the collision. The LNG storage tank had been retrofitted for dual fuel propulsion and was severely damaged in the collision. Reports say the LNG tank was empty at the time and, as such, there was no leak of cryogenic liquids or rapid regasification. Some commentators have suggested a filled tank could have been explosive and dangerous for crew on both ships.
72. The meeting watched a video of the event and noted with concern the real possibility of such an incident being a mass casualty and rescue event, particularly if the incident occurred in port. The meeting also noted the need to be prepared.

Agenda Item 8.1 Mass casualty/evacuation & managing SAR surge

73. The meeting considered jurisdictional capability should a similar event occur in state waters and/or a port.
74. The meeting discussed, what assistance could/would be provided by other states/the Northern Territory and/or the Commonwealth, and when the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF) and the National Coordination Mechanism (NCM) would be activated.

Agenda Item 9. Case study

Agenda Item 9.1 Mantawi Ferry Fire

75. NT Police and AMSA presented on a recent incident involving the NT Police and AMSA.
76. In August 2024, there was an engine room fire on a Mantawi Tiwi Ferry. 180 passengers and 4 crew were on board. In addition to the fire, there was possible passenger smoke inhalation, the vessel was stranded and required assistance. Coordination was transferred from NT Police to AMSA.
77. Safety of passengers and crew and development of a rescue plan were paramount.
78. The fire was extinguished, and all passengers were recovered safely.
79. Each jurisdiction was encouraged to consider how they would respond if a similar incident occurred in their area of responsibility.
80. The meeting considered jurisdictional responsibilities, and how a mass rescue operation such as this would be executed.
81. The meeting recognised the benefit of case study discussions and agreed to include this on the agenda for future annual meetings.

Action 7: Secretariat to schedule case study discussions as a reoccurring agenda item for future annual meetings.

Agenda Item 10. 2025 meeting dates

Agenda Item 10.1 Telecon 1 2025 & 49th Annual Meeting

82. The meeting agreed to the following dates:
 - a. Teleconference 1: Tuesday 25 February 2025, 1300 – 1500hrs AEDT

- b. Annual meeting: Wednesday 15 – Friday 17 October 2025, hosted by Queensland Police.

Agenda Item 11. Working Group Reports

Agenda Item 11.1 Dive Working Group

83. NSW Police and Chair of the Dive Working Group joined the meeting in person, noting the Dive Working Group met in person on Wednesday 16 and Thursday 17 October, at the Marine Area Command in Balmain, NSW.
84. The Chair of the Dive Working Group provided an overview of the meeting and the work of the Dive Working Group, in particular:
 - a. development of a training pathway for the Australian Diver Accreditation Scheme (ADAS).
 - b. national standardisation of police diving equipment, which will be particularly valuable as new police divers are recruited.
85. The meeting confirmed the value of the Dive Working Group and requested that the Group consider and provide advice to the Council Advisory Committee on underwater search capability, particularly using Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV).

Action 8: Dive Working Group to provide advice to the Advisory Committee on national underwater search capability used in SAR, including using devices such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs).

Agenda Item 11.2 Technology Working Group

86. South Australia Police joined the meeting online.
87. As discussed by Council previously, AMSA and South Australia Police will co-chair the Technology Working Group, with support from the Secretariat.
88. The meeting reaffirmed the need to revitalise the Technology Working Group, particularly as opportunities for technology to assist with SAR continues to grow, noting it can be challenging for SAR practitioners to maintain awareness of available technology and technological advancements. The Technology Working Group will provide an opportunity for national discussion and possible national efficiencies.
89. The Working Group will meet for one hour in the afternoon of the first Wednesday of each month, with a standing agenda that includes:
 - a. a presentation from a technology provider and/or expert, which will be recorded if possible
 - b. review of an incident that has, or could have, used technology to improve outcomes
 - c. a call for technology updates across land, marine and aviation SAR.

Action 9: SAR Technology Working Group to review its current Terms of Reference, particularly noting the climate predictions identified by the Bureau of Meteorology in their presentation (refer below).

Action 10: The SAR Technology Working Group will focus on the following priorities as instructed by the Council:

- i. **consider capability & capability gaps across jurisdictions.**

- ii. **provide a paper to the Council Advisory Committee on the status of RPAS in each jurisdiction, particularly regarding regulation.**
- iii. **liaise with the Dive Working Group to consolidate understanding of national underwater search capability.**

Action 11: Secretariat to request from delegates, nominations for Technology Working Group membership.

Action 12: The Secretariat will explore a Working Group chat function on the NATSAR Council SharePoint site to help facilitate information sharing and encourage regular contact.

Agenda Item 11.3 Data Working Group

- 90. Ben Flight, Principal Advisor in AMSA Integrated Operations and Chair of the Data Working Group joined the meeting online to provide an update on the Working Group.
- 91. AMSA, as the Chair of the Data Working Group, and the Secretariat will then continue progression towards a national database, as resources allow. This work will be progressed one jurisdiction at a time, to identify alignment, gaps and work required to rectify these gaps.

Action 13: Data Working to reassess how it implements the 16 data definitions, focusing on individual jurisdictions to identify alignment, gaps/challenges and work required to rectify these gaps.

- 92. The meeting noted staffing and funding constraints within AMSA, which will impact progress of this work.

Action 14: Data Working Group to review its Terms of Reference to reflect national support to progress towards a national SAR database.

Agenda Item 12. SAR Training

Agenda Item 12.1 Training Working Group

- 93. NSW Police, and Chair of the Council Training Working Group, presented Agenda Paper 12.1.
- 94. The Training Working Group met in August 2024, at the end of the NATSAR Managers Course, and considered its Terms of Reference have been met through:
 - a. the introduction of an Assistant Director, who will work with the Director for a two-year rolling tenure; after two years, the co-Director will move into the Director role and a new co-Director will be appointed.
 - b. increased responsibility being placed on the Managers Course Directing Staff, including preparation and delivery of SAR presentations, noting this work was previously led by the Course Director
- 95. The meeting agreed that the Terms of Reference had been met and agreed with the Training Working Group's recommendation that the Group be dissolved.

Action 15: Secretariat to dissolve the SAR Training Working Group, noting it has addressed its Terms of Reference objectives.

Agenda Item 12.2 Managers Course

96. NSW Police, and NATSAR Managers Course Director, presented Agenda Paper 12.2.
97. The 34th Managers Course was held from 5 - 15 August 2024, at the Australian Federal Police Majura Park Complex, Canberra. The Course Director was supported by 16 Directing Staff from NSW Police, NT Police, QLD Police, SA Police, Vic Police, Tas Police, AFP and New Zealand Police.
98. 20 officers obtained the knowledge and learning to manage SAR, which is a requirement of the Advanced Diploma of Police Search and Rescue Management POL60421.
99. The meeting noted the value in students attending the JRCC, and this will be facilitated again in 2025.
100. The meeting noted that, in 2023, the Governor General presented Course Certificates to students. The Directing Staff agreed to pursue this for 2025 and beyond, with SA Police to lead.

Action 16: SA Police and/or NATSAR Managers Course Director to advise the Council at Teleconference 1 on the Governor General's decision to present NATSARMC certificates to students as an ongoing arrangement.

101. The meeting agreed the great value in Dr Jim Whitehead's contributions to the Managers' Course, as an expert rather than as part of Course coordination, and agreed Dr Whitehead will be engaged at future Managers' Courses, as an expert in a similar way that Dr Luckin is engaged as an expert, depending on his availability. The Secretariat would continue to facilitate contracts with Dr Whitehead.
102. The meeting thanked Tasmania Police for agreeing to take on the role of Course Assistant Director in 2025, with a view that he becomes Director for 2026 and 2027.
103. The meeting thanked NSW Police for organising the Managers Course and thanked AFP for hosting.
104. NSW Police noted an invitation from New Zealand SAR colleagues for one Directing Staff and one student to attend the New Zealand SAR Managers Course in November 2024. Nominations should be provided to the Secretariat by 23 October.

Agenda Item 12.3 RTO Agreement

105. QLD Police provided an update on the RTO Agreement that supports national training capability.
106. Noting that QLD Police had recently obtained its status as a Recognised Training Organisation (RTO), the backlog of qualifications has been progressed and should be cleared before the end of the year.
107. As part of the RTO requirements, a letter of agreement will need to be signed between the Manager's Course Director and QLD Police as the RTO, confirming that the 2024 Managers Course assessment work has been provided to QLD Police for consideration in issuing qualifications. This needs to be an ongoing and annual arrangement between the Course Director and QLD Police.

108. Recognising that officers don't always specialise in land and marine SAR, QLD Police has worked to be able to, as the RTO, provide a Diploma of Land SAR and/or a Diploma of Marine SAR. The NATSAR Manual may require amendment.

Action 17: QLD Police to work with the NATSAR Manual Review Team to incorporate suggested wording within the NATSAR Manual, advising the Diploma of Land SAR and Diploma of Marine SAR are now available.

109. The NATSAR Managers Course needs to cover land and marine SAR, to ensure students are eligible for the Advanced Diploma of Police Search and Rescue Management.

110. The meeting noted QLD Police preference to reference the RTO function as a general term with the NATSAR Manual. The meeting agreed for QLD to propose suggested text to amend the NATSAR Manual accordingly. Agenda Item 12.4 NATSAR Manual

111. NSW Police provided an update on the NATSAR Manual, noting the Manual:

- a. is the standard reference document for use by SAR authorities and other organisations that provide SAR services in Australia.
- b. outlines agreed methods of coordination through which SAR operations are conducted within Australia.
- c. outlines that agencies can be called on in coronial enquiries.

Amendments Schedule

112. The meeting noted suggested amendments to the Manual, since the Manual was last published in February 2023.

Proposed amendments

113. The meeting noted that suggested amendments were considered by Managers' Course Directing Staff in August 2024 and supported with minor change.

114. Although review of proposed amendments is not strictly the role of the Directing Staff, the Managers Course provides a valuable opportunity for review in a face-to-face environment, by experienced SAR professionals.

115. The meeting supported the proposed amendments. The AFP agreed to update the Manual, with a revised Manual being published by February 2025.

Action 18: NATSAR Manual Review Team and Secretariat to incorporate the endorsed amendments into the next NATSAR Manual edition to be published online in February 2025.

Manual Review Team

116. On behalf of the Managers' Course Directing Staff, NSW Police proposed that a Manual Review Team be established, noting that QLD Police had previously led this work but this was no longer sustainable.

117. The Manual Review Team will comprise experts who will collectively develop a detailed understanding of the Manual, and will comprise:

- a. three maritime SAR experts (initially NSW Police, SA Police and AMSA)

- b. three land SAR experts (initially NT Police, Vic Police and ADF)
 - c. three aviation SAR experts (initially AMSA x 2 and ADF)
118. The Review Team will be established in early 2025, with a view that the Managers Course Directing Staff again consider proposed amendments, and that, if required, a revised manual will be published by February 2026.
119. The meeting supported the proposal.

Agenda Item 13. Any other business

120. No other business was identified.

Presentations

AMSA Life Jackets Video

121. AMSA presented a recent video on lifejackets, noting in 2023 three people working on commercial vessels lost their lives after going overboard without a lifejacket. In 2024, another life was lost in the same circumstances.
122. In 2023 AMSA made it a legal requirement for owners and operators of commercial vessels to assess the risks of going overboard in their risk assessment, and have a clear procedure in place for when, where and under what circumstances lifejackets must be worn by everyone onboard.
123. In September 2024, AMSA launched a sustained safety initiative, focusing on lifejacket safety.

National Emergency Communications Working Group – Australia and New Zealand

124. The meeting welcomed QLD police and Executive Chair for the *National Emergency Communications Working Group – Australia and New Zealand* (NECWG), who joined the meeting online and provided a presentation on the Transformation of Emergency Communications.
125. The meeting noted challenges facing emergency communication in Australia, including:
- a. community, workforce and operational expectations
 - b. unexpected and/or uncontrolled technological developments
 - c. constraints across resourcing capacity, readiness, legislation and regulation
126. The meeting confirmed the ongoing work of the Technology Working Group will consider cross-jurisdictional sharing of technology and information and identify opportunities to advocate for new and improved services or features through co-design processes to meet community needs.

Bureau of Meteorology

127. The meeting welcomed representatives from the Bureau of Meteorology, who joined the meeting online.
128. The presentation focussed on climate prediction to support discussion of extreme weather events on national SAR operations including:
- a. physical, transitional and legal risks and impacts of climate change including ongoing economic consequences

- b. likelihood and severity of cascading impacts affecting response and recovery efforts such as changing demographics, power outages, air quality, inundation of health and emergency services, and impassable critical supply and evacuation routes.

129. The meeting agreed on the value of the presentation.

Action 19: Secretariat to schedule a Bureau of Meteorology presentations/updates for future NATSAR Advisory Committee annual meetings.

Matthew Mitchell

- 130. The meeting welcomed Matthew Mitchell, retired Commander of the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), who joined the meeting online. The meeting noted Mr Mitchell has more than 24 years of military and law enforcement experience, including a 20-year career in the USCG where he specialized in SAR coordination.
- 131. The presentations covered cognitive bias in SAR decision making and the professionalisation initiative to establish an international peak body for search and rescue coordinators.
- 132. The presentation 'Combating Normalcy Bias' offered evidence that even experienced mission coordinators can experience normalcy bias, described as 'tendency to underestimate the likelihood or impact of a negative event', particularly when faced with:
 - a. reports with ambiguity – because the human mind averages, not aggregates, information
 - b. unconscious motivation not to act
 - c. high frequency of false alerts and/or
 - d. 'black swan' events.
- 133. The presentation also discussed mitigating strategies such as de-biasing training, creating a culture of procedural compliance and adopting an adversarial posture to inaction.
- 134. Mr Mitchell also shared his initiative to establish the International Association of Search and Rescue Coordinators (IASARC), a US-based international non-profit committed to creating robust professional certifications, advocating for improvements to international plans, regulations and laws, and advancing the sciences that support SAR coordination.
- 135. The meeting discussed the benefits and concerns of this initiative, including potential integration of the professional certifications with existing RTO arrangements.

Agenda Item 14. Meeting close

Agenda Item 14.1 Wrap up and summary of actions

- 136. The meeting noted the actions identified in red above.

Agenda Item 14.2 Meeting close

- 137. The meeting thanked NSW Police and AIPM for hosting the 2024 NATSAR Council Annual Meeting.
- 138. The Chair thanked everyone for their participation and engagement in the valuable discussions over three days, and closed the meeting, noting Teleconference 1 is scheduled for Tuesday 25 February 2025, 1300 – 1500hrs AEDT.

2024 Australian Search and Rescue Awards

The Australian Search and Rescue (SAR) Awards are presented by the NATSAR Council in recognition of outstanding contribution to search and rescue within the Australian region.

This year's awards recognise 28 recipients who were instrumental in saving the lives of many people, conducting extensive operations or contributing to search and rescue over their extended careers. The 2024 recipients across the four categories are:

Professional search and rescue category

Award: Victoria Police SAR Squad: Sergeant Mark Braun, Senior Constable Steve Ellis, Senior Constable Rhys Newsome, Senior Constable Simeon Ranick, Senior Constable William Scott – in recognition of extremely challenging SAR efforts on Mount Bogong in August 2019. Note: Recognition of this incident has been necessarily delayed by related coronial proceedings.

Commendation (joint awardees):

- Victoria Water Police: Sergeant David McHenry, Leading Senior Constable Dean Leicester, Leading Senior Constable Christian Airey – for their rescue of the crew of a pilot vessel in distress off Point Lonsdale, Port Phillip Bay in October 2023.
- AMSA Response Centre: Peter Myers, Andrew Johnson, Peter Welch, Stephen Cross, Dion Curtis and Clare Draper from AMSA – for their coordination of the rescue of 2 pilots from a light aircraft that ditched in the ocean off the Sunshine Coast, QLD, in 2023.

Professional volunteer category

Award: Marong SES Swift Water Rescue crew Vic: Chantelle Stronghilis, Peter Johnstone, Steve Goudie, James Plowright, Trent Knight – in recognition of their extraordinary efforts during the Wedderburn floods in January 2024.

Commendation: Marine Rescue Port Macquarie, NSW: Leonard Smart, Robert Britten, David Withers, Warren Gowing, Bruce Lee, Michael Ranson-Smith, Brooke Mason, Ian Pascoe - for their rescue of 2 crew from a stricken sailing vessel in strong winds and heavy seas off Port Macquarie, in October 2023.

Non-professional search and rescue category

Award: Tosh Nottle, Alek Nowak and Matthew Thorburn, Jansz Beach, WA – for their successful efforts saving people from dangerous surf conditions near Exmouth in June 2024.

Commendation: Charlotte Blake, Wilderness Ranger, Parks Tasmania - for outstanding efforts in the assistance of 7 hikers in difficult, remote alpine wilderness on Western Arthur's Track in December 2023.

Long-standing contribution to search and rescue category

Award: Senior Sergeant Michael Gillies, Tasmania Police – in recognition of his long-term commitment, dedication and passion for SAR work throughout Tasmania, since 1993.

Commendation: Senior Sergeant Michael Potts, NT Police – for his outstanding contribution to search and rescue, coupled with leadership, innovation and professionalism.

[Read the media release and incident summaries on the NATSAR Council website.](#)



Figure 5: The 2024 Australian SAR Award recipients receiving their awards at the awards event at the Manly Pavillion, Manly, NSW.