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DIRECTORS GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION
ASIA AND PACIFIC REGIONS**

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AGENDA ITEM: 3 AIR NAVIGATION PLANNING
 AND IMPLEMENTATION

**SEARCH AND RESCUE
IN NEW CALEDONIA AND FRENCH POLYNESIA**

(Presented by France)

SUMMARY

Recent events highlight the importance of the organization of Search and Rescue in case of an aircraft accident.

Search and Rescue is especially important in the Asia and Pacific Regions which include vast oceanic areas.

FRANCE is entrusted with performing this mission in New Caledonia and French Polynesia.

This discussion paper presents the SAR assets deployed in New Caledonia and French Polynesia and the desirable enhancements in short and medium term.

SEARCH AND RESCUE IN NEW CALEDONIA AND FRENCH POLYNESIA

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of Search and Rescue (SAR) services is to provide assistance with maximum efficiency in the rescue of persons on board aircraft in distress and, on request, ensure an aeronautical assistance to the rescue of human lives on land or at sea.

Pursuant to ICAO Annex 12, France is legally bound to organize and provide search and rescue services in the entire SAR area under its responsibility. Therefore, France fulfils this mission in New Caledonia and French Polynesia.

2. SAR IN NEW CALEDONIA

2.1 Areas of Responsibility and Competent Organizations

2.1.1 Aeronautical SAR

The territory of New Caledonia, which is an area of about 18,500 km², is composed of the Main Land, the Loyalty Islands (Ouvéa, Tiga, Lifou and Maré), the Isle of Pines and the Belep Islands. It lies within the Search and Rescue Region (SRR) of Nadi (Fiji).

An aeronautical rescue secondary centre (ARSC) located on the Nouméa-Tontouta airport provides search and rescue service in an area corresponding to the flight information sector of New Caledonia (598,000 km²) entirely included in the Nadi FIR.

This area is adjacent to the area covered by the RSC of Port-Vila in Vanuatu in the North East, the Honiara SSR (Solomon Islands) to the North, Australia SRR to the East, and the non-delegated part of the Nadi SRR to the South and East (see map in annex).

Tontouta RSC has no permanent staff. It is activated when needed with a maximum delay of one hour and manned with civil aviation staff.

2.1.2 Maritime SAR

A Maritime Search and Rescue Region (SRR) under the responsibility of France has been established. The French maritime SRR includes Vanuatu and a portion of sea that is shared with Australia. This region is significantly larger than the area of jurisdiction of the Tontouta ARSC (see attached map).

New Caledonia has a maritime coordination and rescue centre (MRCC), located in Nouméa which ensures permanent continuous watch. This centre is staffed by French Navy personnel.

2.2 SAR Air Assets

2.2.1 Technical assets

The Tontouta Regional Aeronautical Information Office (BRIA) monitors 24 hours a day COSPAS/SARSAT alert messages transmitted by the Australian Mission Control Centre (AUMCC) in Canberra.

The Tontouta air traffic control centre (ATC) operates an ADS-B display which provides positions of ADS-B equipped flights within 300 Nm of Nouméa-Tontouta airport, and two HF frequencies (3,023 KHz and 5,680 KHz) for SAR purposes.

Furthermore, a protocol has been signed between the French Ministry of Defence and the General Directorate of Civil Aviation (DGAC) for an endowment in SAR air-droppable life rafts.

2.2.2 Air assets

Tontouta RSC has only complementary and occasional means. They consist of all military aircraft that are likely to participate to SAR operations on short notice. Other means are State aircraft and private or public transport aircraft that can be activated on a temporary basis. Nadi RCC may provide, if available, additional air assets.

Military air assets which can be used by Tontouta RSC are as follows:

- 1 Alouette AL3 helicopter (80 Nm)
- 2 Ecureuil AS350 helicopters (100 Nm)
- 3 Puma SA330 helicopters (150 Nm)
- 2 Casa CN35 airplanes (500 Nm)
- 2 Guardian FA20 airplanes (500 Nm)

2.2.3 Other assets

Land and sea assets are made available by authorities in charge of land and maritime searches (MRCC).

2.3 Protocols

For air SAR activities, there is not yet any letter of agreement between France and the Fiji government ⁽¹⁾ nor with the countries that are adjacent to the New Caledonia sector (Australia, New Zealand, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands).

SAR agreements were signed between Fiji and New Zealand, and between Fiji and the United States. “Understandings” exist with neighboring countries for SAR assistance.

An agreement between New Caledonia, Australia, New Zealand and Vanuatu deals with maritime SAR activities.

The FRANZ agreement between France, Australia and New Zealand aims at coordinating and streamlining the civil and military assistance to States and territories in the Pacific Islands which experience natural disasters.

An air SAR letter of agreement would be useful to address possible requests for air assets from other countries and to facilitate the organisation of regional exercises and operations.

2.4 Training

The National School of Civil Aviation (ENAC Toulouse, France) organises one SAR training course each year, available to 1 or 2 RSC officers. In addition, local training is provided to the other agents involved.

2.5 Exercises

Exercises are held in New Caledonia (communication, coordination and field exercises), but because of the high turnover of concerned staff, the frequency of these exercises should be increased.

¹ some provisions relating to SAR are included in an annex to the letter of agreement between Nadi ACC (Airports Fidji Limited) and Tontouta ACC.

There are no aeronautical SAR exercises planned yet with neighbouring SAR coordination centres. However, the complexity of the distribution of SAR missions in the region would require better coordination among stakeholders.

Regional cooperation is most advanced with regard to maritime SAR: Australia held a workshop in June 2011, in Cairns, on search and rescue as part of a regional cooperation initiative aimed at improving the capabilities of maritime search and rescue in the Pacific. This was the fourth workshop on search and rescue organized by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) in cooperation with IMO, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA), the Coast Guard Service of the United States and the New Zealand Maritime Safety branch.

Noumea MRCC maintains good cooperation with neighbouring MRCCs (RCC Canberra in Australia and RCC Wellington in New Zealand) and regularly participates in joint operations.

2.6 Transfer of competencies to New Caledonia

The organisation of SAR missions should be adapted to reflect the transfer of jurisdiction from France to New Caledonia that will occur between 2011 and 2014.

With regard to maritime SAR, the transfer of competencies took place on 1 July 2011. The scenario for this transfer was a continuation of the activity of the existing MRCC, providing the service as necessary for maritime SAR operations in territorial waters, without prejudice to the international responsibilities of France in the whole maritime search and rescue region.

With regard to the transfer of aeronautical SAR, the transfer of police and civil air safety responsibilities will take place on 1 January 2013 for domestic air transport. A convention between France and New Caledonia will govern the sharing of competencies and the means for aeronautical SAR missions.

The transfer of civil protection responsibilities is planned in 2014 at the latest.

3. SAR IN FRENCH POLYNESIA

3.1 Area of responsibility

The Tahiti FIR covers 12,500,000 km². French Polynesia consists of five archipelagos (the Windward Islands, the Leeward Islands, Tuamotu, Gambier, Marquesas and Austral). The distance between islands and each of their main town is on average 200 NM (Tahiti - Rangiroa) and for the furthest, 600 NM (Rangiroa - Nuku Hiva).

3.2 Characteristics

The major part of the FIR is a maritime area. The greatest difficulty is locating aircraft in case of radio contact loss, which might suggest an accident, in so far as the coverage of the radar station is limited to a circle of 200 Nm around Faa'a.

3.3 Protocols

Concerning the assets to be used in SAR missions, a protocol has been signed between the Ministry of Defence and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation for the endowment in SAR air-droppable life rafts.

The drafting of a protocol between New Zealand and French Polynesia is in progress.

3.4 Implemented assets

3.4.1 Premises

To optimize the positioning of aircraft, a dedicated A-RCC room has been set up in Papeete, fully equipped with means of transcription, telephone communications both conventional and satellite systems and all the appropriate documentation.

In addition, there is an M-RCC room operated by the Ministry of Defence that manages all the maritime searches and can be supported by a Guardian airplane dedicated to this mission as well as a helicopter

3.4.2 Air assets

- French Air Forces 1 Puma helicopter, 1 Fennec helicopter, 2 Casa airplanes
- French Navy 2 Guardian airplanes

3.5 Training

The National School of Civil Aviation (ENAC Toulouse, France) organizes one SAR training course a year available to 1 or 2 RCC officers. In addition, local training is provided for the other agents involved.

3.6 Exercises

One exercise is held each year in French Polynesia (Communication, coordination and field exercises). The last one took place on 17 May 2011 at Atuona (Marquesas Islands).

The complexity of SAR mission in the region would require better coordination among stakeholders.

3.7 Evolutions

3.7.1 Establishment of a Joint Rescue Coordination Centre in French Polynesia

To streamline resources, a J-RCC will be implemented in phases to manage the whole SAR frequencies. Technical resources optimization will be achieved by pooling equipment and hosting sites. Preventive and/or corrective maintenance will be provided by technical staff of French Polynesia.

3.7.2 Renewal of the aircraft fleet

Cooperation with neighbouring states should be emphasized. A draft protocol with the US should be approved and implemented.

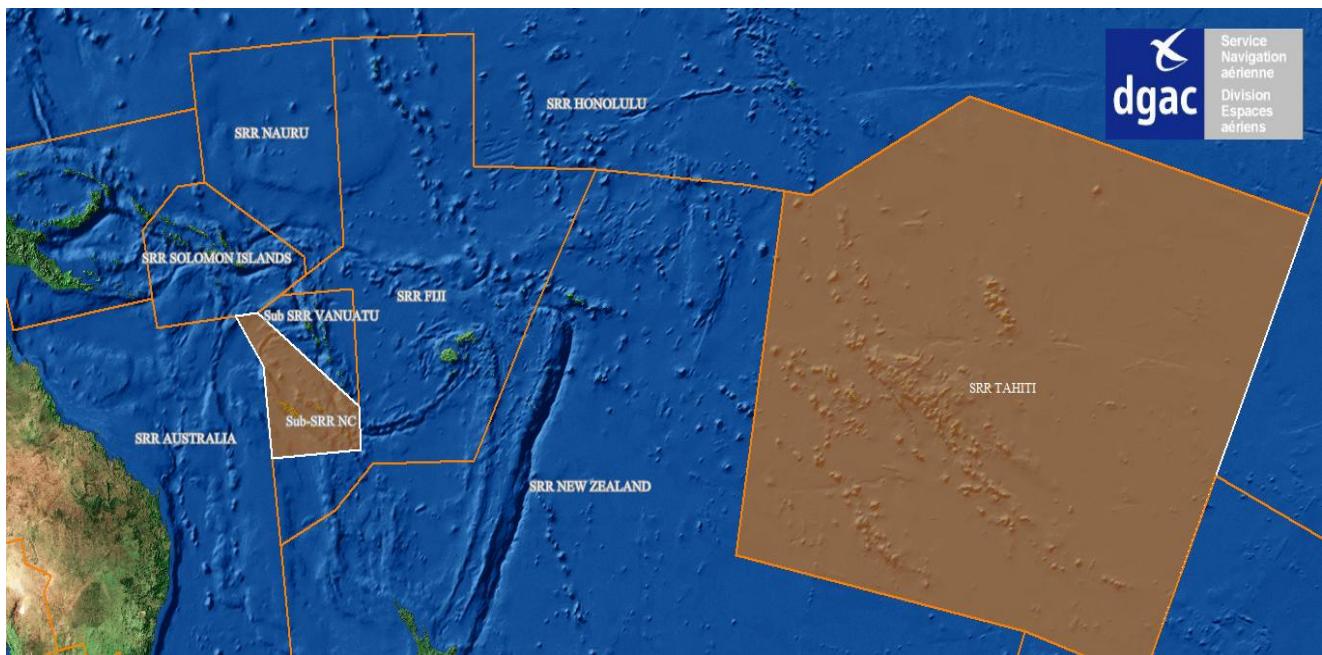
3.7.3 Deployment of remote VHF stations

To improve ground/air communications, France has undertaken the installation of remote VHF antennas. To date, three remote sites are equipped:

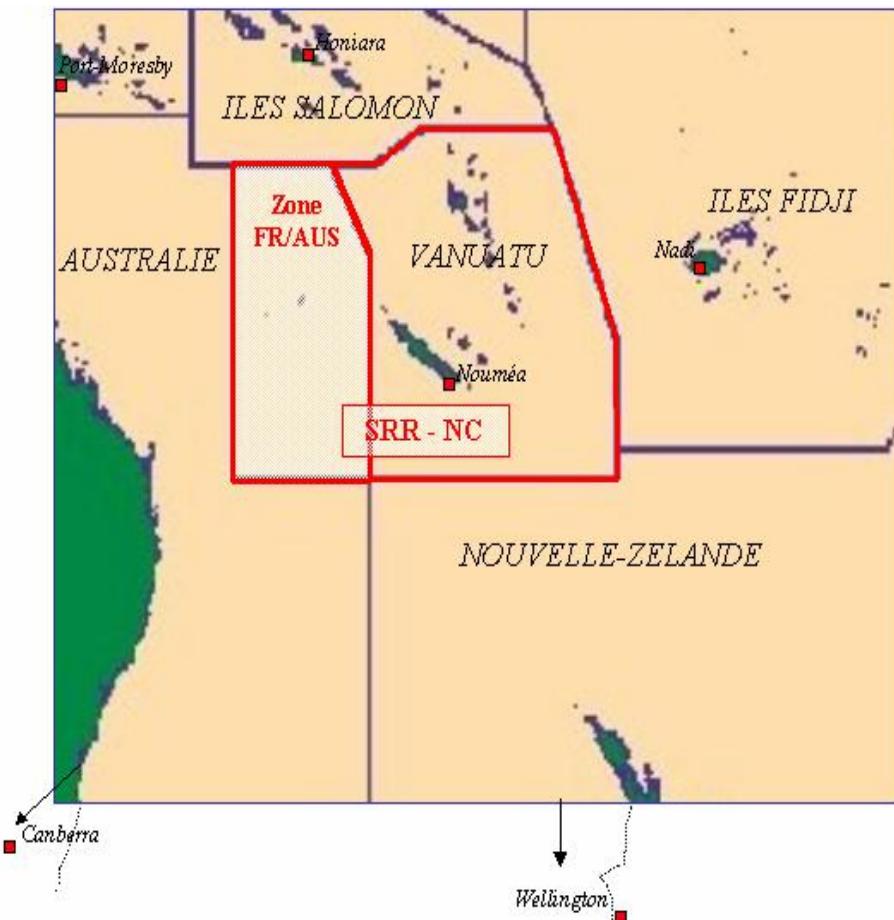
- Rangiroa (Tuamutu in 2009);
- Raiatea (Leeward Islands in 2009);
- Nuku Hiva (Marquesas in 2010).

A study is in process to assess the need for fitting other sites.

SAR Areas of Responsibility in New Caledonia and French Polynesia



Maritime Search and Rescue Region New Caledonia



4. CONCLUSIONS

Aeronautical SAR in New Caledonia and French Polynesia is consistent with international regulations. Nevertheless, it would be worthwhile to:

- address the issue of transfer of responsibility from the French State to New Caledonia regarding domestic air transport and air navigation safety;
- strengthen the synergies between the relevant SAR actors in New Caledonia or French Polynesia (RSC, CRCM, Military, civil protection); and
- develop the SAR cooperation with neighbouring States (drafting of letters of agreement, organisation of regional exercises).

5. ACTION BY THE CONFERENCE

The Conference is invited to:

- 5.1 note information provided in this paper;
- 5.2 encourage the development of Joint Rescue Coordination Centres (JRCC) by States in the Asia Pacific region to ensure an effective and efficient coordination of aeronautical and maritime SAR operations and resources; and
- 5.3 endorse the set-up of a regional working group to develop cooperation between Neighbouring Pacific countries on SAR-related topics.

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