



ICAO

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Video Teleconference, 03 – 06 May 2021

Agenda Item 4: Asia/Pacific and inter-regional SAR planning, coordination and cooperation

AIR OPERATORS WORKSHOPS

(Presented by NEW ZEALAND)

SUMMARY

This paper presents information from a project undertaken by JRCCNZ to visit and present a day workshop to all rescue helicopter crews operating in New Zealand.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Due to the remote and difficult terrain that many New Zealand SAR operations are conducted in, the most logical, efficient and effective rescue asset is usually a helicopter; overland and up to 150nm off shore. JRCCNZ prosecutes approximately 1000 incidents a year, some lasting minutes and others taking days to conclude. More and more people are heading out into the backcountry or out on the water and a professional countrywide SAR system is essential.

1.2 In May 2016 the New Zealand Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 came into force. On reviewing the requirements of this new Act, JRCCNZ decided that current working arrangements between the Air Operators should be improved to ensure that the Health and Safety matters were updated.

1.3 Although operators are regularly tasked for SAR work, JRCCNZ noticed that, with the increased demands on helicopter operators to provide additional 'on call' helicopter pilots and air crew, the number of operational air crew and support staff brought in to the sector has tripled. To this end, JRCCNZ believed there had been an equal and opposite effect on the overall general knowledge, experience and competency of aircrew available to be tasked as an aviation responder to a distress situation.

1.4 To rectify this deficiency JRCCNZ developed a one-day workshop designed to upskill pilots, air crews and new staff on a number of SAR related subjects. These workshops were run between September 2020 and April 2021.

1.5 JRCCNZ regularly engages with fourteen (14) operators across nineteen (19) bases. New Zealand does not have dedicated public aerial or maritime SAR assets but in accordance with Annex 12 2.5, certain operators have been designated as SRUs. These assets are shared between other agencies and are funded partly by central government, local fund raising and some commercial operations. They are all independent companies or trusts. Some have recently come under overarching organizations to better coordinate their operations.

1.6 SAR work is not the rescue helicopters main source of work with percentages ranging between 1% and 20% of their annual operations.

2. DISCUSSION

Planning

2.1 The Air Operators initial feedback when approached about participation in the workshops was very positive.

2.2 Funding was sourced from NZSAR (the organization that provides strategic oversight of SAR in New Zealand).

2.3 The workshops were presented at the Operator's bases rather than a couple of large conference type workshops. This was the most convenient method for the operators as they have high staffing demands and we reached more crew this way. It also gave JRCCNZ SAROs an opportunity to spend time with many of the helicopter crews.

2.4 A team of four SAROs was selected to participate and collectively they designed the workshop content and developed the Power Points and workbook that was be used.

Workshop content

2.5 The content was developed to provide a broad understanding of SAR and then detailing the specifics of SAR as it relates to the tasking of helicopters.

2.6 This was presented in the form of PowerPoints and videos, including:

- (i) Global SAR System
- (ii) New Zealand SAR System
- (iii) Tasking and briefing including Health and Safety
- (iv) Aircraft Crash Site Hazards
- (v) SAR Communications
- (vi) On Scene Coordinators roles and Responsibilities
- (vii) An Introduction to COSPAS-SARSAT and SEND
- (viii) Search Planning, including theory and SARMap demonstration
- (ix) Open discussion

2.7 A workbook was developed to accompany the presentations, including all the Power Points, a booklet about Cospas-Sarsat, promotional material and a course evaluation form.

Workshops/ Presentations

2.8 The workshops ran from 0830 to 1700 each day, at the respective bases, and were attended by as many of the pilots, crew and paramedics from each operator as possible, given the restraints of staffing. The local Police SAR squads were also invited and attended where work commitments allowed. The number attending ranged from ten (10) to thirty (30) but call outs for taskings were inevitable so not everyone could attend for the whole day. Two hundred (220) crew members have been trained up to April 2021.

2.9 Two or three SAROs from the development group attended each workshop and presented the sessions. Other SAROs and NZSAR staff attended as observers when available.

2.10 During the discussions and presentations notes were taken and used to write a final report which was disseminated to interested parties.

2.11 The course evaluation form was completed by the participants and used to improve the workshops.

- (i) The workbooks had to be reprinted as some of the detail was too small to read.
- (ii) SAR stories related by participants informed the presentations going forward.

Outcomes

2.12 There was a very positive response to these workshops across the country. The course evaluation forms were collated and the results input into Survey Monkey. This was made available to the NZ SAR sector.

2.13 In particular the overall response was that JRCCNZ was a professional and mature organization that has a lot of knowledge and experience that can be utilized. Explaining JRCCNZ procedures and methods also gave the operators confidence that we are coordinating and responding to an incident in the most effective way.

2.14 Tangible results that have been noted:

- (i) Debriefing after taskings from the SRUs to JRCCNZ either verbally or written have improved substantially, as the crews now have an understanding of why the information is important. This information is used for statistical purposes and to improve future operations.
- (ii) A better understanding of search patterns and subsequently a noticeable improvement in the flying of them has been observed.
- (iii) A better understanding of the tasking/ briefing information has led to improved communications with the SRUs during an incident. Tasking procedures have changed recently as JRCCNZ now has to task through a central organization when requesting a suitable SAR helicopter. As a consequence JRCCNZ has now formalized the verbal briefing to follow a prescribed format.
- (iv) JRCCNZ Briefing/ debriefing forms are in the process of being improved from the feedback from the operators who receive them and subsequent return them to JRCCNZ on completion of the incident.

2.15 The final session of the workshop was an open discussion which allowed all organizations to voice concerns or learnings about SAR. Although the Operators are part of a national system to provide EMS helicopters to NZ Inc. they do not discuss problems between the various units. This provided JRCCNZ an opportunity to relate openly that all the units are encountering the same problems and concerns and these points have been included in the final report.

2.16 As a consequence of these discussions it became apparent that funding for specific SAR training i.e. winch training, direction finding (DF'ing) to beacons and flying search patterns, was limited, with new crews not having much practice in these specialized techniques. Passing these concerns onto NZSAR has resulted in funding becoming available for some of this training.

2.17 Not all the SAROs had been to the bases or met the crew so it has been of huge benefit to meet some of the crew that SAROs talk to on a regular basis and the networking has improved the collaborative working environment between JRCCNZ and the operators.

2.18 This project has been a worthwhile experience for all involved, it has fostered a greater understanding of our roles and responsibilities and has created a collaborative working environment.

2.19 A second round of workshops has been proposed for the end of 2021 to meet the crew that were missed in the first round.

3. ACTION BY THE MEETING

3.1 The meeting is invited to:

- a) note the information contained in this paper; and
- b) recommend other RCCs engage with their national SRUs to understand their working environment and explain the operation of the RCC and SAR to enhance collaboration.
- c) Contact JRCCNZ for further information about the workshops

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