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**Ninth Meeting of the ICAO Asia/Pacific Search and Rescue
Working Group (APSAR/WG/9)**

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

**RECIPROCAL SAR SERVICES BENCHMARKING ARRANGEMENT BETWEEN
AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND**

(Presented by Australia and New Zealand)

SUMMARY

This paper presents information regarding a new reciprocal search and rescue (SAR) services benchmarking program between Australia and New Zealand.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) and Maritime New Zealand (MNZ) have agreed to implement a new reciprocal SAR services benchmarking program. The first activity under this new program was held in August 2023.

1.2 This new arrangement has been implemented to fulfil four objectives:

- a) Provide a formal mechanism for both organisations to benchmark their SAR services and drive continuous improvement actions,
- b) Grow and enhance the close operational connection between the two SAR organisations, noting that Australia and New Zealand have neighbouring SAR Regions,
- c) Implement an on-going independent review process for the SAR services of both agencies to support meeting the requirements of the ICAO Universal Safety Oversight Audit Program Continuous Monitoring Approach (USOAP CMA), and
- d) Assess alignment with the ICAO and IMO goal for global SAR services to harmonize their aeronautical and maritime SAR services and, as far as practicable, conformity with the ICAO/IMO International Aeronautical and Maritime SAR (IAMSAR) manual.

2. DISCUSSION

SAR benchmarking program summary

2.1 AMSA and MNZ agreed to implement a reciprocal benchmarking program for both SAR organisations to supplement other related oversight arrangements already in place within both agencies. The program provides for an independent assessment of each other's joint aeronautical and maritime SAR services and provides additional benefits including opportunities for closer collaboration, cooperation, learning and SAR service improvements.

2.2 Benchmarking activities will rotate between both agencies, nominally on an annual basis, with one agency visiting the other to conduct the assessment.

2.3 The program involves the option of conducting a SAR exercise (SAREX) to coincide with the benchmarking activity to assist with each independent assessment by demonstrating procedures and practices in action, including debriefing and lessons learnt processes. This has the added benefit to both agencies of meeting the ICAO and IMO requirement for regular SAREXs.

2.4 Ideally, the agency conducting the benchmarking assessment should provide a minimum team of two staff to conduct the assessment, preferably one aeronautical and one maritime SAR subject matter expert, as well as a trained auditor to provide guidance on conduct of the assessment process as appropriate.

2.5 The benchmarking tool used for each assessment is based on the *National self-assessment on search and rescue system* questionnaire from the IAMSAR Manual, Volume I, Appendix H.

2.6 The agency conducting the benchmarking assessment provides a report of observations and any identified opportunities for improvement to the other agency.

2.7 As this is a new initiative, when the first assessments of both agencies have been completed, a joint review will be undertaken by both agencies to determine any improvements to the initial process and what future scheduling interval is considered necessary (annual, biennial, etc).

First benchmarking activity

2.8 The inaugural reciprocal SAR benchmarking activity was successfully conducted over three days from 22-24 August 2023 when a team from MNZ carried out an assessment of AMSA's SAR service during an on-site visit to AMSA's Response Centre, which operates functionally as Australia's Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC) in Canberra, Australia.

2.9 The activity involved a series of interviews, practical activities including a half-day SAREX involving multiple SAR challenges and desktop assessments of AMSA systems, tools and procedures.

2.10 The benchmarking activity included the following to assist the assessment:

a) **Discussion-based questioning and evidence provision** – AMSA representatives provided verbal responses to questions asked by the assessors, and provided evidence which included documents, procedures, records, systems, etc.

b) **SAREX** – to provide a practical demonstration of JRCC Australia response actions, procedures and practices within a realistic SAR incident simulation.

i) The SAREX was conducted internally to JRCC Australia as a SAR communications and coordination demonstration.

ii) SAREX telephone calls and written communications were primarily limited to within AMSA. Some limited external communications were also conducted with RCC New Zealand, primary Australian SAR Units, Australian Defence Force and Bureau of Meteorology.

iii) An internal AMSA Exercise Control Centre simulated communications by other external agencies including Air Traffic Services, Police, other SAR units, other government agencies and contacts to and from the JRCC.

c) In addition, over the course of the benchmarking visit the MNZ team was able to observe JRCC Australia coordinate a number of real SAR operations which helped build on the SAREX observations.

2.11 The MNZ team, in line with the shared vision of using this activity to drive each agency to improve, identified areas of strength and opportunities for improvement for AMSA to consider. Through its participation in this activity, the MNZ team also identified learnings and insights to take back to New Zealand, including some potential AMSA organisational arrangements and practices for MNZ to consider for their own SAR service arrangements.

2.12 Overall, the activity achieved its objectives and strengthened the bilateral SAR relationship, cooperation, and personal contacts between both agencies.

Improving the process and next steps

2.13 AMSA and MNZ are reviewing the conduct of the first activity to consider improvements to the process including whether the IAMSAR Manual *National self-assessment on search and rescue system* questions could be better targeted, and that the activity would more accurately be described as a Peer Review. An AMSA team will visit MNZ during 2024 to reciprocate the activity, possibly using an updated process based on learnings from the first activity.

3. ACTION BY THE MEETING

3.1 The meeting is invited to note the information contained in this paper.

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