



Initial Report of the 35th Meeting of the National Search and Rescue Council

NATSAR REPORT

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2012

Originator: AMSA

Summary

- Executive Summary** This brief summary of outcomes of the 35th Meeting of the National Search and Rescue (SAR) Council is to inform stakeholders regarding actions arising from the meeting. The full report including working papers will be published in early 2012.
- Action to be taken** For discussion and information.
- Related Documents** NATSAR 35 - Working Papers Discussion Pack

35th Council Meeting

The 35th Meeting of the National Search and Rescue (SAR) Council was conducted in Adelaide, South Australia, with four sessions programmed during 15-17th November 2011.

These annual meetings are intended to foster consistent SAR arrangements and procedures amongst Australian SAR Authorities, i.e. AMSA, State and Territory police and the Australian Defence Force. In the main, representation included both senior officers and operational specialists. Such representation is much appreciated for the depth it brings to discussion at both the strategic and tactical levels. Due to operational and financial constraints, the Northern Territory and Tasmania were not represented at the meeting.

Observers from the New Zealand SAR Council, the National Volunteer Marine SAR Committee, and carefully selected industry representatives added a useful range of expertise to the meeting. These relationships continue to evolve as the SAR system responds to shifting demand for authoritative comment on the challenges facing members of the Australian SAR system.

The Council greatly appreciated the role of the South Australia Police, Special Tasks and Response Group in hosting the 35th meeting. Deputy Commissioner Gary Burns opened the meeting, emphasising the importance of inter-agency cooperation, the technology now available to police and SAR practitioners (such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS) packages) and the roles that volunteers play in search and rescue.

Review of the Inter-Governmental Agreement

A principal focus for the SAR Council over the past year has been the review of the *Inter-Governmental Agreement on National Search and Rescue Response Arrangements* and the associated sections of Chapter 1 and Appendix B to the *National SAR Manual*. The original document was signed in 2004, replacing separate agreements between the Commonwealth and the



individual States and Territories for coordination of search and rescue. The revision process sought to acknowledge the continual evolution of the SAR system, taking onboard lessons learnt from major incidents and Coroners' recommendations. Alterations to Chapter 1 and Appendix B of the National SAR Manual will be required to enact the revision, seeking to underline the intention of "best placed to respond".

The first drafts were circulated in mid 2011 with useful feedback received and after further review, the proposed documents were tabled at the Council Meeting. The rationale for the changes was detailed during the Council's discussion and the amendments agreed. Consensus was reached that the draft IGA should be submitted to the Australian and New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency for consideration at the Commissioners' forum. The intention is to present the document for signing by the responsible Ministers by mid-2012. The proposed draft of the Inter-Governmental Agreement is attached at Attachment C.

Council Discussion

The call for papers and presentations for the meeting is normally issued in August, with each authority submitting their annual report of activities as well as any specific concerns or ongoing matters for consideration and discussion. The 41 papers received for the meeting were posted to the National SAR Council website (www.natsar.amsa.gov.au) and provided in the Working Papers Briefing Pack. The agenda and a description of each paper are provided at Attachment A. The complete set of papers and a summary of discussions will be posted to the National SAR Council members in the full report.

The programmed subjects and wide experience of the Council led to robust discussion at both the strategic and tactical levels, covering a wide range of issues. Topics that drew particular interest and generated further avenues for the Council to follow included:

- a. A commitment to prepare a strategic plan and business plan for the Council;
- b. Night SAR operations including use of Night Vision Goggles in multi-asset searches;
- c. The increased involvement of SAR practitioners in Major Incident and Mass Casualty scenarios such as the Queensland Floods and the TC Yasi response and the Christchurch Earthquakes. A section on Mass Casualty Scenarios was proposed for inclusion into the Land Search Operations Manual;
- d. Possible changes to management practices required by the upcoming Workplace, Health and Safety Act;
- e. Reports from the Working Groups regarding searches for those affected by Alzheimers' and other mental illnesses and ongoing management of statistics collection and analysis;
- f. Presentations on force-multiplying applications such as SARMAP and GPX transfer systems; and
- g. Avenues for safety messages and SAR education through use of social media and networking.

Actions Arising

Some 11 areas were identified as requiring further action, with members volunteering to take on responsibilities individually, as well continue the efforts of the working groups over the next year. A complete list of the actions, dates for completion and responsibilities is attached in Enclosure D.

To monitor progress and facilitate the achievement of the action items, the Council members agreed to participate in teleconference sessions in March and August 2012. Additionally, creation of an online discussion board was welcomed as this allows contemporaneous information exchange between members.

Australian SAR Award 2011

The National SAR Council's remit includes selection and presentation of the annual Australian SAR Award. The Council members selected Mr Wayne McDermott, Mr Tyrone Becker and Mr Lincoln Wilson for their outstanding contribution to search and rescue in rescuing Mr Clifford Thurley and his son-in-law Mr Michael Veale from the sea near Strahan, Tasmania on 14 June 2011 after their dinghy capsized.

Describing the men's actions, Rear Admiral Scarce commended "not only their actions in performing the rescue but also in supporting the survivors until they were returned to a place of safety. This level of concern epitomises the best in the Australian character and in human nature."

This sentiment was echoed by the Tasmania Police who nominated the three men, all of whom were working at the Petuna-Sevrup Fish Farm in Strahan at the time. In severe weather conditions, the three men answered a Mayday call and sought out essential supplies before setting off. The police particularly commended the group's clarity of thinking and seamanship in handling their own vessel in the conditions, as well as affecting the rescue of the two survivors.

This year's award was presented by the Governor of South Australia, His Excellency, Rear Admiral Kevin Scarce AC CSC RANR, when he and his wife Mrs Liz Scarce, joined members of the National Search and Rescue Council in Adelaide for the Annual Dinner on Wednesday 16 November.

Conclusion

At this meeting, the Council reflected upon the drivers of SAR in Australia, through changes in industry and recreational activity as well as demands placed upon SAR assets by increasingly frequent large-scale environmental disasters. Working Groups considered statistics measuring the rate of effort of the SAR system and the challenges posed by searches for vulnerable members of the community; demonstrated the collective expertise within the SAR Council and willingness to develop tools to support the wider fraternity.

Reaching a consensus regarding the revised IGA underlines the highly cooperative nature of the Australian SAR environment and acknowledges the continual evolution of the SAR system. The Council Secretariat will work with the Australian and New Zealand Police Advisory Agency on this and other key areas to ensure a national approach.

The Chairman acknowledged the commitment to advancing the professionalism and expertise across the SAR community, welcoming particularly the opportunity to share the year's operational

experiences in a collegiate atmosphere. This benefits the Council on both the tactical and strategic levels, with discussion leading naturally to the development of the Council's Strategic and Business Plans, identified as priorities for 2012.

Next Meeting

Responsibility for hosting the annual meeting is rotated through the members. Tasmania is due to host the 36th Meeting in 2012, however, there are some concerns expressed regarding budgetary constraints by all members. Options are under consideration for the most equitable arrangements for the meeting in 2012.



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Attachments:

- A. NATSAR 35 Working Paper 35-1-1 Agenda
- B. NATSAR 35 Working Paper 35-1-3 List of Attendees
- C. Revised *Intergovernmental Agreement on National Search and Rescue Arrangements* dated 16 Dec 2011
- D. List of Actions arising from the 35th Meeting of the National SAR Council