

**From:** Natasha Rave

**Sent:** Monday, 3 May 2021 9:36 AM

**To:** [REDACTED]

**Subject:** Official Information Act (1982) request relating to New Zealand Search and Rescue (NZSAR) Secretariat

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your request of 13 April 2021, pursuant to the Official Information Act 1982, seeking the following information from the New Zealand Search and Rescue (NZSAR) Secretariat:

- 1) *Correspondence from the two coordinating authorities to either the NZSAR Council or the SAR Secretariat "recording all instances where the changes to helicopter arrangements are impacting on SR services".*
- 2) *The combined paper by NZSAR, Police and RCCNZ to the NZSAR council meeting "outlining the operational issues and an analysis of the actual or potential impact due to the changes in helicopter arrangements".*
- 3) *Minutes, emails or other material discussing the combined paper at (2).*

The following documents fall within the scope of your request and are attached to this email:

- 1) NZSAR Council Paper – procurement of SAR aviation services
- 2) Email regarding Procurement of SAR aviation services
- 3) DRAFT – Procurement of SAR aviation services
- 4) Notes – NZSAR Senior Official's Group 30 January 2019
- 5) Coversheet NZSAR Council Paper

We are unable to provide correspondence on instances where the changes to helicopter arrangements are impacting on search and rescue services, as neither the NZSAR Council nor the NZSAR Secretariat have received correspondence on this matter. For this reason, I am refusing this portion of your request as the information requested does not exist (Section 18(e) of the Official Information Act 1982).

The minutes of the NZSAR Council meeting on 27 February 2019 where the combined paper was discussed are published on the NZSAR website: [NZSAR Council Minutes » NZSAR](#). For this reason, I am refusing this portion of your request on the grounds that the information is publicly available (Section 18(d) of the Official Information Act 1982).

You have the right under Section 28(3) of the Official Information Act to make a complaint about the withholding of information to the Ombudsman, who can be contacted at:

The Ombudsman  
Office of the Ombudsmen  
P O Box 10-152  
**WELLINGTON**

The Ministry publishes our Official Information Act responses, and the information contained in our reply to you may be published on the Ministry website. Before publishing we will remove any personal or identifiable information.

Yours sincerely

Natasha

Dr Natasha Rave

Acting Manager | Resilience & Security | System and Regulatory Design

**Ministry of Transport – Te Manatū Waka**

T: [REDACTED] | [www.transport.govt.nz](http://www.transport.govt.nz)

***Enabling New Zealanders to flourish***

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# Procurement of SAR Aviation Services

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DATE OF REPORT 28 January 2019

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## Background

The Health and Safety at Work Act 2016 (HSWA) places more emphasis on the responsibilities of the coordinating authorities as 'persons conducting business or undertaking' (PCBU's) when it comes to the tasking and coordination of SAR aviation assets.

NZSAR and the two SAR Coordination Authorities have been examining their responsibilities in relation to HSWA, including who, and how, they task rescue helicopters for SAR operations.

To support this work NZSAR employed a contractor to look at SAR helicopter use and provide some guidance for best practice. The result of this SAR Aviation Engagement Project is a set of draft documents covering possible Service Level Agreements (SLA), tasking forms and aides memoir.

In concurrence with this the National Ambulance Sector Office (NASO) a business unit of the Ministry of Health undertook a procurement process for helicopter ambulance services which involved a significant rewrite of the operator's contract requirements, particularly around aircraft & crew specifications and availability.

As the SAR sector predominantly use the same aircraft operators as the ambulance sector<sup>1</sup> any changes in the NASO contracts can have a profound effect on the SAR sector.

After consultation, the new NASO contracts commenced on 1 November 2018.

## Purpose

To provide information on the SAR Coordinating Authorities current issues and initiatives to develop strategies for the management and tasking of SAR helicopters.

To provide an update on the impacts the new NASO Air Ambulance contracts have on the SAR sector

## Scope

The issues and proposed solutions presented in this paper are relevant to both Coordinating Authorities however as this paper is authored by RCCNZ, the views expressed are those of RCCNZ and should not be considered as a formal response from NZ Police.

## Outcomes of NASO Air Ambulance Contracts

NASO has entered into contracts with three helicopter trusts to provide services over the Northern, Central and Southern regions of New Zealand. These trusts are:

- Southern region - Helicopter Emergency Medical Services New Zealand Ltd (HEMS). A joint venture between Helicopters Otago and Garden City Helicopters.

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<sup>1</sup> 92% of RCCNZ's helicopter use is with operators with NASO contracts

- Central region – Central Air Ambulance Rescue Ltd (CAARL). A joint venture between Eastland Helicopters Rescue, Hawkes Bay Rescue Helicopters Trust, Phillips Search and Rescue Trust, Taranaki Rescue Helicopter Trust & Life Flight Trust
- Northern region – The trust, unnamed as yet, is a joint venture between the Auckland Rescue Helicopter Trust & Northland Emergency Services Trust.

The key purpose of the new NASO contracts is to provide a safe, more centralised, fit for purpose air ambulance service, this includes:

1. Increasing the aircraft size to better accommodate the paramedics, additional medical equipment and stretchers
2. Improving the 24/7 availability, response times and utilisation of the aircraft and crew
3. Increased crewing numbers to reduce flight hours for H & S reasons
4. Rationalising where aircraft are based, with the main impacts being the Rotorua aircraft now being used by CAARL as the backup aircraft for the trust and the Te Anau aircraft being a subcontractor to HEMS.

To provide coordination for the Air Ambulance service NASO has contracted with St John to provide a 24/7 Air Desk.

## Outcomes of NZSAR SAR aviation engagement project

NZSAR work involved the employment of contractor Scott McKenzie to review how the SAR coordinating authorities engage with the helicopter rescue sector.

Scott found that there were inconsistencies between RCCNZ and NZ Police on how they engaged with the same operators, particularly in how they were contracted and tasked. He also found that the obligations under HSWA for all parties were not well understood.

Scott recommended improvements in the following areas.

1. Standardisation of documentation and tasking procedures used by the Coordinating Authorities
2. Implementing (or improving existing) and standardising the SLA's the Coordinating Authorities have with the operators. Including clarification of HSWA responsibilities, response procedures and crew/aircraft capabilities.
3. Developing procedures for the use of non-contracted aircraft.

To assist with this Scott has produced a set of draft documents for consideration and possible adoption by the Coordinating Authorities.

## Implications of NASO Contracts

### Precedence

The NASO contracts have set a very high standard in aircraft specifications, equipment, availability, response times, crew numbers and training.

The SAR sector can leverage against this when the same aircraft are being utilised, but when alternative air operators or aircraft are being used (which is sometimes necessary), there is a lot of onus on the Coordinating Authorities to ensure the operators are fit for purpose and HSWA requirements are still being met..

### Aircraft types

Larger twin engine aircraft with more ambulance equipment on board are required for the NASO contracts; this has several impacts on the SAR sector. These are:

- Significant increase in operating costs since the implementation of the NASO contracts. Charge out rates for the SAR sector have risen by approximately 20-25%<sup>2</sup>.
- The increase in equipment carried limits the aircrafts ability to carry large passenger loads like a fully equipped Alpine Cliff Rescue Team.

### **Aircraft availability**

Aircraft contracted to NASO are available to the SAR sector. NASO however retain exclusive rights to the aircraft and can divert them from a SAR activity if required, which may delay a SAR response while alternative aircraft are sourced. .

To negate this issue the Coordinating Authorities have been working closely with the Ambulance Air Desk to ensure the right aircraft are available for each incident and to date there have been some minor coordination glitches but no major clashes.<sup>3</sup>

The SAR sector also has to be conscious that the use of Ambulance aircraft for SAR purposes, particularly for long and drawn out searches may not be the best use of the asset as the ‘ambulance’ may be needed elsewhere. In these cases the SAR Coordinating Authorities need to have access to other suitable aircraft.

### **Crew training / capabilities**

As Search and Rescue is outside the NASO mandate there is no requirement in the contracts for the crews to be trained to operate in Alpine or Mountainous terrain or be equipped to survive in those regions.

When the SAR Coordinating Authorities are using NASO contracted aircraft they need to be aware the crew, particularly the paramedics may not be suitable for the environment they are going into. There is also a concern that the pilots being used may not have the experience to be able to identify the specialised hazards specific to mountainous regions.

## **Issues to resolve**

1. Better coordination and SOP's need to be developed between RCCNZ, NZ Police and the NASO funded St John Air Desk
2. Police and RCCNZ need to determine if a joint SLA with the Air Operators is possible given RCCNZ contract aircraft on a national basis and Police on a district basis
3. Agreements or SLA's and SOP's need to be developed between the two SAR Coordinating Authorities and the Air Operators they utilise, including those operators that are not under NASO contracts.
4. How to manage costs increases if the SAR Coordinating Authorities are to continue using aircraft that have NASO contracts due to the increased operating costs.
5. Both Coordinating Authorities need to ensure that suitable alternative operators and/or aircraft are identified and contracted should NASO aircraft be unavailable or unsuitable for an incident.

## **Solutions**

### **Current initiatives to resolve issues**

RCCNZ and NZ Police have been collating any issues experienced due to the new NASO contracts and NASO and RCCNZ are meeting regularly to sort out any issues that have arisen. <sup>4</sup>

RCCNZ have submitted a funding bid to cover their expected additional costs for ‘variable SAR’.

<sup>2</sup> For RCCNZ this equates to an annual increase in operating costs of \$300,00

<sup>3</sup> This is from an RCCNZ perspective

<sup>4</sup> RCCNZ are acting on behalf of both Coordinating Authorities

A small workshop is planned between NASO, St John, NZ Police and RCCNZ to build on existing relationships and clarify roles and responsibilities. It is hoped this workshop will be the start of producing a set of SOP's for aircraft coordination between the agencies.

During February and March 2019 RCCNZ will be meeting with the CEO's and operational managers of all the air operators they engage with. These meetings will include discussions over HSWA responsibilities, implications of the NASO contracts, access to alternative aircraft and introduce the idea of standardised contracts and procedures. This is an RCCNZ initiative but all information will be shared with NZ Police.

### **Proposed next steps for SAR sector**

Robust SLA's (or similar agreements) need to be put in place between the SAR Coordinating Authorities and the Air Operators. These need to cover standardised SOP's, HSWA requirements, crew and aircraft requirements. Where possible this work can be leveraged off the work already done by NASO but consideration needs to be made for SAR specific requirements.

Ideally any SLA would be a joint SLA between the Air Operator, NZ Police and RCCNZ. A draft SLA has been developed under the SAR Aviation Engagement Project which can be used for this purpose.

A joint SLA does, however, have some difficulties particularly as RCCNZ engage with Air Operators on a national basis and NZ Police do this per district. It should also be acknowledged that RCCNZ only use these operators for SAR purposes where NZ Police utilise helicopters for many other policing purposes.

It may therefore not be possible to obtain full consistency but effort needs to be made to ensure that any SLA developed is as similar as possible.

RCCNZ and NZ Police also need to engage with Air Operators that do not have a NASO contract. These aircraft are often used due to their unique location or specialist expertise e.g. for high alpine rescue work. SLA's and SOP's need to be developed with these operators

## **Conclusions**

For the most part, other than increased costs the new NASO contracts are not having a significant impact on SAR. There is more work required to improve relationships and SOP's between the SAR Coordinating Authorities and St John and this work is already underway.

The NASO contracts have a number of positive outcomes for SAR particularly around leveraging off the H & S compliance that has been put in place with the Air Operators NASO use, but there is an onus on the SAR Coordinating Authorities to make similar arrangements with the Air Operators that sit outside the NASO contracts.

More work is still required between the SAR coordinating Authorities to determine if joint or separate SLA's and SOP's can be developed with the operators, but either way it is important these are put in place.

**Paul Craven**  
Deputy Manager - Operations

**From:** [Mike Hill](#)  
**To:** [Duncan Ferner](#)  
**Cc:** [Paul Craven](#)  
**Subject:** Procurement of SAR aviation services.docx  
**Date:** Tuesday, 19 February 2019 9:47:39 PM  
**Attachments:** [Procurement of SAR aviation services.docx](#)

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Duncan,

Paul's paper attached. I have just made some minor edits.

For your review first though please. In particular Rec 2. I'll be at Avalon in the morning if any changes are needed.

Mike

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# Procurement of SAR Aviation Services

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DATE OF REPORT 28 January 2019

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More work is still required between the SAR coordinating Authorities to determine if joint or separate SLA's and SOP's can be developed with the operators, but either way it is important these are put in place.

## **Recommendations**

The NZSAR Council is recommended to:

1. **Note** – The implications and issues the new NASO Air Ambulance Contracts have had on the SAR sector, in particular the cost increases.
2. **Note** – The issues raised from the from the NZSAR SAR Aviation Engagement Project
3. **Note** – The current work underway and the proposed next steps to resolve these issues

**Paul Craven**  
Deputy Manager - Operations

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**15. SAR Helicopters**

Paul Craven will provide the NZSAR Council information regarding SAR helicopter tasking and the increase in helicopter costs.

**Action:** Don Bogie will provide Mike Hill comments from DOC on helicopter issues.

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## Cover Sheet for NZSAR Council Item 15

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <b>Council Meeting</b>   | 27 February 2019                            |
| <b>Sponsoring Agency</b> | RCCNZ                                       |
| <b>Title</b>             | <b>Procurement of SAR Aviation Services</b> |

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### Purpose

1. To seek NZSAR Council guidance on issues relating to the procurement of SAR Aviation Services.

### Recommendations

2. The NZSAR Council is invited to:
  - a. **Ask** the NZ Police and RCCNZ (with Secretariat support) to develop documented procedures with the National Ambulance Sector Office (NASO) funded St John Air desk to enhance the coordination of aviation assets.
  - b. **Ask** the NZ Police and RCCNZ (with Secretariat support) to provide advice to the NZSAR Council regarding:
    - i. The feasibility of joint (or separate) agreements with air operators able to provide SAR aviation services.
    - ii. The nature and content of any proposed agreements.
    - iii. Joint (or separate) options to manage SAR aviation cost pressures.
    - iv. Joint (or separate) arrangements for the provision of 'non-NASO contracted' aviation assets capable of delivering SAR services.
    - v. The provision of systemic assurance for SAR aviation assets.

### Comments

3. The 2018 NZSAR Aviation Engagement report noted significant differences between the two SAR coordinating authorities in their approach to engaging SAR aviation assets and made a variety of recommendations to reduce risk and improve service.
4. MoH/NASO led changes to the provision of air ambulance services caused significant disruption to the aviation sector throughout 2018, which inhibited further consideration or implementation of any improvements.
5. At its November 2018 meeting, the NZSAR Council asked 'NZSAR, Police and RCCNZ to prepare a combined paper for the next NZSAR Council meeting outlining the operational issues and an analysis of the actual or potential impact due to the [NASO caused] changes in helicopter arrangements.'

### Papers

Item 15a RCCNZ Report of 28 January 2019 – *Procurement of SAR Aviation Services*.