



Strategic Plan New Zealand USAR Search Dog Programme

2005-2009

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Introduction

The broad role and objective of the NZ USAR Search Dog Association is essentially three-fold:

- Promote the appropriate and effective use of USAR search dogs
- Represent and promote the interests of handlers
- Support and promote USAR work in all forms

The *New Zealand USAR Search Dog Programme* is a term which encompasses a wide range of activities that assist the development, training and assessment and deployment of USAR Search Dogs. These include (but are not limited to):

- Development and maintenance of national standards
- Assistance for training
- Liaison with deploying agencies/groups
- Operational support eg cache procurement
- Communication and Information for handlers and the wider USAR community

Most of the above elements, including the delivery of training and assessments, require close interaction with and support from the other elements of the national USAR system. *It is not the responsibility of the Association to resource and deliver all of these activities.*

The USAR Search Dog Association represents canine search specialists on the Specialist Skills Working Group. The Association also has direct interaction with the Response Operations Working Group on operational and training matters.

Background

Dogs have been trained in New Zealand for “disaster” search work for many years, typically in small isolated training groups spread throughout the country. Many of these groups had their own standards and there was little national consensus or leadership. The degree of linkage between these resources and other rescue groups/functions varied greatly.

In 2001 the National Urban Search and Rescue project was started. Search dogs were identified as a specialist resource required for an effective and appropriate response capability. National standards were developed and accepted in 2002, and the first national assessment undertaken early in 2003, resulting in the qualification of NZ’s first *Basic* USAR search dogs. Later in 2003 the New Zealand USAR Search Dog Association was formed to support the development and operational integration of USAR search dogs in New Zealand. New Zealand’s first *Advanced* USAR search dog was qualified in October 2004.

In December 2004 the USAR Steering Committee’s function and focus changed from a project status to a “business as usual” status. This also provided the impetus for the formalisation of the Specialist Skills Working Group (SSWG), which aims to co-ordinate resources and activities associated with medics, search dogs and engineers.

The second anniversary of the Association in July 2005 coincided with the first national training weekend in Wellington. This very successful event was attended by 14 handlers with 16 dogs, along with a range of people from the wider USAR community.

All dog handlers are volunteers and the training of a USAR search dog demands a very significant time and financial commitment by the handler. Many handlers also train for Wilderness search operations, which brings additional demands on their time and commitment.

As at the end of 2005, there were 3 *Basic* and 4 *Advanced* operational USAR search dogs.

Context of This Plan

The USAR Strategic Plan for the period 2005 to 2009 produced by the Steering Committee in August 2005 sets the overall *Strategic Direction* as to ***unify the components of USAR in New Zealand***. The three *Strategic Goals* based on current and future needs are:

- Sustainable Arrangements
- Maximum Interoperability with other agencies and SAR elements
- Integrated Teams, People and Partnerships

The Association's Strategic Plan addresses these elements from the canine specialist perspective.

The critical issues and greatest challenges facing each of the specialist skill strands are:

- How to build the desired level of capability
- How to sustain the capability
- Achieving operational clarity in terms of deployment mechanisms

This strategic plan aims to:

- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of the New Zealand USAR Search Dog Association in relation to the USAR Search Dog programme.
- Provide guidance on national USAR search dog capability targets.
- Identify the support required by handlers for the achievement and maintenance of these targets.

This Strategic Plan is written with an assumption that future funding and support from the USAR Steering Committee for both the Association and major search dog activities will continue at least at the 2005/06 level.

Vision

The high-level vision for USAR search dogs in New Zealand is:

Sustainable numbers of Search Dogs trained and assessed to national standards and used effectively in USAR operations.

In order to provide a practical focus for this vision, the Association's inaugural president, Matthew Dodd, has proposed the following specific elements:

- a) The establishment of three 'centres of excellence' for training and other purposes
- b) purchase of a full set of USAR dog agility equipment for each centre
- c) semi-permanent access to an open grass area in each centre that can be used for agility and obedience training
- d) three permanent rubble/disaster sites that can be used for dog training and assessment
- e) one annual training weekend in each of three centres of excellence
- f) one annual national four day training camp
- g) one annual national dog assessment weekend (CREP)
- h) at least one recognised trainer per centre (in addition to the official evaluators) who is funded to attend all training and assessment courses.
- i) a genuine commitment to using USAR search dogs both inside and outside of New Zealand because the biggest barrier to handler involvement and limitation to quality of performance is the fact that this resource is never used.

The suggested locations for the three nationally supported training 'centres of excellence' for USAR search dogs are Auckland, Palmerston North/Wellington and Christchurch. These are both close to major population centres and also to existing strongholds of search dog excellence. In addition to this they allow for shared training, equipment, venues and social activities with the three national Task Force teams. Some of the benefits from a dog training point of view are resource efficiency, increased exposure to the old-hands for the newbies, sharing of ideas, and mutual encouragement.

With respect to the question of sustainable numbers of trained and operational search dogs, the following short- and long-term capability targets are proposed (refer Appendix One for discussion):

Short-term	Long-term
<i>In place by Dec 2005; fully inducted by June 2006</i>	<i>Within the time scale of the Strategic Plan (ie. by 2009)</i>
9 dogs certified (3 Advanced, 6 Basic) and a total of 15 in active training.	12 dogs as part of Task Forces; additional 12 dogs for use with RRTs.

Strategic Objectives and Activities

The tables on the following pages outline the *strategic objectives, associated activities, key measures* and *responsibilities*.

The four strategic objectives identified by the Association are:

Objective 1: Support Handlers and NZ USAR

Objective 2: Capability Development

Objective 3: Facilitate the testing of USAR search dogs to National Standards

Objective 4: Enhance inter-relationships with key groups and agencies

Each strategic objective has corresponding associated activities (16 in total).

The tables do not describe the basic (or ‘business as usual’) functions of the Association such as:

- Maintaining the USAR Search Dog Association as a viable legal entity
- Providing information to members
- Acting as liaison for issues affecting members
- Representation of canine search specialists on the USAR Specialist Skills Working Group.

Objective 1: Support Handlers & NZ USAR

Activity	Details	Timeframes	Key Measures	Responsibilities
1.1 Maintain infrastructure for the ongoing work of the USAR Search Dog programme	Seek and apply sufficient funding to meet base operational requirements and to achieve objectives	Annually	Prepare and submit budget to the SSWG by 31 January each year	USAR SDA
1.2 Maintain active liaison with NZFS on operational matters	Operational handler(s) appointed by SDA to engage with NZFS	Annually	Ongoing	USAR SDA & NZFS
1.3 Clarify training and deployment mechanisms with TFs and individual RRTs	Produce integrated deployment protocol with Response Operations Group. Develop handler agreements/ contracts with TFs	By June 2006	Deployment protocol developed and implemented Handler agreements finalised	USAR SDA, SSWG and Response Operations WG
1.4 Provide training opportunities for active dogs	Training and Education Programme for handlers Organising annual USAR Dog Training weekend and regional workshops led by senior/operational handlers	Annually	All active dogs have access to appropriate training	USAR SDA
1.5 Implement the development of the 'Centres of Excellence' concept	<i>Establish development plan</i> <i>Implement (additional funding required)</i>	By June 2006 By June 2007	Centres established	USAR SDA, SSWG, MCDEM & NZFS

Objective 2: Capability Development

Activity	Details	Timeframes	Key Measures	Responsibilities
2.1 Build Canine Search capability to stated minimum short-term target levels	Refer table on page 6	By Dec 2005	Numbers achieved	USAR SDA with input from the Response Operations Working Group
2.2 Develop a succession planning framework	Refer Appendix One	By June 2007	Framework developed and agreed to	In conjunction with other Specialist Skills Strand leaders
2.3 Build Canine Search capability to stated minimum long-term target levels	Refer Appendix One and table on page 6	By Dec 2009	Numbers achieved	USAR SDA with input from the Response Operations Working Group
2.4 Develop USAR dogs in priority areas eg Auckland	Introductory sessions and workshops		Minimum of one introductory workshop to be held each year	USAR SDA in partnership with SSWG

Objective 3: Facilitate the testing of USAR search dogs to National Standards

Activity	Details	Timeframes	Key Measures	Responsibilities
3.1 Review current USAR search dog standards	Development of CREP documents in full consultation with stakeholders	Review 2005		USAR SDA
3.2 Co-ordinate testing and revalidation opportunities (CREPS)	Facilitate CREP testing weekend(s).	Yearly CREP including Basic and Advanced	At least one CREP held each year	Steering Committee via SSWG to resource
3.3 Facilitate re-testing of dogs	Facilitate re-testing opportunities	Once yearly re-testing following CREP.	Re-testing held as required (as determined by SDA)	USAR SDA and SSWG
3.4 Maintain pool of qualified evaluators	Yearly process	Ongoing- NZ advanced and basic evaluators available	Pool of qualified evaluators established and maintained	USAR SDA

Objective 4: Enhance inter-relationships with key groups and agencies

Activity	Details	Timeframes	Key Measures	Responsibilities
4.1 Facilitate/liaise with key USAR personnel, other responders and other support agencies (eg. NZ Police)	Distribution of USAR SDA newsletter to wider circulation group Attendance/input into other meeting/liaison opportunities as available	Annually/ ongoing		SSWG and USAR SDA
4.2 Liaison with NZ Land SAR Search dog sub-committee		Annually/ ongoing	One attendance at LandSar Search Dog sub-committee per year each year (or vice versa)	USAR SDA
4.3 Develop more specific relationships with international USAR search dog groups/agencies	Priority given to Australia and USA	Annually/ ongoing		USAR SDA

Appendix One: Capability Targets and Succession Planning

The current USAR Structure in New Zealand focuses on two levels of response:

1. Three National USAR Taskforces consisting of structural collapse technicians, with operational support from canine search specialists, engineers, medics and other logistics.
2. A larger number of USAR Registered Response Teams spread throughout the country, with a focus on first response, surface search and support of USAR Taskforces.

Operationally it is preferable that two certified dogs will work together on a site with the location of human scent confirmed independently by both dogs. This is to provide a high degree of probability to incident controllers, therefore facilitating the effective use of rescue resources.

USAR Taskforces are set-up to work in 2 shifts of 12 hours each. Ideally each shift needs a minimum of 2 dogs.

Registered Response Teams are focused initially on reconnaissance, removal of “surface” victims and identification of likely survival points. Canine Search Specialists can add great value to this role. It is unrealistic to expect all RRT to have CSS as not all will initially be involved in the response phase, or be tasked with this detection role. A “pool” of certified Canine Search Specialists could meet this requirement.

Based on this background information New Zealand needs a minimum of:

3 Taskforces x 2 shifts x 2 dogs/shift	12
6 pairs of dogs for use alongside Response teams	12
TOTAL	24

In order to maintain this number of qualified dogs we need at least twice this number of dogs in training at all times.

Development targets and indicative succession planning to achieve the operational targets indicated on the previous page, corresponding to financial year ends are shown in the table below:

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
In Training					
Beginner	6	9	12	15	18
Intermediate	6	9	12	15	18
Total in Training	12	18	24	30	36
Annual Increase		6	6	6	6
Operational					
Basic Operational	6	6	9	12	12
Advanced Operational	3	6	6	9	12
Total Operational	9	12	15	21	24
Annual Increase		3	3	6	3
Grand Totals					
	21	30	39	51	60
Annual Increase		9	9	12	9

Notes:

The significant gap is getting sufficient “dogs in training” with the need to recruit new handlers to the USAR programme a priority if we are to achieve and maintain the capability targets for years to come.

The distribution of dogs must be a pyramid - there has to be more dogs at the earlier levels than we need at the later levels.

The numbers as “beginners” don't need to be higher as dogs don't remain long at this level.

Appendix Two: SDA Constitutional Objectives

The objectives of the USAR Search Dog Association defined in the constitution are:

- 1) Promote the effective use of USAR dogs to locate injured, trapped and missing persons
- 2) Recommend any changes considered necessary to USAR search dogs competency standards to the existing USAR Training and Standards Working Group of the national USAR Steering Committee
- 3) Support USAR training for handlers and their dogs
- 4) Facilitate testing of handlers and their dogs as search teams
- 5) Represent and promote the interests of handlers and other members of the association
- 6) Seek and apply funding to further the Association's purposes
- 7) Support and promote USAR work in all forms
- 8) Communicate information on the direction and status of USAR in New Zealand on behalf of the national USAR Steering Committee formed by the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management, NZ Fire Service and other organisations to the search dog sector
- 9) Encourage and maintain interaction with other national and international search dogs groups with common interests and develop common activities
- 10) Do any act or thing incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above objectives