

THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY

FIFTH PACIFIC REGIONAL ENERGY AND TRANSPORT MINISTERS' MEETING

Port Vila, Vanuatu, 8 – 12 May 2023

TI 08: NINTH PACIFIC REGIONAL SEARCH AND RESCUE (PACSAR) WORKSHOP 2023

[Submitted by Pacific Community]

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to inform Transport Ministers about the convening and outcomes of the Ninth (9th) Pacific Regional Search and Rescue (PacSAR) Workshop 2023, that was held in Cairns, Australia from 28 February to 03 March 2023, so that they are aware of current developments related to maritime search and rescue (SAR) in the Pacific Islands region.

Background

2. Maritime SAR is an aspect of safety of shipping and a humanitarian obligation of coastal states mandated under the *Safety of Lives at Sea Convention 1974* (Chapter 5, Regulation 7) and the *International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue, 1979* (SAR Convention) which has about One Hundred and Five (105) Contracting Parties including twelve (12) PacSAR members, namely, Australia, Cook Islands, France, Kiribati, New Zealand, Niue, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Palau, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu and United States of America (USA).
3. The international SAR system is coordinated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) under whose auspices the oceans of the world are divided into Search and Rescue Regions (SRR). These regions are allocated to certain countries which are tasked to exercise primary responsibility for SAR coordination and responses. Internationally, IMO cooperates with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to coordinate aeronautical and maritime SAR services, as part of one global SAR system. ICAO and IMO jointly publish a SAR Manual to foster cooperation between themselves, between neighbouring States, and between aeronautical and maritime authorities. The goal of the Manual is to assist State authorities to economically establish effective SAR services and to promote harmonization of aeronautical and maritime SAR services.
4. In the Pacific region, SRRs are allocated to the USA, PNG, Nauru, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Australia, New Caledonia, New Zealand and French Polynesia. **Annex 1** shows the SRRs in the Pacific Ocean. Some SRRs include the maritime exclusive economic zones and adjacent high seas of several countries.
5. Countries or territories which do not have SRRs are still obliged to set up their own SAR services especially over their inshore, nearshore and 12-mile territorial seas. The basic obligation of coastal state concerning SAR is, on receiving information of a maritime incident where any person is in distress within its geographic area of maritime SAR responsibility, a coastal state should take urgent measures to provide assistance, regardless of the nationality or status of such a person or the circumstances in which the person is found.

Current status

6. Because most Pacific communities depend on maritime transport, the inevitable result is that navigators are likely to find themselves in distress at sea. For this reason, all Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) have set up their own SAR response systems that are coordinated either by the Police, navy, maritime administrations, etc. The nature and scope of these systems widely differ; some are well established and resourced Rescue Coordination Centres (RCC), whereas most are basic Rescue Coordination Sub-Centres (RCSC) or a SAR point of contact (SPOC), where people call a designated person/office to report distress incidents.

7. In practice, each agency or authority in a PICT is responsible for maritime SAR in their country or territory, including territorial seas, and will try to respond to each incident using available local assets such as boats or planes. If the local SAR agency considers that it is necessary to request for further assistance, they may seek such help from the RCC of the country whose SRR they are located or from a nearby RCC with suitable air and sea assets such as USA, Fiji, Australia, New Caledonia, New Zealand and French Polynesia.

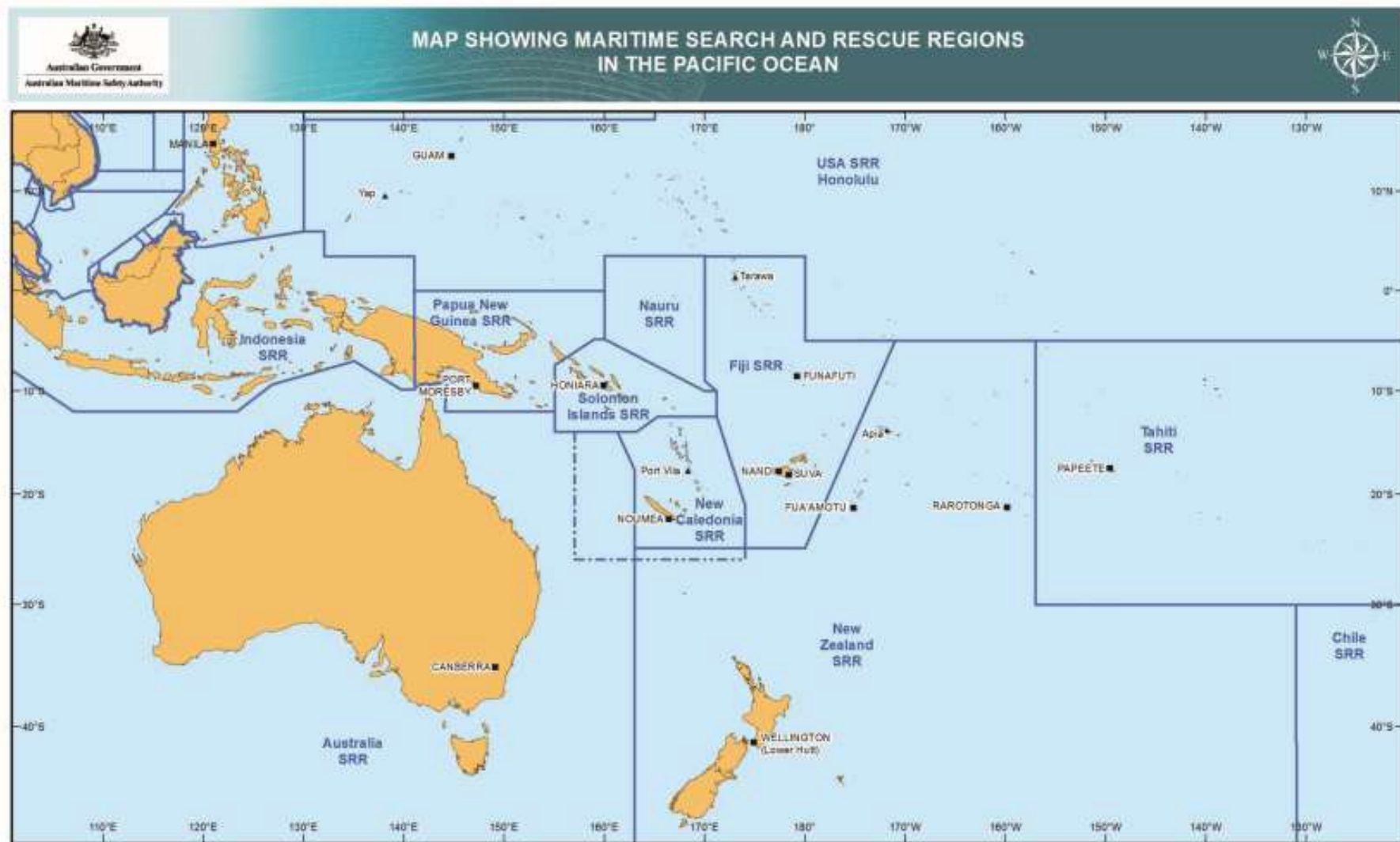
Issues

8. Coordination of SAR systems and responses in the Pacific region is carried out under the guidance of a PacSAR Steering Committee (PacSAR SC) comprised of the principal SAR authorities, namely, Australia, Fiji, France, (for New Caledonia and French Polynesia), New Zealand and USA. Since 2006, members of the PacSAR SC take turns to host biennial meetings attended by SPOCs from PICTs, with generous funding support from the IMO, Pacific Community (SPC) and the principals. The purpose of these meetings is to share ideas to strengthen coordination and cooperation for SAR in the region. The SPC provides secretariat services to PacSAR and technical support to PICTs.
9. Through the PacSAR meeting arrangement, members adopted a *Maritime Search and Rescue Technical Arrangement for cooperation among Pacific Island Countries and Territories that support international lifesaving in the Pacific Ocean 2013* (SAR TafC). This non-legally binding document establishes a framework for consultation and cooperation amongst PICTs to carry out activities related to SAR within the oceanic environment. This has been signed by nine (9) countries and territories and the rest of PICTs are encouraged to follow suit.
10. The PacSAR SC also adopted a *Strategic Plan 2017–2021* which articulates guided action on four pillars, namely, responsible SAR governance, efficient SAR coordination, effective SAR operational response and SAR prevention. The plan is being updated.
11. Since the last PacSAR regional workshop in 2019, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a lapse of further meetings until March 2023 when the Government of Australia (through the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) as the current Chair of PACSAR SC, hosted the 9th PacSAR workshop in Cairns. The workshop was attended by representatives from Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, PNG, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, USA, and Vanuatu. The theme of the workshop was “**Reconnecting Search and Rescue across the Pacific.**”
12. The workshop outcome touched on the *PACSAR Strategic Plan 2022 – 2026*, international conventions and governance, National Self-Assessments, Search and Rescue Technical Arrangement for Cooperation, SAR legislation and regulation, SAR prevention, 10th Pacific Regional SAR Workshop 2025, reporting, and secretariat support. The full workshop [Outcome](#) can be accessed on this link.

Recommendations

13. Transport Ministers are invited to:
 - a. **commend** the Government of Australia, PacSAR SC, IMO and SPC for convening and PICTs for attending the 9th PacSAR workshop to share information and best practices on SAR; and
 - b. **encourage** PICTs, PacSAR SC and development partners to implement the Outcomes of the 9th PacSAR workshop 2023.

Date: 17 April 2023

Annex 1**Important Note:**

SRR boundaries plotted from coordinates contained in Appendix 2 of the IMO document "Maritime Search and Rescue Technical Arrangement for Cooperation Among Pacific Island Countries and Territories that Support International Lifesaving in the Pacific Ocean".

Map prepared 30 May 2014
AMSA Reference: USO49586

Map Datum: WGS84

Coordinate
Definition: GEOGRAPHIC

Map not to be used for navigation
purposes.

Legend

- Shared SRR - Australia and New Caledonia
- Shared SRR - New Zealand and New Caledonia
- SRR Boundary