

Concerned Citizens for SAR in NL (CC-SAR)

Comments on

Draft Discussion Paper on the Organization and Operation of Ground Search and Rescue (GSAR) in the Province of NL

(August 2, 2021)

The draft discussion paper on the organization and operation of GSAR in the province of NL is hereby acknowledged in all its content and likewise in scope. General comments about what is essentially phase one are as follows:

1. The scope of the paper reflects, very nicely, where the province fits within the National SAR Program (NSP).
2. It is very detailed and comprehensive.
3. It reflects a very elaborate and overall complex SAR system that would be understood by those working within the system but would not expect to be easily understood by the public in general.
4. In terms of inquiry organization and approach, the paper represents a prerequisite and perhaps an imperative for those participating.
5. For participants in the inquiry, the paper presents the fundamentals necessary to have a common approach when speaking to operatives within the GSAR system.
6. There appears to be a few missing items that, if included, may promote an understanding and discussion needed for subsequent stages of the inquiry.

The criteria surrounding the discussion paper creates some constraints and perhaps confusion as to what can be said about its contents. I reference language contained in #12 of the invitation to comment on the paper as follows;

“This discussion paper will not address the short comings or the strengths of the ground search and rescue and individuals or entities providing comments upon the draft discussion paper should limit their comments to the content of the paper.....Any comment which address recommendations or **other** matters not relevant to the discussion paper may **not** be considered in the preparation of the final draft of the discussion paper.”

The issue/criteria regarding shortcomings may preclude the mention of a few items that may be considered pertinent to improving the understanding of roles and responsibilities of those executing SAR operations. Some of the more relevant ones are as follows:

1. The meaning and role of designated **primary resources**.
2. The meaning and role of **secondary resources**.
3. The definition of **resources of opportunity** and its role within a SAR incident.
4. Standby posture for primary and secondary resources.
5. National Search and Rescue Manual of Operations -NSM).
6. SAR Operations Report (DND/JRCC requirement in NSM of Operations)
7. The International Aeronautical and Maritime SAR Manuel (IAMSAR)

Given the constraints on listing shortcomings there may not be much utility in describing the relevance of these SAR operatives within the execution of SAR operations. If there were merit considered by the Inquiry Commission on some discussion on these items however, CC-SAR would be more than willing to engage.

The designation and role of primary resources, for example, would certainly impact standards of SAR coverage and response capability. It is likewise linked to standby posture or SAR readiness and often makes the difference between life and death situations. In order to have a meaningful discussion in subsequent Inquiry stages, it would seem to be very important to have participants adequately informed of this operative. Similarly, the availability of secondary

resources and its standby posture may have a direct bearing on whether primary resources are adequate for certain geographical or regional areas.

Resources of opportunity - often refer to search vehicles or human resources located in a search area that could be utilized for the purpose of saving lives or locating people. The discussion paper specifically mention volunteers and their important role in the SAR system. There is a distinction however between those people and resources of opportunity. Most volunteers are often very well trained and acquire SAR skills through experience while resources of opportunity would not necessarily fit that profile.

The mention of the National SAR Manuel (NSM) is relevant because it contains the basic terms of reference for local operating procedures (LOPs) relating rescue coordination at the JRCCs. It also delineates criteria for a "SAR Operations Report", which serves to examine strengths and weaknesses of high profile SAR incidents. It would seem to be an important operative for any inquiry to fully understand whether any SAR incident was put under the microscope in the interest of improving outcomes of future SAR events.

The International Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue Manuel (IAMSAR) is a manual for organization and operations of maritime and aviation SAR. It is jointly published by two UN agencies known as the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO). While this is a significant publication impacting Maritime SAR, it nevertheless can serve as an important TOR for any searches at sea or on land, especially as it relates to the air components of a search. It contains excellent operating and search protocols and procedures. It references international responsibilities and how it interacts with national and regional search requirements in adjacent area.

Notwithstanding some of the items identified in the above comments, the discussion paper does an overall good job in achieving the objectives of the first stage of the subject inquiry. Despite the constraints on comments relating to shortcomings or strengths vis a vis the discussion paper, I am compelled to

underscore the level of hope the CC-SAR group has regarding “standing” within the full scope of the inquiry, which obviously includes other stages beyond the discussion paper. Discussion around whether the elaborate SAR system described in the discussion paper works beyond its theoretical premises obviously cuts to the heart of the rationale for the inquiry in the first place. The discussion paper leans heavily on SAR system operatives such as coordination and collective efforts. It also profiles in its opening remarks the importance of interoperability. It all begs the question(s) on whether it worked or works beyond a “virtual desktop exercise” in real high profile incidents where local lives depend on “getting it right.”