

Sailing Vessel Nina

12 August 2014

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Maritime New Zealand

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Re: RCC-NZ Lessons to learn from the Nina Search: seeking improvement, not praise or blame.

Dear Nigel and John,

The purpose of this letter is to obtain your feedback regarding the families' 21st July 2014 response to the Independent Review of the Nina search. It is to everyone's advantage to be on the same page. We wish to improve search and rescue efforts in the future. While we know the RCC-NZ made its best efforts to find the Nina and her crew, it is clear decisional errors were made. By presenting the facts, we plan to educate the public including dedicated mariners and their associates.

Among the families of the crew of the Nina, we have been discussing our concerns that the Review will be the 'last word' on the Nina saga. What if no meaningful lessons will be learnt, or actions taken, which will improve the quality, and increase the chances of success, of any future SAR missions? We have not, at this time of writing, received any reply to our response and encourage you to respond. This lack of any response, or acknowledgement, leads us to believe our comments are still not being taken seriously and not generating any action on RCC-NZ's part, or yours, on your part.

The Review contains specific recommendations by the reviewer that were buried in the text and obscured to the point that only the compliments of the efforts of RCC-NZ are apparent. This is a mistake as the process of SAR at sea only improves with critical thinking.

Frankly, we find it astonishing a professional and dedicated organisation such as RCC-NZ would not recognize decisions made at the time in these two aspects were not correct. By identifying errors, the RCC-NZ can build on that knowledge to provide a more secure decision process in the future.

As an example, in the families' Response we repeat the comment that "we remain particularly concerned about the delay in launching the search, and the initial selection of search coordinates." We do not think that ignoring these points is doing RCC-NZ any favours – nor does it inspire confidence for future seamen who might find themselves in a similar position.

More specifically on the first point, whilst a written letter of concern was not given to RCC-NZ until 14th June, the initial oral report was made to Australian authorities on June 9th. This critical time reflects the best chance for the survival of sailors in a life raft. Further, the holding back of the physical search due to recasting of the arrival date to June 25th - from the ETA given by the Nina of June 8th - was an extreme delay.

On the second point, one of the recommendations of the report is to amend SOP's to give a "better procedure for determining and ranking LKP, particularly where there are multiple possibilities", BUT this recommendation falls short of emphasising the hugely significant impact this had on the Search Area Determinations, causing RCC-NZ to generate SAD's based on the LEAST likely coordinates during the first seven critical search days.

Furthermore, the data on the Iridium and Spot positions is reproduced in detail in the Review, but the report fails to state that the Iridium coordinates appear random and quite obviously misleading, whilst the SPOT readings appear logical and follow a predictable and forecastable path for the Nina. These observations indisputably support the position texted by Evi Nemeth using her Iridium satellite telephone. Instead, the Review casts doubts on the SPOT readings by quoting a comment, which actually meant something completely different, to suggest that the SPOT was inaccurate. Because of conversations with the RCC-NZ, the families KNOW that RCC-NZ was aware SPOT devices are actually very accurate – but prone to failure: the SPOT coordinates are accurate if and when received. Therefore IT WAS KNOWN that any received SPOT coordinates could be relied upon to be accurate. The lack of a received SPOT message could have been caused by a number of factors.

We therefore reiterate the need for a much stronger recommendation than the Review states. Further comments can be made about the delay in starting the search, and similar detailed comments on the uncertainty on the limitations of radar detection, the involvement of readily available international assets (particularly when international sailors are involved), and the use of (and expertise in) the increasingly sophisticated satellite imagery to reduce costs and improve efficacy of searches.

Furthermore, even the various recommendations made by the Review are not ranked or prioritised, no time-scales are suggested for their completion, and no review mechanism is suggested to ensure that they are enacted. It would seem the assertion to the public that the RCC-NZ “went well beyond the requirements of the SAR Convention” would serve to divert any public interest in ensuring the recommendations are acted upon and meaningful improvements made.

We also believe the negative aspersions in the review regarding the involvement of the wholly volunteer organisation Texas EquuSearch (TES) did nothing to foster the involvement of non-governmental organizations in the search and rescue process. These aspersions were a disservice to both TES and the families. More, the New Zealand tax payer and future mariners will be the losers from a highly valuable resource that might be available.

In summary, the families want to restate their desire to improve the process of SAR by learning from the Nina search. We request a response from RCC-NZ showing that these serious issues are understood and are being acted upon. We want to know a review system is in place to ensure and report completion of remedial actions.

Separately, the families are starting to generate an article to be submitted to Boating magazines and organisations, where issues of boating safety precautions and SAR methods and capabilities are addressed. Our sole objective is to improve awareness of safety measures and of SAR capabilities and limitations.

Finally, we would like to thank Maritime NZ for publicly refuting the unfounded press comments that the Review found that the Nina was unseaworthy.

We await your response.



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