



Australian National
Search and Rescue Council



NATIONAL SEARCH AND RESCUE COUNCIL

STRATEGIC PLAN

2026 - 2031

CHAIR'S FOREWORD

Australia's search and rescue system operates across one of the world's largest and most diverse regions.

In this environment, strong national coordination, collaboration and continual improvement are essential to delivering effective search and rescue outcomes.

The National Search and Rescue (NATSAR) Council brings together Australia's search and rescue authorities to strengthen cooperation, share expertise and guide the future direction of our national search and rescue system. This Strategic Plan provides a clear five-year direction to guide that work.

Over the coming years, we will focus on strengthening national alignment, supporting our people and enhancing capability, while preparing for emerging challenges and opportunities.

From evolving technology and climate-related risks to changing workforce and volunteer engagement, the search and rescue environment continues to evolve, requiring a continued coordinated and forward-looking approach.

This Strategic Plan reflects our shared commitment to a nationally unified search and rescue system and the pursuit of better outcomes for the communities we serve.



ALEX BARRELL

Chair, National Search and Rescue Council

Executive Director, Response & Capability
Division

Australian Maritime Safety Authority



STRATEGIC PLAN

This Strategic Plan sets the five-year direction for the National Search and Rescue (NATSAR) Council.

It defines the Council's vision, mission and role in strengthening Australia's national search and rescue system.

The Strategic Plan sets clear objectives to guide the Council's efforts to drive national efficiencies and support ongoing improvement while preparing for future challenges and opportunities.



THE NATSAR COUNCIL

The NATSAR Council is the cooperative body for national search and rescue arrangements in Australia.

Formalised by an Inter-Governmental Agreement, the NATSAR Council comprises state, territory and federal police, the Australian Defence Force and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority.

Volunteer organisations and New Zealand government participate as observers.

MEMBER AGENCIES



Australian Government

Australian Maritime
Safety Authority



Australian
Defence Force



New South Wales
Police Force



Queensland
Police Service



Victoria Police



Western Australia
Police Force



South Australia
Police



Tasmania
Police



Northern Territory
Police Force

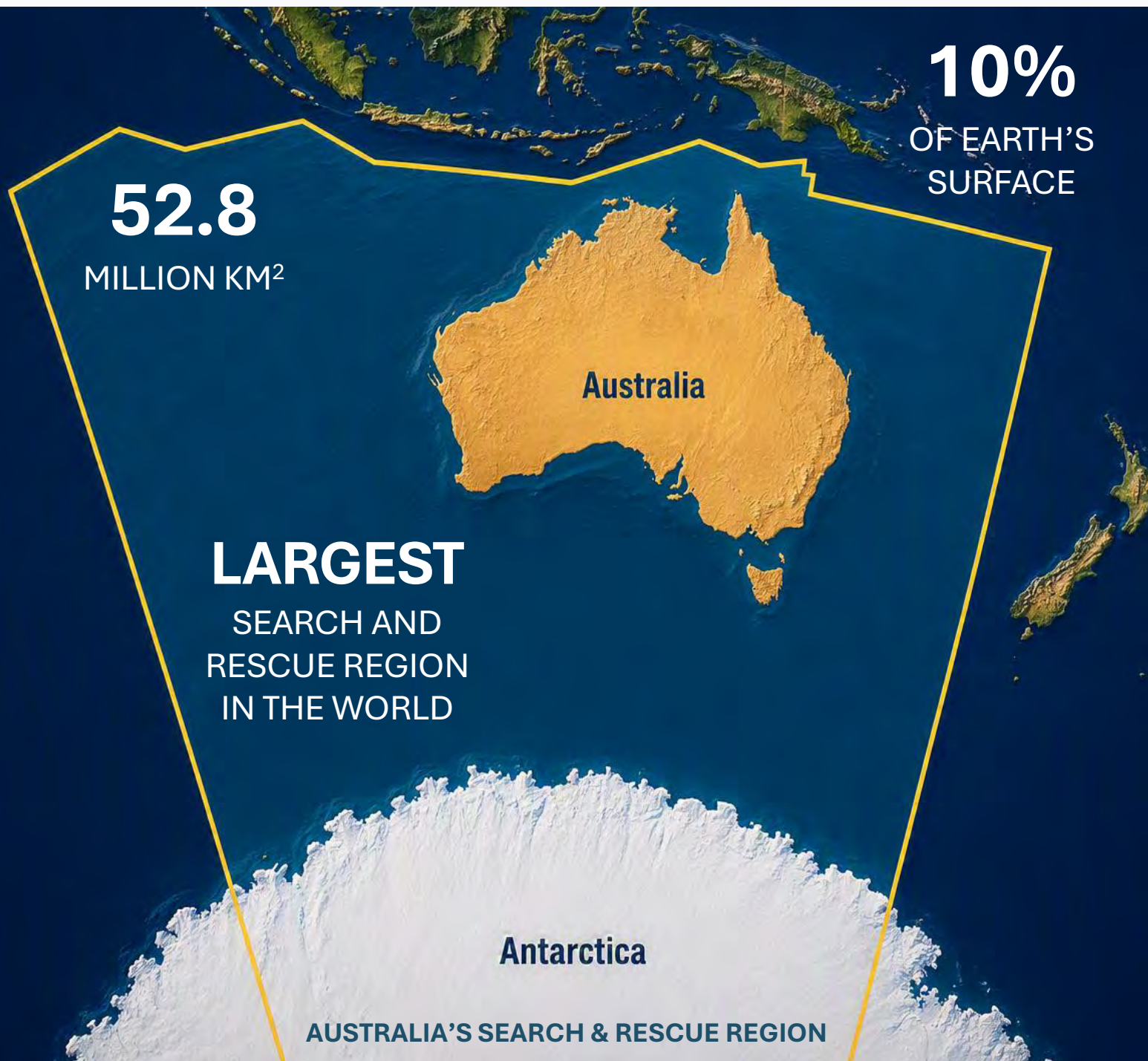


Australian
Federal Police

AUSTRALIA'S SEARCH & RESCUE REGION IS VAST, DIVERSE AND SUBJECT TO RAPIDLY CHANGING CONDITIONS

Strong national coordination is essential to timely and effective search and rescue response.

The NATSAR Council leads cooperative efforts and strategic planning to ensure effective search and rescue outcomes in a complex and dynamic environment.



This map provides a general representation of Australia's search and rescue region to support the information presented in this Strategic Plan. It is not intended to be geographically precise.

VISION

A nationally unified search and rescue system, saving lives together.



MISSION

A world-class national search and rescue system by facilitating cooperation and collaboration across Australia's vast and diverse environments.



WHY IT MATTERS

Our national search and rescue system protects and supports the Australian way of life – from travel, work and recreation to adventure, exploration and enjoying our great outdoors.





STRATEGIC PILLARS

Together, these three strategic pillars provide the framework for strengthening Australia's national search and rescue system over the next five years.

1

**NATIONAL
ALIGNMENT &
ADVOCACY**

*One system,
one voice,
one purpose*



2

**SUPPORTING
PEOPLE &
ENHANCING
CAPABILITY**

*People are our
strength*



3

**TECHNOLOGY,
CLIMATE
& DATA**

*Prepared for
the missions
of tomorrow*



1

NATIONAL ALIGNMENT & ADVOCACY

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

One system, one voice, one purpose

1.1

Review the Inter-Governmental Agreement

1.2

Embed a well-defined authorising environment and strategic thinking forum

1.3

Leverage the unified Council voice to influence decisions across government and industry to strengthen national search and rescue advocacy

1.4

Harmonise search and rescue procedures and best-practice approaches across jurisdictions and agencies

1.5

Progress national search and rescue awareness to promote and demonstrate its critical role in saving lives

1.6

Elevate connections with emergency management related bodies

2

SUPPORTING PEOPLE & ENHANCING CAPABILITY

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

People are our strength

2.1

Joint training and exercises, including ANZPAA programs and the NATSAR Managers Course, to build capability and reinforce safety standards

2.2

Cross-sector and inter-jurisdictional collaboration for resource sharing and innovation

2.3

Support mental health, wellbeing and resilience programs contributing to safe, sustainable search and rescue activities

2.4

Engage across government and industry to support and inform search and rescue prevention strategies/campaigns

2.5

Support recruitment and leadership programs to improve staff retention and increase diversity among search and rescue practitioners

2.6

Increase collaboration with volunteer organisations to strengthen capability

3

TECHNOLOGY, CLIMATE & DATA

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Prepared for the missions of tomorrow

3.1

Progress towards national search and rescue data to support national decision-making

3.2

Collaborate across government to leverage available technology, data and systems

3.3

Review, identify gaps and enhance current search and rescue technologies while exploring emerging technology including AI

3.4

Explore pooled funding mechanisms for high-cost search and rescue capabilities

3.5

Evaluate and integrate evolving climate risks into planning



THE ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN OF SEARCH AND RESCUE IN AUSTRALIA IDENTIFIES **TWO MEGA TRENDS** EXPECTED TO IMPACT SAR AUTHORITIES OVER THE NEXT DECADE

CLIMATE CHANGE

Driving more extreme weather and environmental shifts, creating unpredictable risks and new pressures for public safety and SAR operations.



FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Driving rapid technological change through connectivity, AI, automation, and advanced imaging and analytics, creating opportunities to transform SAR operations.



OTHER KEY DRIVERS EXPECTED TO IMPACT SAR AUTHORITIES OVER THE NEXT DECADE



INCREASE IN SAR FREQUENCY & COMPLEXITY

Demand and complexity for SAR services is expected to increase, partly due to population growth along with growing international tourism and adventure activities driving more people into unfamiliar, high-risk environments.



COST OF SAR AND RESOURCE PRESSURES

Rising SAR costs from complex responses, workforce and technology expenses, combined with tight budgets, create significant resource pressures and competing priorities.



EMERGING OPERATIONAL RISKS

Increase in shipping of flammable chemicals and lithium batteries along with an uptake in new alternative fuel types creates new safety risks in responding to marine SAR incidents.



VOLUNTEER WORKFORCE

Volunteer participation has sharply declined in recent years, with cost-of-living pressures further reducing volunteer availability.



Artwork on aircraft:
Baydham by Badu Island (Torres
Strait) artist Michael Nona, 2022



IMPLEMENTATION & REVIEW FRAMEWORK

Implementation



WORK PLAN

- Activities, responsibilities and milestones
- Actions are ongoing or time-bound
- Reviewed and updated annually

Monitoring & Reporting



PROGRESS

- Overseen by the Strategic Working Group
- Updates provided annually
- Informs continuous improvement

Review Cycle



REVIEW

- Mid-term review in 2029-30
- Strategic Plan refreshed before expiry
- Drivers re-scanned as required



Australian National Search and Rescue Council

E: NationalSARCouncil@amsa.gov.au

W: www.amsa.gov.au/national-search-and-rescue-council

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