

Background

Recognizing the importance of regionalizing and localizing international guidance in the field of urban search and rescue to align with the needs and capacities within the Pacific region, five countries from the Pacific joined the INSARAG network by 2023 and participated in the INSARAG Asia-Pacific regional meeting 2023 in New Zealand. During the meeting, Fiji, Cook Islands, Tonga, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu proposed the creation of an INSARAG Pacific Sub Regional Group to contextualize the INSARAG Guidelines to the Pacific Island Countries (PICs).

The Pacific participants agreed that, given the Pacific context, the establishment of medium or heavy USAR capacity would not be a good use of resources for the foreseeable future; however, INSARAG localization initiatives designed to strengthen national USAR coordination capacity, such as the INSARAG Recognized National Accreditation Processes (IRNAP), and the First Responders Training Program were discussed as being relevant avenues to increase capacity.

This paper discusses the feasibility and advantages of establishing such a group for the Pacific, learning from similar initiatives in the AEME region with the DACHL group (a German speaking group) and the recently formed ME Arabic speaking group. A draft Terms of Reference, activities, and roadmap will be developed based on consultations with the Pacific network members and Asia-Pacific regional group. A first round of consultation will be made among the Pacific member countries and the outcome consultations will be further discussed at the Asia-Pacific Regional Group informal meeting, in the margins of the HNPW 2024, before the proposal is tabled for endorsement at INSARAG Steering Group Meeting in May 2024.

Aim of the Pacific Sub-Regional Group

Based on the discussion at the INSARAG Asia-Pacific regional meeting 2023, the following is the purpose of establishing INSARAG Pacific Sub Regional Group;

- Strengthen the INSARAG network and promote regional ownership in the Pacific.
- Promote INSARAG Guidelines among the PICs as international guidance on USAR coordination and capacity development.
- Leverage the cultural proximity to strengthen peer to peer collaboration in the region.
- Localize and tailor INSARAG methodology by adapting it to national disaster response frameworks to ensure interoperability of national and international response coordination.

- Strengthen capacity development of search and Rescue, particularly by conducting INSARAG first responders training courses and coordination training.
- Support developing national disaster management framework to meet INSARAG Recognized National Accreditation Processes (IRNAP).
- Strengthen the coordination and effectiveness of information sharing (including early warning) and regional response when disasters strike.

Lessons from AEME DACHL and ME Arabic Group

The DACHL Group.

The DACHL Grouping is a disaster relief working group consist of USAR teams from four countries with German speaking populations: Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Luxemburg. It promotes capacity development and operational cooperation according to the INSARAG guidelines. The working language of the group is German, but all the trainings are conducted in English in order to exchange experiences and maintain quality by inviting trainers from outside of the group. DACHL has a chairmanship system with 2-year rotation. While the chair will be taken by the countries, their meetings are hosted by participating teams twice per year, not necessarily in the host countries. Although their governance is separate from INSARAG, the group contributes to the INSARAG network by providing technical inputs and guidance, such as 'beyond the rubble' concept.

The advantage of this group is in having active communication and strong commitment by the participating teams, that lead to further strengthening their capacity and enable them to deliver INSARAG coordination and other technical training, in the specific context of their countries.

The Arabic Group.

Led by Qatar during the 2023 Chairmanship the group met online and during the ISG. Their discussions mainly focus on training at regional level. Such regional training can be tailored to the regional learning priorities in a cost-effective way. The ToRs of this group are attached as reference.

The group engages in Arabic, to facilitate engagements and regional support as well as ownership.

Points for discussions

1. Governance, leadership, and structure of the Pacific Sub Regional Group within or outside of the governance of AP regional group (ToR of the Group, who will lead, how to select the chair, etc.)

The first point of discussion should be the governance of the Pacific Sub Regional Group, whether it is to be a subregional group under the INSARAG governance or independent like DACHL. If it is under the umbrella of the INSARAG AP regional group, it is important to note that large scale events such as EREs and technical training courses still need to be organized at the Asia-Pacific regional level, as there are 11 INSARAG classified teams from nine countries in the region in total. The scope and management of the Pacific Sub Regional Group must be agreed on first.

2. Activities and calendar development

The Pacific Sub Regional Group is expected to have a separate calendar for the region based on the needs of the PICs. Under the governance system discussed above, a calendar of activities should be developed. Implementation of those activities can be done by the Pacific members or by calling for support from AP regional group when extra resources are required.

3. Development of a roadmap for PICs in relation to INSARAG (IEC, IRNAP, or First Responders Training? Joint training?)

The ToRs and activities should contribute to what the member countries aim to achieve. The roadmap could be developed for two years initially, for example, and used as a milestone or basis for developing events in the Pacific.

4. To be mindful of budget and costs for travel of participants, the group should explore existing relevant Pacific forums that this group can meet back-to-back with.

With several initiatives already in place in the Pacific, it would be more cost effective and manageable to add INSARAG discussions at existing events rather than organizing more meetings only focused on INSARAG. This would also be a good opportunity to discuss INSARAG as part of wider disaster management or capacity development frameworks or planning.

5. Support arrangements including mentorship by INSARAG classified teams (Australia and New Zealand)

To maximize the regional resource and maintain the INSARAG minimum acceptable standards, it would be essential to have the support of INSARAG classified teams from New Zealand and Australia. While this wouldn't exclude the provision of assistance from other regions, the primary resource should come from the Pacific so that subregional initiatives are driven and maintained by strong ownership of member countries.

6. Synergy with other emergency management/response activities such as UNDAC, JEU and other OCHA led initiatives.

USAR coordination and capacity development are part of the overall disaster management and coordination framework. The Pacific group leverages on other ongoing initiatives such as NERT. One of the examples is the Fiji National Simex 2023, where the USAR first responders' course and UCC workshop took place back-to-back with the main event. Where possible and relevant, those topics can be brought into discussion by the Pacific group.

Consultation Process

This paper will be discussed with the Pacific network members initially to ensure consensus for the creation of the subregional group, considering the discussion points above. The summary of discussions, proposed ToRs and program of activities would then be shared and further discussed with the AP regional group at the AP informal meeting during the HNPW 2024, before submitting a final proposal for endorsement by the INSARAG Steering Group on 7 May 2024.