

**Security Bureau Circular No. 2/2009**

**CONTINGENCY PLAN**

**FOR**

**MARITIME AND AERONAUTICAL**

**SEARCH AND RESCUE**

**“SAR”**

**Emergency Support Unit  
Security Bureau  
Government Secretariat  
July 2009**

{SF(B) in SBCR 20/1486/74}

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Saving human life is the primary responsibility of all participants in search and rescue operations. This Plan lays down rules for general guidance, but it cannot cover every eventuality. The flow chart at Annex A shows the procedures to be followed when a distress call is received in Hong Kong. Cooperation, and the application of common sense to the contents of this Plan, should ensure the efficient and effective conduct of operations. Nothing in this Plan prejudices the statutory obligations of all Search and Rescue agencies to save life under legislation, international agreements or service instructions.

## **II. THE SEARCH DIRECTOR**

2. The Hong Kong Search Director is responsible for coordinating search and rescue (SAR) operations within Hong Kong’s maritime or aeronautical Search and Rescue Region (SRR) as shown in Annex B.

3. The Director of Marine is the designated Search Director for Hong Kong’s maritime SRR.

4. The Director-General of Civil Aviation is the designated Search Director for Hong Kong’s aeronautical SRR.

## **III. SEARCH AND RESCUE ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

5. A SAR operation is initiated by the Search Director, generally as a result of receiving a distress signal, either directly from a distressed vessel or aircraft, or via a third party. It is probable that the distress signal will be passed via other agencies which have an operational role in SAR. It is important that all agencies shall execute their task(s) according to instructions as laid down in this Contingency Plan or as assigned by the Search Director before setting out on a SAR mission, unless there are exceptional circumstances which justify immediate initiation of a SAR operation. Even in these exceptional circumstances, the Search Director must be informed of any action taken as soon as possible. The effective planning and coordination of a SAR operation can only be achieved if all parties involved in the operation work in a cooperative manner under the direction of the Search Director.

6. The Director-General of Civil Aviation will investigate all Cospas-Sarsat 121.5 MHz alerts in his aeronautical SRR. If the alert, after investigation, is not related to aircraft incident, he will pass the alert to the Director of Marine, who will further pursue it as a maritime incident.

### **Responsibilities of the Search Director**

7. The Search Director has overall responsibility for :
- (a) ensuring that an effective SAR organisation is maintained in Hong Kong;
  - (b) ensuring that SAR staff are trained to carry out their duties efficiently;
  - (c) activating the Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) in order to initiate and oversee the coordination of SAR operations;
  - (d) ensuring the efficient manning and operation of the RCC during SAR operations;
  - (e) keeping appropriate departments briefed on developments relating to the operation;
  - (f) dealing with the media, including handling press enquiries, issuing press statements, conducting media briefings etc., having liaised with the Information Services Department; and
  - (g) determining when a search should be called off.

### **Director of Marine - Responsibilities as Search Director**

8. Responsibility for the coordination of SAR operations for ships and their crew in distress is delegated by the Director of Marine to the Senior Marine Officer/SAR at the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC). The MRCC Controller is the designated SAR Mission Coordinator (SMC) for each incident which occurs in his area of responsibility. The MRCC controller is also responsible for coordinating with the Port Health doctor for providing medical advice requested by ships.

9. The MRCC is responsible for all SAR operations for ships in distress, both within Hong Kong waters, and the Hong Kong Maritime SRR.

10. Within his operational area, the SMC will ensure that the following actions are taken :

- (a) information concerning the incident is collated and evaluated;
- (b) departments which may be involved in SAR operations are alerted, and any vessels or aircraft that may be required for the operation are made available and directed accordingly;

- (c) the extent of the search is determined, and the vessels and aircraft best suited for the situation are properly deployed;
- (d) when necessary, the assistance of other RCCs is requested promptly; and
- (e) if situations so warrant, pass maritime alerts to the responsible RCC directly and expeditiously.

11. Although merchant vessels on high seas are not designated SAR facilities, they are obliged by various international maritime conventions to render assistance to persons in distress at sea. MRCC should, if required by prevailing circumstances, locate vessels in the vicinity of the SAR incident and task them to proceed to the scene as soon as possible.

### **Director-General of Civil Aviation – Responsibilities as Search Director**

12. The authority of the Director-General of Civil Aviation as Search Director for coordinating SAR operations for aircraft in distress is delegated to the Duty Air Traffic Services Watch Manager, or a Senior Air Traffic Control Officer from the Air Traffic Management Division qualified in search and rescue coordination, who will assume the role of SMC and ensure that the following actions are taken :

- (a) the Aeronautical RCC is activated;
- (b) information concerning the incident is collated and evaluated;
- (c) other departments/agencies which may be involved in SAR operations are alerted, and any vessels or aircraft that may be required are tasked;
- (d) the coordination of the SAR operation is initiated and subsequently supervised;
- (e) the extent of the SAR operation is determined;
- (f) where necessary, assistance is sought promptly from the RCCs of other Flight Information Regions; and
- (g) if situations so warrant, pass aeronautical alerts to the responsible RCC directly and expeditiously.

### **Command of SAR Incidents in Hong Kong Water**

13. The Director of Marine is the designated Search Director for all

maritime SAR incidents within Hong Kong waters, although the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) (Marine Region) may take initial action at the scene of such incidents. The Director of Marine may, at any time, assume direction of any SAR operation that is being conducted by the HKPF (Marine Region), and having done so, he will continue to direct the operation until its conclusion.

14. The HKPF (Marine Region) will provide launches for SAR operations within Hong Kong waters, and will, subject to the approval of the MRCC, take initial command of SAR operations in Hong Kong waters, when neither detailed planning, nor search direction, are required. HKPF (Marine Region) will also take initial control of SAR operations in Hong Kong waters in accordance with the criteria laid down in Annex C.

#### **IV. RESPONSIBILITIES OF SAR AGENCIES AND DEPARTMENTS**

15. The Search Director will be assisted by departments and agencies, whose functions and responsibilities are outlined below. Communication links should be maintained between these departments and agencies, and with the Search Director.

16. All communications between the departments/agencies and the Search Director should be channelled through the relevant Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) while the Emergency Support Unit (ESU) of the Security Bureau should be the focal point of contact at the Bureau level.

#### **Government Flying Service**

17. Government Flying Service (GFS) will provide fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters, as requested by the Search Director, to take part in SAR operations.

#### **Marine Department**

18. The Marine Department is responsible for providing and turning-out available search and rescue resources, including launches, hydrographic survey vessel, when requested by the Search Director.

#### **Civil Aviation Department**

19. The Civil Aviation Department (CAD) will assist the MRCC in alerting, controlling and liaising with any aircraft which may be deployed in the ensuing SAR operations, and liaise with the respective air authority to obtain permission for aircraft to conduct SAR in the incident area or special landing outside Hong Kong under the direction of the MRCC.

### **Hong Kong Police Force (Marine Region)**

20. The Marine Region of the HKPF is responsible for providing the Search Director with launches for SAR operations within Hong Kong waters. Police launches may also be deployed for operations outside Hong Kong waters, at the request of the Search Director, and with the permission of the Commissioner of Police. The Regional Commander, Marine, HKPF, will decide on deploying appropriate classes of Police launches for the operation taking into consideration of their off-shore SAR capabilities and, when he considers it necessary, or when it has been requested by the SMC, provide an officer of Inspectorate rank to carry out liaison duties in the RCC, during the course of a prolonged SAR operation which includes the deployment of Marine Police launches.

### **Fire Services Department**

21. The Marine and Offshore Islands Division of the Fire Services Department (FSD) will, at the request of the Search Director, provide fireboats for SAR operations within Hong Kong waters. The Search Director will issue directions for the fireboat(s) as required in a SAR operation.

22. The FSD will provide, within Hong Kong waters, divers to take part in SAR operations. The FSD compression chamber will also be made available for the treatment of victims of decompression illness.

23. At the request of the Search Director, and with the authorisation of the Director of Fire Services, FSD will provide divers, and where appropriate launches/fireboats, for operations outside of Hong Kong waters.

24. The FSD commander of a SAR incident would judge by available information and consider circumstantial factors to call for the support of other departments when necessary through MRCC.

25. The FSD will provide ambulance treatment to and conveyance of those victims from land reception points to hospitals.

### **Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau**

26. Under extraordinary circumstances where urgent procurement or hire of special rescue resources which may incur substantial cost are considered essential for the emergency SAR operations, the Search Director may seek advice from FSTB on procurement and resource matters when necessary.

### **Hospital Authority**

27. The Hospital Authority is responsible for providing, in Hong Kong, medical services for survivors who have been rescued during SAR operations.

### **Hong Kong Observatory**

28. The Hong Kong Observatory is responsible for providing the RCC with details of past weather conditions, and with forecasts of weather conditions in the search area.

### **Home Affairs Department**

29. The Director of Home Affairs and his staff will be responsible for coordinating relief measures and ensuring that those affected are cared for properly. The relevant HAD District Officer will establish a Help Desk at a suitable location in conjunction with the Police, Fire Services Department, Social Welfare Department and other relevant government departments and organizations for collecting information, answering enquiries and providing emergency relief. The District Officer will arrange, in conjunction with the Housing Department, for short-term accommodation for survivors.

### **Immigration Department**

30. The Immigration Department is responsible for providing urgent attention and clearance for survivors rescued by HK rescue units and subsequently landed in HK.

### **Information Services Department**

31. The Information Services Department is responsible for coordinating the dissemination of information related to SAR operations to the news media; as well as public relations efforts in publicizing Government’s actions and efficiency in the operations.

### **Department of Health**

32. Port Health doctors will give medical advice to ships through MRCC and decide if the patient needs to be evacuated from the vessel for treatment in hospital.

### **Emergency Monitoring and Support Centre**

33. In the event of a major, prolonged or very complex SAR operation, the Emergency Monitoring and Support Centre (EMSC) may be activated. EMSC will provide logistical and policy support for the front-line SAR

organizations which are taking part in the operation.

### **Appointment of On-scene Coordinator (OSC)**

34. The activities of search and rescue units and other facilities engaged in search and rescue operations shall be coordinated on-scene to ensure the most effective results. Responsible RCC shall appoint the most capable person as OSC as early as practicable and assign tasks to him as appropriate.

### **Provision and Funding of Specialist Salvage and Rescue Resources**

35. If the OSC of a SAR operation decides that specialist resources, such as heavy lift equipment, are essential for the efficient conduct of the operation, he will contact the Search Director. The OSC will request the provision of the required resources, having due consideration of the lead time and practicability, and will furnish the Search Director with the following information :

- (a) full particulars of the incident;
- (b) on-scene weather conditions; and
- (c) the specialised resource(s) required.

36. When specialist resources are purchased from the private sector, payment for the services provided will be arranged by the Search Director's department.

### **Reception of Survivors**

37. In the case of a major SAR incident, the Secretary for Security, the Permanent Secretary for Security, or a Deputy Secretary for Security may order EMSC to be activated. EMSC will coordinate agencies to provide the following reception facilities :

- (a) short-term accommodation for the survivors (Home Affairs Department and/or Housing Department);
- (b) immigration clearance (Immigration Department); and
- (c) provision of basic necessities (Social Welfare Department).

38. Where practicable, reception of survivors should be done in consultation with the carrier, operator or agent of the vessel or aircraft that has received the SAR services. Once EMSC is activated, the RCC and the HKPF (PHQCCC) will be informed immediately.

39. During incidents in which EMSC is not activated, the RCC should coordinate reception facilities in collaboration with the departments named in paragraph 37.

### **Victim Identification**

40. In the event of a large number of casualties, or a significant number of casualty enquiries, the Commissioner of Police will activate the Casualty Enquiry Unit (CEU), or a Casualty Enquiry Centre (CEC), and where necessary the Disaster Victim Identification Unit (DVIU). If activated the CEU, based at PHQCCC, or the CEC based at an appropriate Regional or District centre, will be responsible for collating details of all casualties, while DVIU will be responsible for identification of the deceased.

41. The HKPF will be responsible for informing the next-of-kin of all deceased and injured persons who are permanent residents of Hong Kong, and will liaise with the relevant Consulate(s) with regard to any dead or injured foreign nationals. The collection of ante-mortem data will be requested via the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol).

## **V. SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS IN DISPUTED WATERS**

42. Hong Kong's Maritime and Aeronautical SRR includes waters to which more than one country have laid claims. These disputed waters are in the region of the Dongsha Islands (Pratas Island and the surrounding reefs), Xisha Islands (Paracel Islands) and Nansha Islands (Spratly Island and the nearby islands and reefs) (as shown at Annex D). Under the agreement reached in the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), Hong Kong has an obligation to conduct and coordinate SAR operations in these waters. Nevertheless, there is a danger that the countries that have claimed sovereignty over these waters may misinterpret, or even oppose, attempts to enter them. When it is necessary for any Search and Rescue Units (SRUs) to enter the areas set out in Annex D, as part of a SAR operation, approval from the Secretary for Security must be sought beforehand. The Secretary for Security will assess the situation and may decide to keep the relevant authorities informed. Paragraphs 43-45 below set out the procedures which should be followed strictly when a SAR operation takes place in, or close to, disputed waters.

### **Authorisation**

43. As soon as the Search Director is aware that there is a possibility that a vessel or an aircraft in disputed waters requires assistance, he should contact the Security Bureau Duty Officer (SBDO).

44. The Search Director should provide SB with the following details as soon as possible :

- (a) the location of the vessel or aircraft in distress;
- (b) the nationality and type of the vessel or aircraft in distress;
- (c) the sources of information concerning the distress, and the action required;
- (d) the nationality of the majority of the passengers;
- (e) the number and nature of vessels, aircraft and other agencies available for search and rescue in the area concerned;
- (f) an estimate of how long it may take for the first rescue vessels or aircraft to reach the scene;
- (g) any information about conditions at the scene, in particular with regard to the presence of military forces of states with claims to the disputed waters; and
- (h) the proposed course of action.

45. Given SAR operation within the disputed waters may involve defence and/or political considerations, additional reference shall be made to the operational instructions/guidelines issued by SB vide memo ref. (51) in SF(B) in SBCR 20/1486/74 (98) Pt.3 of 7 March 2006.

## **VI. SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS IN COASTAL WATERS**

46. Should an incident occur in the coastal waters of the neighbouring Provinces including Taiwan (other than the coastal waters of the Guangdong Province as covered by paragraph 47 of this Contingency Plan), the Philippines or Vietnam, the Search Director must seek the prior approval of the Secretary for Security before deploying any Hong Kong based aircraft or vessels. Only in exceptional circumstances will Hong Kong based aircraft or vessels be deployed in these areas. This will be considered only at the request of the authorities concerned. If the necessary clearance from the Secretary for Security is received, the Search Director may deploy such aircraft and vessels in these waters.

### **SAR Operations in Guangdong Province Coastal Waters**

47. Hong Kong MRCC has standing permission from Guangdong

Provincial Marine Emergency Search and Rescue Centre (Guangdong RCC) to deploy SRUs from Marine Police, Fire Services Department and GFS into the coastal waters of the Guangdong Province, in order to conduct SAR operations in aid of Hong Kong-Macao ferries. In the event of a need to deploy these SRUs into the coastal waters of the Guangdong Province, other than along the Hong Kong-Macao ferry route, MRCC will liaise with Guangdong RCC to obtain permission for such entry. MRCC will confirm with the control room of respective departments whether permission is granted and that Guangdong RCC has passed details of the deployment to the Mainland Boundary Security Forces.

## **VII. REPORTS ON SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS**

48. Following the formal declaration of the end of operations relating to a SAR incident which involved entry into, or operations over, disputed waters (as in Annex D), a full written report must be submitted by the Search Director to the Secretary for Security.

49. For SAR incidents not involving disputed waters, the Search Director may, if he considers it to be appropriate, write a report and submit it to the Secretary for Security. The report should either confirm the adequacy of existing SAR procedures, or describe any deficiencies in resources or procedures revealed by the operation. Proposed solutions for any deficiencies should be included whenever possible for consideration by SB.

Emergency Support Unit  
Security Bureau  
Government Secretariat  
July 2009

*{In addition to this Plan, each department has its own detailed operational instructions. Suggested amendments to, or enquiries about, this Plan should be addressed to the Emergency Support Unit of the Security Bureau.}*

**Annex A**



Flow chart.pdf

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**Annex B**



indicative map  
2006mar051.pdf

**Annex C**

**CRITERIA FOR CONTROL OF MARITIME SAR OPERATIONS  
WITHIN HONG KONG WATERS BY HKPF (MARINE REGION)**

The Regional Commander Marine, Hong Kong Police Force may take initial control of a SAR or an investigation into a SAR incident within Hong Kong waters under the following circumstances:

- (a) where HKPF launches have arrived at the scene of an incident, and it has been established that it is within the capabilities of their launches to execute the rescue, recovery or casualty evacuation, without search direction from the MRCC;
- (b) where no detailed search planning is needed, as the precise location of the incident has been confirmed beyond doubt, or is within well defined limits;
- (c) where HKPF are confident that the execution of a rescue operation is within their resources and capabilities; or
- (d) where an initial alert is of a purely advisory nature, for the time being, and where no SAR elements are yet involved.

2. If the above criteria cannot continue to be met, control will revert to the Director of Marine.

**Annex D**

**DISPUTED WATERS WITHIN  
THE HONG KONG SEARCH AND RESCUE REGION**

The areas within Hong Kong Search and Rescue Region in which there are waters or territory to which more than one state/authority have laid claims are :

- (a) the Dongsha Islands (Pratas Island and the surrounding reefs) of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and claimed by the Taiwan authorities;
- (b) the Xisha Islands (Paracel Islands) of the PRC and claimed by Vietnam and the Taiwan authorities; and
- (c) the Nansha Islands (Spratly Island and the nearby islands and reefs) of the PRC and claimed in whole or in part by Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and the Taiwan authorities.

2. The precise positions are fixed by the following geographical coordinates and marked up at Annex B for indicative purpose only :

- (a) Dongsha Islands – 20 42 N 116 43 E
- (b) Xisha Islands – 16 30 N 112 00 E
- (c) Nansha Islands– in area bounded by 10 N to 12 N and 113 E to 116 30 E

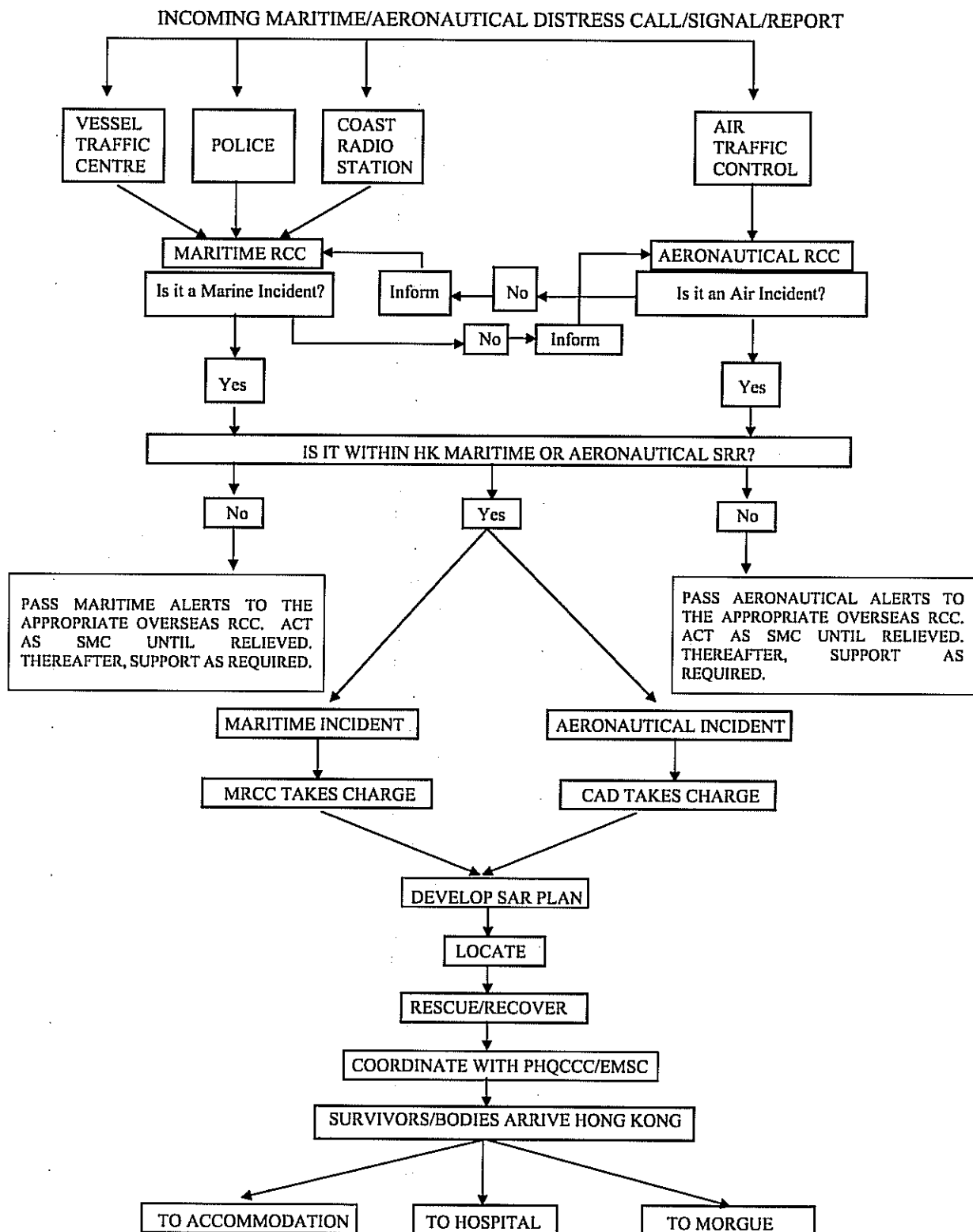
**Appendix A**

**Contingency Plan for Maritime and Aeronautical Search and Rescue**

**RECORD OF AMENDMENTS**

<b>AMENDMENT NUMBER</b>	<b>DATE OF AMENDMENT</b>	<b>DATE INSERTED</b>	<b>NAME/POST</b>	<b>SIGNATURE</b>
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**HONG KONG SAR PROCEDURES**



香港海空搜尋與援救區示意圖  
 INDICATIVE MAP FOR HONG KONG MARITIME AND AERONAUTICAL SEARCH AND RESCUE REGION

