

Hon Annette King

Minister of Transport



10 April 2008

Media Statement

Search and Rescue awards announced

The 2007 Search and Rescue Council Awards recognised exceptional bravery in the field of Search and Rescue, Transport Minister Annette King said when she presented the awards at Parliament this evening.

The ceremony also marked the 40th anniversary of the Wahine disaster, with Ms King acknowledging the efforts of emergency services and volunteers who helped in the Wahine rescue effort. Several Wahine rescuers attended the ceremony.

Ms King presented the 2007 New Zealand Search and Rescue Gold Award to lifeguards Lilah Foote, Rebekah Gee and Briar Macken for their rescue of a family of five after their boat capsized off Pukehina Beach in the Bay of Plenty. Four of the five family members were trapped under the boat for almost 20 minutes until the lifeguards were able to free them from the vessel.

“Had these lifeguards not responded in the way they did, there could have been four lives lost,” Ms King said. “This rescue was possible because of the skill, teamwork and leadership displayed by Lilah, Rebekah and Briar. Each lifeguard had to make quick decisions under pressure with no margin for error. Their dedication to their jobs and commitment to their training served them well.”

The New Zealand Search and Rescue Certificate of Achievement was presented to ‘Operation Brewer’ – the team involved in the rescue of caver Dr Michael Brewer after he injured himself in a fall three kilometres inside the Middle Earth Caving System in Takaka. The rescue, led by Police, involved 98 rescue personnel and lasted 70 hours, including 29 hours of stretcher carrying.

“The technical skill required in the rescue was extraordinary given Dr Brewer’s injuries, the constricted space of the cave system, and the distance he was from the surface when he fell,” Ms King said. “Such a large scale operation, in such an inaccessible place, made this rescue out of the ordinary.”

Ms King also presented the International Maritime Organisation ‘International Bravery Award’ to Wairarapa fisherman Brett Churcher for rescuing a man and his four-year old daughter after they were washed out of their boat near Lake Ferry on the Wairarapa coast.