



State Operations Group (SOG)

Frequently Asked Questions

This document forms the basis of an online module of the State Operations Group Induction Training Course.

1. What is the SOG?

The State Operations Group - or SOG for short - is Marine Rescue NSW's operational response to introduce and manage our on-water flood rescue capability under the State Government's Flood Rescue Enhancement Program (FREP). The FREP delivered significant investment into a multi-agency uplift in flood rescue capability.

Our investment has been into purpose built flood response capable vessels, support vehicles, and specific PPE. This allows MRNSW to deploy appropriately trained and equipped members into declared flood rescue areas of operation as may be requested by NSW SES.

Training requirements for all flood rescue operators are specified in the State Rescue Policy (SRP). SOG members who deploy in support of tactical flood operations will do so as On-Water Flood Rescue Operators under the SRP.

However, flood operations is bigger than just tactical response of an on-water rescue capability. SOG operators may also be engaged in evacuations of at-risk communities and resupply operations to isolated communities. Some roles such as field command and working in an Incident Management Centre (IMT) or Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) require additional training and a suitability assessment. Members considered for these roles will be specifically endorsed before being deployed in those capacities.

The SOG was also designed to be agile in its response capabilities, such as providing assistance in beach evacuations, providing up-stream transport to RFS as may be required, and even on-water support to marine pollution incidents. The SOG also provides a platform for us to develop other specialised areas in the future such as incident management roles, or accessing our highly trained and experienced radio operator base to upskill into a flood operations communications capability.

2. Why have a SOG?

As part of the recommendations from the Flood Enquiry into the 2020/21 NSW floods, NSW government funded an increase to flood rescue and operational response resources in NSW across multiple agencies. MRNSW received specific funding to develop its flood rescue operations capability in support of NSW SES surge capacity requirements. The provision of our support is likely to be during extreme level events, and where a protracted campaign response requires support to better manage organisational fatigue or other capacity requirements.

MRNSW already have highly skilled people and many vessel assets, and an investment into our baseline capability significantly enhances this with a specific flood response focus to deliver a highly effective flood response capability. Coupled with purpose built flood operations vessels and



specialised training, the SOG represents a turn-key capability to assist keeping the communities of NSW safe in times of flood crisis.

Volunteers saving lives on the water just got a wider remit!

3. What does the SOG do?

While ostensibly focussed on On-Water Flood Rescue and associated operational response, the SOG has a remit that will manage operational capability delivery that sits outside normal Marine Rescue operations of providing radio and rescue services to the boating communities of NSW.

4. How does it do it?

The SOG is managed and coordinated from MRNSW State Headquarters to ensure maintenance and consistency in its operational capability and readiness, and the timely and efficient deployment of its assets and members anywhere in the state as may be formally requested by partner agencies in support of their combat roles.

5. What resources does SOG have?

The SOG have 18 flood response capable vessels comprising 8 x twin engine, low-draft, bow loading punt design Multi-Purpose Vessels (MPV), 5 x medium IRBs and 3 x small IRBs. It also has a fleet of 10 dual cab 4wd utilities, 3 of which have heavy tow capacity.

SOG membership is aimed at 150 vessel rated members who will be formally trained to meet (and in many cases exceed) current State Rescue Policy requirements for On-Water Flood Rescue Operators. These Members – *you* – are the backbone of our flood rescue support capability.

6. Does SOG only do flood operations?

No. Whilst the SOG Charter allows for developing many other response capabilities, initial focus is on meeting current gaps in on-water flood rescue capabilities as identified in the Flood Enquiry report recommendations. The SOG's tactical activities include on-water flood rescue, assisted evacuations and resupply operations, as well as incident management and other support roles.

Future development may widen the SOG's capability to include support to other combat agencies in time of surge capacity requirement, such as supporting RFS in beach and up river evacuations during bushfires, or Maritime in providing support to a marine pollution incident.

7. What is the SOG structure? How does it operate?

The SOG is managed, and its operational responses coordinated from MRNSW State Headquarters. This allows for a timely, efficient and well-coordinated response to formal requests for operational support as may be received from other agencies such as NSW SES.



Maintaining the operational readiness of SOG assets is better facilitated in a centralised model, and supported by appointed local Unit Authorised Representatives (AR). ARs are an essential ingredient to the success of this model, ensuring local operational readiness of SOG assets in line with existing MRNSW SOPs as well as SOG-specific requirements. ARs are appointed by the Unit Commander in consultation with the SOG manager at State Headquarters.

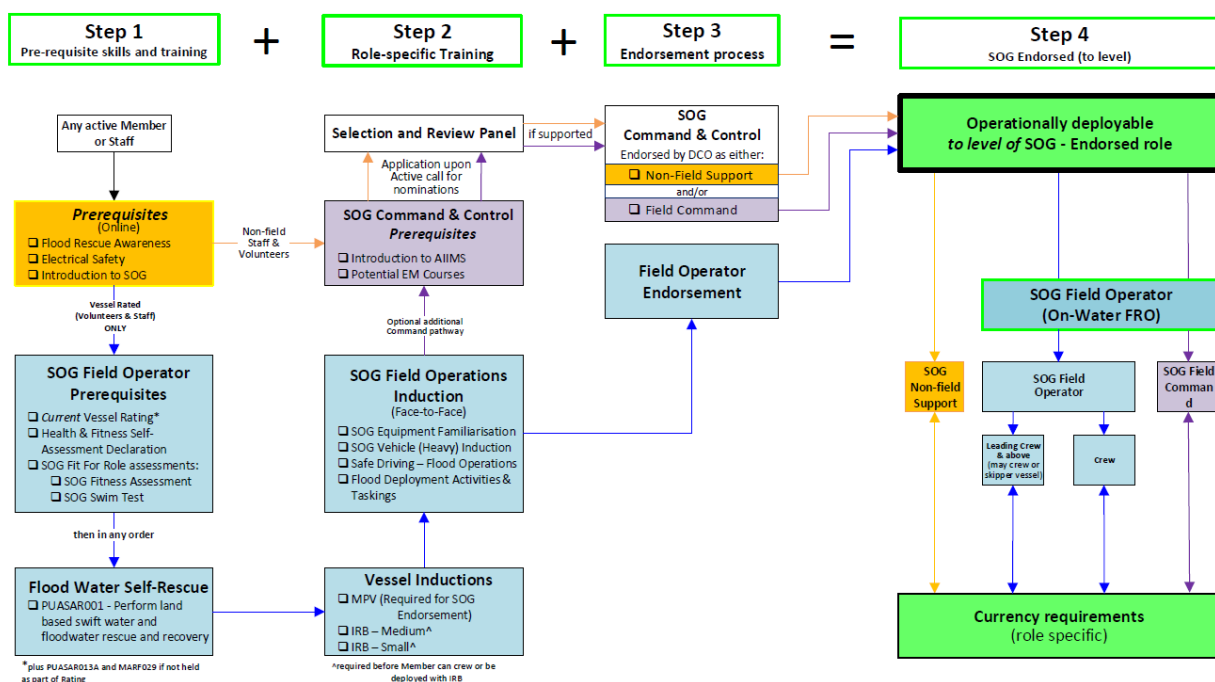
Timely notifications of potential operational activity and deployment requests are also able to be better managed centrally, ensuring Members are kept informed in a timely and accurate manner.

8. Why do SOG members have to undergo additional training?

SOG operatives will be operating in high risk flood environments. They may be on board or assisting in the operations of our MPVs and IRBs. The risks associated with these activities are specific and not always the same as those faced in a marine context. These risks are recognised by the State Rescue Board, who prescribe minimum requirements for all levels of flood rescue operators (FROs). Our Members will be operating as On-Water FROs and must meet the specified training requirements as set out in the State Rescue Policy for On-Water FROs. These requirements, coupled with learnings from previous MRNSW flood responses have informed the SOG Field Operations Induction training package. All FROs will be endorsed as SOG Field Operators.

9. What is the SOG training pathway and requirements?

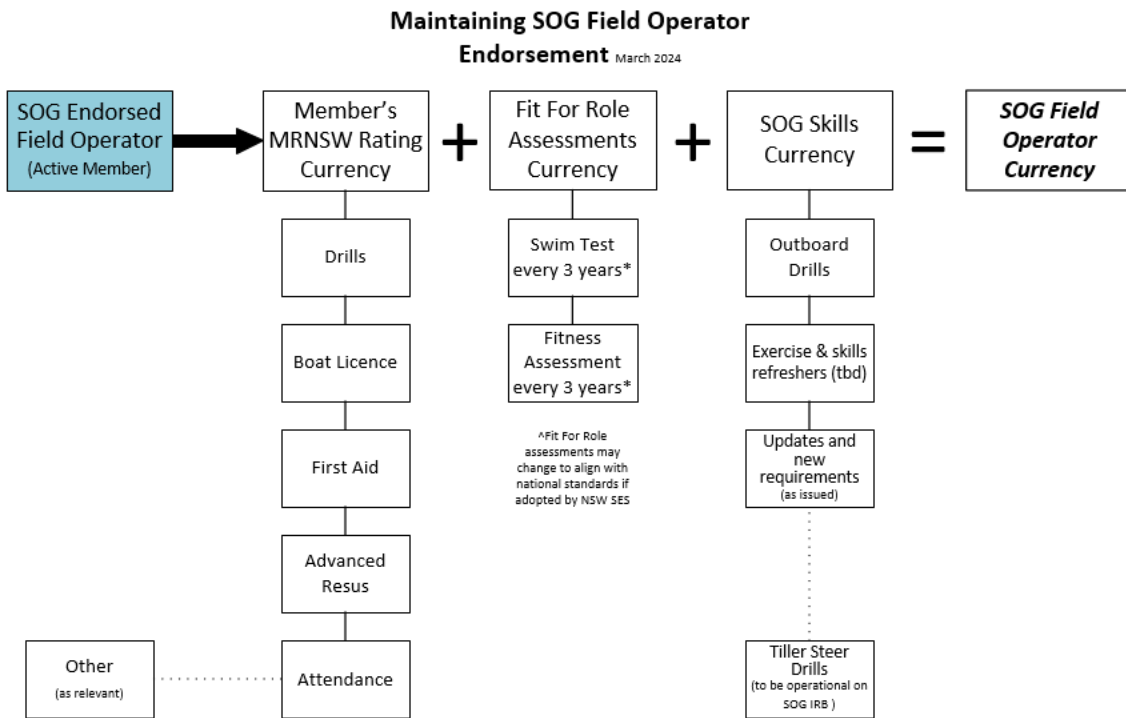
The training requirements for SOG Endorsements On-Water Flood Rescue Operator are set out in the flow chart below:





10. Are there currency requirements to maintain SOG endorsement?

Yes. SOG Field Operator Endorsed members will be required to maintain their currency across key areas. These include their MR vessel Rating and some SOG-specific skills as set out in the chart below.



11. Why specifically do SOG members have to pass a fitness assessment and a specific swim test?

Put simply, safety; yours, your colleagues, and your emergency service partners in the field. MRNSW meets the On-Water Flood Rescue Operator training requirements and delivery of operational capability as set out in the State Rescue Policy. To ensure any flood rescue task is undertaken safely, competently and without increasing the risks already faced, we screen our Members to ensure they are fit for role of flood rescue activities. We hold an unwavering commitment to getting you home to your family safely at the end of the day.

We also seek to minimise any unnecessary and avoidable risks to Members including exacerbating existing injuries in training activities, and the SOG Self-Assessment Declaration and Fit-for-Role assessments are specifically designed to help Members identify areas of concern prior to undertaking physical assessments, SOG training or deployments.

Why? This is why: <https://vimeo.com/872798258/9e845f7ed5?share=copy>



12. So can any member join SOG?

SOG has three operator levels; Non-Field, Field Operator and Field Command. With current focus on Field Operators, any vessel-rated Member who meets the safety based Fit-for-Role requirements may apply to join the SOG. Refer to the Training Pathways chart for the requirements.

13. What are the safety and physical demands on me in being part of the SOG?

Your safety, that of your SOG colleagues and personnel from other agencies is paramount. So too, the lives of the people we may assist in flood operations cannot be placed at additional risk by the rescuers or other operational response they receive from us.

With the SOG's focus initially developing our flood rescue capability, fit-for-role requirements are being strictly applied. Becoming a Flood Rescue Operator is not a walk-up entitlement; it is governed by the State Rescue Policy, and we must ensure our members deployed into flood rescue areas of operations meet those requirements. Whilst there is no age restriction to becoming an FRO, just like all other agencies, some physical requirements may be beyond the comfortable reach of some of our Members.

14. What are the expectations on me if I join?

While every MRNSW member is valuable to our mainstream boating operations service delivery – be it on vessels, radio rooms, fund raising and other valuable support roles, in applying to SOG you accept the requirements of physical ability and specific learnings - online and in face-to-face settings. You also accept to give fair and reasonable consideration to deployment requests as they may arise.

As a member of SOG, you have further invested into both MRNSW and your community. The rewards further helping communities in need, professional satisfaction and comradery built with other MRNSW members outside of your local Unit and with other agency members in training, exercising and operational deployments is worth it.

15. What can I expect when deployed?

You may be exposed to communities that are struggling coming to terms with the devastation wreaked on them by Mother Nature. This in its own right can be challenging, and you will always be briefed on being by the NSW SES Incident Management Team considerate of, and empathetic to, local sentiment and mood.

You must always remember that we are there to help and support a community in need. How we carry ourselves on deployment is on display to fellow members, other emergency service and agency members, and the general public. There may not always be high standard hotel-style accommodation, nor even the basics we all take for granted in day-to-day life. There may not be many modern conveniences nor, in some cases, even electricity. Deployed Members may be accommodated in large makeshift base camps, so always consider your suitability to deploy before agreeing to go.



Operational deployments go hand-in-hand with a well-known phrase used in emergency services; *hurry up and wait*. Deployments can often be long and tedious, with many false starts to actually doing what you think you're there to do. And when you do get around to actually doing something, it may not even be what you thought! This is the reality of emergency response operations, particularly in floods. It is always better that the capability to respond is on site ready to go and not needed, than be needed and not there!

16. Can I self-deploy to a flood rescue or other flood operation?

No! The State Emergency Management (SERM) Act and the State Rescue Policy set clear and non-negotiable governance and processes for all agencies involved flood operations including rescue. MRNSW Members are not permitted to respond to a flood rescue unless directly tasked by Police or NSW SES *and* approved by your ZDOM, or are already actively tasked by the Incident Controller within a designated Flood Rescue Area of Operations.

17. Remember where you may be going!

Vessels float, so therefore they can sink or capsize, or you could otherwise end up in the water, e.g. if the vessel hits a submerged object or you are pulled in whilst effecting a tethered flood rescue.

Field deployments into areas of flood operations, including working on vessels on water come with environmental risks of loss of equipment and personal possessions. Where possible secure your MR or other vehicle keys on land with a trusted person or location who can access the vehicle if needed. If your vehicle keys are lost overboard it is a massively inconvenient and expensive fix. Equally, it may be that you are required to retrieve at a different location to the launch site and require the vehicle to be brought to you.

Personal effects taken on board should be kept to a minimum – wallets, personal mobiles, etc., may of course be taken but are all subject to the same risks. Using a dry-bag helps keep items dry, grouped, and more likely retrievable in the event of an incident.

And finally, if you're still keen to pursue becoming a SOG Field Operator:

18. What do I do next if I would like to join the SOG?

To enrol in the SOG Field Operators Course, you should first refer to the SOG Field Operators Learner Guide (located on Otter under MR Training>SOG).

You must first complete the following before being eligible to undertake the externally provided land-based flood self-rescue course or the Practical Instruction and Familiarisation day:

- Introduction to SOG (online)
- Flood Rescue Awareness
- Electrical Safety
- SOG Fit-For-Role Fitness Assessment and Swim Test before (arranged through your Zone Training Manager)

Questions? If you any have training or operational questions regarding the SOG, contact your ZTM or ZDOM respectively, or Manager Capability.