

EXTERNAL CONSULTATION ON THE CESSATION OF MINISTRY OF DEFENCE SEARCH & RESCUE STATISTICS

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2015

INTRODUCTION

1. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) currently produces a National Statistics series (monthly, quarterly and annual) covering [Military Search and Rescue \(SAR\) Statistics](#). From April 2015 the current mix of military and civilian search and rescue capacity will transition to a single civilian contract, managed by the Department for Transport (DfT). As part of this transition the production of military SAR statistics by the MOD will cease. Data on civilian SAR Helicopter (SAR-H) activities will be managed by the DfT and/or the Maritime Coastguard Agency (MCA).
2. We are now seeking external users' views on the cessation of the MOD statistics and proposed changes to the 2015 Military SAR series. Further details on the proposed changes and process can be found in the consultation document.
3. It should be noted that MCA/DfT proposes to produce an experimental statistics series covering civilian SAR-H activity from April 2015 onwards. DfT/MCA will be running a public consultation alongside the experimental statistics release, anticipated to take place in summer 2015. Further details of the timing and content of this consultation will be published separately by DfT. For further information on the experimental statistics consultation please contact Gemma Brand at: Gemma.Brand@dft.gsi.gov.uk

BACKGROUND

4. The MOD and Maritime Coastguard Agency (MCA) currently provide a 24hr military and civil helicopter Search and Rescue (SAR) service for the UK and local regions. The Royal Air Force currently operates 6 of the UK's search and rescue bases, the Royal Navy operates 2 more and the MCA manage the remaining 4 civilian bases.
5. From April 2015 the current mix of military and civilian search and rescue capacity will begin transition to a single civilian contract, managed by MCA. Operations will commence progressively from 2015 and will be fully operational across the United Kingdom by summer 2017.

6. New operations will include the opening of two new SAR-H bases in April 2015; two in July 2015; one in October 2015; and two more in January 2016. The closure of existing military SAR bases will follow the same timetable. Three existing Coastguard helicopter bases will transition to the new contractual arrangements in 2017.
7. The main users of the Military Search and Rescue Statistics are Military SAR bases to inform planning, resources and training, and the RAF and Royal Navy to assist with invoicing. The statistics are also used to inform press briefings (generally at the end of the calendar year when the annual SAR statistics are released) and to answer very occasional PQs and FOI requests.
8. The National Statistics series includes limited data on the number of incidents responded to by the four civilian bases currently managed by MCA. This information is included for comparison purposes only. The data is considered management information and not subjected to the required standards to be deemed National Statistics.

REASONS FOR THE PROPOSED CHANGES

9. The broader approach being taken by the wider SAR transition project reflects an incremental arrangement, with some SAR functions transferring to DfT/MCA progressively over a period of 2 years. We propose that any arrangements for the ongoing production of SAR-H National Statistics should be consistent with this gradual transition approach.
10. The current statistical series customers are primarily military and therefore the current reports have been designed with their needs in mind. The future user requirements need to be established, which will be addressed through the experimental approach proposed by DfT/MCA. The operational changes to SAR provide an opportunity to fully review the user requirements and develop a new statistical series that better meets their needs.
- 11. The MOD consultation solely seeks to engage users on MOD plans to drawdown and eventually cease production of the current National Statistics series on Military Search and Rescue activities. Consultation on the gradual implementation and development of the new statistical series post transition will be managed separately by DfT/ MCA.**
12. The MOD consultation covers the presentational issues relevant to the drawdown of military SAR, which may include streamlining some of the existing reports. It will also cover aspects of the existing statistical series which are not covered by the new civilian operational arrangements, such

as the Overseas Military SAR helicopter service (e.g. Cyprus and Falkland Islands) and RAF Mountain Rescue Teams.

13. MOD is running the external consultation on military SAR statistics during February 2015, overlapping with the publication of the 2014 MOD SAR annual report.

PROPOSED CHANGES

14. Our proposed changes to the current MOD National Statistics series reflect plans outlined by the wider SAR transition project. The main changes are:
 - Continue with the current format for all reports up until March 2015 and Q1 2015. These will be published in early May 2015.
 - We propose ceasing production of the Quarterly SAR Statistical Bulletin after Q1 2015.
 - We propose continuing the publication of the monthly report in a slightly new format. This would include adding a small number of charts and tables to the monthly report that are currently only available in the quarterly report.
 - The changes to the monthly report would include:
 - adding additional text in the introduction to explain the changes to military SAR and details of when units are closing
 - removing most of the charts for individual units and the bar charts showing a 'snapshot' in time, as these will become less meaningful
 - adding dotted lines to the remaining line charts to show the breaks in series
 - adding further footnotes to tables to show which units have closed as the year goes on
 - adding a map to show how coverage of military SAR changes over the year (currently only the quarterly and annual reports include maps)
 - adding a pie chart for military vs. civilian callouts – this is currently in the quarterly report but not the monthly.
 - adding distance from base to the flying hours table – this is currently in the quarterly report but not the monthly.
 - At the end of the transition year, we propose publishing an Annual Report for 2015, which will be a much-reduced version of the current annual report. This will bring all the figures for the year together into one place. We propose removing most of the commentary and all the tables/charts for individual units, and just including the main summary tables and maps. This will also be the last time that the MOD publishes SAR callout statistics relating to Overseas Military SAR helicopter

service (e.g. Cyprus and Falkland Islands) and RAF Mountain Rescue Teams.

- The proposed changes to the Annual Report would make the report about 10 pages rather than 60. We would also publish an Excel dataset so that anyone who wanted the data for that final year of military SAR would be able to access it easily.

The publication of the Annual Report for 2015 will constitute the last National Statistics report on Search and Rescue produced by MOD.

IMPACT OF PROPOSED STATISTICAL CHANGES

15. The totals summarised in the monthly and annual report will gradually reduce as the military SAR units close throughout the year. This will mean that direct comparisons with previous years will not be possible.
16. The administrative data available under the new SAR contract will be different from the existing sources. It is likely that there will not be a direct comparison between variables/ measures under the current and new operations due to definitional differences. As part of the experimental process DfT will explore new measures applicable to the new coverage. Further details will be included in their consultation documentation. These differences mean it would not be appropriate to combine the statistics on military and civilian SAR into a single report during the transition year.
17. For these reasons we recommend that the existing National Statistics series on Military activity should be considered separately from the ongoing need for Search and Rescue helicopter statistics.

EXTERNAL CONSULTATION FEEDBACK ON PROPOSED CHANGES

18. Considering the reasons for the proposed changes, we now invite the feedback of our external data users, particularly on the following areas:
 - What impact will the proposed changes for 2015 outlined at paragraph 14 have on you?
 - What impact will the cessation of the military SAR statistics have on you?
 - The proposals will also include plans to cease production of those statistical series which are not covered by the new civilian operational arrangements, such as the Overseas Military SAR helicopter service (e.g. Cyprus and Falkland Islands) and RAF Mountain Rescue Teams. What, if any, impact will this have on you?

- As a current user of the military statistics would you find it useful to receive the civilian series once it has been developed? Would you like to be included on the contact list for the MCA/DfT consultation on this series?

TIMINGS

19. This consultation will run for four weeks, from Wednesday 18 February to Wednesday 18 March 2015. This consultation process is in line with National Statistics protocols.

20. If you have any comments on the proposed changes please send:

by email to: DefStrat-Econ-ESES-PI-SARcon@mod.uk

by post to:

Defence Economics (Price Indices)
Ministry of Defence,
Abbey Wood North
#6028, Oak 0 West
Bristol
BS34 8QW

21. When sending your comments please include contact details (your name and either email address, postal address or telephone number) so that we can follow up if clarification is needed.

NEXT STEPS

22. We will publish a summary of responses, with key findings and planned changes on Gov.uk.

23. Please note by responding to this consultation we shall assume that you have given your consent for your responses to be made public.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA PROTECTION

24. Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information may be subject to publication or release to other parties or to disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes¹.

¹ Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) and Environmental Information Regulations 2004