



Department
for Transport

Search and Rescue Helicopter Statistics: Quarters 2 & 3 2015

In this publication

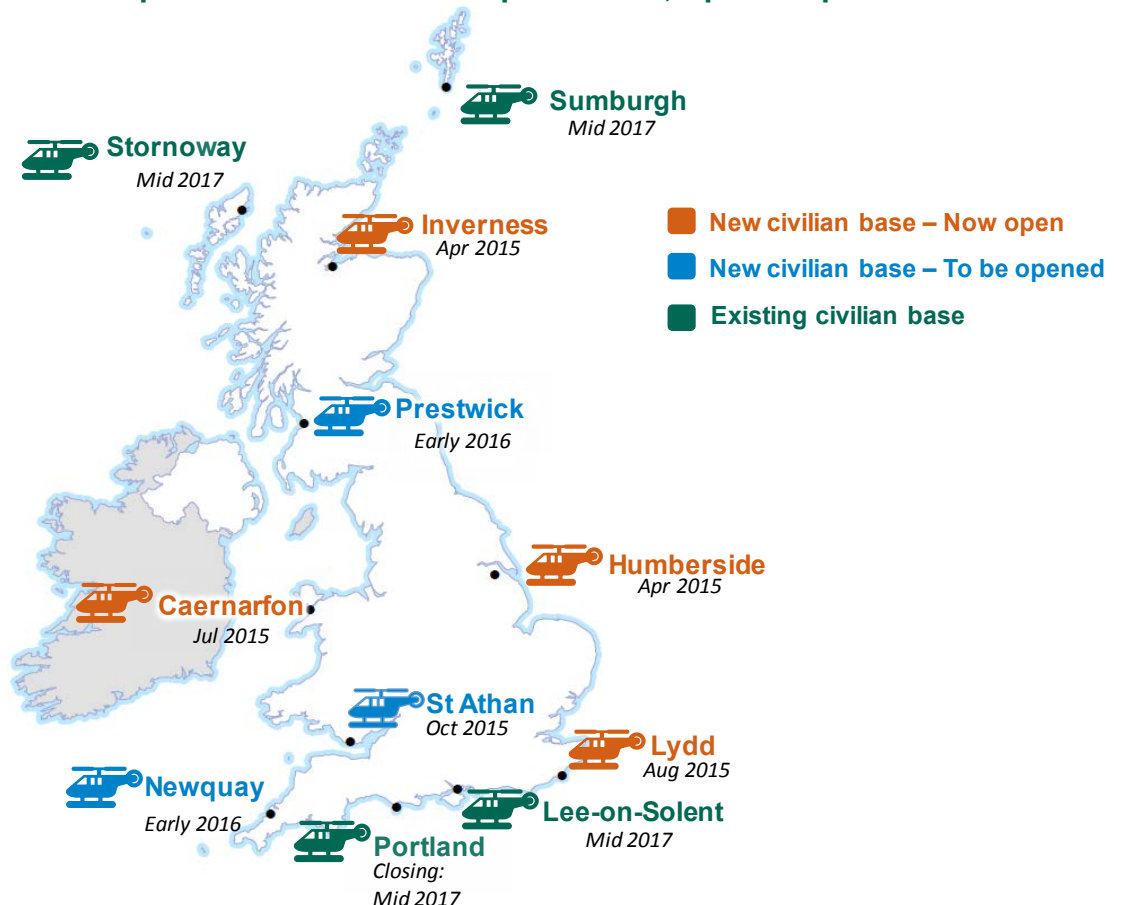
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The operational phase of a new contract to provide civilian search and rescue helicopter (SAR) services in the United Kingdom commenced in April 2015. These new arrangements, managed by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), will take over from the current mixture of military and Coastguard SAR services.

New operations include the opening of new SARH bases throughout 2015 (two in April and one in each of July, August and October), plus two more in January 2016.

Three of the four existing civilian Coastguard helicopter bases will transition to the new contractual arrangements in 2017.

Map 1: Civilian SAR Helicopter Bases, April - September 2015



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Introduction

This is the first release in a new experimental statistics series covering civilian search and rescue helicopter (SARH) operations in the United Kingdom.

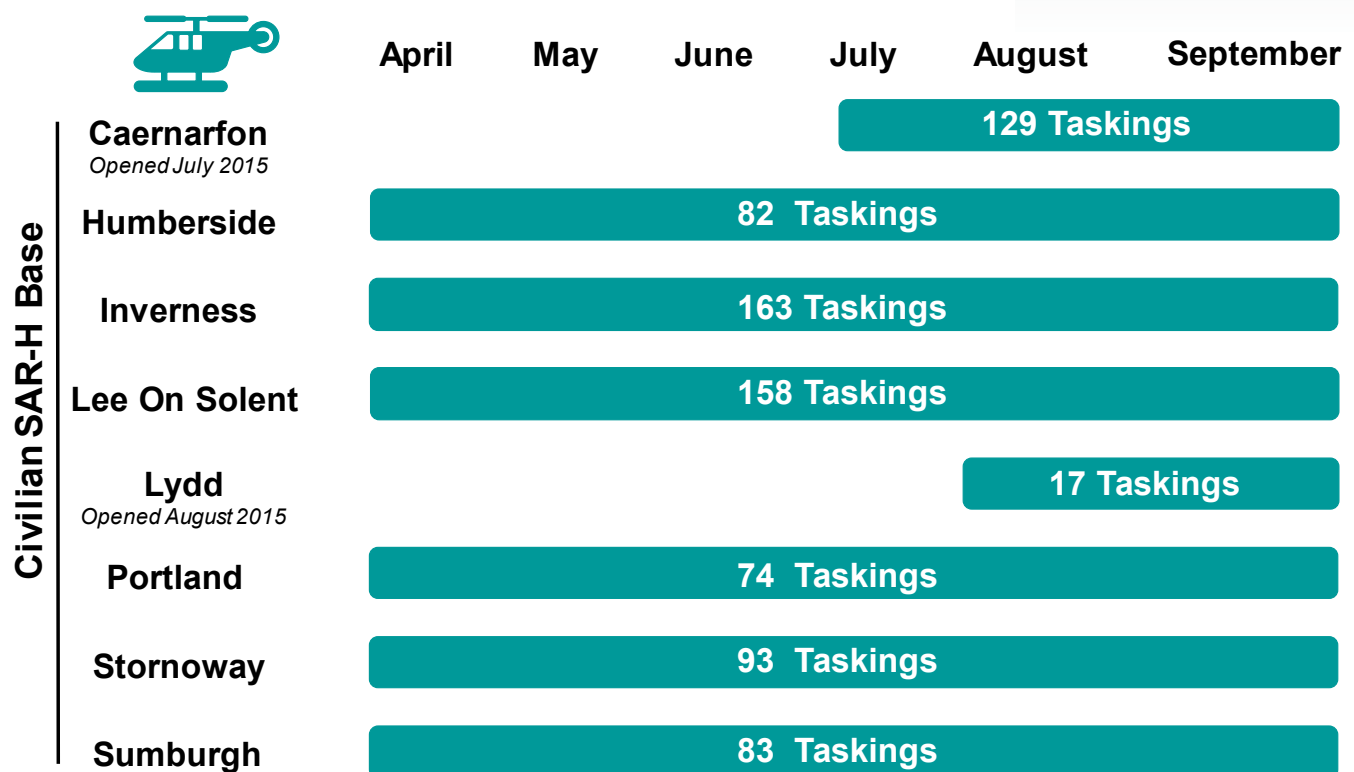
Totals in this series will change considerably during the transition period, as statistics for the new bases are added. This release includes data for those bases open at the end of September 2015.

This release will look in detail at the number of taskings for the civilian bases that are open. There are also sections that cover the tasking category, location and time spent in the air.

Overall Trends

In the six month period (April to September) there were 799 civilian SARH taskings.

Chart 1: Number of taskings by base, April - September 2015



Definition

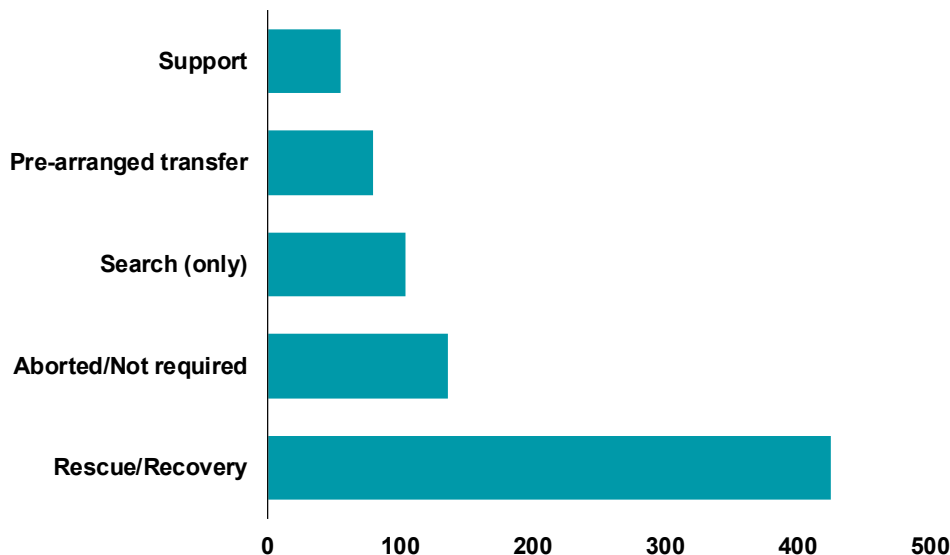
Tasking: An emergency that a SAR helicopter has responded to. Multiple callouts to the same incident are counted as one tasking.

The bases at Lee-on-Solent, Portland, Sumburgh and Stornoway were busier during Quarter 2 (April to June 2015), whereas Humberside and Inverness experienced an increase during Quarter 3 (July to September 2015). Caernarfon experienced the highest monthly average of 43 taskings since it opened on 1 July 2015.

Tasking Categories

Between April and September 2015, taskings involving rescue/ recovery accounted for just over half of taskings; however, the proportion varied by base.

Chart 2: Number of taskings by tasking category, April - September 2015



The vast majority (87 per cent) of rescue/ recovery taskings involved transfer to a medical facility to receive medical attention.

The second most common overall tasking type was aborted/ not required. The majority of this category (84 per cent) was made up of recalls and taskings where aircraft were tasked to respond but were later stood down due to the changing nature of the events. Only 7 per cent were for hoaxes or false alarms.

Location

Just under half of taskings were land-based between April and September 2015.

Taskings occurring in a maritime or land location predominantly resulted in rescue, while coastal locations experienced more varied tasking types such as search and aborted/ not required.

Definition

Tasking category:

A category which summarises the kind of tasking that was carried out.

Aborted/ Not required:

Includes taskings in which a SAR helicopter has been recalled, taskings terminated (e.g. due to bad weather), hoaxes and false alarms.

Pre-arranged transfer:

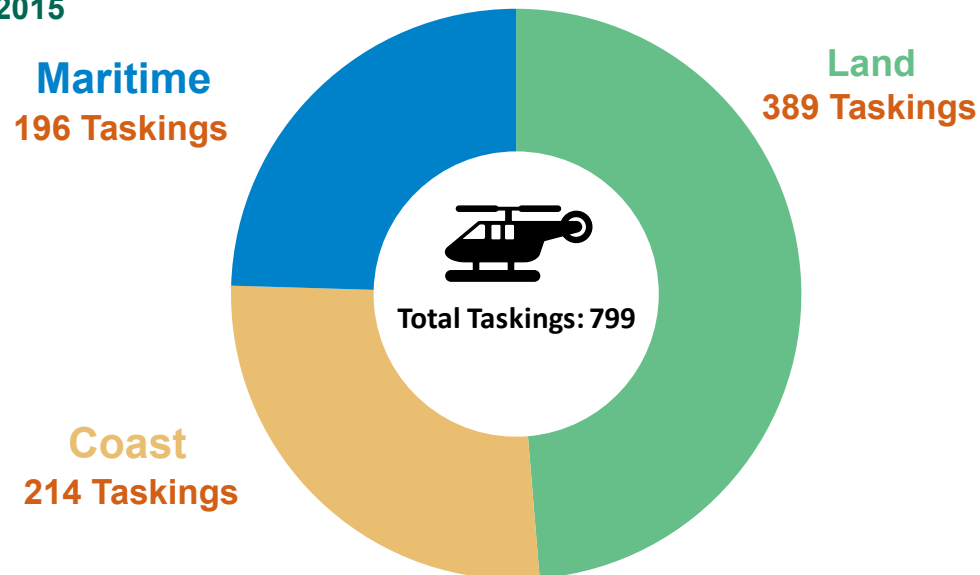
Transfer of patients or organs between medical establishments.

Rescue/ Recovery: The transfer of person(s) resulting in them being delivered to a safe environment (including medical facilities). Includes any rescue that involves an element of search, and the recovery of persons apparently dead.

Search (only): Search for craft, person(s) etc which does not result in moving a person.

Support: Includes on-scene assistance, pre-positioning of SAR units for a potential incident and movement of equipment/personnel.

Chart 3: Proportion of taskings, by location: April to September 2015



Definition

Coast: Taskings occurring between the high tide line and 3 nautical miles out to sea

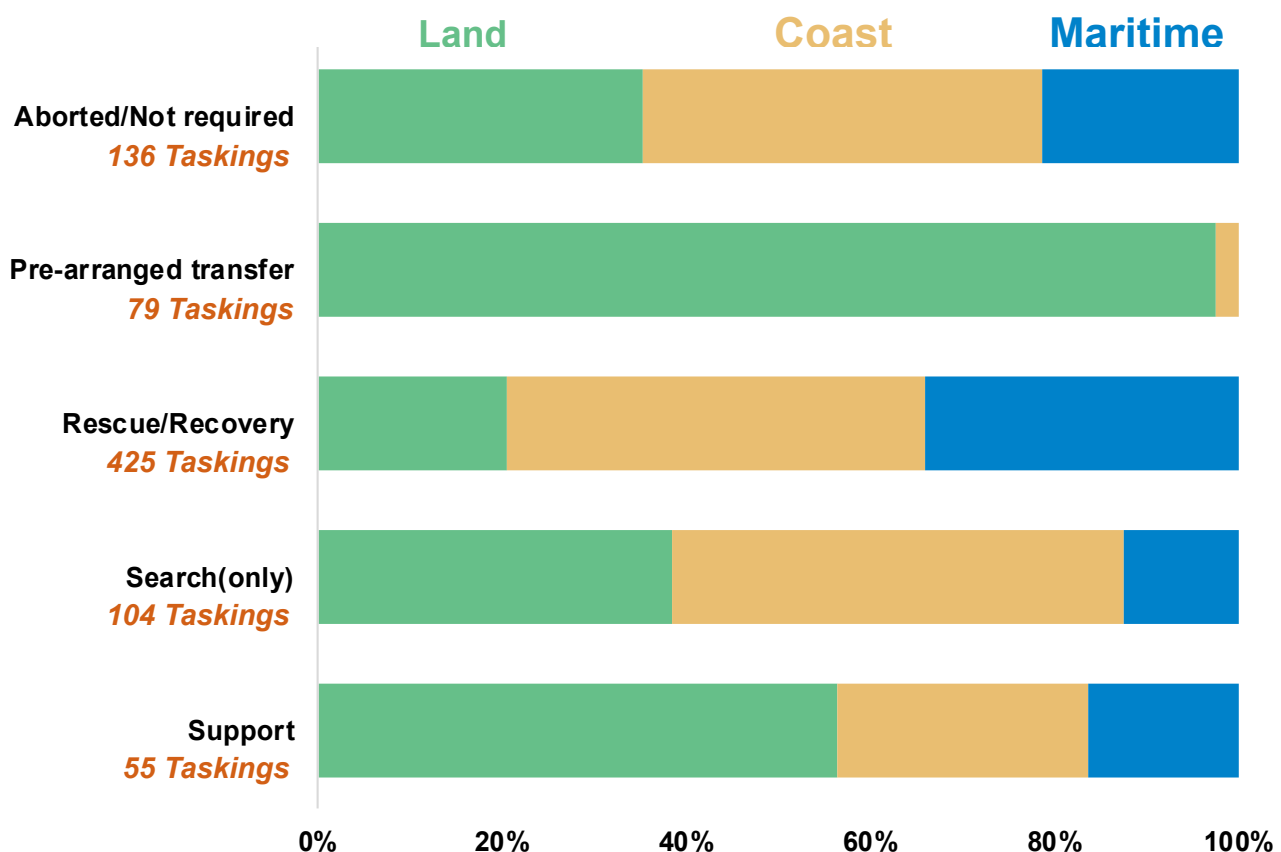
Land: All other taskings that are not classed as maritime or coastal, including inland waterways.

Maritime: Taskings that occur more than 3 nautical miles (1.9km) from the high tide line.

Despite the fact that land was the most common location type overall, the proportions varied by tasking category, with just under half of search (only) taskings taking place on the coast. In contrast to this, 97 per cent of pre-arranged transfers happened on land, while 80 per cent of taskings that involved rescue/ recovery took place either in coastal or maritime locations.

Taskings that were aborted or not required happened fairly evenly across the three location types.

Chart 4: Proportion of taskings by category and location, April to September 2015



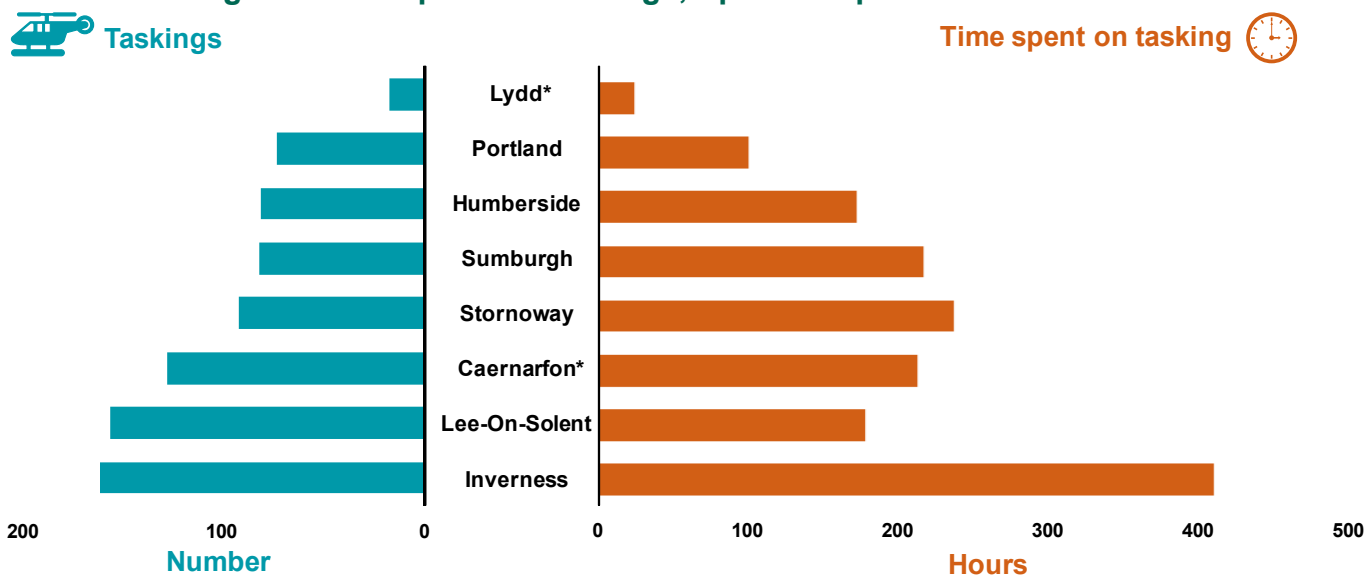
Time Spent on Taskings

Between April and September 2015, civilian SARH units spent 1,554 hours on Search and Rescue taskings.

In Caernarfon's opening month (July) they were the busiest civilian base, dealing with 47 taskings and recording the highest amount of tasking time, spending 81 hours on taskings.

Inverness dealt with 163 taskings between April and September, which equated to 410 hours of tasking time. In comparsion, Lee-On-Solent handled 158 taskings, which equated to 178 hours. This could be due to the fact that areas that are mountainous (e.g. Inverness/ Nevis range) or cover a large area (e.g. Sumburgh) tend to require more time per tasking than an area such as Lee-On-Solent, where incidents tend to happen quite close to base. Patterns in tasking location can be seen in the map on page 7.

Chart 5: Taskings vs Time Spent on Taskings, April to September 2015



* Caernarfon opened in July 2015 and Lydd opened in August 2015.

Key Statistics by Base

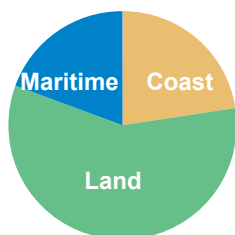
Stornoway

Date of opening: Existing

Taskings in Q2: 50

in Q3: 43

Tasking category: Over half were rescue missions.



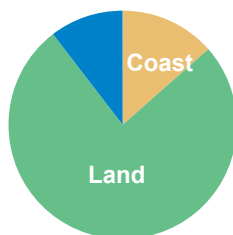
Inverness

Date of opening: April 2015

Taskings in Q2: 74

in Q3: 89

Tasking category: Just under half were rescue taskings with some medical element.



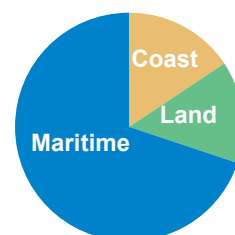
Sumburgh

Date of opening: Existing

Taskings in Q2: 42

in Q3: 41

Tasking category: The majority were rescues.



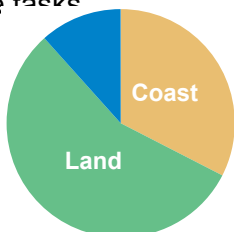
Caernarfon

Date of opening: July 2015

Taskings in Q2: N/A

in Q3: 129

Tasking category: Predominantly called out on rescue tasks.



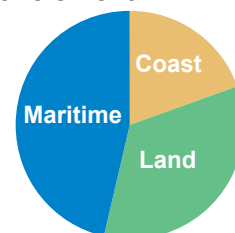
Humberside

Date of opening: April 2015

Taskings in Q2: 31

in Q3: 51

Tasking category: Over half were rescue taskings with some medical element.



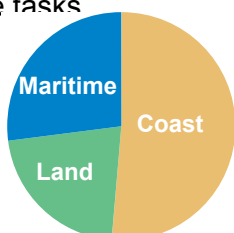
Portland

Date of opening: Existing

Taskings in Q2: 45

in Q3: 29

Tasking category: Predominantly called out on rescue tasks.



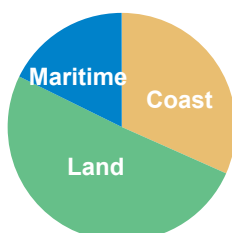
Lee-On-Solent

Date of opening: Existing

Taskings in Q2: 81

in Q3: 77

Tasking category: Largest group: pre-arranged transfers.



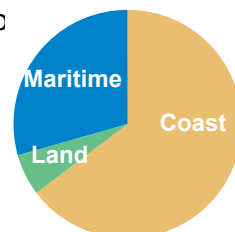
Lydd

Date of opening: August 2015

Taskings in Q2: N/A

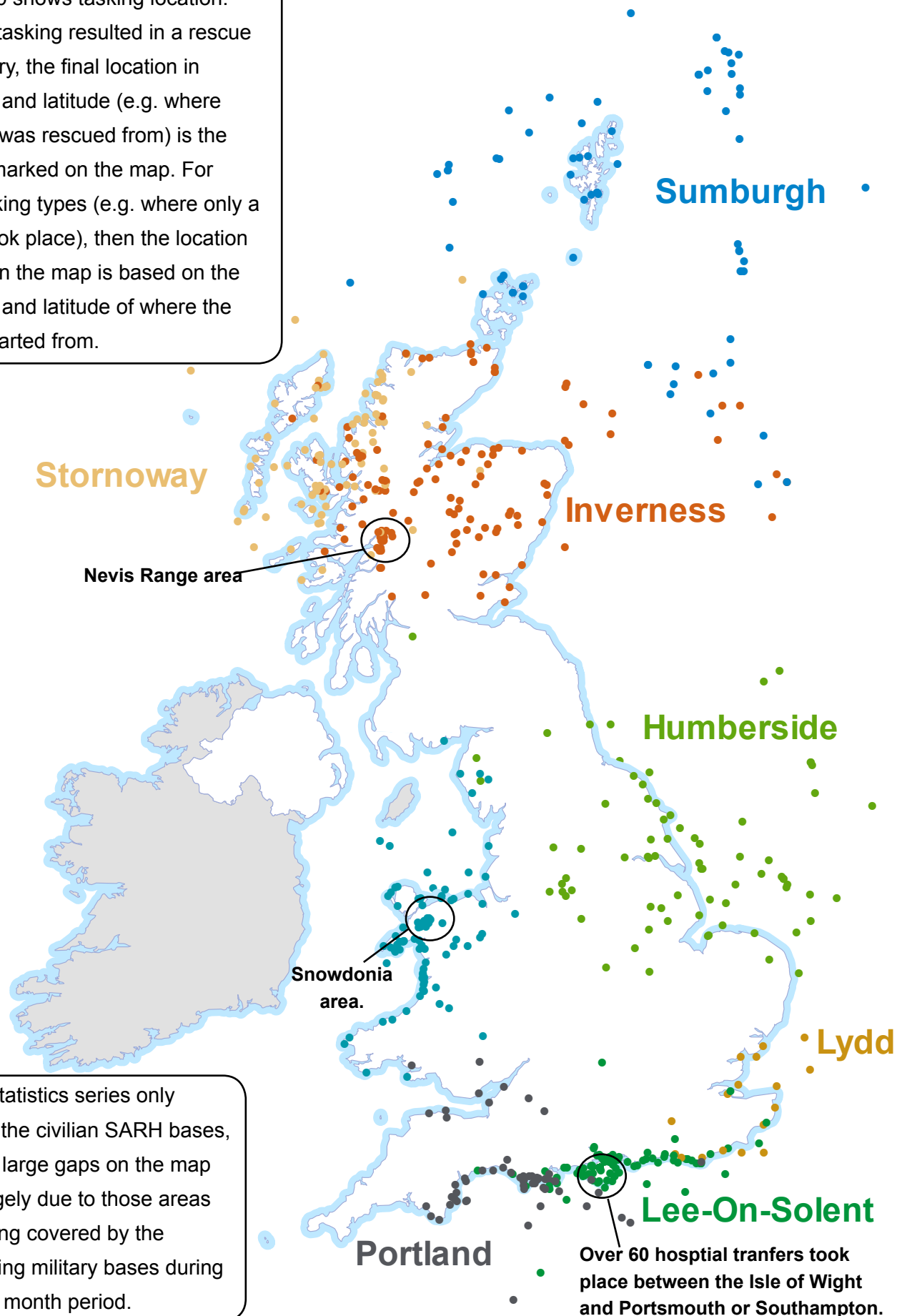
in Q3: 17

Tasking category: Search was the most frequent tasking category.



Map of Tasking Locations by Base

This map shows tasking location. Where a tasking resulted in a rescue or recovery, the final location in longitude and latitude (e.g. where a person was rescued from) is the location marked on the map. For other tasking types (e.g. where only a search took place), then the location marked on the map is based on the longitude and latitude of where the search started from.



This statistics series only covers the civilian SARH bases, and so large gaps on the map are largely due to those areas still being covered by the remaining military bases during the six month period.

Strengths and weaknesses of the data

These data are derived from an administrative system used by the helicopter operators, and provided to DfT by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA).

Data are recorded for management information purposes and not directly for use in statistics. For this reason, they should be treated with caution.

The time spent on taskings is thought to be recorded accurately and can be checked against information in the flight recording system of the helicopter that responded to the tasking. This information is therefore thought to be highly reliable.

If an emergency occurs where a helicopter is called out more than once, this is counted as one tasking. If helicopters from different bases are called out to the same emergency, this is counted separately - once for each base. This means that the definition of “taskings” is slightly different to the definitions of “callouts” and “incidents” used by the Ministry of Defence.

If a rescue or recovery takes place then the location is recorded by the helicopter pilot, based on the coordinates of where the persons were found. For other tasking types, the initial location (e.g. for where a search will take place) is recorded, as supplied by the tasking authority. Both of these methods have the possibility of human error, but this is thought to be low. It is not possible to assess whether the original coordinates provided to the tasking authority for a search were accurate.

The tasking category (rescue/ recovery, pre-arranged transfer, etc.) is taken from a free text field completed by the helicopter operators and coded by database administrators at the MCA. The logic used in coding the data is documented and is kept consistent as far as is possible, but as this process is essentially conducted through individual interpretation, there will always be a potential for human error to be involved.

The data are validated and verified as they are received by the MCA, and signed off at the end of each month, so it is unlikely that data would be revised at a later date. Therefore, figures published in this release will be carried forward for use in future publications (for time comparisons, etc.) with any revisions being specifically pointed out to users.

As all fields are filled in by the contractors, there are no missing data.

There are currently few other sources to compare the data against. Data from the flight recording systems in the helicopters are used for verification, as mentioned above, but this can only be used to verify the timing and duration of the tasking. Data from the co-ordination centres that log the initial calls that request the search and rescue services will become available in 2016. There is currently little information available regarding what data will be useable from this source, but users will be updated on this in a future edition of the statistics release.

Users and uses of the data

As this is the first civilian search and rescue helicopter statistics release, we are still in the process of determining users and finding out how the data can be used.

Within the Department for Transport, they will be used:

- For ministerial briefing and to answer public enquiries;
- As background to policy development;
- For monitoring trends in search and rescue activity; and,
- By analysts in modelling overall search and rescue operations.

Outside of DfT, users may include:

- Search and rescue partners, national parks, tourist boards, mountaineering/ walking groups and others, monitoring the use of search and rescue services by tourists/ members;
- Air ambulance charities monitoring SAR activity in their areas; and,
- Maritime organisations monitoring SAR activity related to their businesses (e.g. near ports).

Links to other information

- The Ministry of Defence have published statistics on military civilian search and rescue helicopter activity. They will continue to publish statistics on military activity until February 2016. Their latest release can be found here : <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/military-search-and-rescue-quarterly-statistics-index>
- Details of Ministers and officials who receive pre-release access to these statistics up to 24 hours before release can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-release-access-lists-for-maritime-and-shipping-series>
- Eventually, the plan is to badge these statistics as National Statistics. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure they meet customer needs: <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>
- Alongside this publication a series of data tables have been published, where you can find the key statistics: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/search-and-rescue-helicopter>.