Department for Transport

Search and Rescue Helicopter Statistics: April to June 2016

Between April and June 2016, Search and Rescue Helicopter (SARH) operators responded to 711 taskings in the UK.

Total number of Civilian SARH taskings, April 2015 to June 2016

New bases still opening   All bases operational

Caernarfon base opened in July 2015.

St Athan base opened in Oct 2015.

All eleven Civilian SARH bases were fully operational from 1 Jan 2016.

Lydd base opened in Aug 2015.

Prestwick and Newquay bases opened in Jan 2016.

There were 711 SARH taskings during April to June 2016.
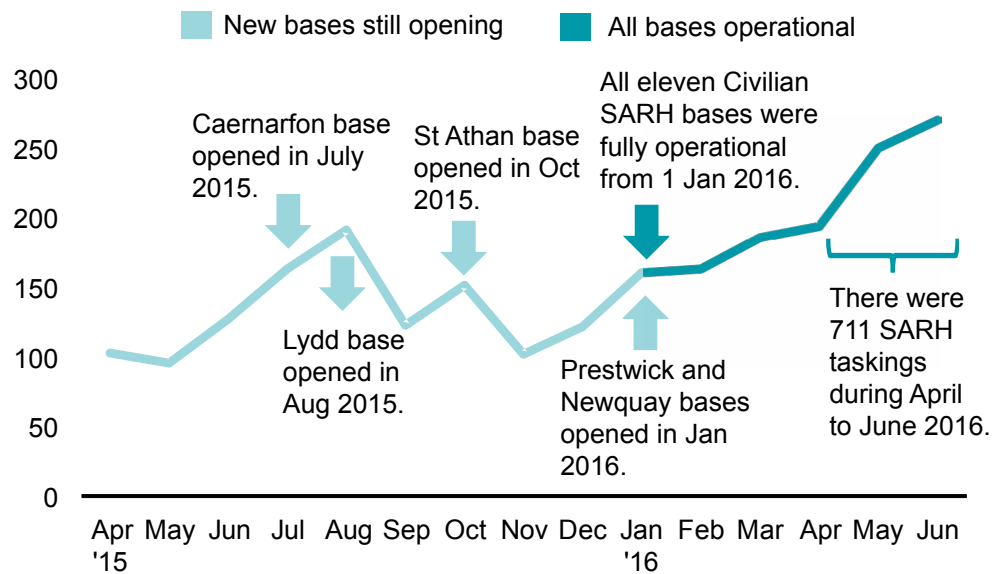
Six of the current eleven bases have been operating since the beginning of April 2015. The Humberside base responded to more than double the number of taskings in April to June 2016 compared to the same period in 2015.

Summary of SARH taskings operating in April 2015 onwards.

	April to June 2015 taskings	April to June 2016 taskings	% change from one year before
Humberside	31	71	+ 129%
Inverness	74	85	+ 15%
Lee-On-Solent	81	47	- 42%
Portland	45	33	- 27%
Stornoway	50	43	- 14%
Sumburgh	42	34	- 19%
Total	**323**	**313**	**- 3%**

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Background Information

In April 2015, the operational phase of a new contract to operate civilian search and rescue helicopter (SARH) services in the UK, managed by the MCA, commenced. These new arrangements have taken over from the previous mixture of military and coastguard SARH services.

The Department for Transport is now responsible for the production of statistics on SARH activity, covering the civilian bases.

Map 1: Civilian SAR Helicopter Bases

Sumburgh
Mid 2017

Stornoway
Mid 2017

Inverness
Apr 2015

Existing civilian base
To be transitioned

New civilian base
Now open

Prestwick
Jan 2016

Humberside
Apr 2015

Caernarfon
Jul 2015

St Athan
Oct 2015

Lydd
Aug 2015

Newquay
Jan 2016

Lee-on-Solent
Mid 2017

Portland
Closing:
June 2017
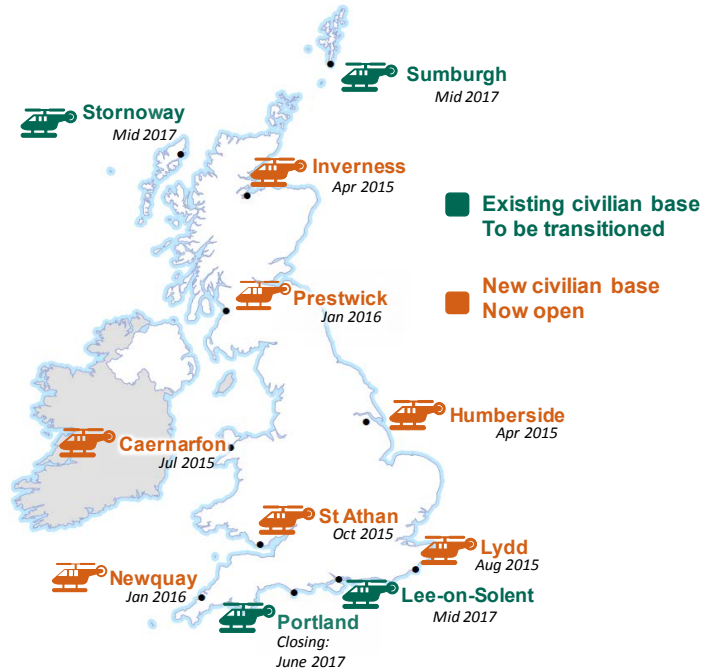
Overall trends

In April to June 2016, there were 711 taskings overall. Of the six bases which were open since April 2015, these bases responded to 313 taskings in the latest quarter. This is broadly unchanged from the 323 taskings in April to June 2015.

The Prestwick base began operating in January 2016 and was the busiest of the eleven bases during its first two quarters of operation. Prestwick had the highest monthly average of 31 taskings during April to June 2016 and responded to 93 taskings in the period, unchanged from the previous quarter. The Newquay base also opened in January 2016 and was the second busiest base after Prestwick, responding to 89 taskings during the latest quarter.

Of the eleven bases, Portland and Sumburgh responded to the lowest number of taskings during April to June 2016, with 33 and 34 taskings respectively.

Definition

Tasking: The response of a SAR helicopter to an emergency as notified by the Aeronautical Rescue Coordination Centre (ARCC).

Chart 1: Civilian SARH taskings, 2016 SARH0101

| Civilian SAR-H Base	2016 Jan – Mar	Apr – June
Caernarfon	62 Taskings	84 Taskings
Humberside	42 Taskings	71 Taskings
Inverness	79 Taskings	85 Taskings
Lee-On-Solent	33 Taskings	47 Taskings
Lydd	36 Taskings	64 Taskings
Newquay	57 Taskings	89 Taskings
Portland	19 Taskings	33 Taskings
Prestwick	93 Taskings	93 Taskings
St Athan	44 Taskings	68 Taskings
Stornoway	18 Taskings	43 Taskings
Sumburgh	25 Taskings	34 Taskings

Tasking Categories

There were 464 rescue or recovery taskings during April to June 2016, accounting for around two thirds of all taskings (65 per cent). However, this proportion varied across the bases, from 40 per cent at Lee-on-Solent to 85 per cent at Sumburgh.

Rescue or recovery was the most common tasking category at all bases in the latest quarter, although Lee-on-Solent had the same number of pre-arranged transfers as rescues or recoveries. Just over a third (34 per cent) of all pre-arranged transfers in the latest quarter were carried out by the Lee-on-Solent base. Together, Lee-on-Solent, Prestwick and Newquay responded to 80 per cent of all pre-arranged transfers during the period.

The Lydd base responded to more search taskings than any other base in the latest quarter, accounting for just under one in five search taskings (18 per cent) between April and June 2016.

Chart 2: Number of taskings by tasking category, April to June 2016 SARH0102
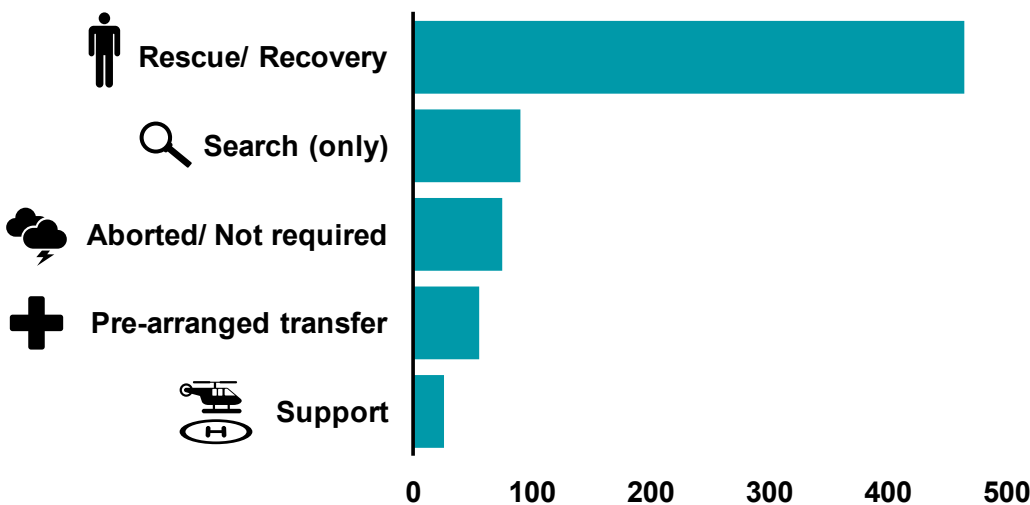
Location

Nearly half of all taskings were land based (48 per cent) during April to June 2016. Maritime taskings accounted for 18 per cent of the total whilst 34 per cent of taskings took place in coastal areas.

Chart 3: Proportion of taskings by location type, April to June 2016 SARH0103

Maritime
131 Taskings
(18%)

Land
338 Taskings
(48%)

Coast
242 Taskings
(34%)

Total Taskings:
711

Of all maritime taskings, 86 per cent were rescues or recoveries during the latest quarter. This proportion was much smaller for the other location types, with rescues or recoveries accounting for around 58 per cent of all land based taskings, and 64 per cent of coastal taskings.

Chart 4: Proportion of taskings by category and location type, April to June 2016 SARH0105

Land **Coast** **Maritime**

Aborted/ Not required
75 taskings

Pre-arranged transfer
56 taskings

Rescue/Recovery
464 taskings

Search(only)
90 taskings

Support
26 taskings

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%
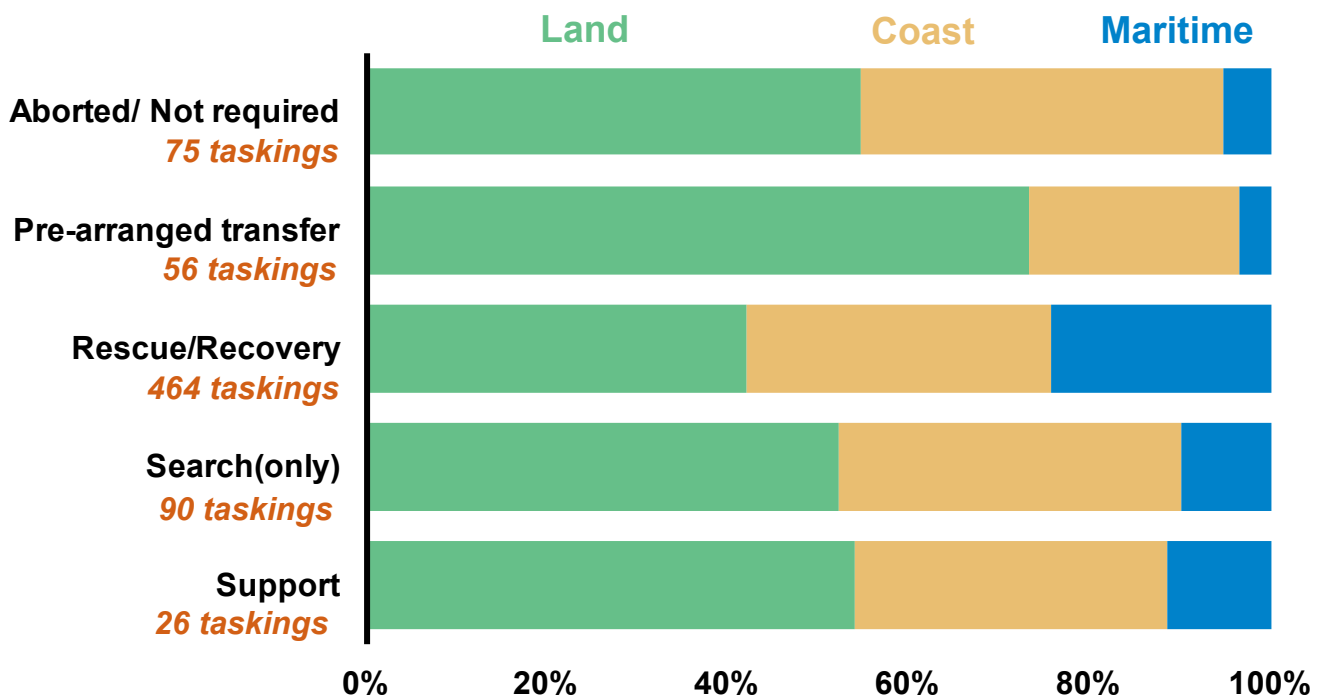
Although, land based taskings were the most common location during April to June 2016 overall, the proportion of land taskings varied by tasking category. Around 73 per cent of all pre-arranged transfers happened over land, and 90 per cent of searches took place on land or in coastal locations, showing that very few searches took place more than 3 nautical miles out to sea.
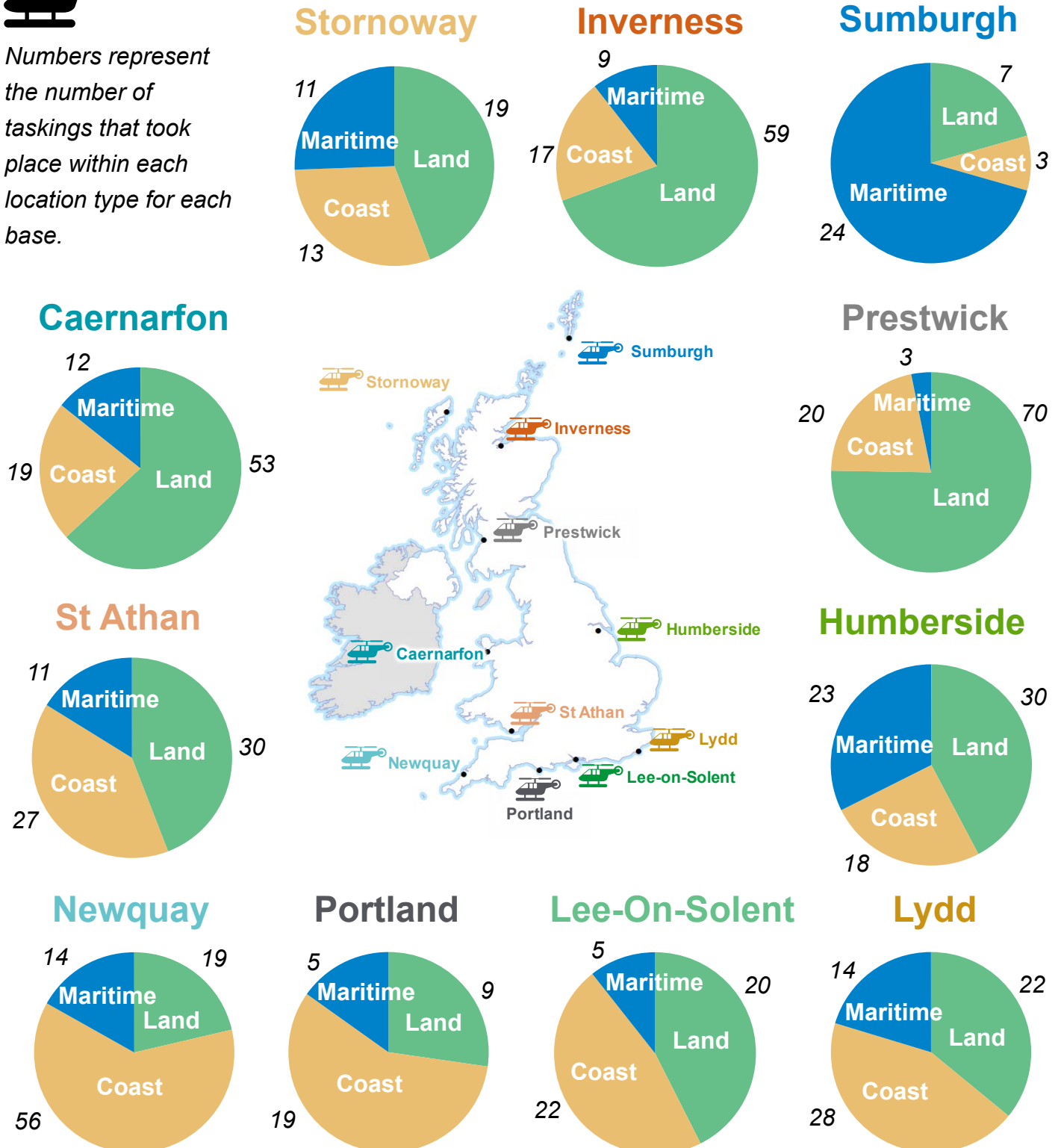
The location type of taskings differed between bases. During April to June 2016, maritime taskings accounted for the greatest proportion of taskings at the Sumburgh base in Scotland. At Prestwick, the majority of taskings were land based and at Newquay, most tasking took place on the coast.

Map 5: Taskings by location type and base, April to June 2016 SARH0104

Numbers represent the number of taskings that took place within each location type for each base.

Stornoway

11 Maritime
19 Land
13 Coast

Inverness

9 Maritime
17 Coast
59 Land

Sumburgh

7 Land
3 Coast
24 Maritime

Caernarfon

12 Maritime
19 Coast
53 Land

Prestwick

3 Maritime
20 Coast
70 Land

St Athan

11 Maritime
27 Coast
30 Land

Humberside

23 Maritime
30 Land
18 Coast

Newquay

14 Maritime
19 Land
56 Coast

Portland

5 Maritime
9 Land
19 Coast

Lee-On-Solent

5 Maritime
20 Land
22 Coast

Lydd

14 Maritime
22 Land
28 Coast

Map locations: Sumburgh, Stornoway, Inverness, Prestwick, Humberside, Caernarfon, St Athan, Lydd, Newquay, Lee-on-Solent, Portland

Time Spent on Taskings

During April to June 2016, civilian SARH units spent 1,372 hours on taskings. Prestwick recorded the highest amount of tasking time during the latest quarter, spending 230 hours on taskings (across 93 taskings). Inverness recorded the second highest time spent on taskings, spending 180 hours on taskings (across 85 taskings) during the latest quarter.

Similarly to the previous quarter, Portland spent the least amount of time on taskings with 52 hours during April to June 2016 (across 33 taskings).

Taskings taking place in maritime locations or in mountainous areas such as the Nevis range or Snowdonia tended to take longer per tasking than in areas such as the South Coast of England, where incidents tended to happen closer to the base and therefore took less time.

Stornoway and St Athan spent a similar number of hours on taskings during the last quarter, but St Athan responded to 25 more taskings than Stornoway, demonstrating that Stornoway taskings tend to take longer.
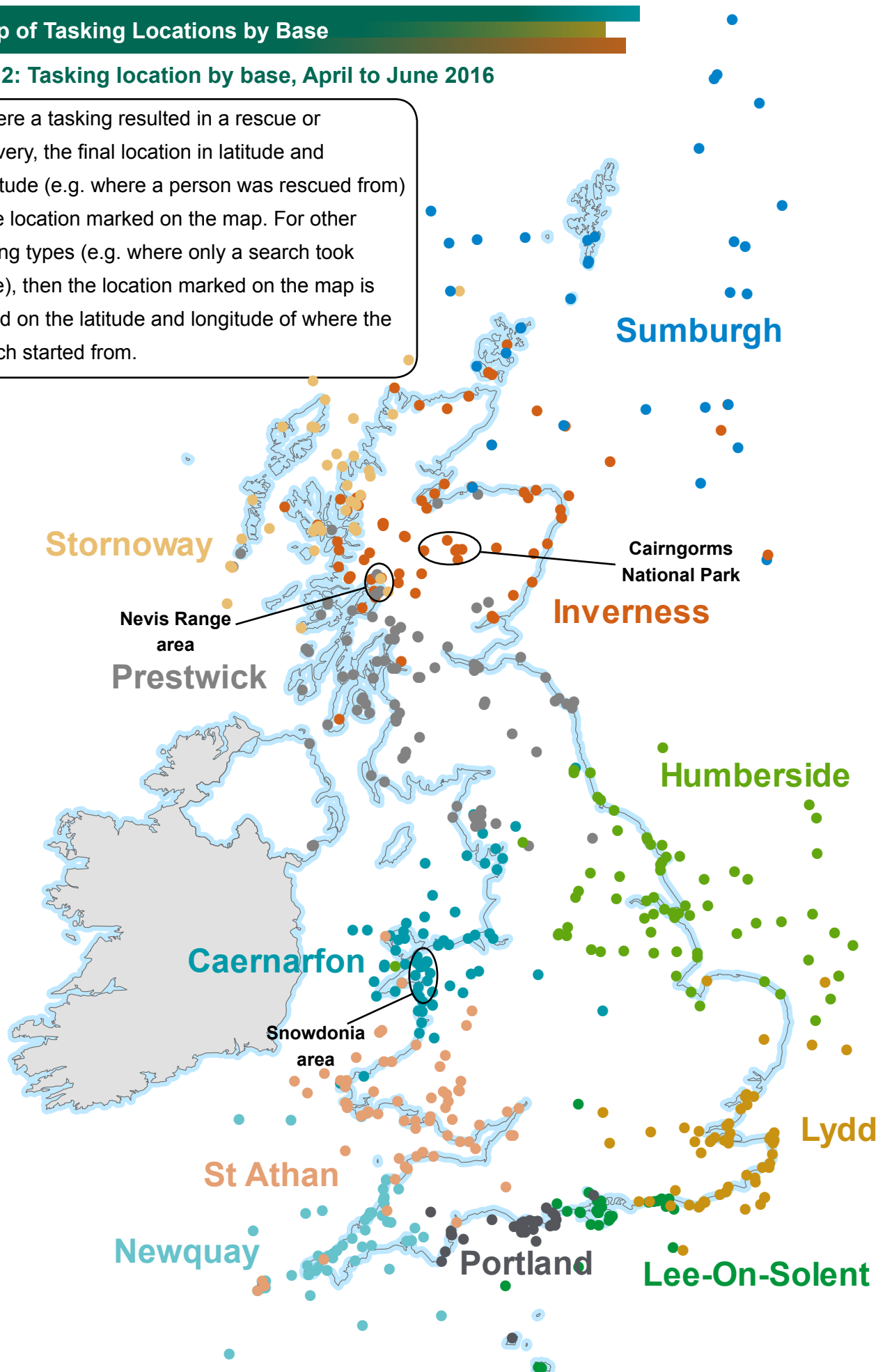
Definition

Length of tasking
Total number of flying hours over the period.

Chart 5: Taskings vs Time Spent on Taskings, April to June 2016 SARH0106
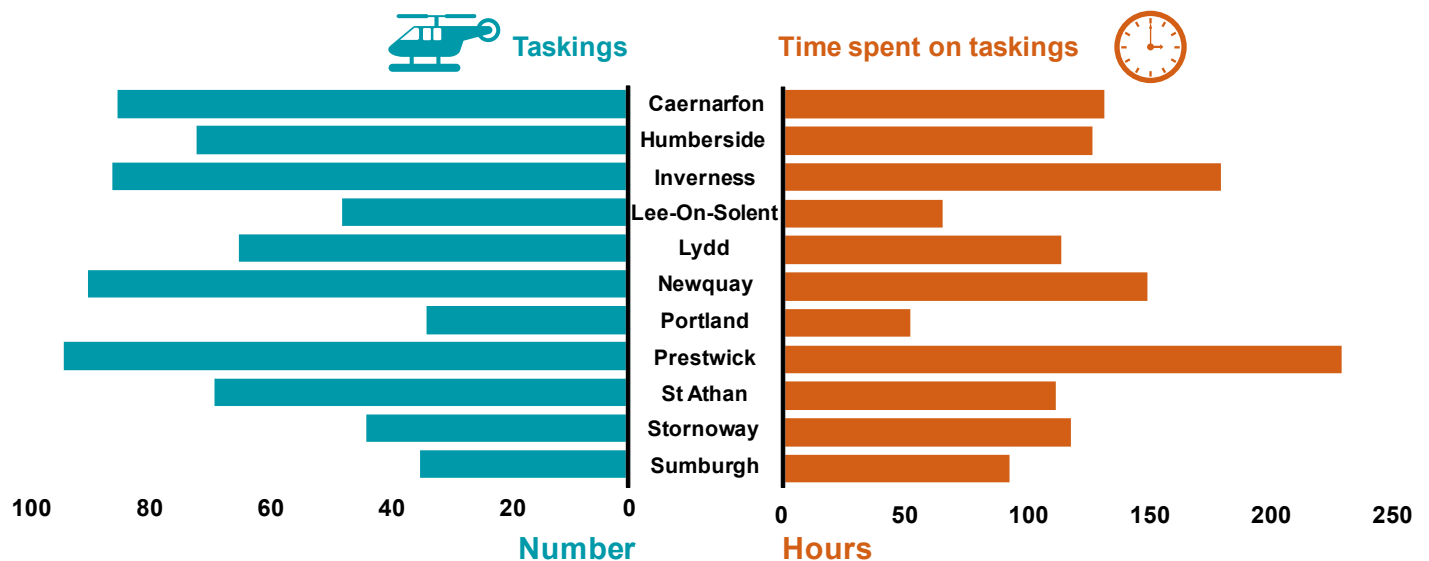
Map 2: Tasking location by base, April to June 2016

Where a tasking resulted in a rescue or recovery, the final location in latitude and longitude (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 latitude and longitude of where the search started from.

Sumburgh

Stornoway

Cairngorms
National Park

Inverness

Nevis Range
area

Prestwick

Humberside

Caernarfon

Snowdonia
area

Lydd

St Athan

Newquay

Portland

Lee-On-Solent

Map 3: Location of taskings by tasking category, April to June 2016

Where a tasking resulted in a rescue or recovery, the final location in latitude and longitude (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 latitude and longitude of where the search started from.
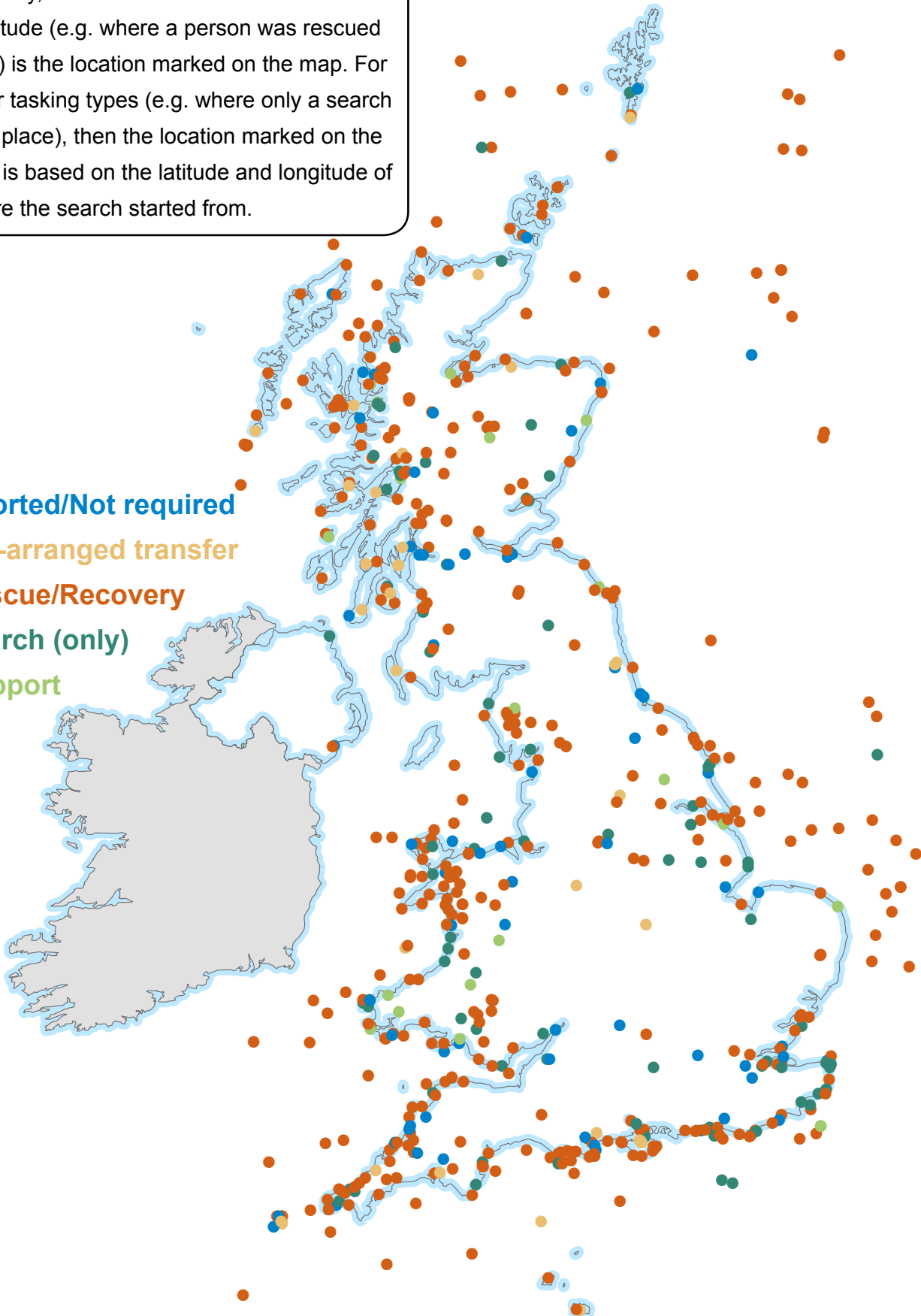
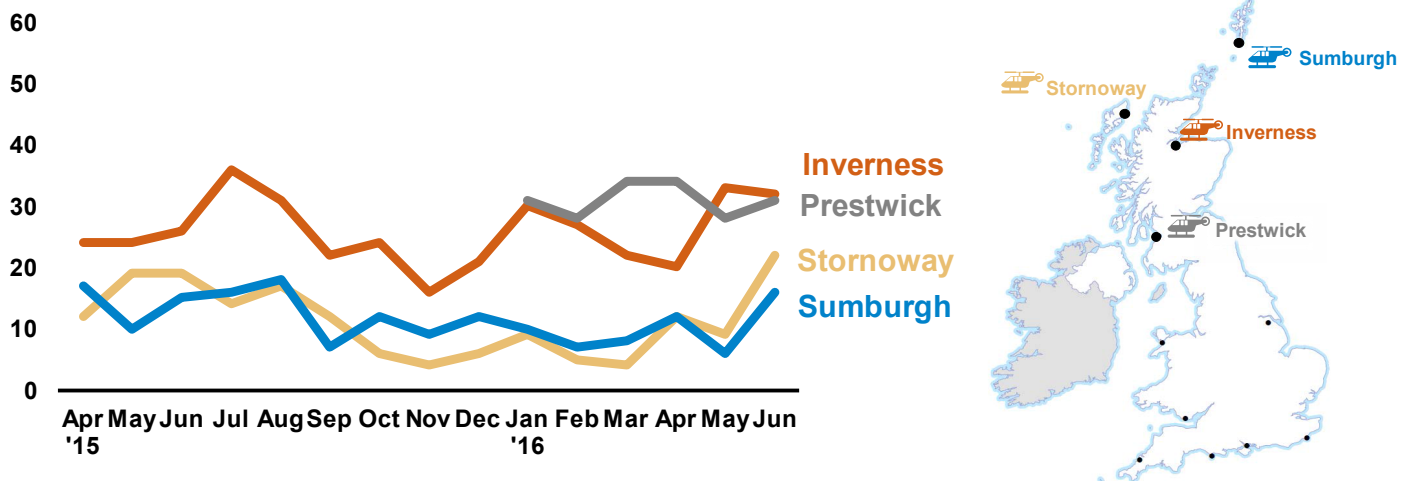**Aborted/Not required**
Pre-arranged transfer
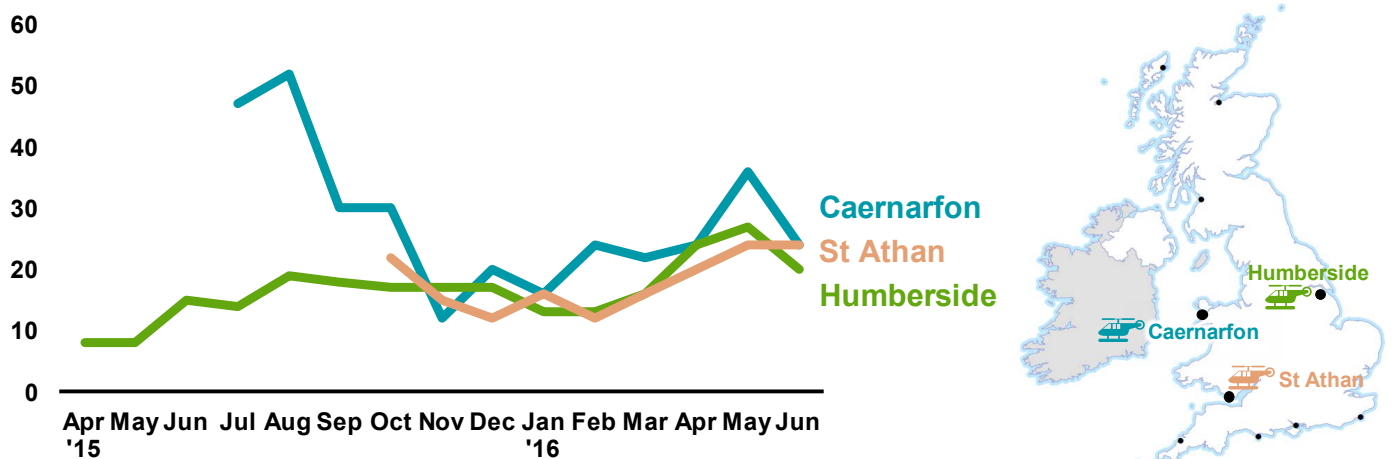**Rescue/Recovery**
Search (only)
Support

Chart 6: Number of taskings from the Scotland bases, April 2015 to June 2016 SARH0101

The Prestwick base began operating in January 2016 and had the highest number of taskings of all bases during April to June 2016, with 93 taskings, and a monthly peak of 34 taskings in April.

During the latest quarter, the Inverness base responded to 15 per cent more taskings than during the same period in 2015. Stornoway and Sumburgh had a quieter start to the quarter than at the same time last year, but both became busier in June 2016: Stornoway responded to a peak of 22 taskings in June, the highest monthly number for this base since the series began.

## Chart 7: Number of taskings from the Wales and Northern England bases, April 2015 to June 2016 SARH0101

Between April and June 2016, Caernarfon was the busiest of the three bases in Wales and Northern England, with 84 taskings during the period. The Humberside base has been operational since April 2015 and taskings at this base have more than doubled in the latest quarter compared to the same period in 2015.

Chart 8: Number of taskings from the Southern England bases, April 2015 to June 2016
SARH0101
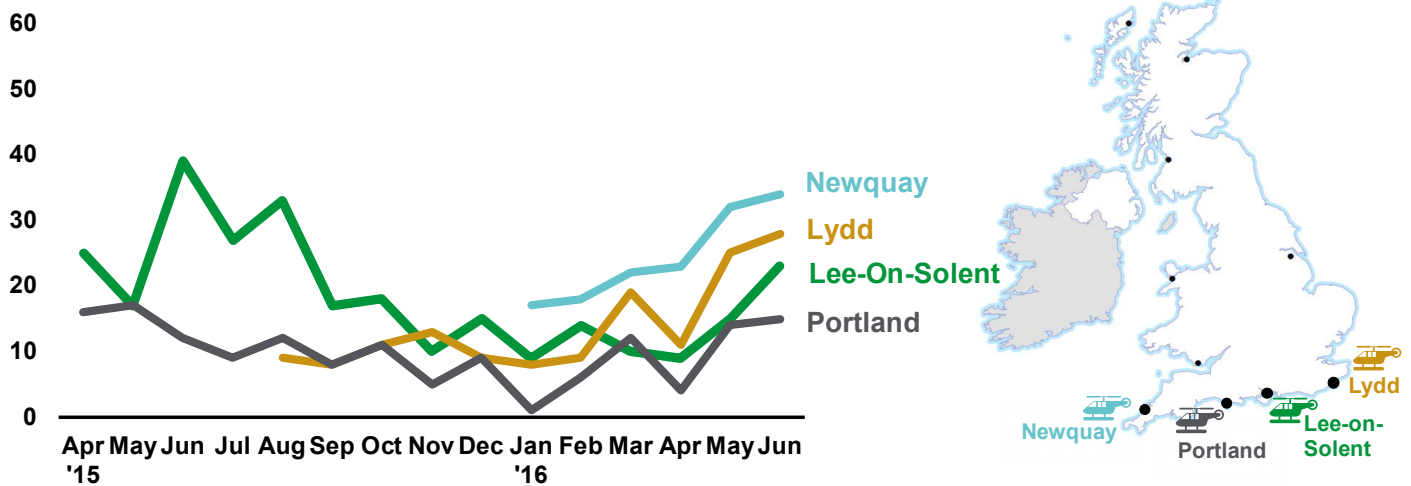
The Newquay base began operating in January 2016 and was the busiest of the Southern England bases, with 89 taskings during April to June 2016. The Lydd base responded to a peak of 28 taskings in June 2016

For the bases that were operational since April 2015, both the Lee-on-Solent and Portland bases saw a decline in the number of taskings. During April to June 2016, Lee-On-Solent responded to 47 taskings, a 42 per cent decline compared to the year before. Portland responded to 33 taskings during the latest quarter, a 27 per cent decline from the previous year, driven by a very quiet April when only four taskings were required to by the Portland base.

User feedback and future releases

This experimental statistics series is under continuous development as we gain views from users and learn more about the data. These statistics will be published each quarter. The Annual release will also include a breakdown by region (West Midlands, South East, Wales, etc), day of the week and time of day. This will be released after the end of each financial year.

We would be grateful for any feedback that users have on this publication, including content, timing, format or on any of the changes made so far to the series so that we can consider how the release can better meet user needs and how the dissemination of information can be improved.

You can contact us by emailing SARH.Stats@dft.gsi.gov.uk.

We thank all respondents for taking the time to give us their views.

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. This should be taken into account when interpreting the results.

Tasking count

If an emergency occurs where a helicopter is called out more than once, this is usually 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.

Tasking category

The tasking category (rescue or recovery, pre-arranged transfer, etc.) is derived from a free text field completed by the helicopter operators and coded by database administrators at the MCA.

Tasking location

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. It is not possible to assess whether the original coordinates provided to the tasking authority for a search were accurate.

The coordinates of the tasking location are also used to define the location type (land, coast and maritime). The latitude and longitude of the tasking location are overlaid onto a geographically accurate map of the UK, and distances between the taskings and the outline of the map are used to categorise the data.

The definitions of the boundaries between land, coast and maritime were chosen based on other widely used definitions, what was sensible given the nature of the topic and what was possible using the data. This breakdown is only as accurate as the coordinate data. If latitude or longitude are recorded inaccurately then this may also impact upon the location type, although the risk of such inaccuracies is perceived as low.

Data Validation

The logic used in coding the data is documented and is kept consistent as far as is possible, but as this process is reliant upon individual interpretation it may vary depending on the operator. There will always be a possibility that a small number of inaccuracies are present in this data.

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.). If there are any revisions, they will be clearly signposted 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. Any anomalies in the data can be checked against the flight recording system 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 late 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 fourth 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 and Maritime Coastguard Agency, 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 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

- Historically, the Ministry of Defence published statistics on military and civilian SARH activity, and they continued to publish statistics on military activity until February 2016 when services were ceased. Their final release can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/military-search-and-rescue-monthly-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, we aim 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.