



On 18 November 2015, the Department for Transport published the first statistical release in a new experimental series covering civilian search and rescue helicopter operations in the United Kingdom. Alongside this, the Department launched an online survey asking for feedback on the statistical release, which ran until 31 January 2016. **This document provides a summary of the survey responses** (as well as a small number of comments received via phone and email), and the Department's response to these.

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

Statistics publications - past, present and future

Historically, search and rescue helicopter (SARH) operations in the United Kingdom were managed by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA).

In April 2015, the operational phase of a **new contract to operate civilian SARH services in the UK, managed by the MCA** commenced. These new arrangements are taking over from the previous mixture of military and Coastguard SARH services.

Until the start of the new contract, the MOD was responsible for publishing statistics on SARH activity. During the transition period, the MOD continued to produce monthly and annual statistical publications for those bases that remained open, until they ceased operations.

The Department for Transport has now taken over the production of statistics on SARH activity, covering the civilian bases.

Availability of data

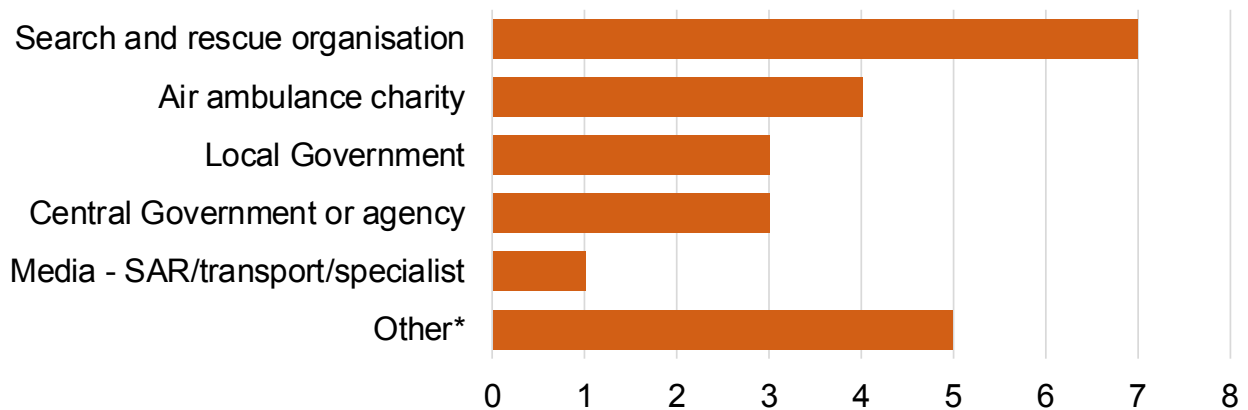
The data and topics included in the series so far have been derived from the helicopter operators' administrative database. All planned developments discussed here are based on the currently available data and potential improvements to data quality. Later in 2016, data from the coordination centre, where taskings are allocated, will become available. The coverage and scope of this new data source are still to be established. Further developments based on the data from the existing source will be balanced alongside potential developments using new data sources.

Respondents to the survey

There were 23 responses to the online survey.

Users identified themselves as being from a range of different types of organisations and were interested in the statistics for a number of different purposes, although the top reason for their interest (given by 10 out of the 23 respondents) was “analysing search and rescue helicopter activity in specific locations”.

Who responded to the survey?



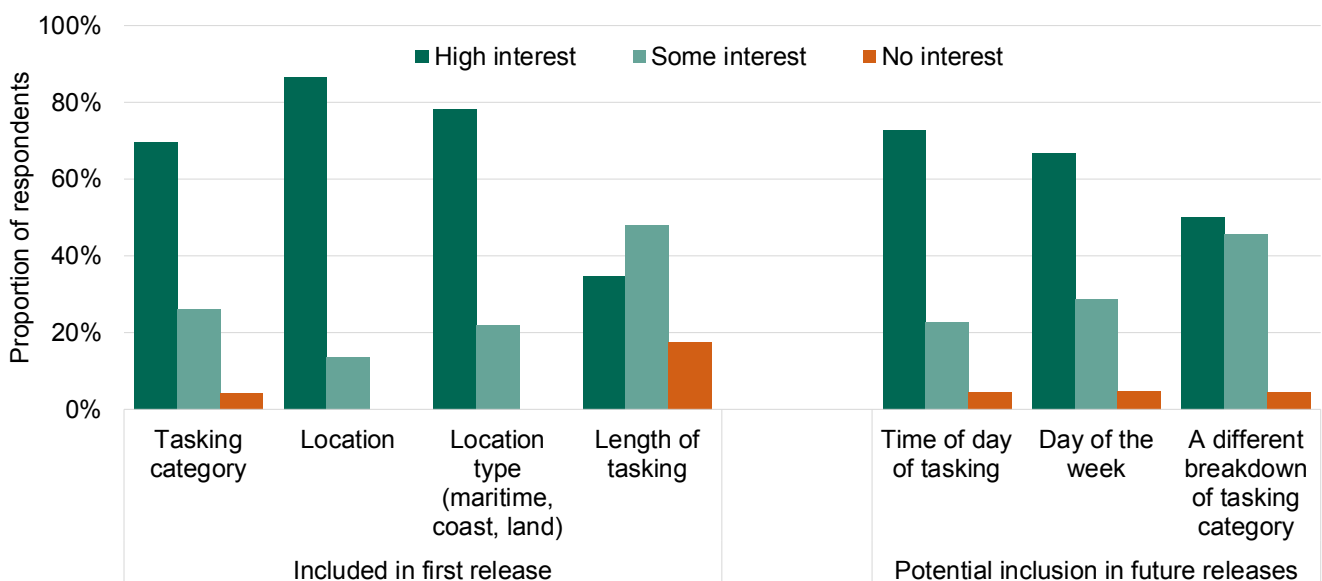
*The "Other" category is predominantly made up of National Parks.

Topics covered in the release

Two of the questions asked respondents to indicate the extent of their interest in each of a list of variables (some were variables that were included in the first release, some were variables that hadn't been included but could be in future if their quality could be verified).

The survey showed that respondents had high interest in tasking category, location and location type. Length of tasking was of slightly lesser interest.

To what extent would users be interested in the various topics covered by the data?



The vast majority of respondents expressed at least some interest in a different breakdown of tasking category, and over two thirds of respondents expressed high interest in seeing data on time of day and day of the week.

Department's response

In response to the feedback received on the further topics that users would be interested in seeing in the release, the Department plans to:

- Continue to present data on **tasking category**, but look into alternative or less aggregated breakdowns, for example, splitting “rescue/recovery” into whether persons were taken to a medical facility. These further breakdowns will only be included if (a) data can be quality assured to a sufficient degree, (b) figures are not disclosive, and (c) the separate groups can be classified as mutually exclusive so that there is a clear distinction between each, and that these differences can be clearly communicated to users.

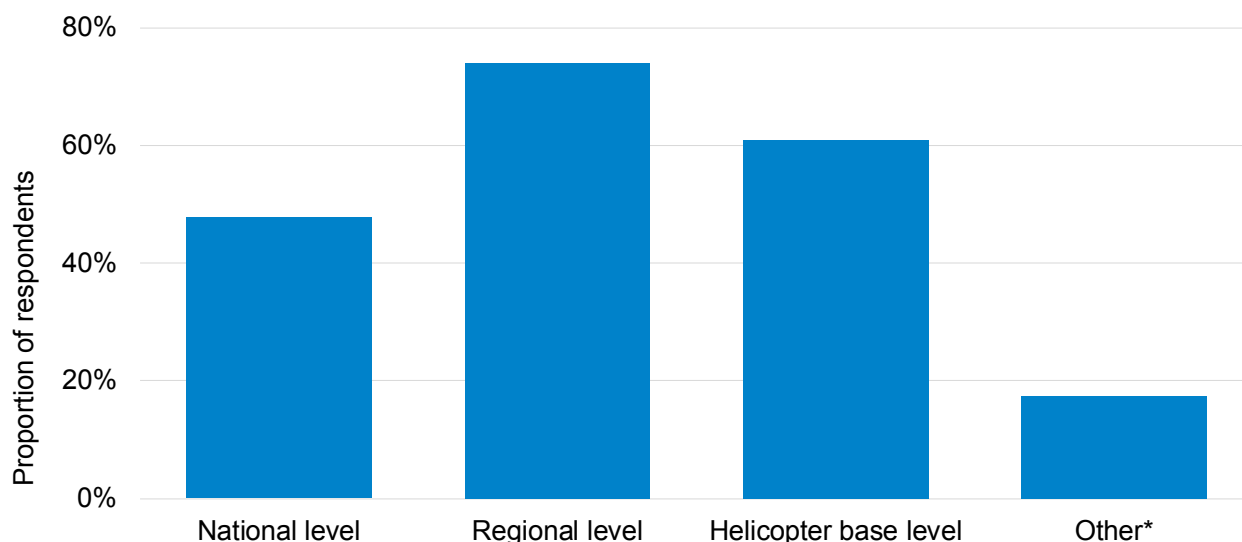
The existing data is not of sufficient quality to be able to produce any meaningful results, but the Department will look into improving the quality of the data at collection, so that in future, further detail on tasking category can be published. Work on this will take place over the next year.

- Continue to present data on **location** and **location type**, but look into further use of these. In the second release, the Department has included an additional map, a more focused look at sections of the UK, and has started to pick out specific events where heavier involvement of the SAR service was required (e.g. during the recent floods). See the ‘Geographic breakdowns’ section for more information on planned longer term developments.
- Continue to look at **length of tasking**, but without focusing on this as an area for further development at this time, as the user feedback showed that this was of less interest than other areas.
- Include summaries of **time of day** and **day of the week**. In the second release, the Department has included breakdowns of these, split by tasking category.

Geographic breakdowns

When asked what levels of geography/ location would be of interest for respondents’ work, regional level came out on top, with almost three quarters of respondents saying they would be interested in this. A number of users said that this was for operational purposes, such as monitoring incidents to better target safety messaging. Helicopter base level came close behind (just over 60 per cent).

Which geographic breakdowns were respondents interested in?



*For the "Other" category, respondents mostly gave specific areas that they were interested in, such as National Parks or counties.

Department's response

As a result of the comments received on the geographic breakdowns that users would find useful, the Department plans to:

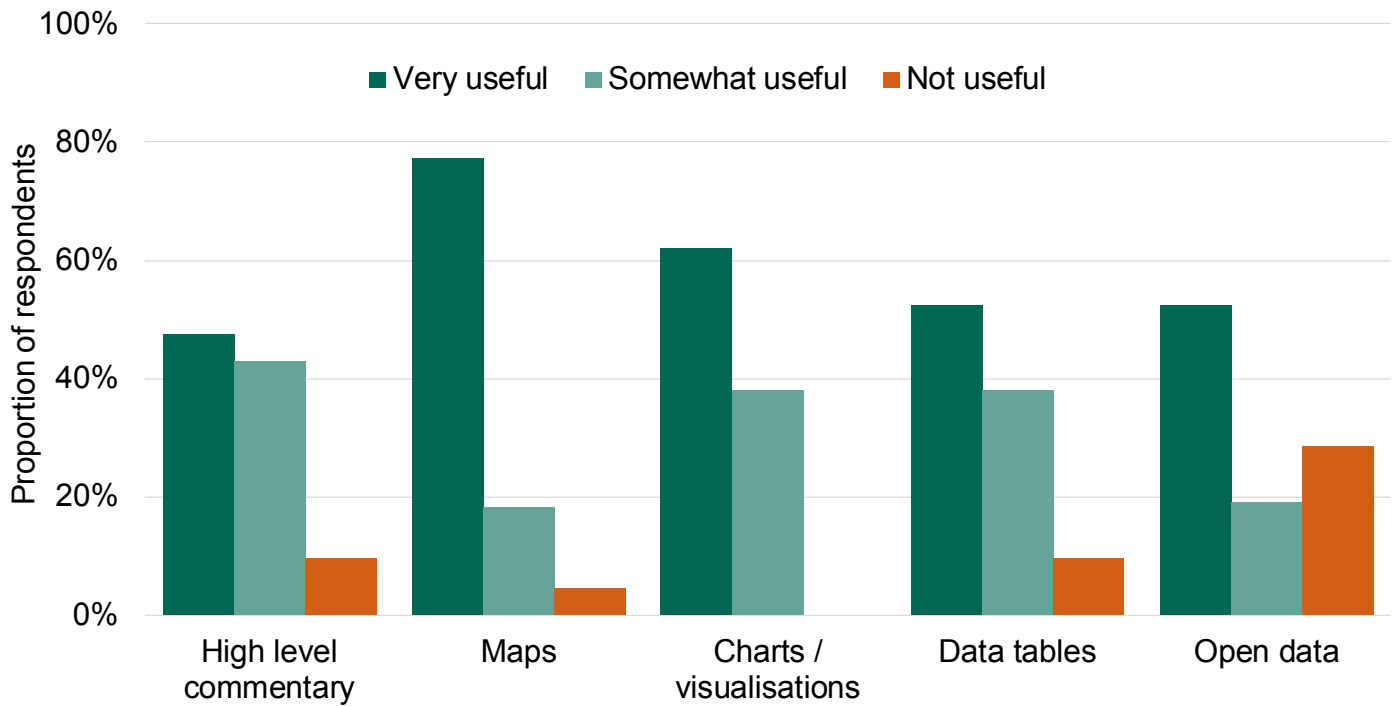
- Continue to publish statistics by **helicopter base**. In the second release, trends for the number of tasking responded to by each base have been added. As the series develops and as more bases open, the Department will look into further use of data by helicopter base for future releases.
- Continue to publish statistics on a **National level**. This was of interest to just under half of respondents, but trends in the total numbers will be useful for those working in connection to the operations, and so simple totals will be provided throughout the publication.
- Look into splitting the data by **region**. In the second statistics release, a more focused look at groups of bases has been included. The Department will explore the use of more detailed regional breakdowns later in the year.

Methods for presenting the data

When asked how useful each of a number of methods of presenting the data were for their purposes, the majority of respondents said that they found maps very useful. Charts and visualisations were identified as being at least somewhat useful to all respondents.

Open data, something that wasn't included in the first release but could be introduced in future, brought mixed responses through the survey. Just over half of respondents said that open data would be very useful, but over a quarter said that it wouldn't be useful.

How useful would different methods of presenting the data be for users?



Department's response

Taking into consideration the user feedback received on how the data could be presented, the Department plans to:

- Continue to produce the map of taskings split by base and look into further use of maps. The second release includes an additional map, this time splitting the taskings by tasking category (rescue/recovery, etc). The Department will work to incorporate maps into further developments of the release.
- Continue to produce charts and visualisations, and look into developing these further, including new and better ways of visualising the data.
- Continue to produce data tables, potentially with some new or different breakdowns based on the additional areas brought up through this survey. In the second release, two new tables have been added, covering time of day and day of the week, broken down by tasking category. In future, tables will also be published for any new data or additional breakdowns that are included in the release, such as a split of taskings by region.
- Continue to write high level commentary that leaves the reader well informed about the meaning and relevance of the data.
- Look into publishing open data once the new data source becomes available later in the year. Publishing open data will require more resource and a more detailed level of quality

assurance. Waiting until both datasets can be fully understood will allow for a thorough comparison of both sources and for a decision to be made based on whether the data can be sufficiently quality assured.

Publication frequency

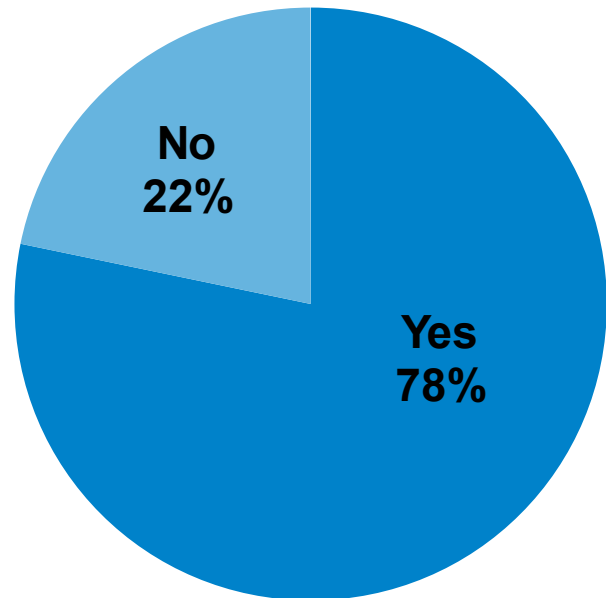
The majority of respondents (18 out of 23) declared that the quarterly release of the statistics suits their purposes.

Department's response

Given that the majority of respondents were content with the data being released quarterly, the Department plans to continue to produce the statistics each quarter, with an annual release published just after the end of each financial year.

The annual release will include figures from the final quarter of the year, plus additional detail for the whole year, including analysis of trends.

Would the quarterly release of data be suitable for users?



Further comments

We would be grateful for any further feedback that users have on the changes made so far to the series and on the developments that will be made over the coming months, 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 **email** to SARH.Stats@dft.gsi.gov.uk or **phone** 020 7944 4676.

Links

- The main statistical release for October to December 2015 can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/search-and-rescue-helicopter-statistics-october-to-december-2015>
- 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>