



Privatisation of RAF/Royal Navy Search and Rescue

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The Joint SAR-H (Search and Rescue Harmonisation) project was established in 2005 to replace the search and rescue helicopter capabilities in the UK currently provided by the Royal Air Force, the Royal Navy and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. That project envisaged the creation of a single SAR entity that would comprise a mix of civilian and military personnel; while all of the airframes would form part of a commercially owned and registered fleet.

The Soteria consortium was chosen as the preferred bidder for the project in February 2010. However, the project was suspended in June 2010 following a Treasury review of the Government's major spending projects. An announcement on proceeding with the project had been expected in December 2010. The Government subsequently confirmed that the project would be delayed while issues relating to the bidding process were clarified.

On 8 February 2011 the Government announced that the SAR-H contract had been cancelled after it emerged that irregularities had arisen in the bidding process relating to the consortium that had gone on to win the competition.

After a period of assessment, the Government announced on 28 November 2011 that a new civilian operated search and rescue capability would be established and that military involvement in search and rescue would cease once that capability becomes fully operational.

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1 Background

The military has formally been providing a SAR capability since 1941 (largely as a result of the Battle of Britain), when the Directorate of Air Sea Rescue was formed at the HQ of RAF Coastal Command. The Directorate had a mandate to form a combined and effective air/sea rescue service for downed Allied aircrew. The RAF Mountain Rescue teams were first established in 1943.

On 6 February 2011 the RAF Search and Rescue Force celebrated its 70th anniversary.

A short history of air/sea rescue is available at: http://www.raf.mod.uk/history_old/sar601.html

2 Search and Rescue in the UK

The current arrangements for SAR in the UK have evolved over the years and largely in response to obligations imposed under various international treaties such as the *Maritime Search and Rescue Convention 1979*. Consequently the SAR framework as it stands is a long-standing and fully integrated system that provides effective SAR coordination and coverage across a number of departments and organisations, including the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), the MOD, the emergency services and organisations such as the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) and the Mountain Rescue Council (MRC).

The key functions of SAR are to provide maritime SAR in offshore, inshore and shoreline areas; aeronautical SAR over land and sea covering an area extending from the Faroe Islands, to the English Channel and approximately halfway across the Atlantic Ocean (see Appendix One); and inland SAR 24 hours a day. Responsibility for civil aeronautical and

maritime SAR policy lies with the Department for Transport (DfT); while the co-ordination of land-based and inland waters SAR rests with the Police Service. The UK SAR Strategic Committee, which brings together representatives of all of those authorities and organisations involved in the provision of UK SAR, is responsible for providing advice on the structure, scope, adequacy of resources and organisational framework of SAR.

The division of responsibility for the exercise of SAR operations is largely as follows:

- **Military SAR** – The MOD is responsible for SAR provision for military operations, exercises and training within the UK.
- **Civil aeronautical SAR** – By agreement with the Department for Transport, the MOD exercises responsibility for civil aeronautical SAR on behalf of the DfT. Some SAR functions are also assigned to the MCA, which has four helicopter bases in the UK.
- **Civil Maritime SAR** - The co-ordination and provision of civil maritime SAR operations is undertaken largely by HM Coastguard. However, where coverage provided by military SAR assets coincides with civil requirements those assets are made available for civil maritime SAR operations.
- **Land-based SAR** – These operations are largely conducted by the emergency services. However, as with civil maritime SAR operations, military assets are made available where coverage coincides. The RAF has a number of dedicated mountain rescue teams which are used in this capacity and work closely with the civil authorities and civil mountain rescue teams.

The RAF and the Royal Navy primarily provide the military SAR assets, which are co-ordinated in all instances by the Aeronautical Rescue Coordination Centre (ARCC) based at RAF Kinloss. The ARCC is permanently manned by experienced SAR personnel from the RAF, Royal Navy and MCA.

In the event of a large scale national disaster, additional military resources for SAR purposes could also be provided under the remit of “Military Aid to the Civil Power”.

If necessary, and subject to military requirements, the 21st Special Operations Squadron of the US Air Force, based at RAF Mildenhall, can also provide assistance to UK SAR operations.

A more comprehensive examination of SAR operations, including the specific role and capabilities of the MCA and the MOD and the division of co-ordinating responsibilities, is set out in a framework document produced by the MCA. The April 2008 edition of that framework document is available at: <http://www.mcga.gov.uk/c4mca/uksar.pdf>

Library briefing [SN/BT/186](#) also provides further information on the MCA and its broader role in search and rescue.

It should be noted that combat search and rescue (CSAR) on overseas operations is not provided by the military assets assigned to the UK SAR framework. CSAR is provided as part of a broader Combat Recovery Operations Capability and utilises assets from Joint Helicopter Command. CSAR provision in Afghanistan is currently a coalition responsibility.¹

¹ HC Deb 22 January 2008, c1830W

2.1 Military and MCA Search and Rescue Locations and Capabilities

There are twelve bases around the UK which operate an SAR operational flight capability. Eight of those are military bases (6 RAF and 2 Royal Navy) and the other four belong to the MCA:

- RAF Lossiemouth
- RAF Boulmer
- RAF Leconfield
- RMB Chivenor
- Wattisham Airfield (RAF)
- RAF Valley
- RNAS Culdrose
- HMS Gannet (Prestwick)
- Stornoway (MCA)
- Sumburgh (MCA)
- Portland (MCA)
- Lee on Solent (MCA)

The Aeronautical Rescue Coordination Centre (ARCC) is based at RAF Kinloss.

The number of personnel employed in search and rescue provision was outlined in answer to a Parliamentary Question in November 2010:

The number of personnel currently employed in roles directly related to search and rescue activities in each of the four categories are listed in the following table:

	<i>Number</i>
Royal Navy	81
RAF	272
Maritime Coastguard Agency	491
Civilians (employed by MOD)	384

The figures exclude Royal Navy, RAF, Maritime Coastguard Agency and civilian personnel who are employed in roles which indirectly support search and rescue

activities but which also carry out non-search and rescue tasks. The figures also exclude volunteers who support search and rescue activities.²

It has been estimated that the RAF helicopter squadrons alone provide approximately 60% of SAR coverage in the UK. In 2010 there were 1,960 UK and overseas incidents resulting in 2,050 callouts of Royal Navy and RAF helicopters, Nimrod aircraft and Mountain Rescue Teams, a 15% decrease on activity in 2009.³ A summary of call outs, by station, is available in the [Search and Rescue Annual Report 2010](#) which is produced by the Defence Analytical Services Agency (DASA).

Military personnel usually undertake two complete tours of duty with other squadrons before joining an SAR squadron and therefore bring with them a high level of operational experience. In return military personnel gain considerable experience through their involvement in civilian rescue which can then translate back into the military environment.

RAF capabilities

The RAF has sixteen Sea King Mk3/3A helicopters in service, divided between No. 22 Squadron and No. 202 Squadron. Each squadron maintains a 15-minutes readiness state during daylight hours and a 45-minutes readiness state during the hours of darkness.

No. 22 Squadron operates out of RMB Chivenor (HQ and “A” flight); Wattisham Airfield (“B” flight) and RAF Valley (“C” flight). No. 202 squadron operates out of RAF Boulmer (HQ and “A” flight); RAF Lossiemouth (“D” flight) and RAF Leconfield (“E” flight). The Search and Rescue Training Unit also operates out of RAF Valley and has three Griffin HT1 helicopters.

Previously, the Nimrod MR2 Maritime Patrol Aircraft, which operated out of RAF Kinloss, also provided a long range SAR capability. That aircraft was withdrawn from service in March 2010. It had been expected that the Nimrod capability would be replaced with the new Nimrod MRA4 aircraft. Like the MR2, the new aircraft would have possessed a secondary long range SAR role. However, that project was cancelled as part of the recommendations of the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), which was published in October 2010.

Since the withdrawal of the Nimrod MR2, the MOD has sought to fill the gap in capability through the use of other military assets, including the Sea King 3/3A. The Hercules C130 aircraft are also fitted with radar systems that could provide a basic maritime search capability; while Royal Navy Merlin Mk1 and Lynx helicopters all possess short range search radar for use in the maritime environment. The E3-D Sentry airborne surveillance aircraft is optimised for the air-to-air role, but its radar does also have a limited maritime search capability.

In response to a Parliamentary Question in July 2010 the MOD revealed that in the last five years the Nimrod MR2 had flown the following number of sorties:⁴

	<i>Number of sorties</i>
2005	28
2006	28
2007	17

² HC Deb 19 November 2010, c968W

³ DASA, *Military Search and Rescue Statistics: 2010*

⁴ HC Deb 7 July 2010, c254W

2008	25
2009	11
2010 (until 31 March)	3

During that same period the Hercules C130 aircraft had been deployed only once on a search and rescue mission (25 February 2009).⁵

The SDSR also announced that following the withdrawal of the Nimrod MR2 and the decision not to bring the MRA4 into service, RAF Kinloss would be surplus to RAF requirements. At present it is unclear whether RAF Kinloss will close or whether Army personnel returning from Germany over the next nine years could be re-located to the base. The closure of RAF Kinloss would have implications for the ARRC and the RAF Mountain Rescue Team which are both based at the station. In answer to a parliamentary Question on 12 November 2010, the MOD stated:

We are now developing a longer term plan to mitigate the impact of the cancellation of the Nimrod MRA4. Meanwhile the UK will continue to provide search and rescue services using a range of assets depending on the response required.

No decision has been taken to close the Aeronautical Rescue Co-ordination Centre, though future arrangements are subject to further work following the decision to withdraw the RAF from Kinloss.⁶

Mountain Rescue Teams

The primary role of the RAF Mountain Rescue Team is to search for, and rescue, the survivors of aircraft crashes, although the majority of the work of the MRT involves searching for lost or injured civilians. The MRT are based at four locations around the UK: RAF Kinloss, RAF Leuchars, RAF Leeming, and RAF Valley. The RAF Mountain Rescue Service HQ is now a lodger unit of the SAR Force HQ, also based at RAF Valley. Each team consists of 8 full-time personnel and up to 28 RAF volunteers, who train in their spare time.

Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm Capabilities

The Fleet Air Arm operates nine Sea King Mk5 helicopters out of RNAS Culdrose in Cornwall and Prestwick in Scotland. Specifically:

- RNAS Culdrose – 771 Naval Air Squadron Search and Rescue is tasked primarily with military and civilian SAR. It operates six Sea King Mk 5 helicopters and consists of 215 military personnel (including 148 maintenance and ground support personnel). The Squadron also trains Royal Navy and Royal Marine Aircrew in winching, vessel transfers, load lifting and confined area operations prior to them being posted to frontline units.⁷
- HMS Gannet (Prestwick) – Operates three Sea King Mk 5 helicopters and consists of 26 military personnel, and 73 civilian staff. In addition to conventional SAR tasks,

⁵ HC Deb 8 November 2010, c23W

⁶ HC Deb 12 November 2010, c502W

⁷ <http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/operations-and-support/fleet-air-arm/naval-air-squadrons/771/introduction/index.htm>

HMS Gannet also provides a medical evacuation service to the island communities off the West coast of Scotland.⁸

MCA Capabilities

HM Coastguard operates four SAR helicopter units out of Stornoway, Sumburgh, Lee on Solent and Portland. The MCA operates two Sikorsky S-92A at both Stornoway and Shetland and two Augusta Westland 139 aircraft at Lee on Solent and one at Portland. The aircraft, along with their crews, are leased under a five year contract with the Canadian helicopter Corporation (CHC). That contract commenced in 2007 and is due to expire in 2012 in line with the provision of the SAR-H contract (see below).⁹ This private sector arrangement with the MCA has been in place for approximately 25 years. Under an agreement between the MCA and the MoD, tasking of these assets is normally undertaken through ARCC at RAF Kinloss.

3 Privatisation of Search and Rescue (SAR-H)

For the last few years the MOD and the MCA have been examining future options for SAR provision in the UK.

The Joint SAR-H (Search and Rescue Harmonisation) project was established in 2005 to replace the search and rescue helicopter capabilities in the UK currently provided by the Royal Air Force, the Royal Navy and the MCA with a single SAR entity that would comprise a mix of civilian and military personnel; while all of the airframes would form part of a commercially owned and registered fleet. Initially it was envisaged that 60 military air crew would form part of the new SAR arrangements, in order to meet the MOD's policy that 10% of expeditionary helicopter air crew have SAR experience.

On 9 May 2006 a Written Ministerial Statement confirmed that the project would be taken forward on a harmonised basis as a Private Finance Initiative. The Department for Transport confirmed:

The Department for Transport and the Ministry of Defence have agreed that the joint Search and Rescue Helicopter Project should go to its next stage. It will now go forward to a competition under the Private Finance Initiative. The service will still retain a high proportion of military aircrew alongside civilian aircrew trained to the same high standards.

We are committed to maintaining the effectiveness and high standards of the United Kingdom Search and Rescue Helicopter Service, currently provided by the Ministry of Defence and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, when the existing Ministry of Defence helicopters come to the end of their service life and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency service contract comes up for renewal, in the next decade.

The decision to proceed to this next stage provides an opportunity to bring together the current search and rescue helicopter providers into one harmonised service under a single contract providing the taxpayer with value for money. The service will continue to be managed jointly by the Ministry of Defence and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.¹⁰

⁸ <http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/operations-and-support/fleet-air-arm/sar-operations/hms-gannet/index.htm>

⁹ Prior to 2007 MCA helicopters were leased from Bristow Helicopters Ltd.

¹⁰ HC Deb 9 May 2006, c12-14WS

A 25-30 year contract, worth approximately £6bn, was expected to be placed in 2010, with a view to phased Service commencement from 2012, when the current MCA contract expires. The planned out-of-service date of the current Sea King Helicopter SAR fleet is 2016.¹¹ That contract would cover all service provision, maintenance, facilities and training.

Under these privatisation plans future basing arrangements for SAR were also expected to be reviewed. It had been suggested that the number of SAR bases around the UK could be reduced from 12 to eight,¹² although this reportedly prompted disagreements between the MOD and the MCA.¹³

3.1 The Bidding Consortia

Four consortia initially bid for the SAR-H contract:

- The Soteria Consortium – comprising Canadian Helicopter Corp (CHC), Sikorsky, Thales UK and the Royal Bank of Scotland. The bid was centred on the Sikorsky S-92 medium utility helicopter, which is currently being utilised by CHC as part of its contract to provide SAR helicopter services to the MCA.
- Air Knight consortium – comprising Lockheed Martin UK, VT Aerospace and British International Helicopters, which offered the Eurocopter EC225. British International Helicopters currently works with the MOD to provide helicopter support to the RAF base in the Falkland Islands.
- UK Air Rescue – comprising Bristow helicopters, FB Heliservices and Serco.
- Agusta Westland

Agusta Westland subsequently withdrew from the competition as an independent bidder in October 2007 and joined the UK Air Rescue consortium in January 2008.

In September 2008 the UK Air Rescue consortium withdrew from the bidding process however, citing “consideration of a wide range of commercial factors within the competition”.¹⁴

The preferred bidder for the SAR-H contract was announced in a Written Statement on 9 February 2010:

I am delighted to announce, together with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Paul Clark), that the Ministry of Defence and the Department for Transport have chosen the Soteria Consortium as the preferred bidder for the joint search and rescue helicopter project following a competition under the private finance initiative.

The Government are committed to sustaining the effectiveness and high standards of the United Kingdom search and rescue helicopter service, currently provided by the Ministry of Defence and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. The new service, which is anticipated to begin with a phased introduction from 2012, will replace the existing Ministry of Defence helicopters at the end of their service life, and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency service contract when it comes up for renewal.

¹¹ HC Deb 6 January 2010, c453W

¹² See HC Deb 13 January 2009, c559W

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ “UK Air Rescue team withdraws from SAR-H competition”, *Jane’s Defence Industry*, 23 September 2008

The new service will bring together the Ministry of Defence and Maritime and Coastguard Agency search and rescue helicopter provision into one highly effective and harmonised service under one single contract. The entire fleet of modern helicopters, some 30 per cent. faster than the current Sea Kings, will be able to attend low-level overland night-time incidents, will have forward-looking infrared equipment and be fitted with fully integrated de-icing equipment for much improved performance in severe winter conditions, thus providing the UK with an excellent SAR helicopter service with the ability to save lives well into the future.

The service will continue to be managed jointly by the Ministry of Defence and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and will retain a proportion of military aircrew alongside civilian aircrew trained to the same high standards.

We will now be working with the Soteria Consortium to finalise the contract, which we expect to award later in 2010.¹⁵

Mr Davies gave further information about the contract in answer to a PQ in March 2010, including on future basing arrangements:

The search and rescue helicopter service will be provided by the contractor under a service contract - MOD/MCA will not be procuring any helicopters. It will be the contractor's responsibility to ensure, throughout the life of the contract, that they have sufficient helicopters to meet the requirement to be able to field one helicopter to incidents from each base during its operating hours. The helicopters will be based at RAF Boulmer, RMB Chivenor, RNAS Culdrose, Glasgow Airport, Leconfield, Lee On Solent, RAF Lossiemouth, Portland, Stornoway, Sumburgh, RAF Valley and Wattisham Airfield.¹⁶

There was controversy, however, over specific elements of the deal which would see the provision of a 24-hour SAR service from only 9 of the 12 search and rescue bases and a reduction in the overall total of helicopters provided under the contract. An EDM tabled by the then Liberal Democrat Defence Spokesman, Nick Harvey, in March 2010 stated:

PROVISION OF SEARCH AND RESCUE HELICOPTER SERVICES

That this House notes with concern the Government's intention to commit approximately £6 billion to a PFI contract to provide Search and Rescue (SAR) helicopter services from 2012; believes that this is a misguided priority at a time when frontline troops urgently need more helicopter capacity; further notes that new helicopters may have faster speeds and greater ranges but believes that they cannot have mastered the art of being in two places at once, and is therefore concerned about the reduction in total helicopter numbers; is alarmed that in consequence some SAR stations will only operate 12 hour cover instead of 24 hour cover, so endangering public safety; and urges the Government to abandon their project, think again, find a more economical alternative, and sustain 24 hour cover at all SAR stations.¹⁷

3.2 Cancellation of SAR-H

In June 2010, the SAR-H contract was suspended following a value for money review of all of the Government's major spending projects. The October 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review made no mention of the possible future of the SAR-H project, leading many to speculate that the military element of the deal remained uncertain, was possibly

¹⁵ HC Deb 9 February 2010, c42-3ws

¹⁶ HC Deb 11 March 2010, c461-2w

¹⁷ EDM 1227, Session 2009-10

unaffordable and could include the phasing out all military involvement in search and rescue provision.¹⁸

Indications that the MOD and DfT would announce that the project was being taken forward with the preferred supplier became apparent in December 2010. In an announcement on 16 December 2010, which came as a surprise to the majority of commentators, the DfT stated however that the deal would be delayed in order for clarification to be sought on an issue which had been raised by Soteria. The Secretary of State for Transport, Phillip Hammond, stated:

Together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, I had planned to announce to the House today an intention to proceed with negotiations with the preferred bidder for the planned procurement of search and rescue helicopter capability. However, the preferred bidder has informed the Ministry of Defence within the last 48 hours that it has become aware of a possible issue in connection with its bid to provide the UK search and rescue capability, which was the basis of its selection as the preferred bidder as announced in February 2010.

In the circumstances it is not appropriate for us to proceed with the planned announcement until the status of this issue has been clarified.

My right hon. Friend and I will make a further statement to the House as soon as we are able to provide further information and to set out our plans for proceeding to secure the provision of search and rescue helicopter capability in the future. We regret the further uncertainty that this entails for all those involved in providing the UK's search and rescue service.¹⁹

In January 2011, the contract appeared to be on the brink of possible collapse after it was revealed that the Royal Bank of Scotland, the major equity partner in the Soteria consortium, had withdrawn from the team.

Further speculation over the future of the contract arose after a series of articles in the media suggested that the MOD had been informed of possible misconduct in relation to the bidding process by the UK Air Rescue consortium back in 2008 (the consortium had pulled out of the competition in September 2008), and that military police were investigating. An article in *The Financial Times* reported:

The Ministry of Defence was warned of possible misconduct in the £6bn privatisation of the search and rescue service more than two years before it launched a military police investigation in to the bidding process.

Senior Whitehall figures have told the Financial Times that a rival bidder raised the alarm in 2008 after discovering that military officers handling the privatisation had taken jobs with CHC, a Canadian helicopter operator whose Soteria consortium went on to win the competition [...]

The response to the 2008 allegations is likely to heighten concerns about the MOD's handling of the privatisation and raise questions over the rules governing MOD employees when taking jobs with industry.²⁰

¹⁸ See "SAR-H contract delayed as Soteria steps back", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 17 December 2010

¹⁹ HC Deb 16 December 2010, c134WS

²⁰ "MOD was told of air rescue concerns", *The Financial Times*, 3 February 2011

Indeed, in a Written Statement on 8 February 2011, the Government confirmed:

On 16 December I and my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced that information had come to light regarding the preferred bid in the search and rescue helicopter competition which required clarification.

In mid-December, the preferred bidder in the SAR-H competition, Soteria, voluntarily came forward to inform the Government of irregularities regarding the conduct of its bid team which had only then recently come to light. The irregularities included access by one of the consortium members, CHC Helicopter, to commercially sensitive information regarding the joint MoD/DfT project team's evaluations of industry bids and evidence that a former member of that project team had assisted the consortium in its bid preparation, contrary to explicit assurances given to the project team.

Since December, our two departments have been working with Soteria better to understand the situation and its implications for the procurement process. In addition, the Ministry of Defence Police are investigating how the commercially sensitive information came to be in the possession of the bidder. It would be inappropriate to comment further on the details of the investigation until it has finished.

However, even without the outcome of that investigation, the Government have sufficient information to enable them to conclude that the irregularities that have been identified were such that it would not be appropriate to proceed with either the preferred bid or with the current procurement process.²¹

Responding to that announcement, the Soteria consortium issued a press release stating:

Soteria is disappointed to learn that the U.K. government has announced the cancellation of the SAR-H programme.

We remain confident that Soteria was designated as the preferred bidder for the SAR-H programme as a result of the value, expertise, dedication, excellence and exceptional technical solution that Soteria can provide in leading search-and-rescue efforts across the U.K.

Soteria is evaluating the government's decision and if given the opportunity is confident that it is capable of delivering the SAR-H programme and stands ready to work with the UK government.²²

Commenting on the cancellation of the SAR-H contract the Scottish Community Safety Minister, Fergus Ewing, called for a resolution to be reached as a matter of urgency. He stated:

The suspension of the bidding for the new search and rescue helicopters is extremely concerning and could have real implications for the service in Scotland – where a significant proportion of the mountain rescue activity in the UK takes place [...]

Unfortunately, the statement by the Secretary of State for Transport contains few clues as to how this situation will be resolved beyond confirming that an announcement will be made in due course. I call on him to make that announcement as a matter of urgency, and involve the Scottish Government and other stakeholders in Scotland in this process as soon as possible.²³

²¹ HC Deb 8 February 2011, c7-8WS

²² <http://www.soteriasar.com/news-article/soteria-sar-h-statement>

²³ The Scottish Government Press Release, 9 February 2011

According to the National Audit Office, £7.2m had already been spent on the privatisation deal by 31 March 2010;²⁴ while the MOD revealed in answer to a Parliamentary Question on 11 February 2011 that approximately £10m had been spent on the project, to date.²⁵

4 A New Civilian Search and Rescue Service

After a period of assessment, the Government announced on 28 November 2011 that a new civilian-led UK-wide search and rescue capability would be established and that military involvement in search and rescue would cease once that capability is fully operational.

In a statement to the House, the Secretary of State for Transport, Justine Greening, stated:

Following the cancellation of the SAR-H private finance initiative in February, the Department for Transport will today publish a notice in the Official Journal of the European Union to commence procurement for a new UK-wide service contract.

My right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary has agreed that the new contract will provide a search and rescue capability provided by civilian crews, enabling our armed forces to focus activity on their front-line operations.

The Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force crews have shown great dedication and professionalism in delivering an exemplary search and rescue service for many years, and we owe them all great thanks for this. Looking forward, we are confident that, building on nearly 30 years of civilian service provided under contract to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), a fully civilian service will be able to maintain the same standards in the future.

This competition will procure a contracted search and rescue helicopter service for the whole of the UK, for a period of approximately 10 years. The Royal Air Force and Royal Navy will continue to provide search and rescue coverage until the replacement for this capability is in place, and it is my intention that the contract I let will require this to be the first part of the new service to become operational. This will ensure that the Ministry of Defence is able to meet its previously announced intention to withdraw from service and retire its fleet of Sea King helicopters by March 2016. The replacement for the capability currently provided by the MCA will follow on from this. This transition will ensure continuity of service.

Bidders for the future service will be able to put forward options which will utilise a mixed fleet of modern helicopters based on the capabilities required at each of the bases (such as range, carrying capacity and endurance). The services will be capable of delivery by different contractors providing complementary services.

The introduction of a modern fleet of fast, reliable helicopters will lead to major improvements in the capability available from the present mix of helicopters. Modern helicopters operating from 10 full-time bases can not only continue to meet all current service requirements but also provide faster flying times to a large part of the UK search and rescue region, as well as providing a more reliable service. This will therefore be reflected in the new contract.

It is my intention that search and rescue operations will cease at RAF Boulmer in 2015 and at MCA Portland when the interim arrangements that were announced in July expire. Other operations at RAF Boulmer will be unaffected by this.

²⁴ National Audit Office, *Major Projects Report 2010*, HC 489-II, Session 2010-11

²⁵ HC Deb 11 February 2011, c455W

Given the complexity of the issues that need to be considered by bidders during the procurement, I intend that this procurement will be undertaken using the competitive dialogue procedure. As far as is practicable however, I intend to run the competition using lean procurement principles during some stages of the procurement. This will, I hope, both expedite and simplify some stages of the procurement that would ordinarily be time consuming and costly for industry to participate in.

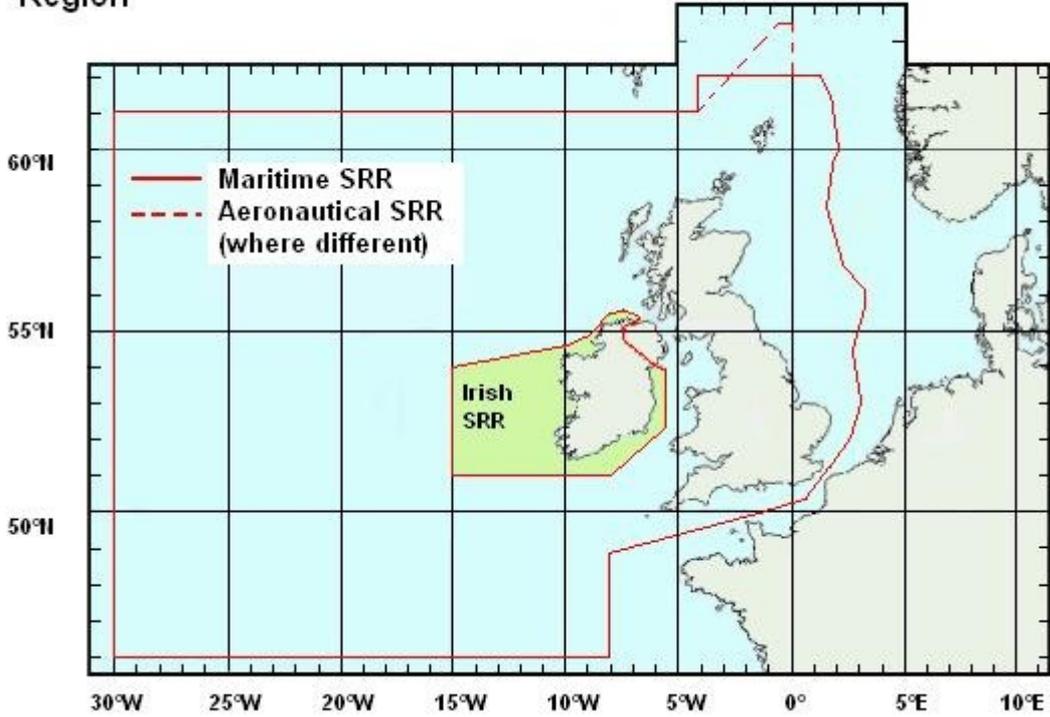
I expect to award a contract in early 2013 to give the future service provider time to mobilise the new capability.²⁶

²⁶ HC Deb 28 November 2011, c52-3WS

Appendix One – Area of SAR Operations

The UK AR region covers some 1.25 million square nautical miles of sea and over 10.5 thousand nautical miles of coastline. The eastern boundary of the UK SAR region joins those of Norway, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium in the North Sea, France in the English Channel. To the west the UK SAR region extends into the North Atlantic to meet those of Canada, Portugal, the Irish Republic and Iceland.

UK Search and Rescue Region



Source: Maritime and Coastguard Agency