



Memorandum of Understanding between Her Majesty's Coastguard and the National Police Chiefs' Councils on the Coordination of Search and Rescue Resources at Coastal Incidents in England and Wales.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The organisation for Search and Rescue (SAR) in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) is an amalgam of separate Government Departments, the Emergency Services and a number of SAR charities and voluntary organisations. These authorities and organisations are committed to a cohesive and cooperative partnership, the aim of which is the continued provision of an effective, cost-efficient national SAR capability. The overall framework for the strategic and operational oversight of UK SAR, its background, scope and responsibilities are laid out in the Strategic Overview of SAR in the UK.¹
- 1.2 Responsibility for the overall provision of national civil aeronautical and maritime SAR and its policies rests with the Department for Transport through the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), which is an executive agency of the Department for Transport. Her Majesty's Coastguard (HMCG) is mandated by the Coastguard Act 1925 and holds duties as determined by the Secretary of State for Transport.² HMCG is responsible for the initiation and coordination of civil maritime SAR within the UK SAR Region. This includes the mobilisation, organisation and tasking of adequate resources to respond to persons either in distress at sea, or to persons at risk of injury or death on the cliffs or shoreline³ of the UK.
- 1.3 Policing in the UK is organised separately in each of the legal systems of England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Police Service in England and Wales is comprised of 43 territorial police forces which are led by operationally independent and local accountable chief constables ('the Police'). The Police coordinate the response to land-based SAR operations, including the inland aspects of those incidents that originate in the sea or in the air, and provide coordination of all emergency services and other authorities where appropriate.
- 1.4 The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) is a co-ordinating body for police services in the UK which assists chief constables and their forces cut crime and keep the public safe by joining up the operational response to the most serious and strategic threats. It also works closely with the College of Policing, which is responsible for developing professional standards.

¹ Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/search-and-rescue-framework-uksar>

² Hansard, [HC Debate 9 March 1992, Vol. 205, Col. 409W](#)

³ This includes Windermere, Coniston Water, Ullswater and Derwent Water, River Severn to Gloucester, Norfolk and Suffolk Broads and River Thames to Teddington.

2 Purpose

- 2.1 This Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) sets out arrangements which have been jointly agreed by HMCG and NPCC on the division of responsibility between HMCG and the Police for the coordination of Coastal SAR incidents in England and Wales, including cliffs and shorelines and designated inland waters.⁴

3. Background and Scope

- 3.1 HMCG has legal responsibility for the coordination of civil aeronautical and maritime SAR. The Police are responsible for the coordination of land-based SAR.

Incidents in the Coastal Area (as defined in paragraph 5.2) as well as other non-maritime / inland based SAR incidents may necessitate the cooperation and sharing of resources between HMCG and the Police.

This MoU should be read in conjunction with the most recent published version of the document titled 'Strategic Overview of Search and Rescue in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland'⁵ or any successor to that document.

4 Statement of Intent

- 4.1 This MoU supersedes the 'Memorandum of Understanding between Police and Coastguard Authority for the Co-ordination of Search and Rescue Resources at Littoral / Coastal / Cliff Incidents' (dated 22 May 1992) and any and all existing memoranda of understanding and / or local arrangements between HMCG and the Police with the exception of the 'Memorandum of Understanding between the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (HM Coastguard), and the National Police Chiefs' Council Recovery of bodies from the water' (dated 1 May 2016) and Memoranda regarding the arrangements for SAR coordination on Windermere, Coniston Water, Ullswater and Derwent Water, River Severn to Gloucester, Norfolk and Suffolk Broads and River Thames to Teddington until such time as those memoranda cease to have effect.
- 4.2 This MoU reflects a shared commitment between HMCG and the NPCC to work collaboratively. It is however neither a binding agreement nor contract and is of no legal effect; rather it is a jointly agreed statement of the way that the Police and HMCG will work together to ensure good communications and the efficient discharge and understanding of the roles of both organisations when coordinating SAR resources at incidents in the Coastal Area.

⁴ This includes Windermere, Coniston Water, Ullswater and Derwent Water, River Severn to Gloucester, Norfolk and Suffolk Broads and River Thames to Teddington.

⁵ Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/search-and-rescue-framework-uksar>

- 4.3 This MoU does not negate the primacy of HMCG or the Police in their respective area(s) of responsibility.⁶

Understanding

5 Application

- 5.1 This MoU applies to the coordination of SAR resources for incidents in the Coastal Area.

5.2 Coastal Area

As agreed in the Strategic Overview of SAR in the UK⁷, a coastal incident is defined as an incident which develops on the seaward side of the coastline below the level of Mean High Water Spring tides (MHWS) but including sea cliffs, shoreline and other littoral areas. Such incidents will be coordinated by HMCG and those above MHWS will be coordinated by the Police.

MHWS means the height at which the average spring tide reaches the shoreline, as marked on Admiralty charts and Ordnance Survey maps of Great Britain.

Sea / river boundaries are regarded as MHWS tidal limits as shown on Ordnance Survey maps unless otherwise specified in separate Memoranda of Understanding between the Police and HMCG or agreed locally (e.g. including by Local SAR Fora, Local Resilience Fora SAR Groups, Local SAR Committees or Maritime Incident Collaborative Working Groups).⁸

5.3 Littoral Area

To further improve situational awareness during operational response and provide additional clarification for the purpose of this MoU, the littoral area is defined as that area which is contiguous to the sea (MHWS mark) and the land, not normally inundated by the tide, including sea cliffs, marshes, dunes and beaches below the generally accepted boundary of the shoreline.

5.4 Non-Maritime / Inland

HMCG will, subject to approval of a HMCG Senior Officer, provide support to the Police and other category 1 and 2 responders, for non-maritime related incidents and other agreed commitments under the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act.

6 Responsibilities

⁶ As outlined in section 6 of this MoU.

⁷ Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/search-and-rescue-framework-uksar>

⁸ See section 7 of this MoU.

- 6.1 The demarcation for coordination responsibilities between HMCG and Police is the MHWS mark.⁹ As agreed in the Strategic Overview of SAR in the UK¹⁰, an incident which develops (i) on or (ii) below the level of MHWS and / or the littoral area will be coordinated by HMCG. An incident which develops (i) above MHWS and / or (ii) not in a littoral area will be coordinated by the Police.
- 6.2 HMCG is responsible for the mobilisation, organisation and tasking of adequate declared¹¹ and additional¹² SAR facilities, including Coastguard Rescue Teams (CRTs), SAR aviation assets, RNLI lifeboats, independent volunteer rescue units and other responding assets. The Coastguard Rescue Service is a declared facility operated by HMCG. It provides a national coastal network of professional CRTs made up of volunteers and managed by full time staff. The teams are available 24/7 for SAR purposes within the Coastal Area and certain designated inland waterways. All CRTs are SAR teams with training and equipment to deliver SAR operations; including casualty care (first aid, casualty packaging, evacuation, rescue stretchers), search, water safety and rescue. Where required teams are equipped with additional technical rescue equipment to enable them to perform rope rescue and mud rescue.
- 6.3 In any incident which occurs in the Coastal Area, any land-based facilities which attend at the request of HMCG, including Police resources, will be under the overall coordination of HMCG. Whenever Police resources are committed to such an incident, operational command of a Police unit will remain with the Police whilst coordination will rest with HMCG.
- 6.4 Where an incident in the Coastal Area is reported to the Police, the relevant Police control room accepts to inform HMCG as soon as practicable so that, if necessary, adequate resources can be mobilised, tasked and coordinated.
- 6.5 Where HMCG receives information regarding an incident where the Police have statutory responsibilities, they will inform the relevant Police control room as soon as practicable.
- 6.6 The Police may from time to time be involved in investigating reports of missing and/or vulnerable people who may be in danger. In these circumstances, the primary responsibility of the Police is to coordinate their own resources and those of other responding agencies including specialist support provided by voluntary inland rescue organisations such as Lowland Rescue Teams, search dogs and other specialist search teams.

⁹ Unless otherwise agreed (see paragraph 5.2)

¹⁰ Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/search-and-rescue-framework-uksar>

¹¹ A declared facility is available for civilian maritime SAR under the coordination of HMCG according to a specific standard or set criteria.

¹² An additional facility may be available from time to time in SAR operations but not to any specified standard of capability

- 6.7 Incidents which develop inland are the responsibility of the Police. However, at the request of the Police, HMCG can provide suitably trained and equipped resources to assist in an emergency response. On such occasions, whilst coordination rests with the Police, operational command of HMCG units remains with HMCG. SAR incidents have the potential to develop into major incidents requiring the implementation of special arrangements by the Police or other Emergency Services. In such circumstances the Police will coordinate the activity of those responding and will have responsibility for processing casualty information and identifying and arranging for the removal of the dead. A national structure has been agreed and adopted which ensures that all organisations understand their role in the combined response.¹³
- 6.8 The Police are also responsible for overseeing any investigation into possible criminal activity that causes an accident or incident that results in injury or death.

7 Liaison

- 7.1 This MoU should form the basis of all future liaison between the Police in England and Wales and HMCG with regards to SAR activities in the Coastal Area.
- 7.2 HMCG and the Police should organise and participate in regular meetings, which should also include representatives of other Emergency Services, appropriate statutory agencies, and voluntary organisations. These meetings (e.g. Local SAR Fora, Local Resilience Fora SAR Groups, Local SAR Committees or Maritime Incident Collaborative Working Groups) should monitor local arrangements for SAR and encourage local liaison at operational level.

8 Body Recovery

- 8.1 The general principles of co-operation for the recovery of bodies from the water have been agreed in the 'Memorandum of Understanding between the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (HM Coastguard), and the National Police Chiefs' Council Recovery of bodies from the water' (dated 1 May 2016).

9 Communications

- 9.1 It is essential that if both HMCG and the Police attend an incident, the respective Incident Officers co-locate and, where appropriate, set up a joint incident command post (which may also include Fire and Ambulance personnel if in attendance). Both HMCG and the Police will operate in accordance with Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP).
- 9.2 All on-scene communications between CRTs, SAR aviation assets and RNLI Lifeboats or other independent rescue boats participating in SAR

¹³ Strategic Overview of SAR in the UK (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/search-and-rescue-framework-uksar>)

operations are normally conducted on a marine band radio frequencies designated by the HMCG Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) coordinating the incident.

- 9.3 Police units assisting in a shoreline search should establish and maintain contact with the coordinating RCC either through their Police control room or the CRT on scene throughout the operation and until the RCC declares SAR operations terminated.
- 9.4 Communications regarding activities coordinated by the Police are normally conducted on TETRA¹⁴ / Emergency Services Network (ESN).
- 9.5 Any press releases in respect of matters pertaining to this MOU and or joint operations conducted in accordance with this MOU should be agreed by the participants to this MoU before publication whenever practicable.

10 Major Incidents

- 10.1 In the event of a maritime major incident which is likely to have an impact shore-side (e.g. where there may be large numbers of survivors and / or casualties being brought ashore) HMCG will instigate Operation WAYPOINT, which provides a JESIP compliant situation report and facilitates agreement on activation of a landing point for reception of survivors.
- 10.2 The Police force responsible for coordinating the shore-side response to a maritime Major Incident will be sent a WAYPOINT situation report by email following a verbal brief to the relevant control room.
- 10.3 Operation WAYPOINT, HMCG's Major Incident Plan and associated guidance are held on the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's ResilienceDirect pages.

11 Training

- 11.1 To maintain standards of training appropriate to the provisions of this MoU, HMCG and the Police should regularly take part in joint training exercises, which may include both organisations participating in multi-agency exercises.

¹⁴ Terrestrial Trunked Radio (formerly Airwave) is a European standard for a trunked radio system specifically designed to enable secure communications for use by government agencies and emergency services.

Management of this MoU

12 Costs

- 12.1 HMCG and any Police forces which are involved in joint operations under the terms of this MoU will bear their own costs, including those for communication equipment, unless otherwise specified.

13 Term of Duration

- 13.1 This MoU is effective from the date it has been signed by both participants and will remain valid until terminated in accordance with paragraph 14.

14 Review, Variation and Termination

- 14.1 This MoU will be reviewed every three years. However, either participant to this MoU may request that the MoU be reviewed at any time should the need arise and the participant receiving such a request will endeavour to cooperate in completing that review in a timely manner.

The provisions of this MoU may be varied at any time by the joint agreement of the participants.

- 14.2 Correspondence or communication regarding this Memorandum should be addressed to:

For HMCG:
 Assistant Director Policy
 HM Coastguard
 Spring Place, 105 Commercial Road
 Southampton, Hampshire, SO15 1EG
sar.response@mcga.gov.uk

For NPCC:

[point of contact information to be completed]

- 14.3 Termination of this MoU will be subject to discussion by HMCG and the NPCC. Either participant may terminate this MoU by giving not less than six months' notice in writing and stating the reasons for such termination.

15. Signatories

Signed on behalf of Her Majesty's Coastguard

Claire Hughes, Director of Her Majesty's Coastguard

Signature

Personal Data

Date 3rd November 2021

Signed on behalf of the National Police Chiefs' Council

Commander

Name

Lead for Search

Signature

Personal Data

Date 2nd November 2021

Assistant Chief Constable

Name

Lead for Missing

Signature

Personal Data

Date 3rd November 2021

Assistant Chief Constable

Name

Lead for Search and Rescue

Signature

Personal Data

Date 8th November 2021