



Maritime &
Coastguard
Agency



Statement of Need – English Channel SAR Operations (ACP-2021-088)

This statement of need confirms the essential State requirement that will be delivered by Bristow Helicopters Limited (BHL) utilising unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) operating from Lydd London Ashford Airport in Kent.

Bristow Helicopters Limited have been requested by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency to submit an Airspace Change Proposal to enable long-term Beyond Visual Line Of Sight (BVLOS) UAS operations in the vicinity of the English Channel. Routine HM Coastguard patrols are required to support Search and Rescue taskings in the region as a result of the significant increase in demand placed on emergency services responding to migrant crossings.

As part of UK Government's response, The Department for Transport (DfT) has been directed by the Government to expand routine situational awareness (SA) patrols of the English Channel due to the increased levels of migrant crossings which regularly result in Search and Rescue operations following multiple '999' calls. Based on the intelligence from the UAS, Her Majesty's Coastguard (HMCG) decision makers can ascertain the scale and an accurate location of an incident and mobilise the appropriate rescue assets to attend, ensuring an efficient use of limited resource.

HM Coastguard has been working closely with local authorities and emergency services to utilise the limited resources effectively to address the current and predicted increase in SAR incidents. Deploying Bristow's UAS for SA patrols and safety overwatch in the English Channel provides operational staff at HM Coastguard with vital intelligence which can be shared with other emergency services, other Government departments and local organisations, ensuring an effective and co-ordinated deployment of air, sea and ground resources. This co-ordinated approach will allow the selection of the most suitable resources and ensure that where possible UK SAR helicopter (SAR(H)) assets can be maintained in their primary life-saving role therefore, reducing pressure on the Service and crews.

Due to the enduring nature of this requirement, a permanent viable solution to replace the current English Channel temporary danger area (TDA) complex is needed to continue to support the UK Government's response to the current migrant issue. It is expected that as well as supporting MCA UAS operations, the final airspace solution will consider the requirements of all parties and will be designed and managed in such a way as to provide opportunity to support the wider UK, multi-agency response in the region. If in the future the requirement no longer exists or a technical advancement negates the need for the airspace change, it will be relinquished.