

Safety Recommendation Number:	IRLD2021016
AAIU Event Reference:	IRL00917016
AAIU Report Number:	2021-008
Date of Publication of Safety Recommendation:	5 November 2021
Safety Recommendation Status:	Implemented, closed

Safety Recommendation:

The Minister for Transport should, in conjunction with the relevant agencies, review processes regarding the requesting/tasking of Top Cover assets, fixed wing or helicopter, and should ensure that terminology is well-defined and consistently used.

Response:

On 01 February 2022, and in subsequent engagement with the AAIU, the Department of Transport provided the following response to this Safety Recommendation:

"On behalf of the Minister I would like to convey the following:

The recommendation is accepted.

The Coast Guard revised its procedure for determining the requirements for requesting/tasking and coordination of air support for long range SAR operations. The operator participated in the drafting of the SOP to ensure that terminology is well defined and consistently used.

The revised procedure is set out in Operation Notice issued in 2018. It sets out definitions, and clearly distinguishing between utilisation and role of Fixed Wing and the use of Helicopters in a SAR support role. The Ops notice sets out a stepped arrangement for utilising Helicopters in a SAR support role, at the discretion of the commander of the primary responding asset. The notice prescribes that the Commander of the primary responding SAR asset (Helicopter) conducting the mission, in considering the viability of the mission, is responsible for determining the requirement for Top Cover and if it is unavailable, the requirements for provision of support by a Secondary SAR Asset (Helicopter).

The Coast Guard will carry out a broader review and stakeholder engagement to include agreements with other aviation stakeholders.

The Coast Guard will provide further update on this matter to the AAIU by Q4 2022."

On 19 September 2023, the Department of Transport provided the following update for this Safety Recommendation:

"The revised procedure pertaining to provision of Top Cover, or when not available the use of Helicopters in a SAR support role is operating satisfactorily. Air Corps is the sole national provider of Top Cover support on

a 'request and availability basis'. Arrangements for international support from UK are captured in an MOU on the basis that each participant agrees to provide when practical and reasonable, assistance to each other when requested by the other participant, which includes, but is not limited to personnel, resources, information and advice. The operator of the CG Helicopter contract has experience of conducting long range operations in collaboration with UK Maritime and Coastguard Fixed Wing Assets.

The next generation Coast Guard Aviation contract makes provision for a dedicated Coast Guard Fixed wing asset. Anticipated commencement of Coast Guard Fixed Wing Service is 2025."

AAIU Comment:

The AAIU notes the Minister's response of 01 February 2022.

The AAIU also notes the Q4 2022 timescale for further update.

The AAIU considers the status of this Safety Recommendation to be 'In process of implementation'.

The AAIU notes the Minister's response of 19 September 2023.

The AAIU considers the status of this Safety Recommendation to be 'Implemented, closed'.