

### United Kingdom Search and Rescue

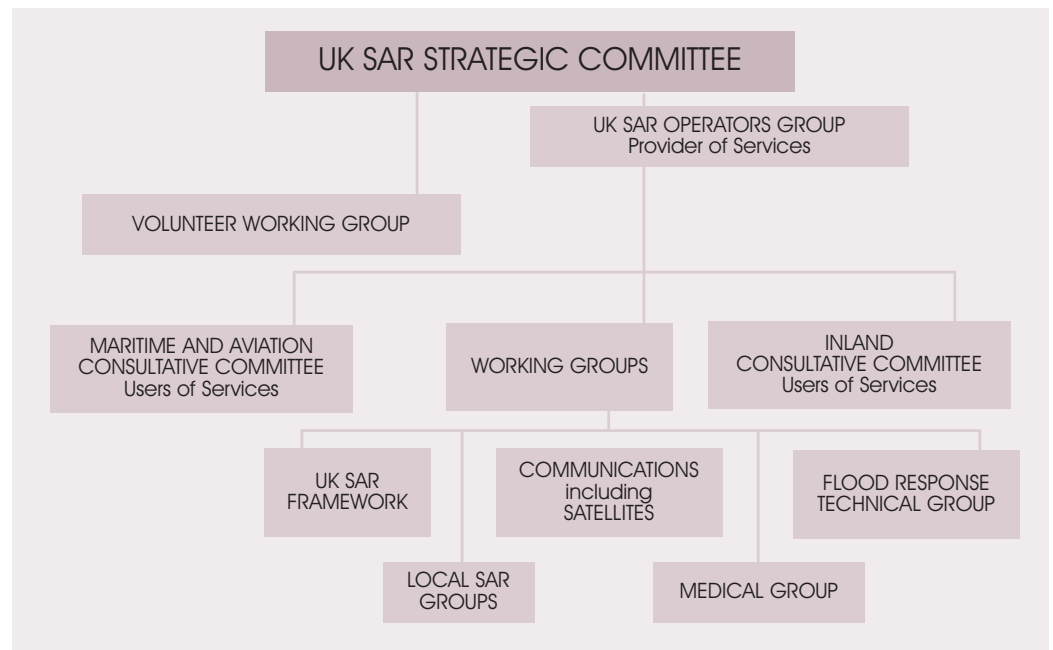
by Dr ASG Jones MBE

The co-ordination and representation of all Search and Rescue (SAR) was reorganised with the establishment of the current structure in 2000.

The definition of SAR, as given in the Foreword to The Framework Document, is 'Search and Rescue is the activity of locating and recovering persons either in distress, potential distress or missing and delivering them to a place of safety.' Civil Maritime and Aviation SAR is not a devolved function but land SAR is devolved to various local levels. The police have primacy in land SAR. The current structure is shown in the organogram.

The terms of reference of the strategic committee are:

1. To develop criteria for the coverage, responsiveness and availability of SAR resources, consulting the UK SAR Operators Group as required.
  2. To offer views to ministers on improving SAR capability, effectiveness and co-operation.
  3. To promote effective and efficient co-operation between the various government departments, the emergency services and other organisations including voluntary agencies for the provision of an effective SAR service at national level and, where appropriate, international level.
  4. To establish the framework for UK SAR as described in this document.
  5. To provide terms of reference for the UK SAR Operators Group.
- It should be noted that the Strategic Committee reports directly to ministers and, in doing



so, represents the views and ideas on all aspects of SAR.

#### The Strategic Committee

Membership of the Strategic Committee consist of representatives from:

- Department for Transport (DfT) – Chair and Secretariat
- Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
- Ministry of Defence (MoD)
- Home Office (HO)
- Association of Chief Police Officers, England, Wales and Northern Ireland (ACPO)
- Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland) (ACPO(S))
- Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA)
- Department of Health (DoH)
- Northern Ireland Office

- Scotland Office
- Welsh Office
- Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI)

#### The Operators Group

The Terms of Reference for the Operators Group, acting under the aegis of the UK SAR Strategic Committee, are:

1. To develop a programme of work to implement the tasks set by UKSARSC.
2. To consider reports and recommendations from associated SAR working groups.
3. To consider the views of the UK Maritime and Aviation SAR, and inland SAR consultative committees.
4. To advise and make recommendations to the UKSARSC on a national SAR

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framework to ensure efficient and effective co-operation between SAR agencies and those concerned with civil SAR.

5. To determine the terms of reference and issue other guidance as appropriate to SAR Working Groups and Consultative Committees.

In the normal course of events, the Operators Group meets four times a year.

### The Operators Group

The UK SAR Operators Group consists of members representing the national bodies of the providers of SAR services. As such, all are directly involved in the provision of SAR services. The members are:

- DfT - MCA, Chair and Secretariat
- MoD (RAF), Vice Chair
- HO, Emergency Planning Division
- ACPO
- ACPO(S)
- CFOA
- DoH
- Association of Lowland Search and Rescue (ALSAR)
- British Cave Rescue Council (BCRC)
- Mountain Rescue Committee of Scotland (MRC of S)
- Mountain Rescue England and Wales (MREW)
- Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS)
- Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI)

All the national voluntary organisations that provide SAR services are full members of the operators group. Since the inception of the current structure, mountain and cave rescue has been active in the work of the

operators group and its working groups.

### The Consultative Committees

The two consultative committees – Maritime and Aviation, and Inland – are made up of members representing the users of SAR services. These two committees report directly to the Operators Group. The views of users can be placed before the Operators Group and information on the developments in SAR can be circulated to users of the services.

Much of the detailed work on many aspects of SAR has been and will be delegated to the working groups shown in the organogram. Some of the working groups are in abeyance until such time as there is need to reactivate them, others are currently active. Additional working groups may be established as and when the need arises.

### Helicopter Provision

The Helicopter Provision Group tabled its report in June, 2001. It carried out a risk assessment based on 42,000 incidents within the UK search and rescue region over a three year period. It established coverage criteria for SAR helicopters which are:

A. A SAR helicopter should take-off as quickly and safely as possible, normally within fifteen minutes by day and 45 minutes by night, from receiving notification of the incident by the appropriate RCC.

B. A SAR helicopter should be capable of reaching all very high and high risk areas and 75% of all

medium risk areas within the UKSRR within 60 minutes of take-off

C. There should be a SAR helicopter available 'on-state' at each SAR base for 98% of the base's declared SAR operating time; usually 24 hours per day throughout the year. In addition, to cater for concurrent SAR tasks and to provide a surge capacity for large disasters, a second helicopter and crew should be available at certain military SAR bases.

SAR Harmonisation will start in 2010.

### The UK SAR National Plan

The UK SAR National Plan was republished by the MCA in April, 2008 and is titled 'Search and Rescue Framework for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.' The document is available as a pdf file at the following URL:

[http://www.mcga.gov.uk/sandr/framework/UK\\_SAR\\_Framework\\_Document.pdf](http://www.mcga.gov.uk/sandr/framework/UK_SAR_Framework_Document.pdf)

It is also available on the UK SAR web site:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/transport/oryou/uksar/>

### The Communications Working Group

The Communications Working Group (including Satellites) was established to consider all aspects of communications related to SAR. In 2001, the CWG subsumed the work of the National Controlling Committee (NCC). Of direct benefit to mountain and cave rescue was the release of additional VHF High Band channels for the exclusive

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use of Land SAR. The MCA took on the licence and approved users operate under a Letter of Authority issued by the MCA. The use of these VHF High Band Channels is governed by the 'Implementation and Control of the United Kingdom VHF High Band land Search and Rescue Radio Channels.' The current version of this document may be found on the UK SAR website. The change over to the High Band channels has been completed.

Control of confusion is particularly important when one team is on a training exercise and one is involved in an actual operation. Actual operations must have priority over training and similar activities. In the case of two teams being operational, a balance will be required to ensure there is minimal confusion on the two operations. Through the auspices of the CWG, chief constables agreed to their control rooms passing on requests for co-operation in reducing radio interference. It is noted that control rooms cannot order an emergency shut down of a radio net. The procedure to be followed is as follows:

1. Identify the call sign and, hence, the team causing the confusion. If possible, identify the area in which the team is operating.
2. Attempt to contact the team directly by radio and inform them of the problem.
3. If contact cannot be established, contact your local police control room and ask them to pass on the request to the control room in the relevant area from which the confusion is originating.



*...teams must use the proper, authorised call signs...*

**Teams must use proper, authorised call signs and abide with the requirements of the most current version of the Implementation and Control Document.**

It is a regulatory requirement that written radio logs are kept whenever radios are in use. Teams proposing to engage in a training exercise should advise the police control room of their proposed area for training and how they may be easily contacted.

In the event of an approved user wishing to lodge a formal complaint, copies of the written radio log will be requested before the CWG will consider the case.

#### PLBs

The use of Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) on land is a developing subject. As of

February, 2009 the use of PLBs on land is contrary to regulations but the demand for use on land is increasing. Satellite support for PLBs operating on 121.5 MHz has been withdrawn. The use of PLBs and enhanced PLBs operating on 406 MHz on land is being considered for use on land. If permitted, a mandatory registration system will be enforced.

#### The Medical Group

The Medical Group was established in 2005. It was established to consider many aspects of casualty care in the context of SAR in all environments. The Terms of Reference are:

#### General

- The UK SAR Medical Group's aim is to develop the convergence of patient care within UK SAR.

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#### Detailed responsibility

- Review current medical provision for UK SAR.
- To encourage the development of commonality of training and standards for patient care within UK SAR.
- Identify guidelines for future structure to harmonise clinical governance within UK SAR.

#### Membership

Membership comprises members and/or appropriate specialists for the organisations represented at the UK SAR Operators Group.

One of the underlying principles of SAR is the 'order of priority'. SAR personnel must be:

- A specialist first (caver, mountaineer, lifeboatman, helicopter rear crewman)

- A rescuer second
  - A provider of casualty care third
- With active participation in the Operators Group and its working groups, the profile of mountain and cave rescue has been raised significantly. There has been a greatly increased awareness of the work carried out by the voluntary organisations active in providing SAR services.

Dr Anthony Jones is vice chairman of Mountain Rescue England and Wales. Born in India, he was educated at Bishops in Cape Town, where his work with mountain rescue began in 1954, with the Cape Town section of the Mountain Club of South Africa. In the UK, he joined the Ogwen Valley team, of which he is now an Honorary Life Member. Over the years, his involvement has spanned comms and helicopter liaison, medical matters, SARDA Wales and training, driving the cause of mountain rescue forward through his work with ACPO, the Home Office and the SAR Operators Group.

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