



## DEBATE PACK

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# Offshore helicopter safety

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## Summary

**This is a Westminster Hall debate for one and a half hours, initiated by Alex Cunningham MP, on *Offshore helicopter safety* that will take place on Wednesday 6 February 2019 at 2.30 pm.**

Offshore helicopters in the UK are primarily operated within the offshore oil and gas industry on the UK Continental Shelf (UKCS) in the North Sea. In 2018, there were 70 active aircraft in the UKCS helicopter fleet, made up of 6 airframe types.

Since 1997, four fatal accidents have claimed the lives of 38 offshore workers and flight crew, and there have been 16 non-fatal accidents. 2017 was an accident-free year in offshore helicopter operations.

Given the tragic history of fatal accidents in the sector, the safety standards of offshore helicopters have been an ongoing concern. These concerns were brought to the fore following the tragic August 2013 accident in which a Super Puma helicopter crashed into the sea while on approach to Sumburgh Airport on Shetland, killing four passengers. Several reviews, groups and initiatives were launched in the aftermath of that accident and are briefly outlined in this paper.

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

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# 1. Background

Offshore helicopters in the UK are primarily operated within the offshore oil and gas industry on the UK Continental Shelf (UKCS) in the North Sea. The helicopter has been referred to as the “workhorse of the industry”<sup>1</sup>, with Oil and Gas UK describing them as being “intrinsic to their operations [and that] there are no realistic alternatives for the...sector as a whole.”<sup>2</sup>

The North Sea is a hostile environment for helicopter operations, making helicopter flights a relatively high-risk operation compared to other means of aviation transport. Despite that risk:

...both industry and regulators recognise that helicopters are the most practical mode of transport for transferring personnel between oil and gas installations and the mainland. Helicopter transfer is unaffected by the surge of the sea and provides higher speed and greater efficiency than fixed-wing aircraft or ships.<sup>3</sup>

In 2018, there were 70 active aircraft in the UKCS helicopter fleet, made up of 6 airframe types (table below). Over 820,158 passengers were flown offshore in 2017, totalling nearly 69,005 flight hours.<sup>4</sup>

## UK Continental Shelf active helicopter fleet, 2018

Type	Weight Class	Introduced	In Fleet
<b>Leonardo AW139</b>	Medium	2005	19
<b>Airbus AS365N3 (Dauphin)</b>	Medium	1979	2
<b>Airbus H155</b>	Medium	2007	1
<b>Airbus H175</b>	Medium	2016	8
<b>Leonardo AW189</b>	Heavy	2014	3
<b>Sikorsky S92</b>	Heavy	2005	37

Source: Oil and Gas UK, [Health and Safety Report 2018](#), 2018

In 2016, there were 96 helicopters in the fleet, including 31 Super Pumas (H225 and AS332L2). These were ‘grounded’ by a CAA directive in 2016 following a fatal accident in the Norwegian sector where 13 passengers and crew lost their lives. In July 2017 the restriction was lifted, although no operator has reintroduced the Super Puma to the UKCS to date.<sup>5</sup> An [early day motion was tabled on 16 November 2017](#) stating that “that Super Pumas should not return to the North Sea without the prior agreement of a majority of offshore workers.”

<sup>1</sup> Health and Safety Executive, [How offshore helicopter travel is regulated](#), September 2011

<sup>2</sup> Oil and Gas UK, [Health and Safety Report 2018](#), 2018, p31

<sup>3</sup> Transport Committee, [Offshore Helicopter Safety](#), 8 July 2014, HC 289 2013-14, para 8

<sup>4</sup> Oil and Gas UK, [Health and Safety Report 2018](#), 2018, p31

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p33

Offshore helicopters are increasingly being utilised by the offshore wind industry in the UK as windfarms are built further from shore (see box below). It should be noted that the information in this paper applies almost entirely to those offshore helicopters operating in the oil and gas industry.

### Offshore helicopters and wind farms

The rapid growth of increasingly distant offshore wind farms off along the UK coastline is stimulating demand for helicopters to help transport turbine engineers and other support staff.<sup>6</sup> The helicopters are an option to access the turbines by sea during the more inclement months and to increase accessibility for longer periods of the year.

The consensus in the offshore wind energy sector is that “support to the wind farm fields is best conducted by a mix of maritime vessel transfer and helicopter hoist operations”, with the “deciding factor on which mode of transport to use dependent on wave height verses weather limitations.”<sup>7</sup>

Helicopters are not without their limitations. Conditions that hinder their operation include when visibility falls below 3 km, the cloud base is less than 600 feet, or the wind rises above 60 knots.<sup>8</sup>

Airbus recently stated that it was looking to take advantage of new opportunities presented by the growing spread of offshore wind farms around the world. It expects worldwide demand for up to 1,000 helicopters from the sector over the coming two decades, equating to revenue of about £8 billion.<sup>9</sup>

For more information about the role, regulations and standards for offshore helicopters in the renewables sector, see [The Offshore Renewables Aviation Guidance](#), which was produced in 2016 by a Steering Group of RenewableUK members.

## 1.1 Who is responsible for safety?

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has responsibility for aircraft flight safety, including the implementation of European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) regulations and standards. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has responsibility to ensure that helicopter decks on offshore installations are safe. Industry and the workforce are also responsible for different aspects of offshore helicopter safety, the details of which are described briefly below.

<sup>6</sup> [‘Helicopter Operations to Offshore Wind Farms - London Conference Update’](#), Rotor & Wing International, 1 July 2013

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> [‘Airbus looks to expand into renewables sector’](#), The Press and Journal, 25 September 2018

## Regulation

Aviation regulation within the UK has evolved “from a national model under the CAA to a pan-European model under EASA.”<sup>10</sup> In the areas for which EASA is responsible, such as aircraft certification, continued airworthiness and aircrew regulation, the CAA serves as EASA’s local office to implement regulations. In areas for which EASA is not responsible, the CAA serves as the primary regulator. Since 28 October 2014, [Commission Regulation \(EU\) 965/2012](#) has applied to the UK, which superseded national regulations on safety requirements during offshore helicopter operations.

### What does Brexit mean for aircraft safety regulation in the UK?

The UK’s involvement with EASA and the associated standards and safety regulation is an issue that will need to be resolved post-Brexit. As outlined in the 2017 [Royal Aeronautical Society](#) paper, there are three options open to the UK and the EU in terms of EASA membership and regulations:

- the UK could remain a full member of EASA;
- take an off-the-shelf participation option as Switzerland and Norway have done; or
- withdraw from EASA and repatriate all regulatory powers back to the CAA, potentially contracting some activities back to EASA.

There is widespread agreement that continued membership of EASA would benefit the UK and the EU. For example, [in a speech given on 1 December 2016](#) the then Chief Executive of the CAA, Andrew Haines, argued that it was in the UK’s best interests to remain an active member of EASA and that it would mean a significant increase in the regulatory burden if the UK sought to establish its own regime.

Both the EU and the UK appear to advocate for continued membership of EASA. On 7 June 2018, the Government published a series of slides on the [‘Framework for the future UK-EU partnership’](#) for transport, in which it set out its desire to secure liberal aviation market access arrangements, including to explore the terms of participation in EASA. The [March 2018 European Council negotiating guidelines](#) also stated that “the aim should be to ensure continued connectivity between the UK and the EU after the UK withdrawal. This could be achieved, inter alia, through an air transport agreement, combined with aviation safety and security agreements”

In the short-term, the UK’s membership of EASA’s remains uncertain and depends on the outcome of forthcoming Brexit votes and any subsequent negotiations. Under the current Withdrawal Agreement, and as part of the transition period, the UK will be subject to both existing EU law and EU law which enters into force during the transition period but the UK will not take an active role in the EU’s decision making processes including those conducted by EU agencies such as EASA. Therefore, if the current Brexit deal is agreed the UK will remain in EASA and follow its rules for the foreseeable future.

A no-deal scenario paper on aviation safety with EASA was [published by the DfT](#) in September 2018. It states that in the event of ‘no deal’, the functions currently performed by EASA in relation to approvals for UK designed aeronautical products and approvals for third country organisations would be conferred on the CAA. This position was also made clear in [European Commission Notice to Stakeholders](#). The CAA has set up a microsite, explaining in more detail what would happen in the event of

<sup>10</sup> Transport Committee, [Offshore Helicopter Safety](#), 8 July 2014, HC 289 2013-14, para 39

'no deal'. The CAA has also published a [short paper](#) to what a 'no deal' means for aviation safety regulation.

In terms of contingency planning for a no-deal scenario, the Government [has indicated](#) that it would grant permission to EU airlines to continue to operate on the expectation that EU countries reciprocate in turn. In order to ensure permissions were granted and flights continued, the UK's "preference would be to agree a basic arrangement or understanding on a multilateral basis between the UK and the EU." On 19 December 2018 the EU Commission [adopted two measures](#), including a proposal for a Regulation to extend temporarily (for 9 months) the validity of certain aviation safety licences. This is subject to the UK conferring equivalent rights to EU air carriers, as well as the UK ensuring conditions of fair competition.

The HSE is responsible for regulating health and safety matters offshore. The [Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 \(HSWA\)](#), supported by the HSWA (Application outside Great Britain) Order 2013, defines HSE's jurisdiction. HSE works with other regulators under Memorandum of Understandings and agency agreements where there are potential overlaps in responsibilities.<sup>11</sup> For full detail around the role and responsibilities of the HSE, see their paper [How offshore helicopter travel is regulated](#).

In the event of an incident involving a helicopter there may be additional agencies involved. Search and rescue facilities are mainly the responsibility of the Department for Transport (DfT) and its executive agency the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. The UK Air Accident Investigation Branch (AAIB) is responsible for the investigation of civil aircraft accidents and serious incidents within the UK and its overseas territories.

## Role of industry and workers

Oil and Gas UK is the leading trade association for the oil and gas sector, "open to all companies active in the UK continental shelf, from super majors to large contractor businesses and from independent oil companies to SMEs working in the supply chain."<sup>12</sup> They work with "helicopter operators, helicopter and safety equipment manufacturers, and regulators to further reduce aviation risks", which is done specifically:

...by collectively and vigorously pursuing robust operating procedures and practices, by pursuing offshore helicopter safety initiatives and research projects, as well as ensuring, where practicable, swift implementation of actions and recommendations arising from accident investigations, inquiries and reviews.<sup>13</sup>

For example, UK Oil and Gas have been working closely with the CAA through the Offshore Helicopter Safety Leadership Group and with

<sup>11</sup> HSE, [Offshore statistics & regulatory activity report 2017](#), August 2018

<sup>12</sup> Oil and Gas UK, [About us](#) [accessed 31 January 2019]

<sup>13</sup> Oil and Gas UK, [Health and Safety Report 2018](#), 2018, p31

wider industry representatives through the Aviation Safety Technical Group.<sup>14</sup>

Trade unions also have an important role in driving improvements in safety in the industry and are consulted on proposals for new regulations and guidance affecting offshore helicopter travel.<sup>15</sup> Unite and RMT, for example, are members of the Offshore Helicopter Safety Action Group (see below).

The actual achievement of safety is, according to the HSE, “the responsibility of all of those on whom the law places a duty, including helicopter operators, flight crews, installation operators and the offshore workforce.”<sup>16</sup> The HSE have usefully described their respective responsibilities:

- **Helicopter operators** must satisfy CAA that they continue to meet the requirements for safe public transport passenger operations. They demonstrate this by holding an Air Operator’s Certificate, which requires operators to publish detailed operational procedures in the company’s Operations Manual. They are also responsible for the safety briefing of passengers and, in conjunction with offshore duty holders, for providing certain personal safety equipment aboard the aircraft. Helicopter operators have a duty under the Air Navigation Order to only permit flights to suitable landing areas. The Helideck Certification Agency acts on behalf of the helicopter operators for inspection of all helidecks operating in the UKCS and, together with them, ensures the application of operational limitations and/or restrictions where appropriate.
- **Flight crews** are regulated by CAA in various aspects including licensing, training and testing requirements, and flight and duty time limitations.
- **Installation operators** are responsible for the safety of the entire installation, including the helideck and helideck operations. They are required to ensure that the helideck operating environment is such that helicopter operators can discharge their duties. Installation operators have control over the physical characteristics of the helideck, the levels and manning of the rescue and firefighting facilities and communications. They are required to ensure that competent personnel are assigned to all activities on the helideck during helicopter operations. They must also have a weather policy in place for passenger safety on the helideck and for passenger survival and rescue in the event of an incident occurring.<sup>17</sup>

## 1.2 What is the safety record in the UK?

The safety record of UK offshore helicopters has previously been described by the Health and Safety Executive as being “good, but

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<sup>14</sup> Oil and Gas UK, [Health and Safety Report 2018](#), 2018, p4

<sup>15</sup> Health and Safety Executive, [How offshore helicopter travel is regulated](#), September 2011, p6

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p3

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

accidents and fatalities have occurred.”<sup>18</sup> Oil and Gas UK also believe that the “overall safety record is good for this type of operation” but point out that “there have been several incidents over the past 41 years.”<sup>19</sup>

Since 1976, commercial air transport helicopter flight statistics and reportable accident data for offshore helicopter operations have been collected by the CAA under its mandatory occurrence reporting scheme.<sup>20</sup> Between 1976 and 2017,<sup>21</sup> over 68 million passengers have been transported to and from UKCS offshore installations on over 8.1 million flights (or sectors flown), totalling nearly four million flying hours. During the same period, 13 fatal accidents have claimed the lives of 119 offshore workers and flight crew. There have also been 61 non-fatal accidents.<sup>22</sup>

Since 1997, four fatal accidents have claimed the lives of 38 offshore workers and flight crew, and there have been 16 non-fatal accidents.<sup>23</sup> The most recent accidents, including the links to the respective AAIB reports, are listed below:

- [February 2009](#) - A Super Puma EC225 ditched in fog a short distance from a BP oil platform 125 miles east of Aberdeen. All 18 people on board survived. The AAIB attributed the accident to crew error and a faulty alert system.
- [April 2009](#) - All 14 passengers and two crew on board a Super Puma AS332 L2 were killed after it crashed in the North Sea. The AAIB attributed the accident to a catastrophic gearbox failure.
- [May 2012](#) - All 14 people on board a Super Puma EC225 were rescued when it crashed about 30 miles off the coast of Aberdeen. The AAIB attributed the accident to a gearbox failure.
- [October 2012](#) - All 19 people on board a Super Puma EC225 were rescued safely after it ditched in the sea off Shetland. The AAIB found that the incident was caused by a cracked shaft in the main gearbox.
- [August 2013](#) - a Super Puma helicopter crashed into the sea while on approach to Sumburgh Airport on Shetland. Four passengers were killed.<sup>24</sup>
- [December 2016](#) - During the descent to land, at about 4 feet above the helideck, a Sikorsky S92 yawed rapidly to the right and at the same time it rolled 20° to the left causing the left main landing gear to contact the helideck surface. All 11 people on board were safe, with no injuries.

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<sup>18</sup> Health and Safety Executive, [How offshore helicopter travel is regulated](#), September 2011

<sup>19</sup> Oil and Gas UK, [Health and Safety Report 2018](#), 2018, p31

<sup>20</sup> For more information, see: CAA, Accident and serious incident reporting [accessed 31 January 2019]

<sup>21</sup> For more detailed discussion of offshore helicopter accidents between 1976 and 2002, see: HSE, [UK Offshore Public Transport Helicopter Safety Record \(1976-2002\)](#), 2004

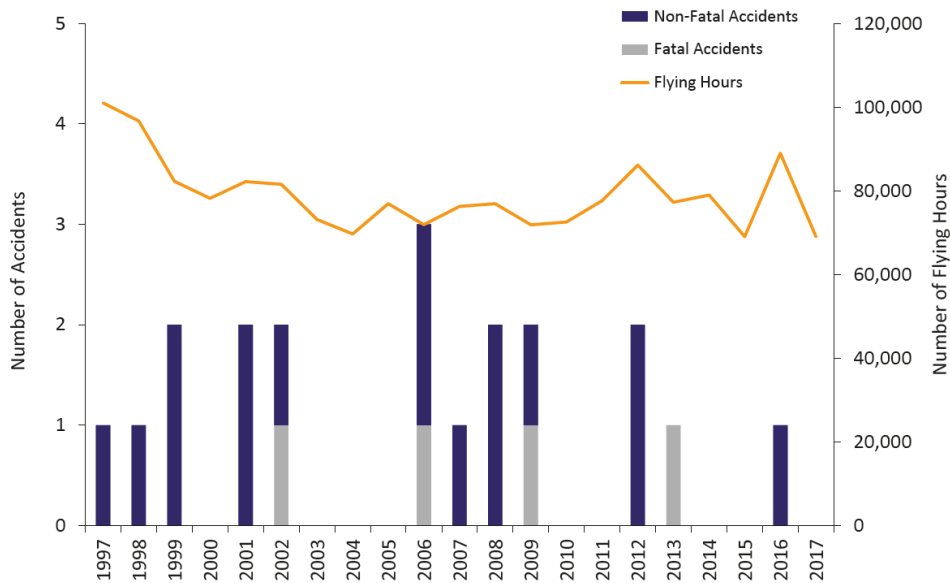
<sup>22</sup> Oil and Gas UK, [Health and Safety Report 2018](#), 2018, p32

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Transport Committee, [Offshore Helicopter Safety](#), 8 July 2014, HC 289 2013-14, para 21

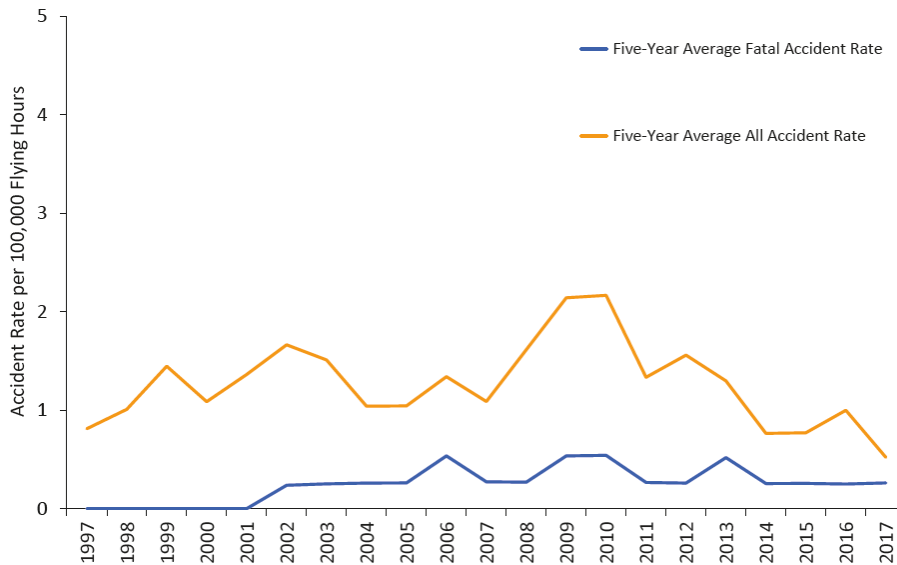
For the full list of incidents, see the [Oil and Gas website](#).

**Fatal and all accidents distribution, 1997 to 2017<sup>25</sup>**



2017 was an accident-free year in offshore helicopter operations. As a result, the UKCS’ five-year average all accident rate has decreased from 1.0 to 0.52 per 100,000 flying hours. The accident rate data show that the five-year average for fatal accidents has remained between 0.2 and 0.5 per 100,000 flying hours for the last decade.<sup>26</sup>

**Fatal and All Accident Rates per 100,000 Flying Hours<sup>27</sup>**



**1.3 Safety reviews and initiatives since 2013**

Given the tragic history of fatal accidents in the sector, the safety standards of offshore helicopters have been an ongoing concern. These concerns were brought to the fore following the tragic August 2013

<sup>25</sup> Oil and Gas UK, [Health and Safety Report 2018](#), 2018, p34

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p35

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*



accident in which a Super Puma helicopter crashed into the sea while on approach to Sumburgh Airport on Shetland, killing four passengers. Several reviews, groups and initiatives were launched in the aftermath of that accident and are briefly outlined in this section of the paper.

## CAA Offshore Helicopter Safety Review 2014

Shortly after the Sumburgh crash, the CAA announced a joint review of North Sea helicopter operations with the Norwegian CAA and EASA. The review studied the operations, previous accidents and offshore helicopter flying in other countries, and it made recommendations to improve the safety of offshore flying.

### Previous reviews by the Civil Aviation Authority

- UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) [CAP491: Helicopter Airworthiness Review Panel Report](#) published in 1984 - it focused on a range of airworthiness / design matters.
- UK CAA [CAP641: Review of Helicopter Offshore Safety & Survival](#) published in 1995 – it focused on survivability matters.

The CAA [published its review](#) of offshore helicopter safety on 20 February 2014. The CAA review set out 32 safety interventions that fell within the remit of the CAA and 29 recommendations that fell within the remit of other parties. Some of the notable recommendations included:

- The establishment of a new Offshore Helicopter Safety Action Group to work for improved safety in helicopter operations on the UK Continental Shelf;
- The prohibition of helicopter flights in the most severe sea conditions, except in response to an emergency, so the chance of a ditched helicopter capsizing is reduced, and a rescue can be safely undertaken;
- Pending further safety improvements to helicopters, passengers will be able to fly only if they are seated next to an emergency window exit to make it easier to evacuate (unless helicopters are fitted with extra flotation devices or passengers are provided with a better emergency breathing system);
- Operators will be prohibited from carrying passengers on offshore flights, except in response to an offshore emergency, whose body size, including required safety and survival equipment, is incompatible with push-out window emergency exit size;
- Passengers will be required to have an enhanced emergency breathing system to increase underwater survival time unless the helicopter is equipped with side floats; and
- Changes to the way pilots are trained and checked. For instance the CAA will review all helicopter training programmes to ensure that basic flight skills are maintained, so that crews can deal with manual flight if required. (This is in response to concerns about new helicopter pilots joining the industry who rely too much on automated systems.)<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Summary provided in: Transport Committee, [Offshore Helicopter Safety](#), 8 July 2014, HC 289 2013-14, para 28

## Transport Select Committee 2014 inquiry

The Transport Select Committee also [launched an inquiry](#) following the helicopter crash off the coast of Sumburgh in August 2013. The inquiry examined how operators, the oil and gas industry and regulators can improve standards for offshore workers. The Committee published their final report in July 2014. The headline recommendation coming out of the report was the call for a full, independent, public inquiry to address whether commercial pressure from oil and gas companies affects the safety of offshore helicopter operations (see box below).<sup>29</sup> The Committee also concluded:

- Regulatory inertia at EASA is exposing offshore workers to unnecessary risk by slowing down the implementation of safety improvements.
- There is no conclusive evidence that Super Puma variant helicopters (which make up some 60% of the UK offshore helicopter fleet) are less safe than other helicopters. Nevertheless,

In addition, the Committee recommended that:

- The UK Government must uphold and entrench the CAA's ability to act quickly and unilaterally.
- Operators, manufacturers and industry safety groups should continue to engage with the offshore workforce to address workforce concerns [about Super Puma helicopter safety].
- The Government must push EASA to implement changes recommended by the AAIB more rapidly and become more transparent in its dealings.<sup>30</sup>
- AAIB keep crash survivors better informed on the progress of investigations in future.
- CAA to meet survivors to hear their experiences and to consider their suggestions for safety improvements.
- CAA to use its chairmanship of the Offshore Helicopter Safety Action Group to lead the reduction of risk for passengers across the industry through improved standardisation of customer requirements for helicopter operators.
- Operations managers in the North Sea should prioritise safety by facilitating a culture of approachability and openness at all levels.<sup>31</sup>

### **Safety standards, commercial pressures and a public inquiry**

The Transport Committee concluded that the "CAA review did not consider the evidence that commercial pressure impacts on helicopter safety in sufficient depth." It subsequently recommended:

<sup>29</sup> Transport Committee, [Offshore Helicopter Safety](#), 8 July 2014, HC 289 2013-14, para 54

<sup>30</sup> Transport Committee press notice, [Call for full public inquiry into offshore helicopter safety](#), 8 July 2014

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

The Government must convene a full, independent public inquiry to investigate commercial pressures on helicopter safety in the North Sea operating environment. That inquiry must also examine the role and effectiveness of the CAA. In addition, the DfT must commission ongoing independent research similar to the SINTEF reports in Norway to examine improvements and threats to offshore helicopter safety. Once published, this research should be laid before Parliament for consideration.<sup>32</sup>

At the time of the Committee's inquiry, Mark Swan of the CAA was ambivalent about a public inquiry. He stated that the CAA review was comprehensive and had not missed anything significant.

The British Airline Pilots Association called for a tightly focused public inquiry to consider the issues outside the CAA review, including an examination of "the control of the offshore helicopter industry by the oil companies who charter services from the helicopter companies."<sup>33</sup>

The Government, in response to the Committee report, rejected the need for a public inquiry, stating that:

With regards to commercial pressure, neither the CAA, Industry nor Government has seen any evidence to suggest that safety is being compromised as a result of commercial pressure from the industry. It is true that competition for contracts, particularly where contracts are offered at short notice or awarded at a lower price may impact on the ability of the operator to recruit and train for a new commitment, but there is no evidence to suggest this is the case. The Committee's report state that helicopter operators do not support the accusation that commercial pressure from their customers affects the safety of their operations and hotly dispute the suggestion made by BALPA.

It is important for the CAA and industry to be given time to implement the recommendations from the CAA's Offshore Review. In the circumstances the Government does not support the call for a public inquiry on this issue.<sup>34</sup>

An [early day motion was tabled on 16 November 2017](#) and signed by 32 Members supported the call for a public inquiry.

Colin Clark, Conservative MP for Gordon, Aberdeenshire, [said recently](#) that a public inquiry into the crash was unnecessary, despite concerns from trade unions to review offshore travel.

Scottish transport minister Michael Matheson and energy minister Paul Wheelhouse have [recently agreed](#) to meet with the CAA and the Oil and Gas Authority to discuss how to improve safety during air transportations.

## Follow-up reviews to the 2014 CAA inquiry

The CAA published its [Offshore Helicopter Review Progress Report](#) in January 2015, which provided an update on progress against those actions and recommendations as at 31 December 2014. The update noted that:

<sup>32</sup> Transport Committee, [Offshore Helicopter Safety](#), 8 July 2014, HC 289 2013-14, para 54

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, para 52

<sup>34</sup> Transport Committee, [Offshore helicopter safety: Government, CAA and Oil & Gas UK Responses to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2014-15](#), HC 717 2014-15, p3

...substantial and important progress has been made toward improvements in offshore helicopter safety. flights no longer take place over the most extreme sea conditions. Every single passenger on an offshore helicopter is equipped with new improved Emergency Breathing System. Offshore workers have received new guidance and – crucially – improved safety training. We believe these changes together will contribute to lives being saved in the UK offshore industry in the years to come.<sup>35</sup>

The CAA published another [Offshore Helicopter Review Progress Report](#) in September 2016, which provided a further update on progress against the actions and recommendations stemming from the Offshore Helicopter Safety Review. The update stated that:

...majority of the actions and recommendations are now completed and we have identified a number of ongoing workstreams to ensure that we continue to see improvements in offshore helicopter safety.<sup>36</sup>

## Other UK industry groups and initiatives

An action from the 2014 CAA review was to set up a CAA-led safety governance body for offshore operations, with representation from key organisations from across the industry. The named [Offshore Helicopter Safety Action Group](#) was subsequently set up in 2014 and its primary purpose is to:

- facilitate delivery of the CAA Offshore Helicopter Safety Review actions;
- to monitor the progress of recommendations made to others;
- facilitate dialogue between helicopter operators, employee representatives, manufacturers and regulators;
- to coordinate and lead the communications of the review to stakeholders and media; and
- to assess the ongoing effectiveness of implemented safety initiatives to ensure tangible measurable safety benefits are delivered.<sup>37</sup>

According to the CAA, some of the main safety improvements so far include:

- prohibiting helicopter flights in the most severe sea conditions to improve the chances of rescue and survivability;
- providing passengers with better emergency breathing equipment;
- offshore workers have received improved safety training;
- making sure that people only sit next to exits that they can escape from;

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<sup>35</sup> CAA, [Safety review of offshore public transport helicopter operations in support of the exploitation of oil and gas – Progress Report](#), CAP1243, January 2015, p4

<sup>36</sup> CAA, [Safety review of offshore public transport helicopter operations in support of the exploitation of oil and gas – Progress Report](#), September 2016, p5

<sup>37</sup> CAA, [Offshore Helicopter Safety Action Group \(OHSAG\)](#) [accessed 31 January 2019]

- changes to the way pilots are trained · Improving helicopter design; and
- increased oversight of helideck safety.<sup>38</sup>

The [Helicopter Safety Research Management Committee](#), which is a cross-industry organisation chaired by the CAA, has also been in existence for several years to identify, direct and co-ordinate research relating to offshore helicopter safety, involving both regulators and industry.

[Step Change in Safety](#)'s [Helicopter Safety Steering Group \(HSSG\)](#) was established in August 2010 to take over the work started by the [Helicopter Task Group](#) following the helicopter crash on 1 April 2009. The HSSG "addresses cross-industry issues around helicopter safety and works to strengthen confidence in helicopter travel. The group is a platform for sharing information, offering advice and encouraging lessons learned on cross-industry matters that directly influence safety."

These are not the only related industry groups and others include the: Helicopter Management Liaison Committee; the Helicopter Safety Steering Group; the Aviation Safety Technical Group; Oil Industry Advisory Committee, Helideck Liaison Group; Joint Operators Review; and [HeliOffshore](#).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> CAA, [Offshore helicopter operations](#) [accessed 30 January 2019]

<sup>39</sup> CAA, [Offshore Helicopter Safety Action Group \(OHSAG\)](#) [accessed 31 January 2019]

## 2. Further reading and press articles

### 2.1 Parliamentary material

#### Parliamentary questions

[Helicopters: Norway](#)

**Asked by:** Cunningham, Alex | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has had discussions with the Civil Aviation Authority in respect of the recommendations in the final report from the Accident Investigation Board of Norway into the fatal incident involving a H225 Super Puma helicopter near Turoy, Norway, on 29 April 2016; and if he will make a statement.

**Answering member:** Jesse Norman | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Department for Transport

The safety of those who travel on offshore helicopter flights is a priority. The Department for Transport has had discussions with both the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and the Air Accidents Investigation Branch regarding the fatal incident in Turoy, Norway.

The report from the Norwegian Accident Investigation Board supports the action taken by the UK CAA since the accident. The CAA is continuing to work with the helicopter operators, the offshore industries, international regulators, unions and pilot representatives to enhance offshore safety standards further and all these parties are actively involved in discussions.

13 Jul 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 161550

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[Offshore Industry: Helicopters](#)

**Asked by:** Cunningham, Alex | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, further to the oral contribution of the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth of 19 April 2018, Official Report, column 228WH, what response he has received from the Civil Aviation Authority on the regulation of helicopter safety standards in the offshore oil and gas sector; and if he will make a statement.

**Answering member:** Claire Perry | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

Last week, the Department received reassurances from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) that additional safety measures have been introduced to the H225LP and AS332L2 models of Super Pumas. Although the European Aviation Safety Agency has cleared the helicopters to return to service, both the CAA and their Norwegian counterparts have decided to keep the operational restrictions in place until the completion of the Norwegian inquiry at the earliest. I have asked BEIS officials to send a copy of the CAA's letter to all members who were present at the Westminster Hall Debate on the 19<sup>th</sup> April 2018.

28 Jun 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 156422

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### [Helicopters: Offshore Industry](#)

**Asked by:** Cunningham, Alex | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment he has made of trends in commercial pressures on helicopter companies which are privately contracted to transport offshore oil and gas workers in the North Sea; and if he will make a statement.

**Answering member:** Jesse Norman | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Department for Transport

Offshore helicopter services provide a vital link to ensure the viability of the UK's oil and gas industry. High standards of air safety are a fundamental concern in ensuring these services are commercially viable. Through the Aviation Strategy, the Government will look at its role in supporting the commercial success of operators whilst balancing this against environmental and safety concerns.

As the UK's aviation safety regulator, the Civil Aviation Authority's (CAA) concern is whether the commercial environment has any impact on safety. The CAA monitors all aspects of the operations of offshore helicopter companies and any risks to safe operation through its safety oversight programme.

The CAA has announced a series of measures to increase the safety of offshore helicopter flights and continues to work with the helicopter operators, the offshore industries, international regulators, unions and pilot representatives to enhance offshore safety standards still further.

12 Mar 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 131017

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### [Offshore Industry: Helicopters](#)

**Asked by:** Cunningham, Alex | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will bring forward proposals to improve offshore workers' confidence in the safety of commercial helicopter transport in the North Sea oil and gas industry.

**Answering member:** Mr John Hayes | **Party:** Conservative Party |  
**Department:** Department for Transport

In 2014 the CAA published a comprehensive strategic safety review of offshore public transport helicopter operations in support of the exploitation of oil and gas. Following this review the CAA announced a series of measures to increase the safety of offshore helicopter flights. These measures included:

- Prohibiting helicopter flights in the most severe sea conditions, so that the chance of a ditched helicopter capsizing is reduced and a rescue can be safely undertaken.
- Pending further safety improvements to helicopters, passengers will only be able to fly if they are seated next to an emergency window exit to make it easier to get out of a helicopter in an emergency (unless helicopters are fitted with extra flotation devices or passengers are provided with better emergency breathing systems).
- Requiring all passengers to have better emergency breathing equipment to increase underwater survival time unless the helicopter is equipped with side floats.

Following the fatal accident of a H225 helicopter in Norway in April 2016, two helicopter types, popularly known as Super Pumas, were restricted from being used commercially by UK and Norwegian operators. The restrictions have been lifted after receiving extensive information from the Norwegian accident investigators and being satisfied with the subsequent changes introduced by Airbus Helicopters through detailed assessment and analysis. The CAA would not have made this decision unless they were convinced that the changes to the helicopters and their maintenance restore the required airworthiness standards.

The CAA continues to work with the helicopter operators, the offshore industries, international regulators, unions and pilot representatives to enhance offshore safety standards still further.

05 Dec 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 115882

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[Offshore Industry: Helicopters](#)

**Asked by:** Cunningham, Alex | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make an assessment the effect of the Civil Aviation Authority's review of offshore helicopter safety CAP1145, published 20 February 2014, on offshore



workers' confidence in commercial helicopter transport in the North Sea.

**Answering member:** Mr John Hayes | **Party:** Conservative Party |  
**Department:** Department for Transport

The review resulted in a number of wide ranging recommendations and actions and resulted in significant changes in safety that were introduced as quickly as possible and welcomed by everyone involved.

The Civil Aviation Authority will continue to work with the helicopter operators, the offshore industries, international regulators, unions and pilot representatives to enhance offshore safety standards still further.

05 Dec 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 115878

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#### [Offshore Industry: Helicopters](#)

**Asked by:** Cunningham, Alex | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment he has made of the comparative safety record of Super Puma helicopter models (a) EC225LP and (b) AS332L2 operated commercially in the (i) North Sea and (ii) internationally over each of the last ten years.

**Answering member:** Mr John Hayes | **Party:** Conservative Party |  
**Department:** Department for Transport

Following the fatal accident of a H225 in Norway in April 2016, these two helicopter types, popularly known as Super Pumas, were restricted from being used commercially by UK and Norwegian operators.

The Civil Aviation Authority has remained in close contact with the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA); the Civil Aviation Authority of Norway; UK and Norwegian operators; and with the manufacturer, Airbus Helicopters which has developed the modifications and enhanced safety measures for the Super Puma Model.

The restrictions have been lifted after receiving extensive information from the Norwegian accident investigators and being satisfied with the subsequent changes introduced by Airbus Helicopters through detailed assessment and analysis.

A plan of checks, modifications and inspections needs to be undertaken before any flights take place. It will also be for operators and their customers to decide whether they wish to re-introduce the helicopters to service. In order to resume operations individual operators will need to supply safety cases to ensure that they have all the necessary measures (procedures, processes, tooling and training) in place for a return to service. To date no UK operators have done so.

30 Nov 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 115877

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[Offshore Industry: Helicopters](#)

**Asked by:** Cunningham, Alex | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions he has had with the Civil Aviation Authority on the potential merits of a public inquiry into the safety of helicopter transport in the North Sea oil and gas industry.

**Answering member:** Mr John Hayes | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Department for Transport

In 2014 the CAA published a comprehensive strategic safety review of offshore public transport helicopter operations in support of the exploitation of oil and gas. The review examined the risks to helicopter operations to support the oil and gas industries in and around the North Sea. It was conducted in conjunction with the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and the Norwegian Civil Aviation Authority and was peer-reviewed by independent experts. It identified a wide range of opportunities to improve the safety of those operations and resulted in significant changes in safety that were introduced as quickly as possible and welcomed by everyone involved.

The CAA will continue to work with the helicopter operators, the offshore industries, international regulators, unions and pilot representatives to enhance offshore safety standards still further.

30 Nov 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 115875

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[Offshore Industry: Helicopters](#)

**Asked by:** Cunningham, Alex | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has conducted a cost benefit analysis of returning Super Puma helicopter models (a) EC225LP and (b) AS332L2 to workforce transport operations in the North Sea oil and gas industry.

**Answering member:** Mr John Hayes | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Department for Transport

The safety of those who travel on offshore helicopter flights is a key priority for both the UK and Norwegian aviation authorities. The CAA would not have made the decision to lift operating restrictions on these Super Puma helicopters unless they were convinced that the changes to

the helicopters and their maintenance restore the required airworthiness standards.

A plan of checks, modifications and inspections needs to be undertaken before any flights take place. It will also be for operators and their customers to decide whether they wish to re-introduce the helicopters to service. In order to resume operations individual operators will need to supply safety cases to ensure that they have all the necessary measures (procedures, processes, tooling and training) in place for a return to service. To date no UK operators have done so. Now that restrictions have been lifted, a cost benefit analysis is a matter for operators and their customers.

30 Nov 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 115872

**Date tabled:** 27 Nov 2017 | **Date for answer:** 30 Nov 2017 |

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#### [Offshore Industry: Helicopters](#)

**Asked by:** Cunningham, Alex | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent discussions he has had with the (a) Civil Aviation Authority and (b) trades unions on the safety record of Super Puma helicopter models (i) EC225LP and (ii) AS332L2 in the offshore oil and gas sector.

**Answering member:** Mr John Hayes | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Department for Transport

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has lifted operating restrictions on H225LP and AS332L2 helicopters. The restrictions were imposed following the fatal accident of a H225 helicopter in Norway in April 2016. The two helicopter types, popularly known as Super Pumas, were restricted from being used commercially by UK and Norwegian operators. The restrictions have been lifted after receiving extensive information from the Norwegian accident investigators and being satisfied with the subsequent changes introduced by Airbus Helicopters through detailed assessment and analysis.

A plan of checks, modifications and inspections needs to be undertaken before any flights take place. It will also be for operators and their customers to decide whether they wish to re-introduce the helicopters to service. In order to resume operations individual operators will need to supply safety cases to ensure that they have all the necessary measures (procedures, processes, tooling and training) in place for a return to service. To date no UK operators have done so.

The CAA continue to work with the helicopter operators, the offshore industries, international regulators, unions and pilot representatives to enhance offshore safety standards still further and all these parties are actively involved in ongoing discussions.

30 Nov 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 115870

## Early Day Motions

### [FATAL ACCIDENT INQUIRY INTO THE SUMBURGH HELICOPTER CRASH IN AUGUST 2013](#)

That this House recalls the helicopter crash in August 2013 in which a Eurocopter AS332L2 Super Puma Mk 2 crashed into the sea two nautical miles west of Sumburgh, Shetland with four fatalities; notes that both the Air Accident Investigation Branch and Police Scotland have conducted and concluded their investigations into the circumstances of the crash; further notes that, despite this, no date has been set by the Lord Advocate for the holding of a Fatal Accident Inquiry into the deaths of the four passengers killed in the crash, contributing to the continued distress of the families of the deceased and to the continuing concerns of many people working in the North Sea about the safety of the helicopter fleet servicing the industry; and calls on the Lord Advocate to instruct the earliest possible holding of the Fatal Accident Inquiry into the circumstances surrounding this tragic event.

29 Jan 2018 | Early day motions | Open | House of Commons | 867 (session 2017-19)

**Primary sponsor:** Carmichael, Alistair | **Party:** Liberal Democrats

### [OFFSHORE HELICOPTER SAFETY](#)

That this House is concerned by the safety of offshore helicopter transport; observes that since February 2009, 33 offshore workers and crew have died and 65 have been rescued from the North Sea following six accidents involving Super Puma 225 and AS332 L2 helicopters; remembers the 13 passengers and crew who lost their lives on 29 April 2016 in a crash off the south coast of Norway; notes that Norwegian and UK investigations of fatal and non-fatal Super Puma accidents since 2009 have found similar mechanical failures; supports the continued grounding of the Super Puma fleet across the North Sea; further notes that the manufacturer Airbus surveyed offshore workers in June 2017 and found a majority with profound reservations over flying in Super Pumas again; is further concerned that the Civil Aviation Authority lifted official restrictions on these helicopters in July 2017 without consulting offshore workers or their trade unions; believes that Super Pumas should not return to the North Sea without the prior agreement of a majority of offshore workers; is concerned that the Government rejected the Transport Select Committee's July 2014 recommendation for a public inquiry into commercial pressures on offshore helicopter safety; recognises that 2018 is the 30th anniversary of the Piper Alpha disaster and a reminder of the necessity for the highest possible standards of offshore safety; and supports the RMT union's call for the Government to launch a public inquiry into the offshore helicopter safety concerns that are being raised by offshore workers.

16 Nov 2017 | Early day motions | Open | House of Commons | 553 (session 2017-19)

**Primary sponsor:** Mearns, Ian | **Party:** Labour Party

## Select committee Reports

House of Commons Transport Select Committee, [Offshore Helicopter Safety](#) 2014

## 2.2 Further reading

Norwegian Accident Investigation Board, [Report on the air accident near Turøy, Øygarden municipality, Hordaland county, Norway 29 April 2016 with Airbus Helicopters EC 225 LP, LN-OJF, operated by CHC Helikopter Service AS](#), July 2018

Oil and Gas UK, [Health and Safety Report 2018](#), 2018

SINTEF Technology and Society [Norway], [Helicopter Safety Study 3b](#), 2017

Civil Aviation Authority, [Safety review of offshore public transport helicopter operations in support of the exploitation of oil and gas Progress report](#), 2016

Civil Aviation Authority, [Safety review of offshore public transport helicopter operations in support of the exploitation of oil and gas: Progress report](#), 2015

Civil Aviation Authority, [Safety review of offshore public transport helicopter operations in support of the exploitation of oil and gas](#), 2014

Civil Aviation Authority, [Summary Report on Helicopter Ditching and Crashworthiness Research](#), 2005

Health and Safety Executive, [UK Offshore Public Transport Helicopter Safety Record \(1976-2002\)](#), 2004

Civil Aviation Authority, [Helicopter Tail Rotor Failures](#), November 2003

Health and Safety Executive, [Helicopter safety offshore](#), 2001

Civil Aviation Authority, [Review of Helicopter Offshore Safety & Survival](#), 1995

Civil Aviation Authority, [Review of Helicopter Worthiness](#), 1984

## 2.3 Press releases

[RMT statement on Piper Alpha 30th Anniversary 6 July 2018](#)

Offshore workers union RMT today remembered the lives of the 165 offshore workers and two seafarers who died in the Piper Alpha disaster in the North Sea on the night of 6th July 1988.

General Secretary Mick Cash said; "In remembering the lives of the 167 workers who died in the Piper Alpha disaster, the union offers

condolences and support to the families, loved ones and work mates affected by this deeply traumatic incident. "Respecting the memory of the Piper Alpha victims should mean adopting the highest possible standards that put safety before profit.

This would be consistent with the Cullen Report's objective of continuous improvement of the offshore safety culture. "Regrettably, however, the business model that has developed in the North Sea especially since the 2014 downturn is putting unwelcome pressure on our members. "3 weeks on 3 and weeks off shift pattern, a crisis of confidence in the safety of helicopter transport, ineffective regulations and the prospect of North Sea assets repeatedly changing hands before decommissioning by low-paid foreign staff is the industrial reality for today's offshore workers.

Employers, Government, regulators must do more for the safety of offshore workers. The consequences of complacency are unthinkable."

## 2.4 Press articles

[Ministers pushed for answer on helicopter safety inquiry](#)

**Energy Voice, 9 January 2019**

[Fatal Leicester crash prompts inspection of North Sea helicopters](#)

**Energy Voice, 23 November 2018**

[No charges in Norway's fatal 2016 Super Puma crash](#)

**Agence France, 23 October 2018**

[Offshore helicopter crashes: improving safety and saving lives](#)

**Offshore Technology, 9 October 2018**

[Norwegian investigators recommend H225 gearbox redesign](#)

**Flight Global, 5 July 2018**

[Offshore safety still subject to pressure](#) [Intranet link]

**Labour Research, July 2018**

[Airbus :Full Interview on Super Puma Future](#)

**Oil Industry News, 4 October 2017**

[Thumbs down on return of Super Pumas to oil industry](#) [Intranet link]

**The Herald, 9 September 2017**

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