

**UK SAR OPERATORS GROUP
INLAND CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**

Web site URL: www.uk-sar.org

Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Wednesday 16th June, 2004 at 11.00 hrs. The venue was The Stoddart Suite, Merseyside Police HQ, Canning Place Liverpool. L69 1JD

PRESENT

- 1 Supt. J. Darcy, Chairman, Northern Constabulary, ACPO(S)
- 2 Chief Supt. P. Forrester, Merseyside Police, ACPO
- 3 Mr. A. Ashton, RNLI, Maritime & Aviation Consultative Committee
- 4 Mr. J. Cousins, Mountain Leader Training UK
- 5 Dr. R. D. Mehew, National Caving Association
- 6 Dr. A. S. G. Jones, Secretary

1 APOLOGIES

Mr. Michael Vlasto, Maritime & Aviation Consultative Committee
Mr. Tom Redfern, Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres
Mr. Andrew Ebben, Royal Life Saving Society
Mr. John Muston, Scout Association
Mr. Nick Owen, Youth Hostel Association

WELCOME.

The Chairman welcomed members, and in particular, Andrew Ashton to the meeting.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 17th DECEMBER, 2003

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 17th December, 2004 had been circulated. They were taken as read and were accepted as a true record.

3 MATTERS ARISING

A) Item 3, A: UK SAR Web Site

The UK SAR Web Site became available in early October 2003 at:-

www.uk-sar.org

With regard to the question raised as to whether the PITO document on Interoperability and Interworking would be placed on the Web Site the view had been expressed that it would not be appropriate to do so until matters had been finalised and been through the proper procedures.

B) Item 3 B v: Emergency 999 calls

The Chairman informed the meeting that the letter to BT regarding 999 emergency calls had not been sent. He was due to meet representatives of BT in the near future and would raise the matter verbally.

The Secretary informed the members that the subject had been discussed at the last meeting of the Operators Group. The Chairman of the Operators Group would take the matter to the 999 Liaison Committee.

4 CORRESPONDENCE

i) Andrew Ebben, RLSS, had written to the Secretary to inform him that he had been away from work for an extended period following a serious spinal injury. He had to re-enter hospital at Easter for additional surgery which would preclude his attendance at this meeting. He had hoped to nominate a deputy. He is very keen that the RLSS retains its contact with and membership of the I.C.C. and continues to receive all papers.

2

It was agreed that the Secretary would write wishing Andrew Ebben a complete recovery, looking forward to his future attendance at meetings and assure him that RLSS membership of the I.C.C. is secure.

5 REPORT FROM THE UK SAR OPERATORS GROUP.

A) Meeting held on Monday 23rd February, 2004.

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 23rd February, 2004 had been circulated with the agenda for this meeting. Members attention was drawn to the following points.

i) The Confederation of Helicopter Ambulance Services was represented by Mr. Paul West.

The Chairman informed the meeting that the Memorandum of Understanding between ACPO(S) and the Scottish Ambulance Service had been agreed and signed. The Memorandum would be tabled at the next Operators Group Meeting. It was agreed that the MoU would be circulated to members with the minutes of this meeting.

ii) The revision of the Framework Document had been slightly delayed because of significant changes with respect to the Fire Services.

iii) The commissioning of the additional 10 new VHF High Band Channels for Land SAR was progressing. The MCA hold the licence for these channels and users operate under a Letter of Authority. It is the intention of the Communications Working Group to exercise strict control on who will be granted permission to operate on the VHF High Band Land SAR Channels.

iv) The issue of 999 calls remains unsettled. The matter was being taken to the 999 Liaison Committee.

v) With regard to emergency beacons supported by Satellites, a major problem was registration and the development of an accessible data base.

It was understood that the use of emergency beacons on land was still contrary to regulations.

vi) Firefighting at Sea. Work was progressing.

vii) Scottish Mountain Safety Forum.

viii) The RNLI were undertaking trials of a hovercraft on the Mersey.

The meeting was informed that the trials had been successful. It was intended that a hovercraft would be stationed at New Brighton and would become operational at the end of the year. Two further trials were being conducted. The point was made that hovercraft complimented Lifeboats and did not replace them.

6 MARITIME AND AVIATION CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

The last meeting of the Maritime and Aviation Consultative Committee was held on Wednesday 9th June, 2004 at the Met Office, Exeter. Chief Insp. Ian Arnott who had attended on behalf of the Chairman had submitted the following brief report.

A) Firefighting at Sea Project

i) The purpose of the project is to establish a standard offshore fire fighting service and to address CBRN incidents at sea.

ii) The strategic document is currently out for comment with responses to the MCA due by 30th June, 2004.

It was understood that the document had been circulated to members of the Operators Group.

iii) It is proposed to include a section on Inland Waters rescue but no details were presented to the Committee. This matter should be raised at the next meeting of the Operators Group on 8th July, 2004.

3

B) Communications

i) The MCA had written to ACPO and ACPO(S) representatives advising them of details of the Marine Band VHF Channels that have been released for use by UK Inland SAR groups.

ii) Strict rules about usage have been applied and any misuse could lead to withdrawal of the services.

iii) Since the original notification of the availability of these channels there had been two frequency changes in response to interference problems. The changes had been advised.

C) UK SAR Website

i) The web site address is given at the start of these minutes. Unfortunately little information is currently available. The request was made that this advertised amongst members and encouragement given to forward information for the website to the Operators Group.

D) MCA SAR Prevention Strategy

i) In order to improve working practises, the MCA Prevention Branch and the Safety Branch have been merged to form the Risk Analysis and Prevention Branch.

ii) The recent television programme "Danger on the Beach" had raised the profile of sea safety. The series will be followed by another later in the year.

E) Maritime Security

- i) There was a detailed discussion about the ISCP Code.

F) Police Officers Water Life Saving Skills

- i) The RLSS representative raised an issue about the swimming life saving skills training being withdrawn from the Police training programme.

Neither the Chairman nor the ACPO representative were aware of such a withdrawal. Enquiries would be made. The point was made that the considerable expansion in recruitment was placing a considerable strain on regional training centres. Some training would have to be done within the Forces and this could result in a diminution of life saving skills in water

G) VHF Channel 16 Monitoring

- i) The MCA had advised that monitoring of Channel 16 no longer occurs with a dedicated operator using a headset. Channel 16 is still monitored by way of loudspeakers. There was no diminution in the service.

The next meeting of the Maritime and Aviation Consultative Committee would be held on Tuesday 7th December, 2004 in Southampton.

In response to a question about attendance the meeting was informed that there was no comment on the numbers attending.

7 HEALTH AND SAFETY; DRAFT DIRECTIVE ON WORKING AT HEIGHTS

Two papers had been circulated with the agenda for this meeting:

- A) The Work at Height Regulation and Adventure Activities Sector - WAHR Paper 1 (final).
B) Press release of 2nd April, 2004.

The Secretary informed the meeting that he had attended the meeting at Plas y Brenin on 14th January, 2004. (Item 3 C xi of last minutes)

4

The meeting was informed that action was continuing. The small group leading for the Adventurous Activities Sector was due to have a meeting with Jane Kennedy MP, Minister for Work and Pensions in the week beginning 21st June.

During the discussion the following points, amongst others, were made:-

- i) It was understood that the regulations would not apply when not at work nor to voluntary bodies.
ii) With regard to SAR there was potential for confusion in respect to those deemed to be at work and those who were entirely voluntary.
iii) It had been stated that "the imperative of saving life should not be interfered with".
iv) It would seem that the regulations were really aimed at the Construction Industry.
v) An element of frustration had arisen because the regulations would not improve safety in adventurous activities nor in SAR.
vi) Mention was made of the problem of frequent staff changes at HSE and the apparent lack of continuity and handover of information.
vii) The meeting was informed that a meeting between the Chief Executive of HSE and the MCA was due to be held on 18th June, 2004.
viii) It would seem that the regulations would not apply to caving and mountaineering on the continent of Europe.
ix) The RYA was also involved in the work of the group dealing with the WAHR.
x) Work at Height: a further meeting last week (1 June) between John Cousins and Tom Redfern (mountaineering and caving) and HSE confirmed that adherence to the normal 'best practice' of the sports, as determined by the appropriate National Governing Bodies, was all that would be necessary to comply with the regulations. We deposited copies of the various NGB handbooks and training schemes with HSE for their reference. HSE are now writing guidance notes for their inspectors to this effect. We will see the drafts for final comment.

At the conclusion of the discussion it was agreed that the Secretary would forward the salient points to the MCA as a matter of urgency.

8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A) Land SAR Communications in Scotland

The Chairman informed the meeting that the Scottish Executive had made available some £300,000 for new radios. This amount may be increased. It was intended to issue every member of a recognised team with a personal radio.

There was further discussion. It was pointed out that the situation in England and Wales was very different.

B) General Funding for Mountain Rescue in Scotland

The Chairman gave a brief outline of the current situation where the Scottish Executive had made funding available for Mountain Rescue through ACPO(S). There followed a brief discussion.

C) Use of Search and Rescue Volunteers as Expert Witnesses

Reference was made to a recent court case in South Wales that involved a fatality in a cave.

The meeting was informed that the matter had been discussed at a recent meeting of the ACPO Emergency Procedures Group. The point had been made that the rescue community at large is reluctant to be seen as a potential agent for enforcement, with the result that the mountain/caving groups may be reluctant to seek help in the future. The Rescue Community and in particular the Cave Rescue Community is small and such a policy may introduce conflicts of interests and tensions with dangerous results.

D) Insurance Cover for SAR Teams

The meeting was informed that the subject was still under consideration within ACPO Emergency Procedures Group. There was a short discussion.

5

E) Volunteering

The meeting was informed that the Promotion of Volunteering Bill was before Parliament for its 3rd Reading. Julian Brazier MP was leading. The Bill may fail because of drafting problems. The view was expressed that if the Bill did fail the Home Office should be pressed to redraft the Bill and lay it before Parliament again.

Members attention was drawn to two papers published by H.M. Treasury on aspects of volunteering:

i) *Next Steps on Volunteering and Giving in the UK: A discussion Document.* December 2002. H. M. Treasury.

ii) *The Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Service Delivery: A Cross Cutting Review.* September 2002. H. M. Treasury.

Both documents may be accessed through the web site;

<http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk>

Copies are available from:-

The Public Enquiry Unit,
H. M. Treasury,
1 Horse Guards Parade,
London. SW1A 2HQ
Tel. 020 7270 4558.

G) The Community Fund and the MRC

The meeting was informed that a grant application from the MRC had been rejected by the Community Fund on the grounds that as mountain rescue worked for the Police and, as such, was a statutory service. The MRC had raised the matter with the ACPO representative and had been brought to the attention of the ACPO Emergency Procedures Group. The Manager of the Strategic Grants Office had been advised that the Police did not have such a statutory responsibility. He had been requested to reconsider their earlier decision. The point had been made that if this was rejected it would have serious implications for the MRC.

H) An Award

The meeting was informed that the Daily Express and Vodaphone had instituted an award for life saving at sea where a mobile phone had been used.

There was a short discussion.

9 DATE, TIME AND VENUE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on Wednesday 15th December, 2004 at 10.30 for 11.00 hrs. The venue will be:

Room 1/84,
Merseyside Police HQ,
Canning Place,
Liverpool. L69 1JD

A light lunch will be provided.

Any items for the agenda of the next meeting should be sent to the Secretary by 12th November, 2004.

3 Maes Tyddyn To
Menai Bridge,
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Dr. A. S. G. Jones, MBE
Secretary.