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Pete Wishart MP
Scottish Affairs Select Committee Chair

By email: scotaffcom@parliament.uk

12 December 2022

Dear Pete,

On Monday 31 October, Douglas Ross MSP raised concerns with Keith Brown MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Justice, at the Scottish Affairs Committee hearing into firearms licensing regulations in Scotland (HC 710). This hearing was being held as a result of the fatal incident on Skye in August 22. Mr Ross raised concerns relating to the emergency medical response coverage within Scotland.

I have set out information in relation to these concerns which I hope will offer reassurance to the Committee that the Scottish Ambulance Service(SAS) provides adequate emergency medical cover for the whole of Scotland and that patient safety is as much of a top priority for the Scottish Government as it is for SAS.

I must also acknowledge this tragic set of events and the impact on everyone involved in this incident, including the wider community. My upmost sympathy remains with the families. I would also like to praise the professionalism of the emergency services and how they responded during those extremely challenging circumstances.

With regards to the emergency medical coverage provided for Scotland, The Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS), through a contract with GAMA Aviation, has access to two Airbus H145 helicopters based at Inverness and Glasgow. These aircraft, with medical interior and normal crew compliment of three (pilot and two paramedics) and assuming clear day, nil wind, no delays and transit at optimal altitude of around 4500 feet, have a maximum flying distance of 300 nautical miles (nm) in the day or 285nm at night which offers more than adequate coverage of mainland Scotland.

With the full ScotSTAR Emergency Medical Retrieval Service team on board, this moves to a crew of five. These additional passengers and additional kit weight reduces the fuel load, which in turn reduces the flying distances, to 240nm in the day and 225nm at night with the trade-off being that interventions historically only provided in hospital can now be delivered by the consultant led "Trauma Team" at the scene and during transport.

Where the maximum flying distances (including the return leg) exceeds that stated above, as is standard practice in flight planning, the pilot will introduce a refuelling stage. This will be

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discussed with the responding team to ensure optimal patient care with no increased clinical risk or delay. This approach is also used by Search and Rescue teams.

The aircraft operators are sighted on the strategic importance of having access to enough refuelling sites to support efficient operations, particularly in remote and rural areas. The availability of such is monitored and continually reviewed by operational management teams, a relatively recent example of which would be the addition of a refuelling bowser at Oban Airport to support operations on the West coast.

In relation to the incident in Skye this year, I believe the question is in reference to the patient that was brought to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Glasgow. It was a SAS aircraft, not the Scottish Charity Air Ambulance that responded to that patient, with the aforementioned Trauma Team on board. Due to the potential risk associated with the uncertain location of the firearms incident and live time triage of the multiple calls received, the helicopter burnt off a little more fuel than usual, while enroute to the scene. Assessment of the patient's injuries by the clinical team led to the decision that the helicopter would reposition to Plockton to refuel. This was because the team required time to start treating certain time-critical injuries prior to transfer and because the nature of the persons injuries was going to require a longer, low altitude transfer back to Glasgow. The aircraft was back on the ground in 15 minutes and at the scene for around 20 minutes before the medical team declared the patient ready for travel, meaning the refuel had absolutely no impact on patient care.

I hope you have found this information useful.

Yours sincerely,



HUMZA YOUSAF

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