NEW HELICOPTER CONTRACT FOR
GENERAL LIGHTHOUSE AUTHORITIES

The General Lighthouse Authorities (GLAs) of the UK and Ireland have announced a £13M seven-year contract to PDG Helicopters for the provision of helicopter services to cover all three Authorities.

Provision of one helicopter supplier across the GLAs will deliver significant cost savings of around £7.9M to the General Lighthouse Fund, which pays for the safety critical work of the GLAs to provide a reliable, efficient and cost-effective marine aids to navigation service around the coast of UK and Ireland.

Until now each authority has contracted its own helicopter service provider and co-ordinated its own activities. The decision to award a single tri-GLA contract for helicopter services is a first for the participating authorities, who established a cross-GLA project team to manage the procurement process.

Helicopters have been contracted by the GLAs since the 1970s for the transport of personnel to remote and difficult-to-access sites and for specialised operations to move materials to and from their support vessels and lighthouses.

PDG Helicopters is one of the UK and Ireland’s leading helicopter providers and operates an extensive fleet of modern aircraft and will deploy two Eurocopter EC 135 aircraft to fulfill the contract requirements. Headquartered in Scotland PDG has operating bases across the United Kingdom and Ireland from which it flies over 11,000 hours a year supporting a wide range of onshore and offshore markets. The new seven year contract, with an extension option for up to a further three years, will commence in December 2015 allowing existing contracts to complete and for a period of training and familiarisation.

The projected flying hours across the GLAs will be around 1,000 per annum – the number of flying hours has reduced over recent years – in part achieved through the improved engineering of remote lights giving greater reliability and reduced maintenance burden created by the ongoing work to introduce solar power and LED lights but also through more effective and collaborative planning across the GLAs.

Deployment of the helicopter will be co-ordinated by the three lighthouse authorities, working together. The GLAs will consult on PDG Helicopters work plans and align the helicopter services in the most efficient and effective manner to meet their operational requirements. However, by the very nature of the safety critical work of the GLAs, an agreed contingency procedure will be put
in place to allow the authorities to deal with any immediate or short-notice high priority tasking.

Captain Ian McNaught, Deputy Master of Trinity House said: “This single contract demonstrates the GLAs’ willingness to adapt and change working practices collaboratively in order to develop best practice and reduce operating costs. It makes a positive contribution to the achievement of real cost reduction whilst continuing to deliver the essential network of aids to navigation the GLAs provide to the maritime community in the UK and Ireland. A potential saving of £7.9M is something the GLAs are extremely pleased to report to its stakeholders.”

Mike Bullock, Chief Executive of the Northern Lighthouse Board commented: “Helicopters provide an essential capability for the GLAs as they allow both personnel and material to be delivered to difficult to access sites in remote and often hostile environments. With safety considerations at the forefront of the procurement process, we have looked very closely at the type and capability of helicopter to ensure we provide a reliable and safe means of access to and from our sites.”

Yvonne Shields, Chief Executive of the Commissioners of Irish Lights reflected: “We are pleased to be working with PDG Helicopters. Over recent years the EC 135 has already proved its capabilities by carrying out operations for two of the GLAs under separate contracts and PDG Helicopters, through its subsidiary Irish Helicopters, has successfully worked with the Commissioners of Irish Lights since the 1970s so we are aware of the service they provide and we look forward to continue working with them under the new contract.”

At the contract signing Jerry Francis, Chief Executive of PDG Helicopters stated: “We are delighted to be awarded the GLA Helicopter Service Contract and are proud to be supporting them in the delivery of their statutory duty for the safety of the mariner. In working closely with clients to deliver a truly bespoke helicopter service and by responding quickly to our clients’ needs we continue to build on our reputation and commitment to safety. The award of this contract is a natural progression from working exclusively with the Commissioners of Irish Lights and we look forward to extending this vital service across the entire United Kingdom and Ireland.”

**More on the General Lighthouse Authorities**
The General Lighthouse Authorities (GLAs) of the United Kingdom and Ireland are: the Commissioners of Northern Lighthouses, known as the Northern Lighthouse Board with responsibility for Scotland and the Isle of Man; the Corporation of Trinity House, known as Trinity House for England, Wales,
Channel Islands and Gibraltar and The Commissioners of Irish Lights, known as Irish Lights for all Ireland, that is to say the Republic of Ireland and Northern Island.

The GLAs have a Joint Mission Statement which reads: “To deliver a reliable, efficient and cost-effective aids to navigation service for the benefit and safety of all Mariners.”


With regard to funding the costs of the GLA services are met from the General Lighthouse Fund (GLF), which derives its income mainly from light dues that are charged on commercial shipping calling at the ports of the United Kingdom and Ireland. The Irish Government contribute to the GLF, and the UK and Irish Governments have agreed that from 2015 onward CIL operations in the Republic of Ireland (RoI) will be funded from RoI sources.

As for their fixed assets the Northern Lighthouse Board currently own and operate 205 lighthouses around Scotland and the Isle of Man. Trinity House currently own and operate 61 lighthouses around England, Wales, the Channel Islands and Gibraltar. The Commissioners of Irish Lights currently own and operate 72 lighthouses around the whole of Ireland.

**Background on use of Helicopters within the GLAs:**
The General Lighthouse Authorities started using helicopters for some operations as far back as the 1960s and following successful trials, put in place helicopter contracts in the 1970s. Over the years a series of helipads were built at various rock lighthouses, like the magnificent Skerryvore lighthouse off Tiree in the Atlantic and at remote lights around the coast of the UK and Ireland. The positioning of helipads vary between authorities, the NLB chose to locate their pads on the rocks at remote pillar rock lighthouses, whilst Trinity House located theirs on the top of the lighthouse at rock stations, such as the famous Eddystone lighthouse. These early helicopter flights and up to 1998, when the final lighthouse automations took place, were used to carry out lightkeeper reliefs at remote stations. Helicopters were also used by the GLAs Engineering Departments in support of civil engineering works during upgrading works to stations. Working in conjunction with the GLA ships, which by now had the addition of helipads on deck, the helicopters were able to undersling materials swiftly to site. Today helicopters are used to transfer personnel to remote sites around the coast for lighthouse maintenance and to support capital improvement/refurbishment projects.
Of the tender process, that for this award followed Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) guidelines.

**Picture caption**

*PDG Helicopters (subsidiary Irish Helicopters) EC 135 Helicopter carrying out mobilisation of materials at Ardnakinna Lighthouse (Co. Cork) in preparation for planned lighthouse maintenance. Ardnakinna Lighthouse is owned and operated by the Commissioners of Irish Lights.*