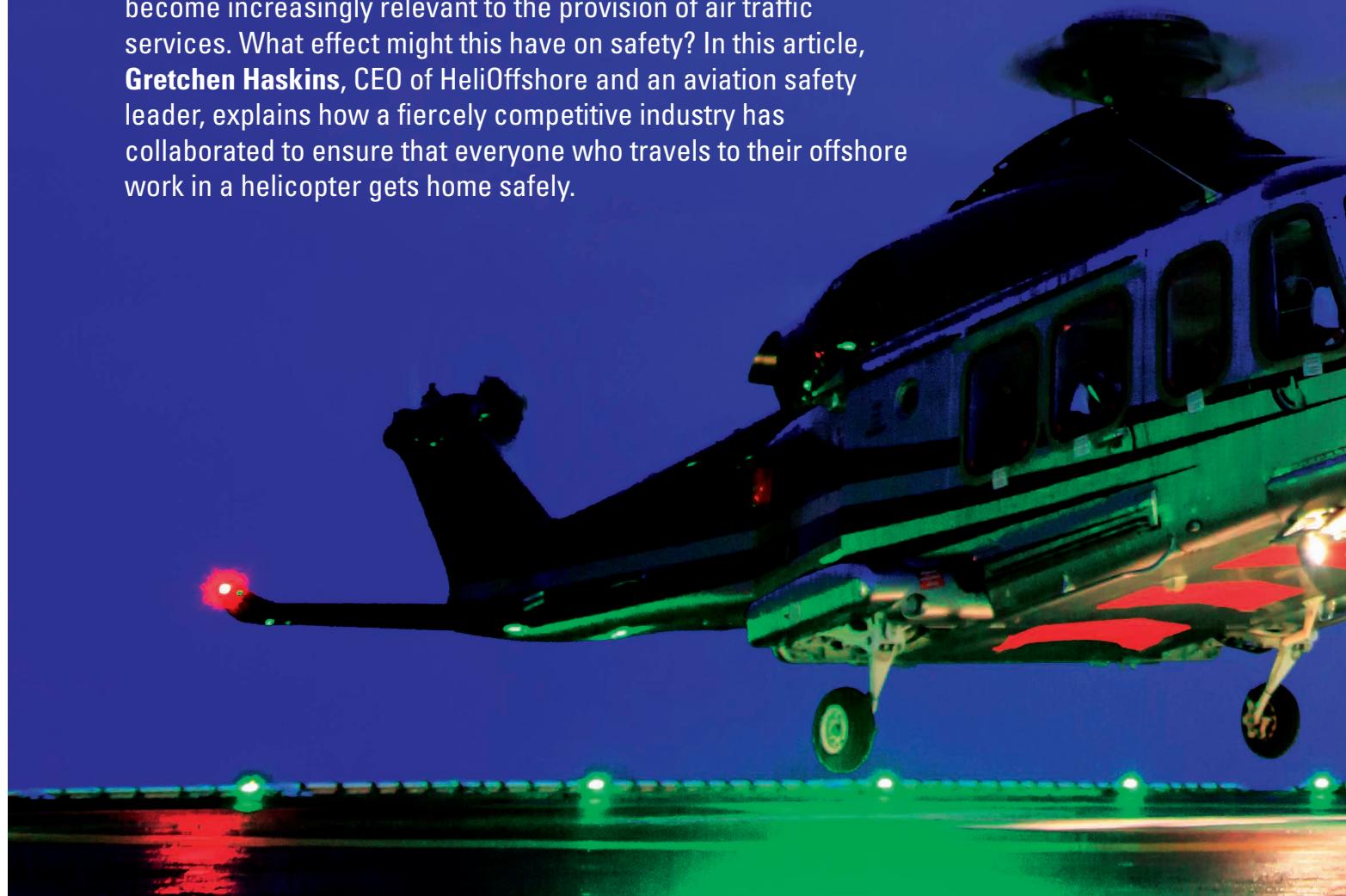




HOW FIERCE COMPETITORS JOINED FORCES TO MAKE OFFSHORE HELICOPTER OPERATIONS SAFER

Over recent years, competition and commercialisation have become increasingly relevant to the provision of air traffic services. What effect might this have on safety? In this article, **Gretchen Haskins**, CEO of HeliOffshore and an aviation safety leader, explains how a fiercely competitive industry has collaborated to ensure that everyone who travels to their offshore work in a helicopter gets home safely.



KEY POINTS

- 1. Breakthroughs in safety performance are more likely through collaboration.**
- 2. Focus on results in the frontline, and areas that will make the greatest difference to saving lives.**
- 3. Shared collection and analysis of day-to-day operational activities are key factors in setting and achieving measurable safety goals.**
- 4. Translating operational performance improvements into business benefits helps to achieve buy-in from senior stakeholders.**
- 5. As per ICAO Annex 19, every organisation and country should have a safety performance improvement strategy. There should be a common framework for this strategy, which aids collaboration across organisations.**

At face value, it might seem a tall order to get fierce commercial rivals to put their differences to one side to collaborate in pursuit of enhanced safety. Try doing that when the market in which these companies compete is going through a sustained downturn of almost existential proportions, and you might well be tempted to give up. But this is the story of how HeliOffshore came to be and how, three years on, the offshore helicopter industry is achieving tangible, life-saving results.

Back in October 2014, the chief executives of five leading helicopter operators—Babcock Mission Critical Services, Bristow Group, CHC Helicopter, Era Helicopters and PHI jointly launched HeliOffshore. Based on an understanding not to compete on safety, they agreed to strive for shared best practices and to work towards more common standards by sharing data and pooling resources to achieve safety goals that save lives.

Today, the group has more than 100 members globally, including helicopter operators, aircraft manufacturers, equipment and services providers, as well as a growing number of oil and gas companies. From the outset, I was convinced of the potential that the group has to achieve a major step forward in offshore helicopter safety and I've been able to apply safety strategies developed during my time in the US Air Force, at the UK air traffic control company NATS and the UK Civil Aviation Authority.

Collaboration is absolutely integral to all of our work, which is focused on four key areas:

- **System Reliability & Resilience** – improving the combined human/machine interface to reduce single points of failure that can cause accidents.
- **Operational Effectiveness** – developing and implementing technology, training and procedures that make all stages of flight safer.
- **Safety Enablers** – harnessing leadership, data sharing and analysis, and safety management measures to ensure sufficient capability to enhance safety.
- **Survivability** – ensuring that flights happen in suitable conditions with adequate plans and equipment in place for passengers and crew to survive an accident.

These core sets of safety goals are developed, championed and implemented by HeliOffshore's workstreams, which consist of seasoned frontline safety leaders from across our member companies working in tandem with the organisation's small full-time staff and a select group of specialist consultants. Together, we develop best practices and guidelines and then work with member operators to get these implemented at the frontline.

Essentially, HeliOffshore (<http://helioffshore.org/>) has created a 'safe space' in which commercial rivals can put their differences to one side in a common pursuit of enhanced safety. We have created a clear set of safety priorities, goals and implementation timelines based on what makes accidents occur and what are the best measures to prevent these happening.

Gretchen Haskins is CEO of HeliOffshore Ltd., a company dedicated to global offshore helicopter safety. She has served on the board of the UK CAA as Group Director of Safety, and as Group Director of Safety at NATS. Gretchen previously worked in nuclear certification and safety of intercontinental ballistic missiles, joint airworthiness trials for military aircraft, and as an expert advisor to NATO on human performance and safety critical systems. She has flown jet and piston aircraft in the U.S. Air Force.



A whole-industry safety management system

Shared data and learning are critical to achieving these goals. This is why we established our HeliOffshore Space and InfoShare portals to allow companies to constructively work together through their operational experience and knowledge. In effect, we are a virtual company with a mission statement to enhance safety. What we've created – and continue to progress – is a giant safety management system for the whole offshore helicopter industry. In common with the air traffic management community, we're looking to both minimise safety risk and improve performance. In our safety performance model (<http://bit.ly/HeliOffshoreSPM>) we've articulated 'what good looks like' and we're trying to get the industry to achieve a safer system from that consistent framework. This model looks at the threats and creates a set of accident prevention goals based on actions that we have to be good at on a day-to-day basis to make offshore helicopter operations safer in a sustainable way. For example, if you want to avoid obstacles, you have to be good at seeing and avoiding them. If you want to avoid loss of control, you have to be good at flight path management. Once we have clearly articulated these accident prevention goals, we are better placed to examine the cost benefits of the various solutions that different organisations can offer to improve safety performance.

Our collaboration has widened to include aircraft, engines and avionics manufacturers, as well as specialist service providers across the industry. One of the beauties of our collaborative approach is that it helps to work at every level of the supply chain, tapping a collective investment and effort to get the best possible safety outcomes. This is important because design is a key factor to help improve human performance.

HeliOffshore members understand that investing in safety is crucial not only to saving lives, but also represents a sound value proposition that is repaid several times over by cost savings. We've created a collective business case for key improvements, linking costs to safety performance benefits and making the

HELOFFSHORE SAFETY ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Approach Path Management guidelines**
- **Establishing the InfoShare portal to allow operators to share information about safety incidents**
- **Collaboration on technologies to help with obstacle avoidance**
- **Best practice guidelines for health and usage monitoring systems**
- **Pilot eye-tracking research to support the development of Evidence Based Training**
- **Research resulting in new guidelines to avoid helicopters landing on the wrong decks**
- **A series of training videos to show flight crew how to make best use of automation in the cockpit**
- **Promoted collaboration between aircraft manufacturers and operators to produce Flight Crew Operating Manuals to encourage standardisation of operating procedures**
- **Progressive introduction of a safety intelligence data sharing programme (a first for the helicopter sector) that will drive key improvements in technology and operating procedures**

case for investing in safety both across companies, as well as within them individually.

One of the key challenges for any industry is that you can't just create a company to 'do safety' for everyone. You need people who are busy doing their frontline jobs to make safety work relevant and see that it gets implemented. Participants need to have sweat equity in the shared work rather than just writing cheques to get the safety monkey off their backs.

Ultimately, success depends on having the people for whom safe operations is a day job to lead the conversation across the industry about how to design the road map for better performance. This is how we came up with the concept for HeliOffshore's workstreams and how they focus on achieving breakthroughs in safety performance that reduce the causal factors of accidents.

For successful collaboration, you need to have senior level buy-in and we are very fortunate to have this among our member companies. We've been able to agree clear strategic priorities to ensure that we are focused on deliverable activities that will provide safety benefits. Consistent leadership from the top has allowed our stakeholders to align their safety priorities around work that has the most potential to save lives. This approach is delivering best practices and ways of measuring safety performance in a consistent way so that we can identify the degree to which further action may be required. We've been pleased by the extent to

which this approach encourages safety breakthroughs in performance and a commitment to shared improvement. Safety issues faced by one stakeholder are often best resolved through the experience of another stakeholder. This is a very interdependent industry. Quite apart from operators themselves, aircraft, engine and systems designers can make operations safer, and training companies can too. Shared data gathered and analysed in a consistent way is a true foundation for this holistic approach. This 'Safety Intelligence' enhances our ability to focus on weak signals of potential issues, and to measure the potential and actual safety benefits of safety improvements, giving people across the industry the ability to make more data-driven decisions.

Lately, we've been very excited by opportunities to step up our collaboration with offshore helicopter operators' customers – the energy companies. The International Association of Oil and Gas Producers is aligning its strategy with our own and has indicated a willingness to contribute to the shared investment in safety. We also work in close alignment with the regulators and with other safety advocates, such as the Flight Safety Foundation so that we're all heading in the same direction. The first three years of HeliOffshore's mission have confirmed our conviction that only through collaboration is there a viable prospect of achieving our industry's ultimate goal of ensuring that everyone who travels to their offshore work in a helicopter gets home safely. 