



MALAYSIA PICKS AW189 FOR DISASTER-RELIEF ROLE

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Malaysia's fire and rescue department is to operate a pair of AgustaWestland AW189 super-medium helicopters for use in disaster relief operations.

Due for delivery in 2017, the 8.3t rotorcraft were ordered by Malaysian company TPG Aeronautik at the Singapore air show today.

They will be used for fire fighting, disaster relief and search and rescue missions. However, unlike pure SAR-rolled AW189s, which are assembled at a dedicated line at its Yeovil, UK plant, the two helicopters destined for Malaysia will instead be built at its Vergiate, Italy factory.

With nine of a total of 11 Yeovil-built AW189s so far delivered - seven to Bristow Helicopters and two to British International Helicopters, according to UK registry data - there is a danger that the line will shortly run out of work if no new orders materialise.

To add to the problem of a depleted backlog is the fact the GE Aviation CT7-powered helicopter has yet to enter service on the UK's Bristow-run SAR contract, nearly a year behind schedule.

The main reason for the delay has been the slow pace of development and certification of the type's full ice protection system (FIPS).

Flight tests of the FIPS have been taking place in Alaska over the past few months and Finmeccanica Helicopters' chief executive Daniele Romiti is confident of securing certification for the system by mid-2016. And, he says, the helicopters will be operational in the UK prior to that approval milestone.

Meanwhile, the manufacturer is closing in on first flight for the other major SAR programme currently in development at Yeovil, with the first AW101 for Norway due to take to the skies "by mid-year", says Romiti.

He describes the model, which features a new digital autopilot, as "the most advanced from the technical viewpoint" adding: "The Norwegian application for the AW101 is proving the effectiveness of this platform in the role."

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