

Document 15 – Question from Parliament Representative

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From Ivar Kristiansen (Conservative Party) to the Minister of Justice

Answered on 14 March 2008 by Minister of Justice Knut Storberget (Labour Party)

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Question:

The acquisition process for the new rescue helicopters has lasted a long time. Based on *Dagens Næringsliv's* articles on the rescue helicopter issue last week, important questions have emerged concerning the impartiality assessment of the management and consultants associated with the acquisition project for new rescue helicopters. There have also been queries of why the Ministry of Justice has not made use of the Armed Forces' technical and operative expertise in this matter. Does the Minister believe that impartiality has been assessed satisfactorily in this case?

Reply:

The acquisition of new rescue helicopters represents a considerable investment in life-saving material that will last for the next 30-40 years. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the work is being done carefully and is of the highest quality. As the Minister responsible for our rescue services it is of great importance to me that the material we acquire is appropriate both for the rescuers and for those to be rescued. The process leading up to such choices must be well organised and inspire confidence in all parties involved. High quality is therefore important to me, and by that I mean the quality of the process as well as of the outcome.

As the representative points out, this process has lasted for some time, but the long period helps ensure that the correct choices are made. Once the Government, following an overall assessment, decided not to take up the option of NH90 as rescue helicopters due not least to their short range, it was decided to initiate a new acquisition process through an open tender competition. This shows clearly that the government will go far to fulfil the requirements of a modern rescue helicopter service, which has to cover large areas of sea and land and be able to rescue many people, often over great distances.

The public sector has established quality assurance systems to ensure high quality decisions. These are time-consuming processes, but the Government has determined that there must be quality assurance of the future acquisition of new rescue helicopters in line with the Ministry of Finance's policy for external quality assurance of major government investments. This work is still in an early phase. In light of the articles in *Dagens Næringsliv* and the media interest in this matter, I would like to underline that no supplier of future rescue helicopters has so far been either preferred or excluded. It is too early to make such choices.

As regards impartiality I am, just like *Dagens Næringsliv*, eager to have transparency and for all aspects of such an acquisition to be of a high ethical standard. Although I see that the newspaper's perspective does not provide a complete picture of the situation, I am pleased that the press is keeping a keen eye on us. That inspires us to further exertions in ensuring a transparent and ethical process. Measures have been taken during the whole process to ensure a high ethical standard and to make sure people have confidence in the process, and I will continually be assessing whether more measures should be implemented.

To prevent errors and in line with current project theory, structures with executive and controlling tasks have been established for the acquisition. The project is managed by the Ministry of Justice as a line assignment, and a team of experts has been set up to prepare the ground for the political decisions that will be made. In addition, an advisory cooperation group consisting of staff representatives from the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Health and Care Services, meets regularly to ensure coordination and support. A Ministers' group has also been set up for this purpose and is kept updated at all times.

To prepare for the coming acquisition I have set up an acquisition project that will assist in preparing input for the decision-making process. The project organisation members have broad experience from helicopter-technical and helicopter-operative aspects as well as legal and financial consultancy. The group consists largely of people from the Armed Forces, and a key subproject is also being managed by the Armed Forces. A few consultants from the civilian industry have also been engaged in order to provide sufficient balance and representation in the assessments that will be made. Since it was presumed that the need for such expertise (which was supplementary to that of the permanent members from the Armed Forces) would vary from one period to another, it was decided to enter into framework agreements with consultants. The same decision was taken for financial and legal expertise.

Following a tender competition throughout the EEA, an evaluation team in the Ministry of Justice carried out a careful assessment of the relevant candidates on the basis of previously announced evaluation criteria, in order for the evaluation of the tenders to be as objective as possible. Impartiality assessments formed a part of this evaluation. Once framework agreements had been signed with the consultancy companies, the lawyer who has been engaged through the legal agreement assisted us in reviewing once more the impartiality of the project manager and the other consultants. In addition to this an ethics seminar has been held and ethical guidelines have been prepared for the project participants.

As part of the above-mentioned quality assurance process, an extensive information gathering campaign has been started in the market. All potential suppliers of helicopters and maintenance may provide information. A great many have registered their interest so far, and this would not seem to indicate any distrust of the process in the market.

To make doubly sure, however, I have now implemented another review to ascertain whether the impartiality situation is as it should be.