

QUEENSLAND

AEROMEDICAL & AIR RESCUE NETWORK

HELICOPTER TASKING GUIDELINES

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QUEENSLAND AEROMEDICAL & AIR RESCUE NETWORK

HELICOPTER TASKING GUIDELINES

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HELICOPTER TASKING GUIDELINES

1. INTRODUCTION

The Queensland aeromedical and air rescue helicopter network operating throughout the State is provided through the Department of Emergency Services (DES), various Community Helicopter Providers and a contract helicopter service in Torres Strait.

The network of aeromedical and air rescue helicopter providers is as follows:

- Queensland Government Helicopter Rescue Service Air Units (Queensland Rescue) in Brisbane, Townsville and Cairns;
- CareFlight Queensland (RACQ CareFlight) at the Gold Coast;
- Sunshine Coast Helicopter Rescue Service (Energex Community Rescue) at the Sunshine Coast and Bundaberg;
- Capricorn Helicopter Rescue Service (RACQ CHRS) at Rockhampton;
- Central Queensland Helicopter Rescue Service (RACQ CQ RESQ) at Mackay; and
- Contract Helicopter Service in Torres Strait (Torres Strait Rescue).

Where practical, the helicopter providers listed above should be the first choice to undertake the range of tasks listed in Section 3 of this document. Should these providers be unavailable, Tasking Agencies may seek helicopter services from alternative sources.

However, only the helicopter providers listed above have been approved by the Minister for Emergency Services under the *Ambulance Service Act 1991* to provide ambulance transport in helicopters.

Queensland Rescue, RACQ CareFlight and Energex Community Rescue are also authorised under section 23 of the *Ambulance Services Act (NSW) 1990* to conduct ambulance services in NSW.

2. PURPOSE

These guidelines have been developed as a practical aid to assist tasking agencies using the aeromedical and air rescue helicopter services throughout the State. They are designed to facilitate availability, coordination and monitoring of aeromedical and air rescue helicopters. They aim to provide a consistent, standard approach to the delivery of aeromedical and air rescue helicopter services.

3. INTERPRETATION

ACC means Ambulance Communications Centre

Activation means notifying the pilot that a given flight has been authorised by an appropriate person and is to be undertaken at a determined time. Aircraft will usually be activated by the relevant Communications Centre or officers such as a Police District Officer/Regional Duty Officer or from Australian Search and Rescue (AusSAR). Final activation will be subject to the pilot's agreement, particularly in relation to weather and other safety issues.

Aeromedical Operations include Aeromedical Primary Response and Inter-Hospital Transfers:

Aeromedical Primary Response means any response to a patient who has not yet been assessed at a Queensland Health facility (hospital, clinic, medical aid post, etc). Primary response could include: motor vehicle and boating accidents, heart attack victims and emergency situations where life is at risk.

Inter-Hospital Transfer means the movement of a patient from one medical facility to another.

Clinical Coordination means provision of the following advice by a medical practitioner approved by Queensland Health:

- the mode of transport for an inter-hospital transfer;
- the clinical needs of the patient in preparation for, and during aeromedical transport; and
- the appropriate clinical crew required to treat and accompany the patient.

FCC means Fire Communications Centre

Monitoring means monitoring the location and availability of aircraft 24 hours per day. Monitoring is the responsibility of the ACC.

Paramedic means a QAS officer qualified as a Paramedic, Paramedic (Advanced Care) or Paramedic (Intensive Care).

PCC means Police Communications Centre.

QAS means Queensland Ambulance Service.

QFRS means Queensland Fire and Rescue Service.

QPS means Queensland Police Service.

Tasking means a decision is taken by an agency, with appropriate advice from pilots when necessary, to use an aircraft for a specific operation. An example is a decision made between a Clinical Coordinator and an ACC to ensure the optimum aircraft, crew and timing for a given flight.

Tasking Agency means an agency as specified in Section 6 of these Guidelines that is authorised to activate the aeromedical and air rescue helicopter network.

Urgent QPS and/or urgent QFRS responsibilities means where immediate action is required to respond to a life threatening situation or to alleviate a significant threat to the community.

4. RANGE OF TASKS

The network of helicopter providers undertake the following range of tasks:

- aeromedical operations (including aeromedical primary responses and inter-hospital transfers);
- search and rescue operations (SAR);
- counter disaster operations;
- urgent QFRS responsibilities (fire spotting and suppression, transportation of QFRS specialised equipment and personnel). Non-urgent QFRS responsibilities may involve cost recovery;
- assist with urgent QPS responsibilities. Non-urgent QPS responsibilities may involve cost recovery.

Note: All tasks undertaken by the contract service in Torres Strait are on a user pays basis.

5. LIFE SAVER HELICOPTER RESCUE SERVICE

The Life Saver Helicopter Rescue Service (LSHRS), operated by Surf Life Saving Queensland, provides surveillance and rescue services in the white water/surf environment.

In circumstances where the helicopter providers listed in Section 1 are unavailable, Tasking Agencies may approach LSHRS for assistance with emergency tasks that require use of a helicopter. If any funding issues arise from such assistance, these are the responsibility of the Tasking Agency.

LSHRS does not have Ministerial approval to provide ambulance transport in their helicopters, however this does not preclude LSHRS from providing transport for medical teams.

6. TASKING AGENCIES

The helicopter providers listed in section 1 of this document can be tasked to provide emergency helicopter services by the following agencies:

- Queensland Health through the State-wide Clinical Coordination System;
- QPS through the PCCs;
- QAS through the ACCs;
- Ambulance Service of New South Wales (via the Medical Retrieval Unit, St George Hospital, Sydney NSW) through the Queensland Clinical Coordination System;
- QFRS through the FCCs;
- State Counter Disaster Organisation
 - State Disaster Coordination Centre
 - Disaster District Coordination Centre
 - Local Government Disaster Coordination Centre
- Australian Search and Rescue (AusSAR), a Division of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA)

Final activation of helicopters is subject to the pilot's agreement, particularly in relation to weather and other safety issues.

7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Tasking Agencies have a range of responsibilities as follows:

7.1 Queensland Health and Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS)

- **Aeromedical**

There are two types of aeromedical operations. The first is Inter Hospital Transfer (IHT) and the second is Aeromedical Primary Response.

Primary Response is further subdivided into Category A Primary Response (defined as an aeromedical response in which the aircraft forms the initial ambulance response) and Category B Primary Response (defined as an aeromedical response in which the aircraft forms a secondary or backup response to health professionals already on scene).

Queensland Health has primary responsibility for the transport of patients from one Queensland Health facility to another, but is supported in this task by ACCs that provide communications links, and aircraft tasking and monitoring. QAS has primary responsibility for pre hospital care, but is supported in this task by Queensland Health Clinical Coordinators who can provide high level clinical advice and support and immediate access into major hospital facilities. Patient care is clearly a continuum involving multiple agencies and an attitude of cooperation and goodwill is essential to ensure optimal patient outcomes.

Tasking Guidelines for Inter Hospital Transfers (Flow charts on pages 14 & 15)

1. All urgent (less than 24 hours) inter hospital aeromedical transfers must be referred to a Queensland Health approved Clinical Coordinator – in general this should be the Clinical Coordinator from the patient's destination.
2. The Clinical Coordinator will provide advice on patient management both prior to and during transport and decide on the most appropriate vehicle and crew for the transport.
3. The aircraft and crew will be tasked by the regional ACC.
4. The ACC will monitor the location and availability of aeromedical aircraft to ensure rapid tasking when required. The Aeromedical Desk located in the ACC in Brisbane monitors all aeromedical aircraft in the State.
5. When prioritisation of multiple patients is required the Clinical Coordinator of the tertiary centre and the appropriate ACC will ensure optimum use of aviation resources.
6. All decision making within this system must be clearly documented in accordance with the *Aeromedical Services Queensland Minimum Data Set*, as approved by the Queensland Emergency Medical System Advisory Committee (QEMSAC).

Tasking Guidelines for Primary Response (Flow chart on page 13)

1. Queensland Health Clinical Coordinators act in support of QAS in the provision of care for patients in the pre hospital arena.
2. In a Category A Primary Response where flight time to an incident is less than 30 minutes the ACC will task the aircraft with an intensive care paramedic and then, as soon as possible, notify the Clinical Coordinator who will consider the need for a secondary response and the appropriate destination hospital.
3. In a Category A Primary Response where flight time to an incident will exceed 30 minutes or a Category B Primary Response the ACC will notify the Clinical Coordinator prior to tasking the aircraft. The Clinical Coordinator and ACC will jointly develop the most appropriate response using the principles of task specific crewing. Queensland Health staff should be aware of the need for an immediate response to a primary call and hence minimise delays. In general, medical staff should only be tasked on a primary response when there is a high likelihood of critical care skills being required and that staff member is immediately available.
4. All decision making within this system must be clearly documented in accordance with the *Aeromedical Services Queensland Minimum Data Set* as approved by QEMSAC.

7.2 AMBULANCE SERVICE OF NEW SOUTH WALES

- **Aeromedical Operations**

Queensland Rescue, RACQ CareFlight and Energex Community Rescue are authorised under section 23 of the *Ambulance Services Act (NSW) 1990* to conduct ambulance services in New South Wales.

Aeromedical tasks into NSW may be undertaken on a cost recovery basis, however the task must be first approved by the Ambulance Service of NSW via the Medical Retrieval Unit (MRU) at St George Hospital, Sydney, NSW. The NSW hospital requiring the service is responsible for obtaining the requisite approval from the MRU.

Subject to approval, aeromedical tasks are then coordinated through the Queensland Health Clinical Coordination system (refer to section 7.1 of this document).

7.3 QUEENSLAND POLICE SERVICE

Police Officers should refer to s.2.32 “Government and Community Helicopter Providers” of the QPS Operational Procedures Manual for information and current QPS policy.

- **Search and Rescue (SAR)**

QPS has responsibility for the coordination of the following SAR operations:

- hikers;
- land vehicles;
- all vessels in port (except for military);
- pleasure craft and fishing vessels at sea;
- unregistered aircraft;
- provision and coordination of land SAR units for registered aircraft and manned space vehicles crashed on land.

Should a marine SAR operation exceed locally available facilities, responsibility for coordination of the operation may move, by mutual agreement, from QPS to the Commonwealth SAR agency, AusSAR.

- **Urgent Police Responsibilities**

QPS will task helicopters for assistance with a range of urgent Police responsibilities. Such tasks may include (although not be limited to) sieges, abduction, and restoration of urgently needed communication equipment when ground access to the site of the equipment is not practical.

- **Non-urgent Police Responsibilities**

If QPS task a helicopter for non-urgent tasks such as training or photography, the helicopter provider may choose to seek cost recovery. Where cost recovery is to be pursued, this should be agreed between QPS and the provider prior to the task commencing.

Tasking Guidelines (Flow charts on pages 16, 17 & 18)

1. Tasking of helicopters for QPS responsibilities is coordinated through the PCC in the relevant region. The PCC will contact the helicopter provider directly (arrangements in place in some areas require the PCC to also contact the ACC for aircraft tasking and monitoring).
2. The helicopter pilot will contact the Police Officer requesting the task for a full task briefing. In the case of search and rescue tasks, the pilot may contact QAS to ascertain if a paramedic is required/available.
3. For monitoring purposes, the helicopter pilot must advise the ACC that the helicopter has been tasked for a QPS operation. If possible, the helicopter pilot should also advise the ACC of the name and contact telephone number of the Police Officer responsible for the task. The pilot should also advise the ACC of the return of the helicopter when the task is completed.

7.4 QUEENSLAND FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE (including Rural Operations)

- **Urgent QFRS Responsibilities**

The FCCs across the State are responsible for dispatching aerial support to assist with fire spotting and suppression and transportation of QFRS specialised equipment and personnel.

Tasks can include transport of fire crews and equipment, fire spotting, and water bombing.

- **Non-urgent QFRS Responsibilities**

If QFRS task a helicopter for non-urgent tasks, such as training or non-urgent transport, the helicopter provider may choose to seek cost recovery. Where cost recovery is to be pursued, this should be agreed between QFRS and the provider prior to the task commencing.

Tasking Guidelines (Flow charts on pages 19 & 20)

1. Tasking of helicopters by QFRS must be approved at Assistant Commissioner level.
2. Tasking of helicopters by QFRS must occur through the appropriate FCC.

3. The helicopter pilot will then contact the fire officer requesting the task for a full task briefing.
4. For monitoring purposes, the helicopter pilot must advise the ACC that it is has been tasked for an operation by QFRS, and provide the name and contact telephone number of the controlling officer from QFRS. The pilot should also advise the ACC of the return of the helicopter when the task is completed.

7.5 STATE COUNTER DISASTER ORGANISATION

- **Disaster Response and Recovery Operations**

The State Counter Disaster Organisation (SCDO) is responsible for managing a whole-of-government integrated approach to disaster management. The SCDO operates through a State Disaster Coordination Centre (SDCC) operated by Counter Disaster and Rescue Services Division. The SDCC is activated as required to manage the impact of disasters such as cyclones and flooding. This body assists local governments in supporting their communities to plan, prepare, respond to and recover from disasters.

When an area is affected by a disaster, the District Disaster Coordinator (DDC) (usually the QPS District Officer) can approve the tasking of local resources, including helicopters.

Requests for assistance that cannot be provided from local resources must be directed to the SDCC in Brisbane. For example, if a DDC requires a helicopter to be deployed to a disaster affected area, a request for aerial support must be made to the SDCC in the first instance. Subject to deployment of a helicopter being approved by SDCC, tasking of the helicopter can then be approved through the DCC direct.

Queensland Rescue helicopters deployed to Disaster Districts remain under the control of DES and tasking is approved by the Director, Aviation Services Unit, DES or delegate.

If the Minister for Emergency Services activates State Disaster Relief Arrangements (SDRA) or Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements (NDRA) for a particular area, the tasks undertaken by the helicopter (including costs of relocation) are undertaken on a cost recovery basis through NDRA.

The following tasks are eligible for reimbursement if SDRA/NDRA has been activated:

- the cost of relocating an aircraft to an area and return to base;
- food drops/resupply of essential supplies to isolated individuals and communities;
- transportation of personnel, equipment and materials for public safety and counter disaster operations, including medical needs;
- the activation, coordination and administration of SDRA/NDRA relief measures including damage assessments; and

- tasks for the protection/safety of life, health and public/community property.

Tasking Guidelines (Flow chart on page21)

1. Local Government: local government is responsible for forwarding tasking requests to the DDC - if the tasks are approved by the DDC, local government will then provide detailed pilot briefing(s) for the task.
2. Disaster District: the requesting DDC is responsible for tasking locally available aircraft and for providing a detailed pilot briefing.
3. State Government Level: the SCDO Duty Officer is responsible for providing a detailed pilot briefing through Aviation Services Unit, DES.

7.6 AUSTRALIAN SEARCH AND RESCUE (AusSAR)

• **Civil Search and Rescue Activity (Marine and Aviation)**

Australian Search and Rescue (AusSAR) is a division of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority.

AusSAR is immediately responsible for the following:

- Marine: An incident which involves the searching for and rescue of persons from any vessel (other than a fishing boat or pleasure craft) at sea, which is not the responsibility of Police or Defence, or is outside of Police capability eg. merchant shipping; and
- Aviation: air searches for overdue civil aircraft and military aircraft on request from a military authority.

AusSAR coordinate the incident, including the tasking of fixed wing aircraft and helicopters to assist in the searches over land or water. AusSAR may request local Police to coordinate activities on its behalf. If an aircraft is subject to a SAR action over land, AusSAR maintains responsibility for the operation until the aircraft is located. Once location is established AusSAR will then seek to transfer overall coordination to the QPS to take over the provision and coordination of land search and rescue units.

Tasking Guidelines (Flow chart on page 22)

1. In most cases, AusSAR will contact the helicopter provider direct to task for a SAR operation. The pilot may contact QAS to ascertain if a paramedic is required/available.
2. AusSAR has a database of contact telephone numbers. If the database has a helicopter provider's contact number recorded as the ACC in a given area, then the officer who takes the call should ensure that AusSAR and the helicopter provider are connected promptly.

8. DETERMINING TASKING PRIORITIES

If there are competing demands in relation to tasking of an aircraft, either prior to or during a task, the relevant officers from the tasking agencies shall urgently negotiate the priority of the tasks based on the need to preserve life and ensure community safety and well-being.

If the helicopter is undertaking a task and a competing task occurs, the helicopter shall only divert to the subsequent task once negotiations, as stated above, have been completed. If a decision is made to divert the helicopter, the initial tasking agency shall then advise the helicopter, through the relevant ACC, to respond to the subsequent task.

If the competing demands relate to two or more clinically coordinated aeromedical tasks the Clinical Coordinator shall decide the medical priority.

When there are competing demands, the ACC shall ensure communication between the competing/relevant agencies occurs. The ACC will provide advice on other available aircraft to assist the negotiations.

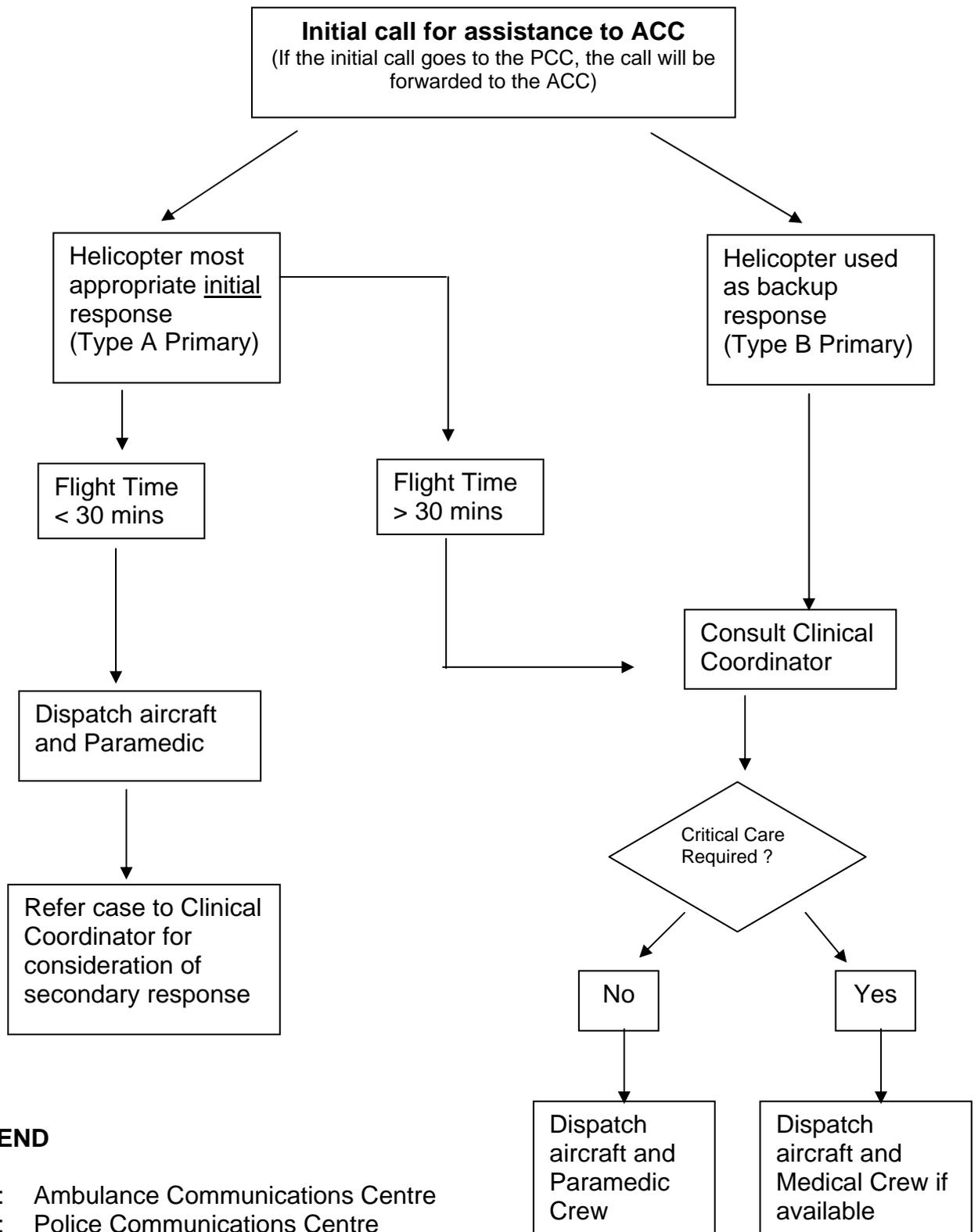
As a part of the negotiations, the helicopter pilot shall assess all relevant operational issues including the weather conditions and time of day to decide if it is safe to undertake the task.

9. REVIEW OF THE GUIDELINES

The *Queensland Aeromedical and Air Rescue Network Helicopter Tasking Guidelines* will be reviewed by Aviation Services Unit, DES on an annual basis.

AVIATION TASKING PROCEDURE FLOW CHARTS

AEROMEDICAL PRIMARY RESPONSE



LEGEND

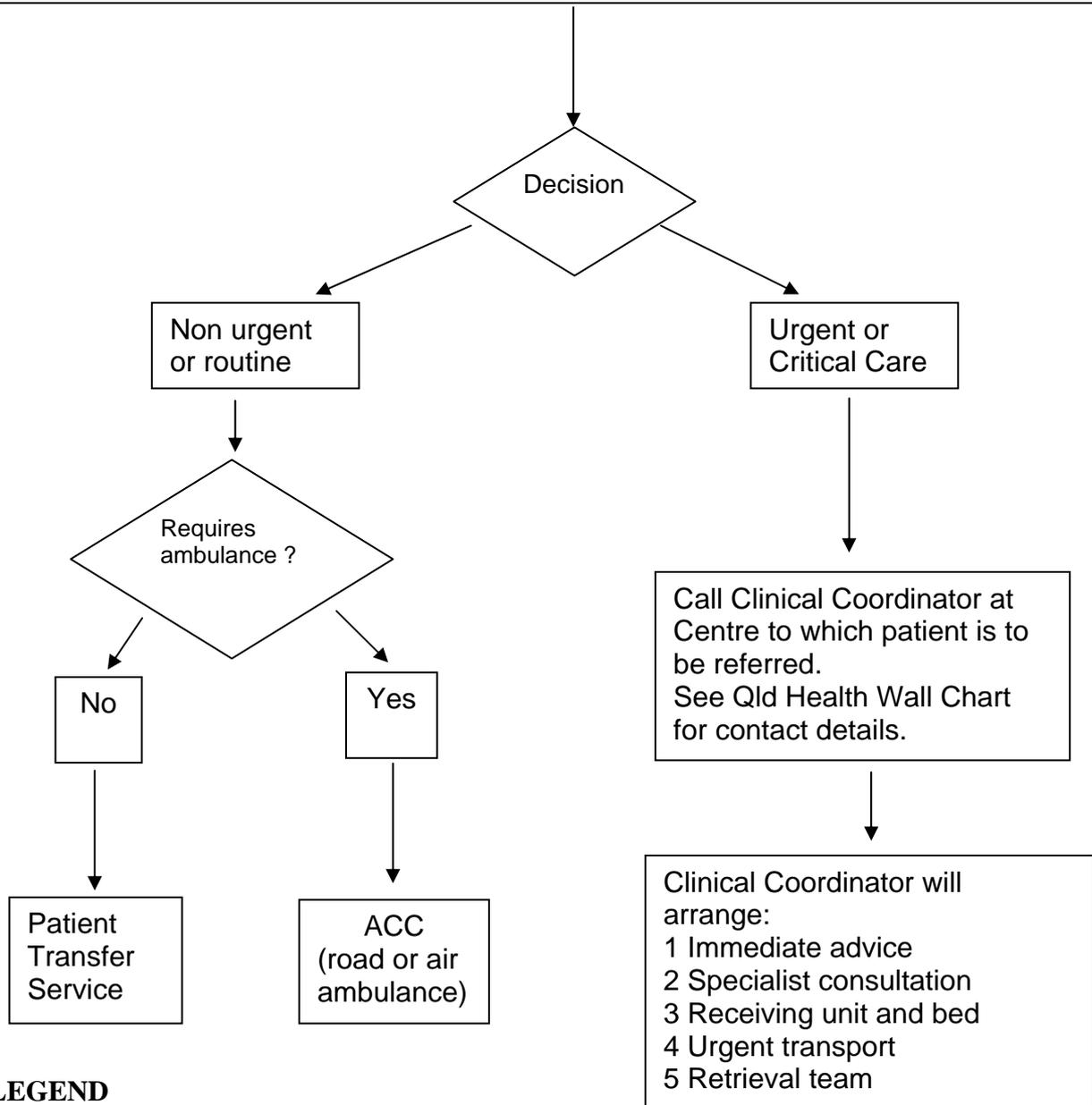
ACC: Ambulance Communications Centre
PCC: Police Communications Centre

AVIATION TASKING PROCEDURE FLOW CHART

AEROMEDICAL INTER-HOSPITAL TRANSFER

QUEENSLAND HEALTH FACILITY

When a patient could be managed within the local health service every attempt should be made to do so. Advice and support can be sought from nominated senior rural practitioners, the flying specialist services and from clinical coordination centres.



LEGEND

ACC: Ambulance Communications Centre

AVIATION TASKING PROCEDURES FLOW CHART

AEROMEDICAL INTER-HOSPITAL TRANSFER

DESIGNATED HEALTH FACILITY

PUBLIC OR PRIVATE

When a patient could be managed within the local health service every attempt should be made to do so. Advice and support can be sought from nominated senior rural practitioners, the flying specialist services and from clinical coordination centres.

Decision to refer for urgent higher level care

Contact Clinical Coordinator at Centre which patient is to be referred. See Qld Health Wall Chart for details.

Clinical Coordinator confirms retrieval is required and determines most appropriate mode of transport, crew composition and destination.

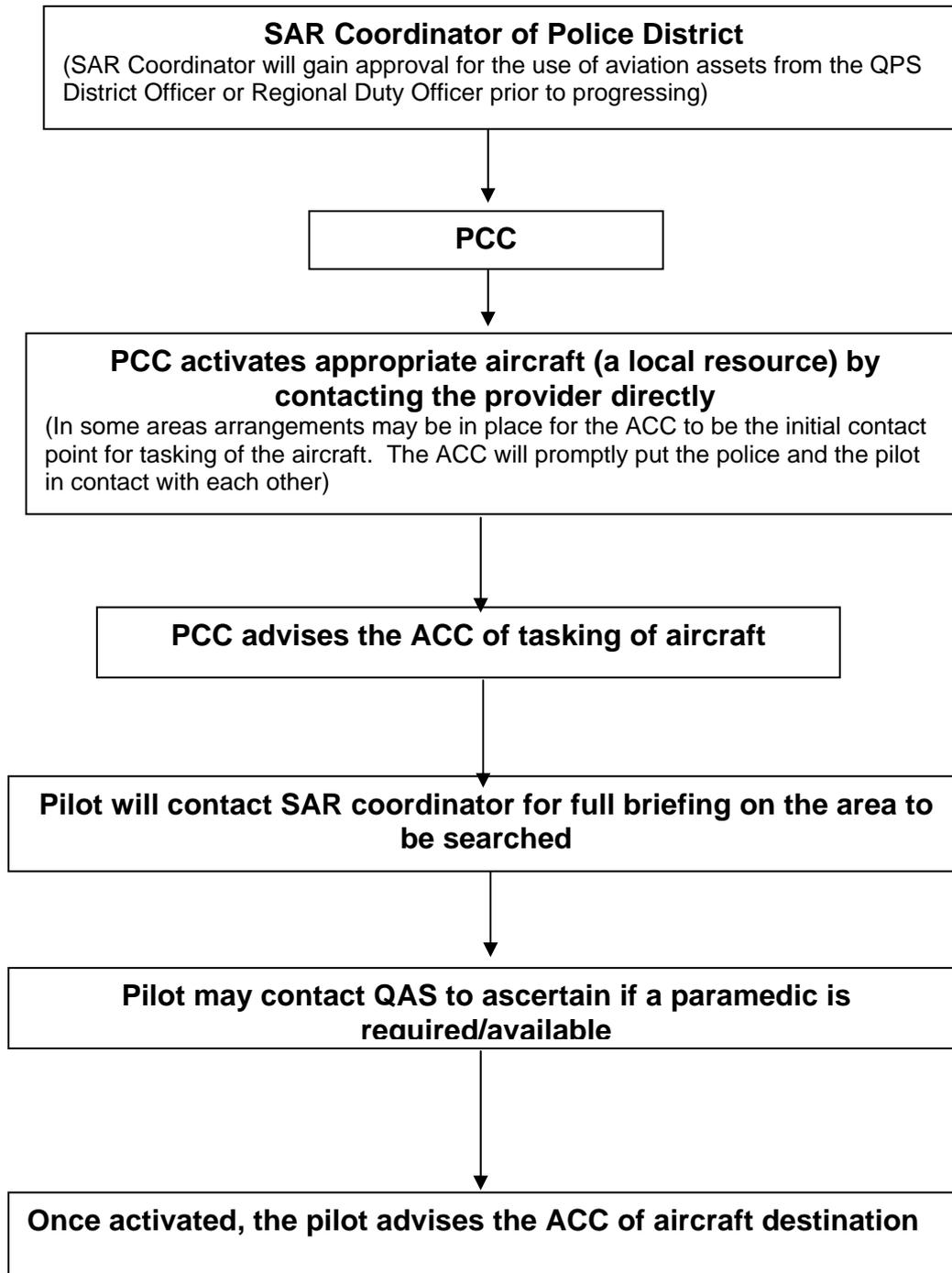
ACC advises on aircraft availability & activates appropriate aircraft.

LEGEND

ACC: Ambulance Communications Centre

AVIATION TASKING PROCEDURES FLOW CHART

SEARCH AND RESCUE (SAR) - QLD POLICE SERVICE

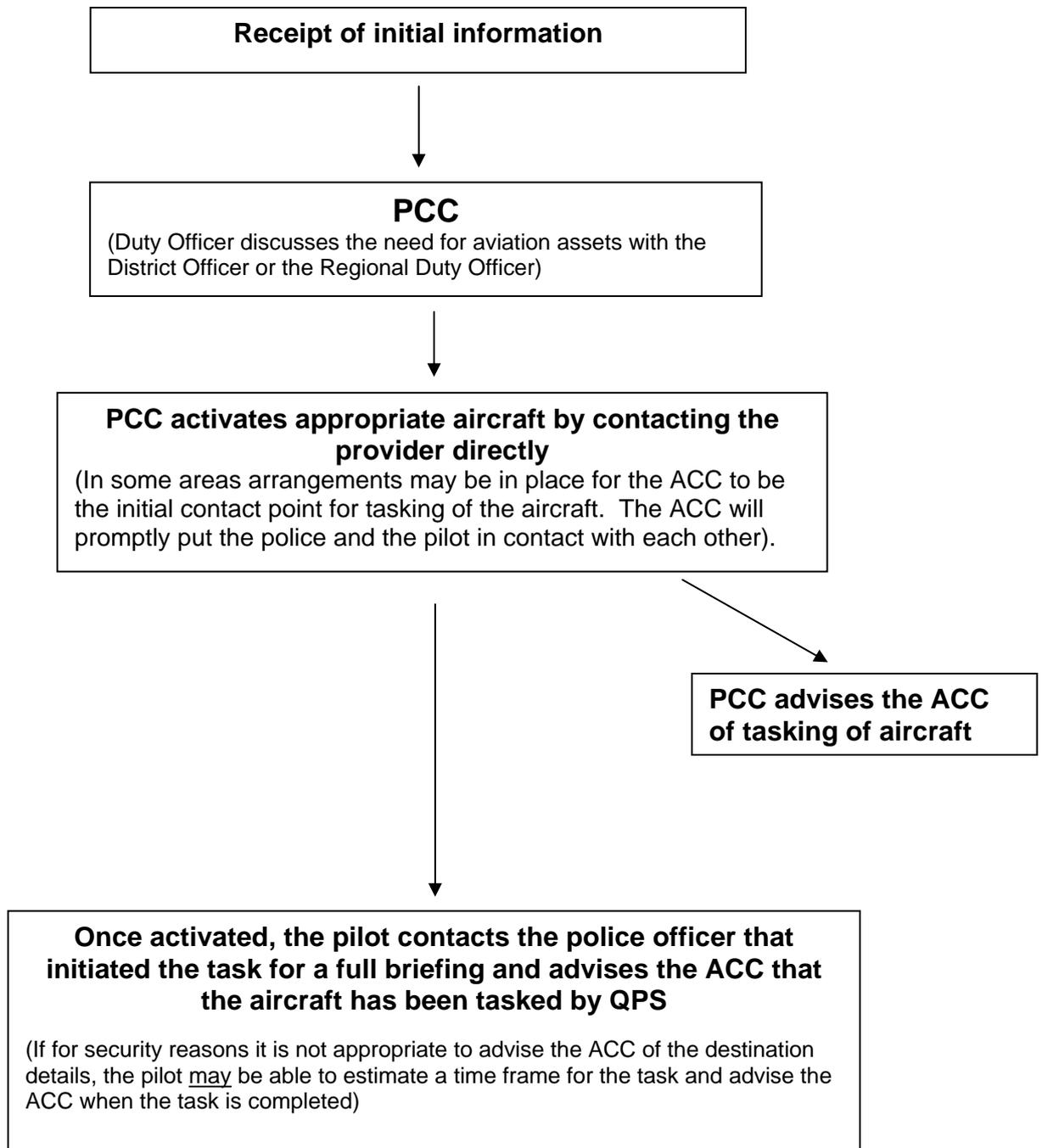


LEGEND

ACC: Ambulance Communications Centre
PCC: Police Communications Centre

AVIATION TASKING PROCEDURES FLOW CHART

URGENT POLICE RESPONSIBILITIES

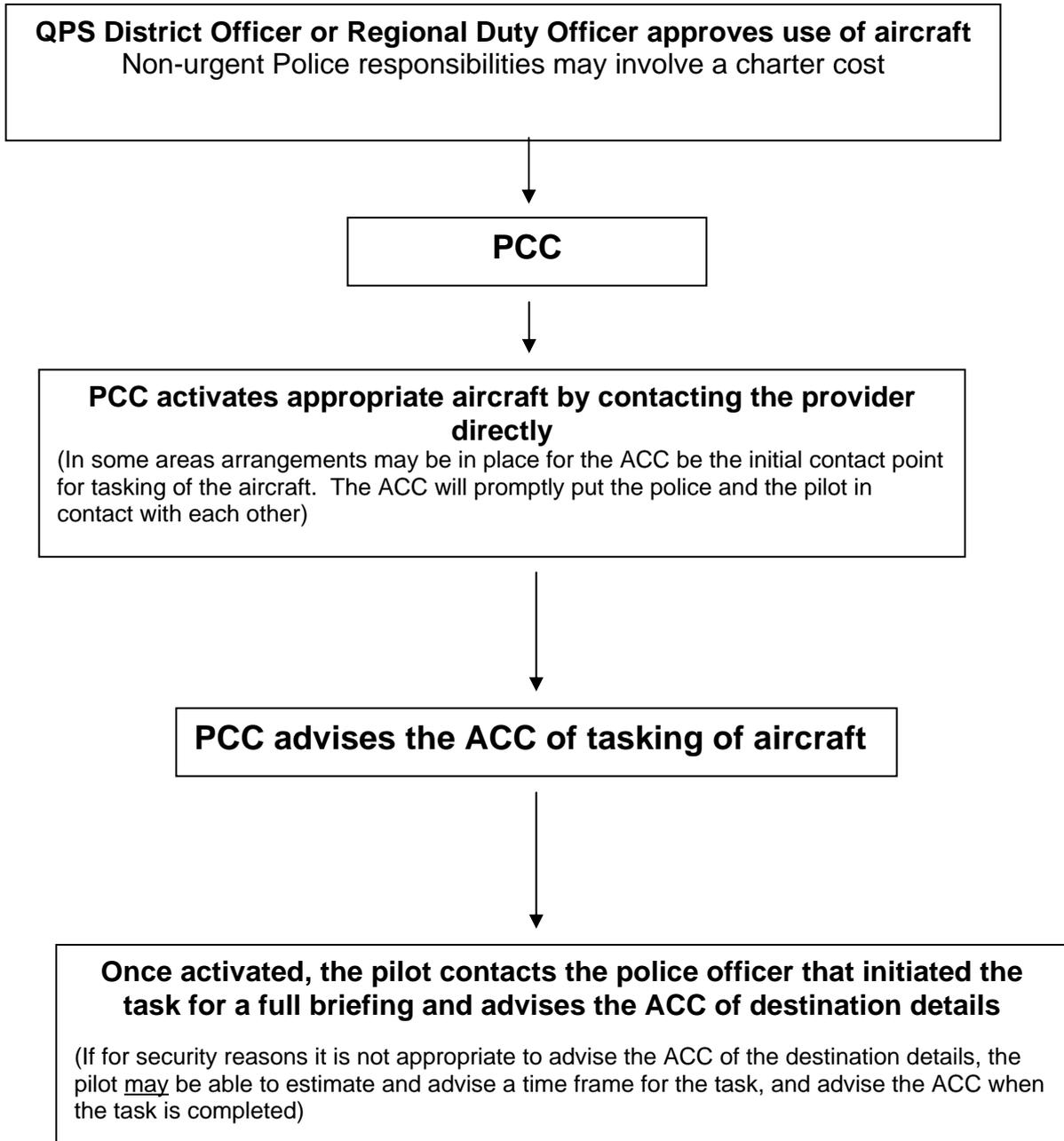


LEGEND

ACC: Ambulance Communications Centre
PCC: Police Communications Centre

AVIATION TASKING PROCEDURES FLOW CHART

NON-URGENT POLICE RESPONSIBILITIES

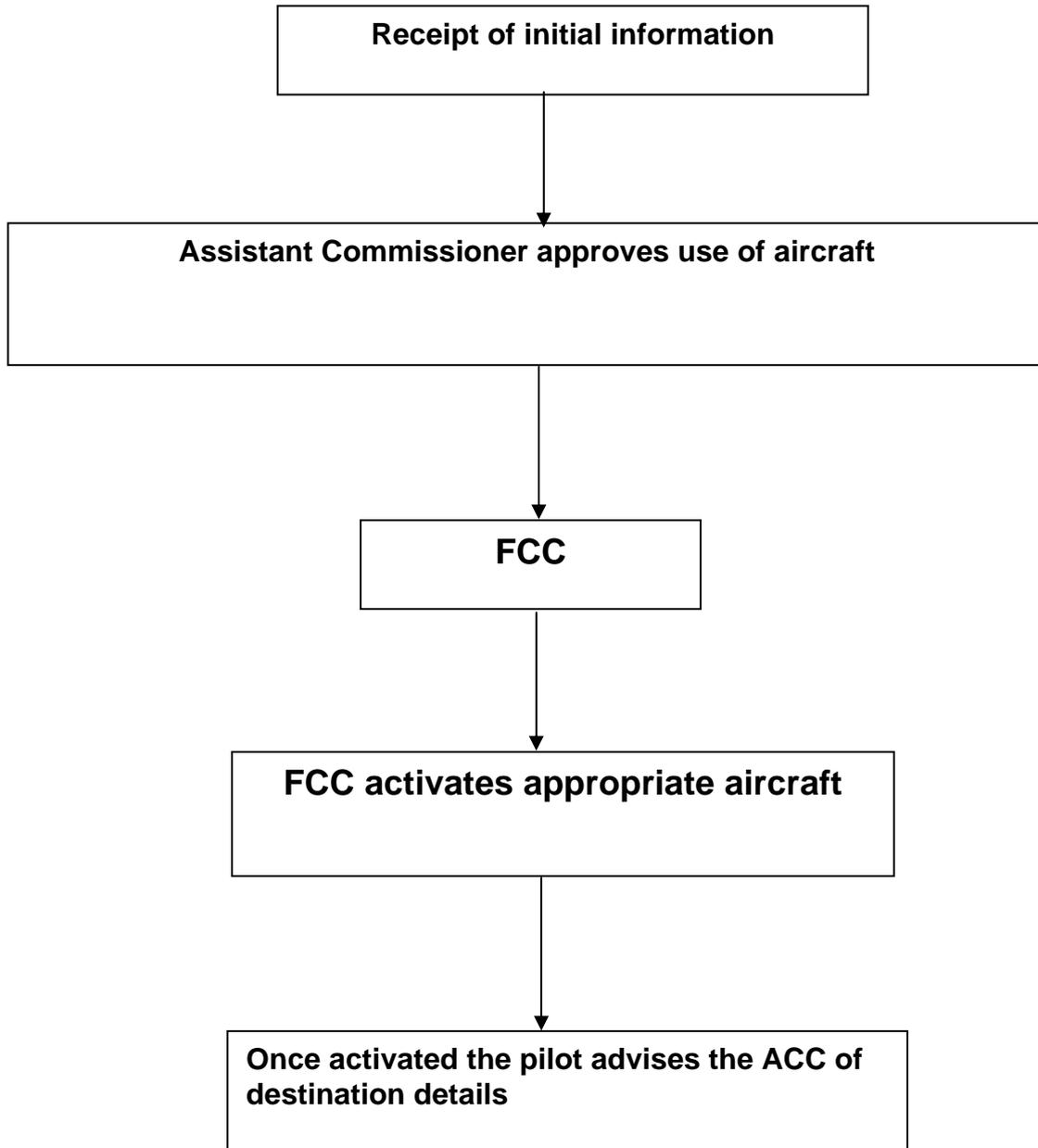


LEGEND

ACC: Ambulance Communications Centre
PCC: Police Communications Centre

AVIATION TASKING PROCEDURES FLOW CHART

URGENT QFRS RESPONSIBILITIES

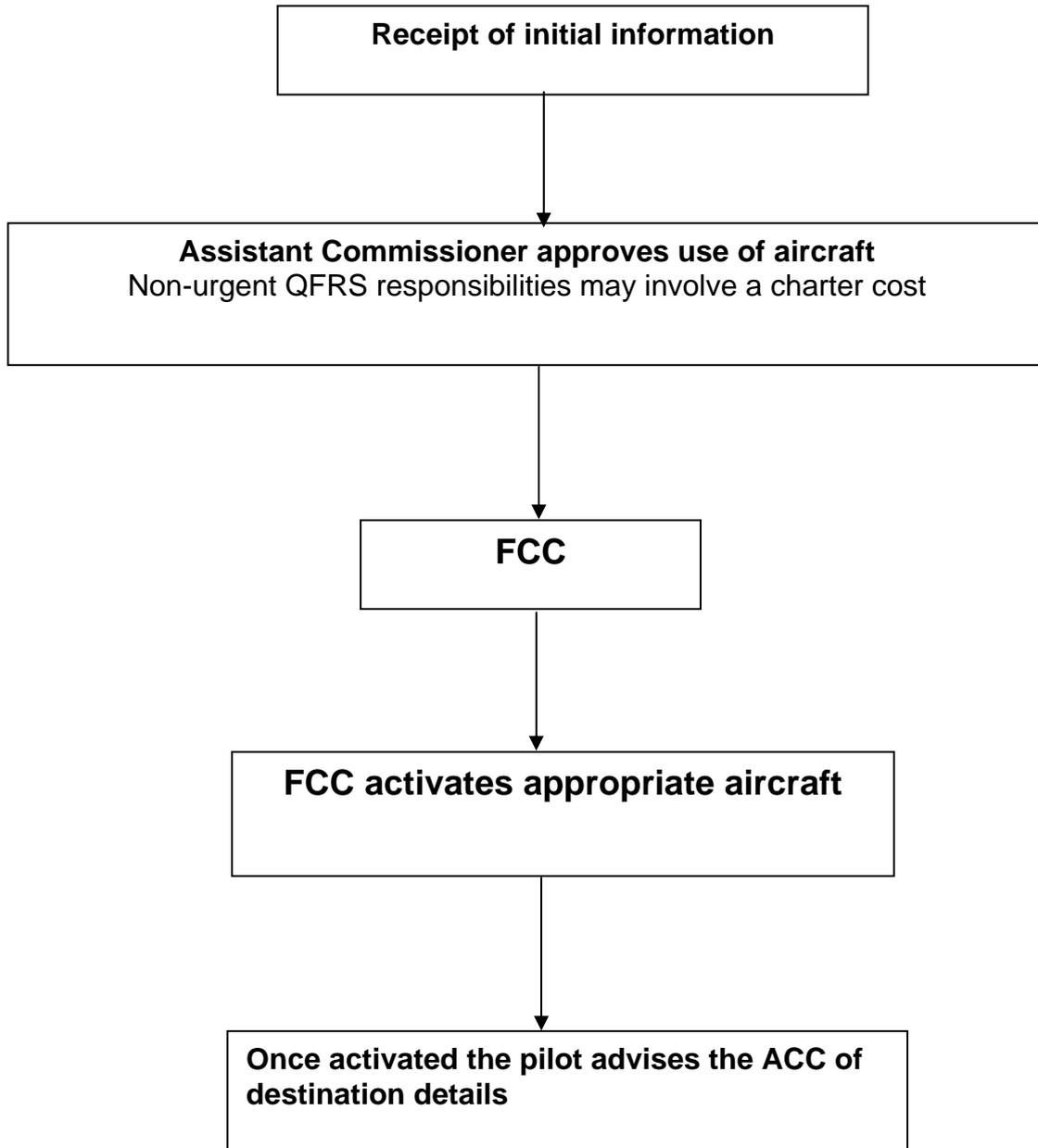


LEGEND

ACC: Ambulance Communications Centre
FCC: Fire Communications Centre

AVIATION TASKING PROCEDURES FLOW CHART

NON-URGENT QFRS RESPONSIBILITIES

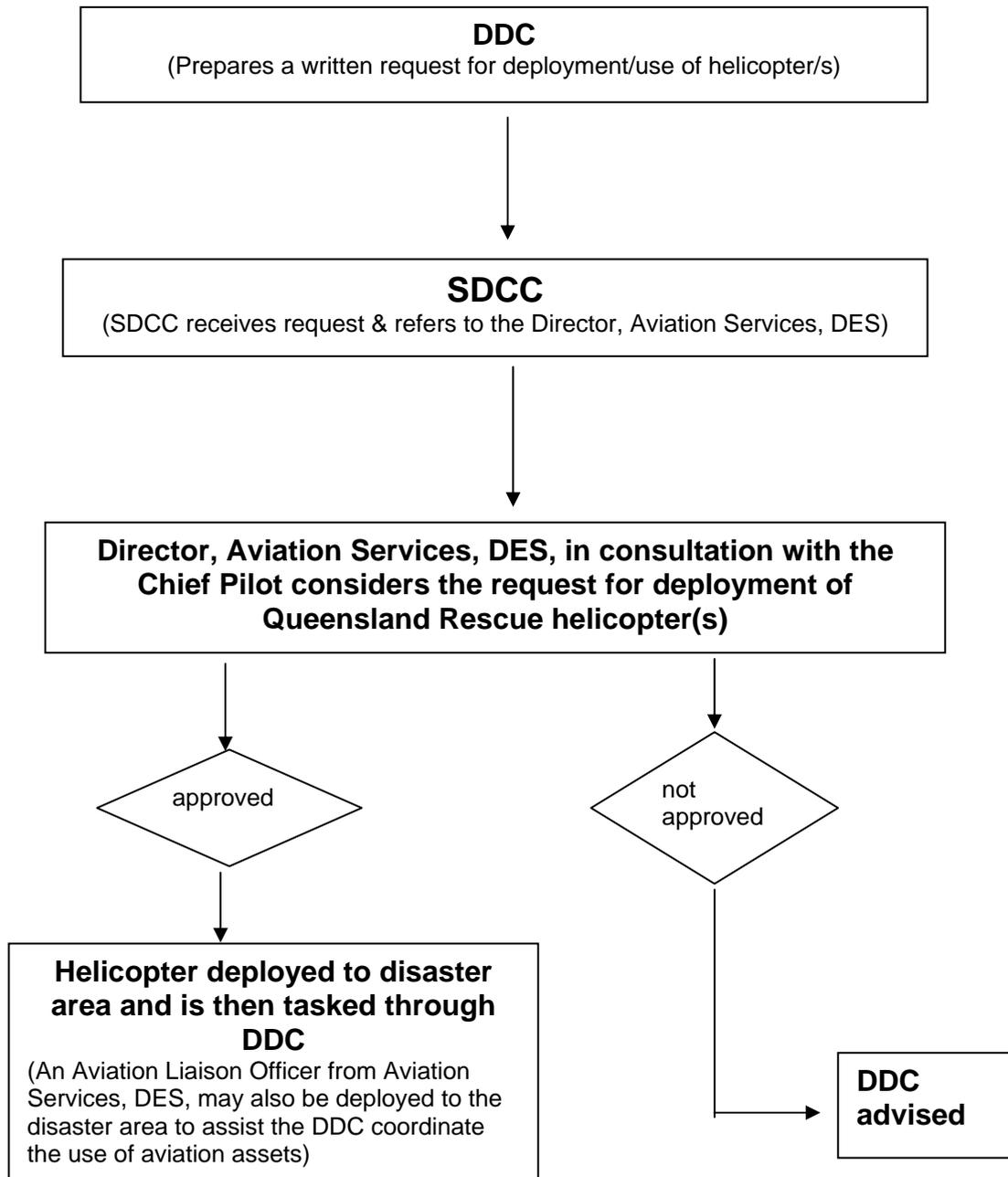


LEGEND

ACC: Ambulance Communications Centre
FCC: Fire Communications Centre

AVIATION TASKING PROCEDURES FLOW CHART

DES DISASTER RESPONSE AND RECOVERY OPERATIONS

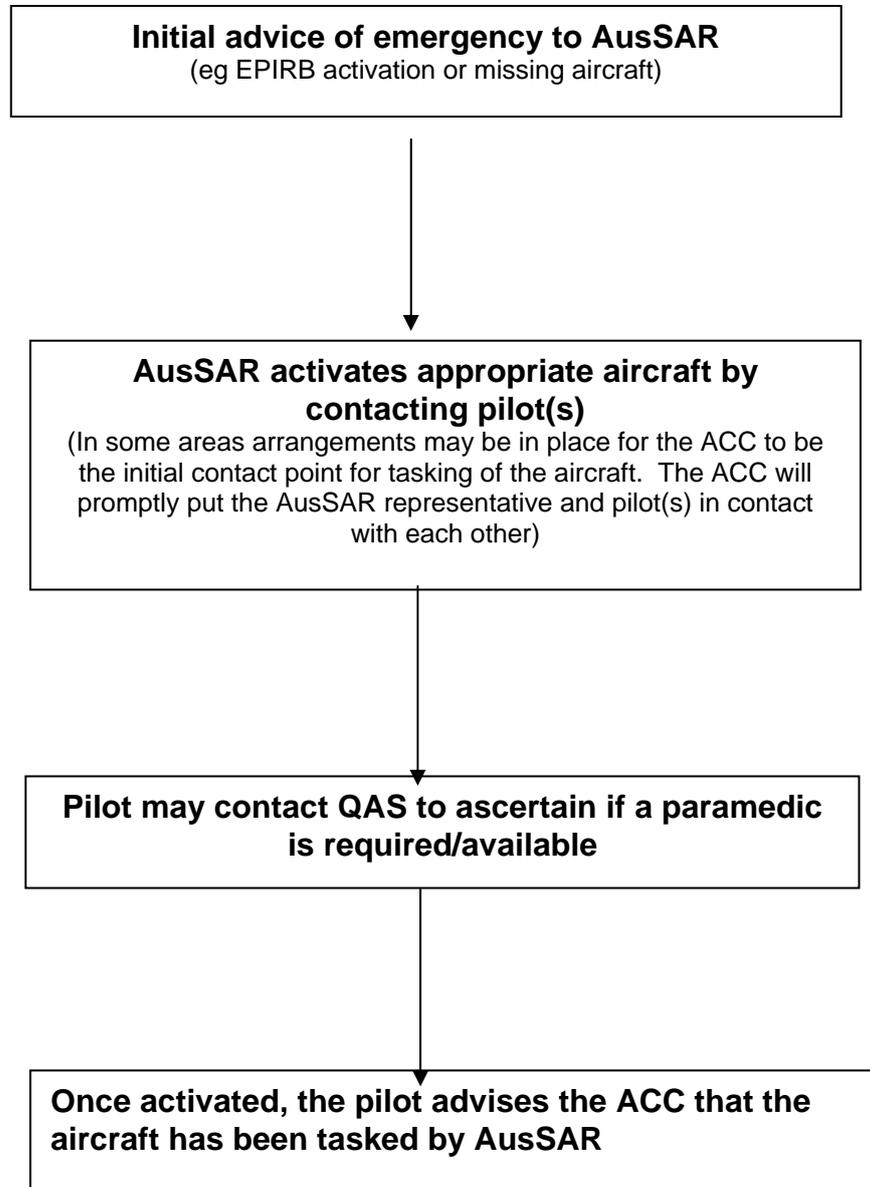


LEGEND

DES: Department of Emergency Services
DDC: Disaster District Coordinator
SDCC: State Disaster Coordination Centre

AVIATION TASKING PROCEDURES FLOW CHART

CIVIL SEARCH AND RESCUE ACTIVITY (MARINE AND AVIATION)



LEGEND

ACC: Ambulance Communications Centre