

**Department of War
United States Marine Corps**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
For Replacement of
CH-53E Heavy Lift Helicopter with the CH-53K Heavy Lift Helicopter
at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar
San Diego, California**

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA, 42 U.S.C. § 4321 et seq.) and the Department of Defense (DOD) NEPA Implementing Procedures, the Department of Navy (DON) gives notice that an Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required for Replacing CH-53E Heavy Lift Helicopters with CH-53K Heavy Lift Helicopters at Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Miramar, San Diego, California. This action will be implemented as set out in the Preferred Alternative.

Proposed Action: The United States Marine Corps (USMC) currently operates 4 squadrons of legacy Sikorsky CH-53E (Super Stallion) heavy lift helicopters based at MCAS Miramar, San Diego, California. This aircraft is at the end of its anticipated operational life span and cannot meet current or future heavy lift requirements. As such, the USMC proposes to replace all existing CH-53E heavy lift helicopters currently based at MCAS Miramar with new CH-53K heavy lift helicopters. At this time, construction of new facilities, changes to personnel loading, or new operations and training activities are not expected to result from implementing the replacement action. However, in accordance with the procedural requirements of NEPA, if any such changes are proposed in the future, the appropriate environmental impact review will be completed and corresponding documentation prepared.

Purpose and Need: The USMC currently operates 4 squadrons (64 aircraft) of CH-53E Super Stallion heavy lift helicopters at MCAS Miramar. The CH-53E model aircraft was first introduced to the USMC in 1981. The last CH-53E aircraft was delivered to the USMC in 2003. As such, MCAS Miramar's fleet of CH-53E aircraft have been in service for as long as 45-years. In 2018, Congress mandated that the USMC maintain a fleet of 200 CH-53E aircraft. However, due to aircraft mishaps, fatal accidents, and other aircraft losses, the USMC only has an inventory of 147 aircraft. To further exasperate the ability of Marines to safely achieve training, readiness, and lethality standards while flying the aging CH-53E, only an approximate 37% of the 147 aircraft fleet is available for operations at any given time. From September 2015 to December 2024, there were more than 10 total loss events recorded while operating the CH-53E. Unfortunately, several of these recent events have costs the lives of brave servicemen and servicewomen. Therefore, the *purpose* of the Proposed Action is to replace MCAS Miramar's 64 CH-53E heavy lift helicopters with the new CH-53K heavy lift helicopters, in accordance with the 2025 USMC Aviation Plan (USMC 2025). The *need* for replacing CH-53E aircraft with the CH-53K aircraft is to ensure that the USMC can continue to conduct the heavy lift helicopter training at MCAS Miramar necessary for mission and battlefield readiness, to maintain battlefield superiority, and to execute operational tasking.

Alternatives Analyzed: The USMC's EA evaluated the No Action Alternative and Preferred Action Alternative. Under the Preferred Action Alternative, the CH-53E aircraft currently based at MCAS Miramar would be replaced with the CH-53K. This would represent a one-for-one replacement of all the CH-53E aircraft authorized at MCAS Miramar (4 squadrons, 64 total aircraft). Under the No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action would not occur. The existing CH-53E heavy lift helicopters at MCAS Miramar would not be replaced with the newer CH-53K heavy lift helicopters. The No Action Alternative would not meet the purpose and need for the Proposed Action; however, the No Action Alternative was carried forward to serve as a comparative baseline for environmental analysis.

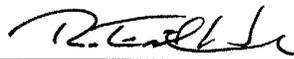
Environmental Effects: The EA supports this FONSI by evaluating potential environmental impacts of the Preferred Action Alternative and the No Action Alternative on resources and areas of environmental concern that could be affected by implementation of the Preferred Action Alternative. Resource areas evaluated in the EA include air quality and the noise environment within the MCAS Miramar region. The following resource areas were not carried forward for further evaluation in the EA because potential impacts were considered negligible or nonexistent: geological resources, hydrology, cultural resources, biological resources, hazardous materials and hazardous waste, public health and safety, and socioeconomics. Technical studies for air quality and the noise environment were completed in 2025. The results of the air quality study demonstrate that the Preferred Action Alternative would result in decreased emissions of volatile organic compounds, carbon monoxide, and inhalable particulate matter. In addition, the results of the air quality study indicate that the Preferred Action Alternative would result in increased emissions of nitrous oxides and sulfur dioxides. However, the USMC's Clean Air Act conformity analysis and determination demonstrate that the increases in NOx and SO2 emissions would not be significant. Approval of this FONSI signifies finalization of the conformity determination. Likewise, the results of the noise technical study demonstrate that there would be no significant impacts to the noise environment in the MCAS Miramar region as a result of implementing the Preferred Action Alternative.

Finding: Based on the analysis presented in the EA, which has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of NEPA and the DOD NEPA Implementing Procedures, DON finds that implementation of the proposed action as set out in the Preferred Action Alternative will not significantly impact the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an EIS will not be prepared.

The EA proposed by the Marine Corps addressing this action is on file and interested parties may obtain an electronic copy from: Commanding Officer, MCAS Miramar, Attn: Environmental Management Department, Environmental Planning Division P.O. Box 452001 San Diego, CA 92145-2001, telephone (858) 307-6115.

2-2-2024

Date



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