



House of Commons  
Transport Committee

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# **The Coastguard, Emergency Towing Vessels and the Maritime Incident Response Group: follow up**

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**Sixth Report of Session 2012–13**

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**Sixth Report of Session 2012–13**

*Volume I: Report, together with formal minutes, oral and written evidence*

*Additional written evidence is contained in Volume II, available on the Committee website at [www.parliament.uk/transcom](http://www.parliament.uk/transcom)*

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## The Transport Committee

The Transport Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Transport and its Associate Public Bodies.

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### Publication

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the internet at <http://www.parliament.uk/transcom>. A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Parliament is at the back of this volume.

The Reports of the Committee, the formal minutes relating to that report, oral evidence taken and some or all written evidence are available in a printed volume. Additional written evidence may be published on the internet only.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Mark Egan (Clerk), Farrah Bhatti (Second Clerk), Tony Catinella (Senior Committee Assistant), Adrian Hitchins (Committee Assistant), Stewart McIlvenna (Committee Support Assistant) and Hannah Pearce (Media Officer).

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## Summary

We published a critical report on the Government's proposals to modernise the Coastguard Service in June 2011. Revised modernisation proposals were published in November 2011 and are now being implemented. In this report we review issues raised by implementation.

There is a surprising degree of consensus that the Coastguard Service has to be reformed, with fewer coordination centres and greater resilience and greater inter-operability. However, we have a number of significant concerns about implementation of the current proposals:

- it is unclear what role the new national Maritime Operations Centre (MOC) will play in relation to the work currently undertaken by Maritime Response Coordination Centres (MRCCs)
- the vacancy rate in the Coastguard Service has doubled in two years
- there have been mixed messages about the timing of station closures
- there is a clear risk that local knowledge will be lost; the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's stance in respect of the local knowledge it expects coastguards to have is confusing and contradictory
- issues remain with communication links, particularly in relation to Shetland MRCC.

Morale is low in the Coastguard Service and there is a risk that talent and expertise is being lost. We call on the Government to set out its strategy for retaining experienced coastguards, particularly in terms of recruitment to positions based at the MOC.

Our report also follows up scrutiny of the Government's decisions not to renew the contract for emergency towing vessels (ETVs) and not to fund a nautical fire-fighting initiative, the Maritime Incident Response Group.

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# 1 Introduction

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1. In June 2011 we published a critical report on the Government's proposals to modernise the Coastguard Service. We also condemned the Government's decision to withdraw funding for emergency towing vessels, which helped protect the UK's coastline from pollution from merchant shipping, and for a nautical fire-fighting initiative (the Maritime Incident Response Group (MIRG)). We concluded that we could not support proposals that reduced maritime safety in this way.<sup>1</sup>

2. Ministers accepted our central recommendations on reform of the Coastguard Service, withdrawing their original proposals, bringing forward new ones, and consulting on them. Changes to emergency towing vessels and MIRG went ahead largely as planned, although the Government was unable to find a commercial alternative to a state-backed emergency towing vessel in the seas north of Scotland. Opposition to the Government's reforms has continued, focused in particular on defending coastguard stations which are scheduled to close.<sup>2</sup>

3. In the light of these continuing concerns we decided to revisit our earlier report and look at how the Government was implementing its reforms. We took oral evidence on 22 October from coastguard trade unions – PCS and Nautilus International – and from the new shipping minister, Stephen Hammond MP, and the chief executive of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), Vice-Admiral Sir Alan Massey KCB CBE. We are grateful for the written and oral evidence we received.

4. Our inquiry took place immediately after the Scottish Affairs Committee had taken oral evidence on the future of the Coastguard Service in Scotland. Its report concluded that the Government "has clearly failed so far to carry public opinion on the proposed changes" and must do more to explain the rationale for station closures.<sup>3</sup> These findings chime with our own.

5. We also received submissions about the procurement of a new, unified search and rescue helicopter service, which will entail the closure of helicopter bases at RAF Boulmer and Portland. We discussed these concerns in a private briefing with Richard Drax MP, Dr Ian Mew of Dorset County Hospital and Department for Transport officials on 5 November. Following that meeting we wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport to ask further questions about the procurement and to express disappointment at the Government's decision not to undertake a public consultation about the closures. We have published the submissions from Mr Drax and Dr Mew and our letter to the Secretary of State along with the written evidence for this inquiry.<sup>4</sup> We will consider returning to this issue when we receive the minister's reply.

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1 Transport Committee, 2010–12, Sixth Report, *The Coastguard, Emergency Towing Vessels and the Maritime Incident Response Group*, HC948, paragraph 80 (hereafter *First Report*).

2 One station, Forth, has already closed, on 28 September.

3 Scottish Affairs Committee, 2012–13, Fifth Report, *The Future of HM Coastguard in Scotland*, HC583 (hereafter *SAC Report*).

4 See Ev w38 and Ev w42.

6. We focus in this report on reform of the Coastguard Service, which is the subject of the next chapter. Most of the evidence we received concerned the reorganisation of Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres (MRCCs), rather than the work of the volunteer coastguards who undertake rescues. However, the concerns we expressed in our previous report about the impact of the reorganisation on volunteer coastguards remain valid.<sup>5</sup> Chapters three and four briefly cover emergency towing vessels and what has become of MIRG. We pull the strands of this report together in a concluding, fifth chapter.

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5 First Report, paragraphs 27–30. For the RNLI's view see Ev w30.

## 2 The Coastguard Service

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### The Government's proposals

7. Maritime rescues are coordinated by professional coastguards based in 17 MRCCs (since the closure of the Forth station on 28 September) spread around the UK coast. They receive incoming distress calls and arrange for volunteer coastguards to undertake rescues. Each MRCC is paired with a neighbouring station to provide resilience, but there is no national network. If an MRCC is overwhelmed by work or cannot operate fully for some reason it can only call on its paired station, which may have its own workload or operational issues, for support.<sup>6</sup>

8. The aim of the Government's reform programme is to create a more resilient national network, in which peaks and troughs in workload between stations can be more effectively managed. The original proposals, published in December 2010, envisaged there being two Maritime Operations Centres (MOC), at Aberdeen and in the Solent area, assisted by five MRCCs,<sup>7</sup> open only during daylight hours. Ten MRCCs would close and staff numbers would fall from 596 to 370 over four years. We criticised numerous aspects of these proposals, including the evidence base for some of the changes; the risks involved in handing over incidents to an MOC when an MRCC closed for the night; and the impact on response times of coastguards having less local knowledge of specific coastlines.

9. The Government responded to our report, and the public consultation on its proposals, by publishing a revised plan in July 2011. This was based on there being one MOC, in the Solent area, with back-up provided by the Dover station, and eight MRCCs all open round the clock. Eight MRCCs would close, including Swansea, which had previously been scheduled for retention. The number of employed coastguards would fall to 436.<sup>8</sup> This revised plan is now being implemented.

### How will the new system work?

10. In our previous report we questioned why it would not be preferable to create greater interoperability between MRCCs to improve resilience, rather than to create a new centralised structure based on a single MOC. The Government explained that the MOC:<sup>9</sup>

- could co-ordinate a range of maritime functions, including counter pollution and vessel traffic monitoring;
- could provide a swifter response to major incidents, co-ordinating with other Government departments as necessary;

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6 See *First Report*, pp9–10 for more information. The current position is slightly different because of arrangements made to deal with the closure of the Forth station and the forthcoming closure of the Clyde station.

7 In addition, a 24-hour centre at Dover would oversee Channel traffic.

8 *Blueprint for future coastguard organisation in the UK*, DfT, November 2011 (hereafter *Blueprint*) section 6. 314 coastguards would be based in MRCCs. Also see Ev 45.

9 Transport Committee, Seventh Special Report, 2010–12, *The Coastguard, Emergency Towing Vessels and the Maritime Incident Response Group: Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report of 2010–12*, HC 1482 (hereafter *Government Reply*) p8.

- would have the resources to manage risks actively rather than simply react to situations as they developed; and
- would provide coastguards with opportunities to use their skills more often.

11. In preparation for the establishment of the new system, new grades and responsibilities for coastguard officers have recently been agreed by management and trades unions.<sup>10</sup> The Minister said that the MCA had been working “tirelessly” on the practical implementation of the modernisation plan.<sup>11</sup> The Department told us that some 30% of Coastguard Service staff had volunteered to participate in work associated with implementation.<sup>12</sup>

12. Coastguard witnesses said that they were unclear about what their responsibilities would be under the new arrangements. Brian George of Liverpool PCS said:<sup>13</sup>

We still fail to understand how the new system will work. We have had no information about it. There is rumour and speculation that originally the MOC would take a lot of weight from various places round the country, but that now seems to have changed. Again, there is rumour and speculation that the MRSCs - the sub-centres - will do more of the rescue coordination, with the MOC backing them up, but we don't know ... The suspicion at the moment is that they don't know.

Steve Quinn, President of the MCA section of the PCS, said that staff were being asked to apply for jobs at the new grades without knowing what the new jobs will entail, “how they will fit into that system ... what shift patterns they will be working ... what roles they will take on”.<sup>14</sup> The Minister and Sir Alan Massey acknowledged that uncertainties about pay and conditions were affecting the morale of coastguard staff. Sir Alan said that he hoped negotiations with the unions about shift allowances and other arrangements would be concluded by the end of the year.<sup>15</sup>

13. **We can see the advantages in having a national MOC to coordinate a major incident which could be too large for an MRCC to manage, even if it worked in partnership with another station. However, we remain unclear about the role the MOC will play in relation to the day-to-day responsibilities of MRCCs.** Will it be expected routinely to take control of incidents from MRCCs, sidelining the regional stations? Or will it mostly monitor the work of coastguards in MRCCs, adding little or nothing to their work? Sir Alan Massey talked about the “self-evident” advantages of having a national coordination centre in the event of there being “a Titanic incident”.<sup>16</sup> However, neither he nor the Minister was able to explain what the MOC, with its 96 staff, would add to existing arrangements at times when a major incident was not occurring.

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10 Q53 and Ev 42–45.

11 Q53.

12 Ev 31, paragraph 4.

13 Qq 13–14. #See also Ev w23, paragraph 1.4.

14 Q28.

15 Qq108–111 and Q72. #Also see Ev w23, paragraph 1.4 and Ev w36.

16 Q66.

14. One of the main sources of anxiety amongst coastguards concerns the division of responsibilities between the MOC and MRCCs. **Although we would not expect every dot and comma of the new arrangements to have been decided at this stage there remains a worrying lack of information about what coastguards at the MOC will actually do from day to day. We recommend that the Government urgently address this concern, starting by including in its reply to this report a range of scenarios typically faced by coastguards across the UK and how MOC and MRCC coastguards will be expected to work together to address them in future.**

## Timing of station closures

15. The MOC will be based at Fareham, Hampshire, making use of a control centre built for the previous Government's ill-fated FiReControl programme. This building is now being fitted out. Operational simulation testing is due to start in June 2013 with a view to live operations beginning in April 2014. It will be some time after that, following more testing, before the final networked structure is in place.<sup>17</sup>

16. When the revised reform proposals were announced in November 2011 it was envisaged that the MOC would be operational during 2013/14.<sup>18</sup> The Clyde and Forth coastguard stations were scheduled for closure in 2012/13, with the Portland, Yarmouth, Brixham and Solent stations closing in 2013/14.<sup>19</sup> Clyde and Forth seem to have been earmarked for early closure for financial reasons.<sup>20</sup> However, there has been confusion from the start about the timing of the closures. The MCA's Frequently Asked Questions document published in November 2011 gave the impression that MRCCs would only begin to close once the MOC had been established.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the previous shipping minister, Mike Penning MP, told the House in November 2011 that "no centres will close before the robustness of the system is demonstrated. Should there be any blips in the system ... no station will close until we have the level of resilience that we do not have today".<sup>22</sup> Many witnesses cited these words in their submissions as evidence that the Government had brought forward MRCC closures, risking the safety of seafarers in the process.<sup>23</sup>

17. Mr Hammond emphasised that the closure programme was progressing in line with the original timetable. Pairing exercises between stations and work to transfer local knowledge, which we will come onto in our next section, would ensure that the service remained resilient and robust, honouring the commitment given by his predecessor.<sup>24</sup> Mr

17 Ev 31–32, paragraphs 5 and 12.

18 *The consultation document and questions posed*, Announcement on HM Coastguard Proposals for Modernisation Consultation 2011, DfT, Nov 11, (hereafter FAQs) p5.

19 *Blueprint*, p9.

20 FAQs p11. Also see Clyde Ev w5, paragraphs 5.3 and 9.5 and Ev w25.

21 *Ibid.*, Answers to first two questions on p11.

22 HC Deb, 22 Nov 11, c166.

23 For examples see Ev w5, paragraph 6.8, Ev w30, paragraph 5.

24 Qq55–56. And see Q71 for more detail.

Hammond argued that his predecessor's statement had to be seen in the context of a statement to the House which implied that the existing closure plan was unchanged.<sup>25</sup>

18. The Government's revised proposals to reform the Coastguard Service included the closure of at least two MRCCs before the new MOC was operational. In that respect, the Minister is correct to rebut the claim that the closure of the Forth and Clyde stations this year represents a change of policy. However, his predecessor's statement to the House of 22 November 2011 was sufficiently ambiguous to raise hopes that no MRCC would close until the new, national network, based on the MOC, was up-and-running. Loose drafting in the documentation published by the MCA at the same time encouraged such thinking. **It is regrettable that the previous Minister for Shipping and the MCA were not clearer in their statements about the timing of the closure of MRCCs and the opening of the new MOC and appear not to have sought to correct misunderstandings caused by those statements. The morale of coastguards, and coastguards' confidence in the leadership of the service, will not have been enhanced by this episode.**

### Local knowledge

19. Central to the controversy over the reforms of the Coastguard Service is a difference of view about the scope and importance of the 'local knowledge' of coastguard staff in coordination centres. Coastguards place a high premium on the detailed knowledge they possess of the geographical features, tides and currents, and the location and characteristics of volunteer rescue teams along their coastlines. Alex Dodge of Shetland PCS told us that it "could take anything up to a year" for someone to gain sufficient local knowledge of a new coastline, particularly if they were not working alongside coastguards who already possessed such knowledge.<sup>26</sup> During our two inquiries we have heard numerous examples of how a lack of local knowledge could cause confusion and delay in tasking volunteers and saving lives.<sup>27</sup>

20. Whilst not dismissing the relevance of local knowledge, the MCA clearly wishes to move away from reliance on the knowledge built up over many years by individual coastguards. Its current thinking was set out as follows:<sup>28</sup>

MCA is working collaboratively with the Ordnance Survey on the development of a vernacular place name database. This database allows multiple names to be applied to any coastal feature or place in order that local as well as Gaelic or Welsh names are available for search. In addition to this, Coastguard officers are taking part in training including exercises with their counterparts in other MRCCs to share and capture situational awareness and operational links across the maritime domain for future reference, periods of duty in flank operations rooms, familiarisation visits to relevant coastal areas and expert input from officers residing in the various coastal communities.

25 Ev 42–45.

26 Q24 and Q26.

27 For example Ev w14 section 4 and Ev w30 paragraph 2; *First Report*, Ev w11; and *SAC Report*, paragraph 42.

28 Ev 32, paragraphs 8–9.



It would appear that the requirement for coastguards to be tested every two years on their local knowledge will be dropped.<sup>29</sup> There is no expectation that staff in the MOC will have local knowledge of the entire UK coastline, although presumably they will be able to use the local knowledge database.

21. Coastguard witnesses did not support the approach taken by the MCA to local knowledge. Shetland PCS said “such databases cannot be the repository of intimate local operational knowledge. What value are these databases if you don’t then know how to efficiently apply the information which they contain”?<sup>30</sup> Liverpool PCS argued that “senior managers are assuming they can denigrate the status, training and experience of watch officers and replace it all with technology”.<sup>31</sup>

22. Coastguards at Aberdeen and Shetland have already had to take over responsibility for new areas of coastline, following the closure of the Forth station. Sir Alan Massey said that the Aberdeen and Forth stations had had an “umbilical linkage” so “local knowledge is pretty much a given”.<sup>32</sup> He said that a “very structured process” was underway to transfer local knowledge of the Clyde district to coastguards in Belfast and Stornoway, involving pairing exercises, new technology and staff transfers.<sup>33</sup>

23. However, we were concerned to hear that the transfer of local knowledge from Aberdeen to Shetland coastguards, necessary because Shetland has now taken on responsibility for new coastline in north east Scotland consequent upon the closure of the Forth station, has not been so well planned. Steve Quinn told us that Shetland coastguards had been encouraged to make visits to their new area:<sup>34</sup>

but there is no structured format to them. They are having to do it in their four days off. They have been told that there are no overtime payments available to do it; they will have to take time off in lieu, which just means that the problem of getting people leave and having enough staff on station gets pushed further down the line.

Shetland MRCC said that they were now responsible for an additional 6,000 square nautical miles of sea and several hundred miles of coastline, with no additional staff:<sup>35</sup>

The MCA clearly stated that staff taking over new areas would be given ample opportunity to visit and familiarise themselves with their new areas of responsibility. This simply HAS NOT HAPPENED. We believe this could potentially have a detrimental effect on safety.

24. Sir Alan Massey’s answers about knowledge transfer in north east Scotland were complacent and lacking in detail. He started by arguing that “opportunity has definitely

29 *Supporting documentation*, Announcement on HM Coastguard Proposals for Modernisation Consultation 2011, DfT, Nov 11, section 4.

30 Ev 40, paragraph 6.

31 Ev 19, paragraph 6.

32 Q71.

33 Q71 and Q53. Some witnesses said this process was inadequate, see Ev w5, paragraph 7.9; also Ev w23, paragraph 1.5.

34 Q24.

35 Ev 41, paragraph 12.

been given” to Shetland staff to gain local knowledge of their new district, but when pressed for more details said “I did not give a specific commitment to Shetland”.<sup>36</sup> He also questioned the whole rationale for coastguards having local knowledge: “What does one gain from doing it? I don’t know. It is not a *sine qua non* [an indispensable or essential element] of developing the system”.<sup>37</sup>

25. The Minister subsequently argued that the new area of operational responsibility taken on by the Shetland coastguards was “predominantly sea” and that “Shetland-based officers have always been and will continue to be very familiar with that coast and its associated rescue resources”. He described arrangements for staff from Shetland and Aberdeen MRCCs to share information and pointed out that as Aberdeen MRCC remains open, “officers there can be called upon for any additional information or expertise if necessary”.<sup>38</sup>

26. **The MCA’s stance in respect of the local knowledge it expects coastguards to have is confusing and contradictory, reflecting a deeper ambiguity about how the Coastguard Service is expected to operate in future.** In north west Scotland considerable work is underway to ensure that the local knowledge of the Clyde district is passed to coastguards in Belfast and Stornoway. However, Shetland coastguards say that they have been left to pick up local knowledge from their colleagues in Aberdeen without any structured process and in their own time. The chief executive of the MCA has questioned the need for coastguards to have local knowledge at all.

27. **Over the next three years, when several MRCCs close, there is a clear risk that local knowledge will be lost. Either local knowledge is a requirement for the role of coastguard in an MRCC or it is not, as Sir Alan Massey suggested. The MCA must clarify and articulate its vision of why coastguards in MRCCs need local knowledge and, if they do, how they should go about gaining and retaining it.**

28. We do not object to the use of new technology in this area but this should not preclude coastguards learning about their district by more traditional means, including getting out to meet local volunteers and see particularly dangerous features and areas for themselves. **We recommend that any work to develop and foster local knowledge should be organised by MCA management, properly scheduled, and remunerated, not left to coastguards to organise themselves when they are off duty.**

## Technology

29. In our earlier report we called on the MCA to clarify the nature and benefits of improved technology being proposed for MRCCs.<sup>39</sup> In response the Government explained that “the future design will see the same core technologies as we use today being used, but located and configured differently”. The aim would be to ensure that “coastguards anywhere within the network will be able to access any of the radio aerials they need” so that they can “receive and enter information, thereby making it immediately available to all

36 Qq 82, 86.

37 Q84.

38 Ev 42–45.

39 First Report, paragraph 41.



coastguards in the national network”.<sup>40</sup> In oral evidence, Sir Alan Massey emphasised the importance of using technology to increase resilience, for example by putting in additional dial-up links between MRCCs.<sup>41</sup>

30. The coastguard unions drew attention to weaknesses in current communication links between MRCCs and potential problems with the MCA’s plans to increase resilience.<sup>42</sup> PCS said that “passing coordination from one station to another can cause errors to occur”: new technology, not upgrades of existing equipment, was required.<sup>43</sup> Mrs Dodge said that Shetland’s dial-in connection to the Aberdeen VHF aerials had fallen over nine times from 1 to 20 October.<sup>44</sup> Shetland MRCC’s written submission complained that a promised cable link to the mainland had not materialised and “there is no indication of when this will happen, if at all”.<sup>45</sup> Sir Alan Massey accepted that there was a vulnerability in the fixed link between Shetland and mainland Scotland but said that a cable link would shortly be installed.<sup>46</sup> **There is clearly an urgent need to improve the communication links between Shetland MRCC, mainland Scotland and other MRCCs. We recommend that the Government provide us with details of how and when this will be done.**

## Staffing

31. The coastguard unions expressed concerns about a number of aspects of the staffing of the Coastguard Service. These included:<sup>47</sup>

- the current vacancy rate, which the PCS said was 15%;
- the proportion of coastguards on fixed-term contracts, which PCS said was around one quarter;
- the number of coastguards with less than two years experience; and
- the number of staff at MRCCs due to close who will leave the Coastguard Service rather than transfer to a new station or the MOC.<sup>48</sup>

PCS argued that “this loss of experienced staff will lead to the MOC and operations centres having, for many years, to rely on inexperienced staff which will lead to mistakes being made and possibly lives being lost”.<sup>49</sup> Nautilus International also spoke of the “increasing challenge to recruit and retain specialist staff”.<sup>50</sup>

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40 *Government Reply*, p7.

41 Q98.

42 For example, see Ev w14, section 8.

43 Ev 37, paragraph 2.12 and Q44.

44 Q5.

45 Ev 41, paragraph 15.

46 Q98.

47 Ev 36–38, paragraphs 2.4, 2.19 and 2.20. Also see Ev w23, paragraph 1.6.

48 On this point see Ev w5, paragraphs 4.3–4.4, Ev w9, paragraph 8, Ev w14, paragraph 2.1, Ev w28.

49 Ev 37, paragraph 2.4.

50 Ev 34, paragraph 6.

32. Shetland MRCC gave an example of the implications of staff vacancies in their district:<sup>51</sup>

Effectively we only have 12.5 fully qualified Operational Coastguards, not including the Rescue Co-Ordination Centre Manager (RCCM) who as well as his normal daily duties carries out on-call duties as the Duty Operations Manager ... What this means in practice is that due to sickness, absence, leave, courses etc., often the manning level per watch can be below the risk-assessed level (which may be different at each station) with below minimum levels of qualified staff on watch ... The staff are having to work greatly increased amounts of overtime and opportunities for experience elsewhere through secondments etc are seriously diminished.

33. Sir Alan Massey said that the current vacancy rate was 13.8%, which was “manageable” but not comfortable.<sup>52</sup> He attributed the high vacancy rate to the uncertainty caused by the reform programme, but argued that this uncertainty was now being addressed following the agreement on grades and pay in the new structure.<sup>53</sup> Sir Alan described the “huge sense of urgency” in dealing with this situation.<sup>54</sup> The Minister subsequently confirmed that the Coastguard Service’s vacancy rate has doubled since December 2010 and is substantially higher than the vacancy rate at other DfT executive agencies.<sup>55</sup>

**34. In our view, the loss of experienced coastguards is one of the most significant risks to the successful implementation of the Government’s reform programme. Years of uncertainty about the shape of the service, station closures and low morale have acted in combination to drain talent from the service. Finding experienced staff willing to transfer to the new MOC in Fareham may prove particularly difficult. We recommend that the Government provide us with statistics on the age profile and length of service of coastguards at each MRCC and set out its strategy for retaining experienced coastguards, particularly in terms of recruitment to positions based at the MOC.**

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51 Ev 40, paragraph 3.

52 Q91.

53 Qq101–11.

54 Q106.

55 Ev 42–45.

### 3 Emergency Towing Vessels

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35. Emergency towing vessels (ETVs) were introduced in 1994 on the recommendation of Lord Donaldson following a review of pollution from merchant shipping. Their core work was to intercept disabled ships, bring them under control and tow them to safety. There were four ETVs, one each in the Dover Straits, the south west approaches, the Minches and the Fair Isle Channel, supplied under contract to the MCA. The Government allowed this contract to expire in September 2011, arguing that the services provided by ETVs could and should be provided commercially.<sup>56</sup>

36. In our earlier report we concluded that the state should play a role in providing ETVs, in order to protect marine and coastal environments from pollution, but that there was scope to find additional sources of income to help cover costs. We doubted whether the Government would be able to find fully suitable alternatives to the ETVs.<sup>57</sup>

37. One year on, commercial arrangements are in place to provide ETV capability in the Dover Straits and the south west approaches. The Minister said that these arrangements were working well.<sup>58</sup> However, it has so far proved impossible to find a commercial alternative to a state-contracted ETV in Scottish waters. The MCA is letting an annual contract for a single ETV, based in the northern isles, covering the area previously covered by ETVs in the Minches and the Fair Isle Channel, for the duration of the spending review period (i.e. until 2015). The Minister confirmed that the Scotland Office was still searching for a commercial alternative.<sup>59</sup>

38. Opposition to the Government's decision to stop funding ETVs remains strong. For example, Nautilus International referred to the policy as "gambling with the safety of lives and the environment".<sup>60</sup> The Scottish Government has objected to the 50% cut in ETV provision in Scottish waters and stated that there is no commercial alternative to a Government-funded ETV in the far north.<sup>61</sup> The Outer Hebrides Coastguard Task Group considered that a commercially-funded ETV might be available in the west of Scotland by the end of the decade as the off-shore renewables industry matures. In the meantime, it argued for two ETVs to be provided in Scottish waters, as an ETV based in the northern isles could be too distant to reach incidents in the Hebrides, particularly in difficult seas.<sup>62</sup>

39. ETVs are a form of insurance policy against environmental disasters caused by merchant shipping. In the Dover Straits and the south west the Government has changed the way in which this protection is provided: the new, commercial arrangements are simply untested. In Scotland, the Government has halved the cover it provides, increasing the risk of pollution affecting the west coast in particular. In 2015 funding for the Government-

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<sup>56</sup> *First Report*, paragraphs 48–51.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, paragraphs 62 and 65.

<sup>58</sup> Q115.

<sup>59</sup> Qq115–117 and Ev 33, paragraph 20.

<sup>60</sup> Ev 35, paragraph 16.

<sup>61</sup> Ev w13.

<sup>62</sup> Ev w32, paragraphs 2.7 to 2.10. Also see Ev w5, paragraph 3.8 and Ev w23, paragraph 2.2.

backed ETV off the northern coast of Scotland runs out and there seems little prospect of a commercial alternative emerging at that stage. **We recommend that the Government clarify by spring 2014 the ETV arrangements it will have in place in Scottish waters from 2015; and confirm whether or not it is in discussions with the Scottish Government to devolve ETV provision. We also recommend that the Government explain how an ETV stationed in the northern isles can effectively serve the west coast, including by providing estimates of journey times to points on the west coast in different sea and weather conditions.**

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## 4 Fire-fighting at sea

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40. The Government also withdrew funding last year from the Maritime Incident Response Group (MIRG), a partnership between the MCA and the Fire and Rescue Service formed in 2006 to respond to incidents at sea for which fire-fighting, chemical hazard and/or rescue teams are required. The Government argued that demand for the service was too low to justify the cost.<sup>63</sup> After unsuccessful discussions between the MCA, Fire and Rescue Authorities, and the Chief Fire Officers Association, to see whether a stripped down version of MIRG might be feasible, MIRG was closed down in December 2011.<sup>64</sup>

41. The Government told us of three successor arrangements to MIRG:<sup>65</sup>

- a fire assessment advice service using commercial salvors;
- evaluation of the condition of a ship potentially seeking refuge, an international obligation, which may involve the local Fire and Rescue Service “should they wish to be included”; and
- discussions with the Chief Fire Officers Association “to consider whether shore Fire and Rescue Services could develop suitable arrangements to provide a fire assessment capability that could be called upon ... as an alternative to the inspection and assessment activity” mentioned above.

42. As with ETVs, witnesses remain unreconciled to the loss of MIRG. Nautilus International “unreservedly condemned” the decision not to fund MIRG and described its demise as “utterly incomprehensible”.<sup>66</sup> Nautilus cited the fire and explosion on board *MSC Flaminia* as evidence of the sort of incident which demonstrated the need for MIRG and ETVs. **We recommend that the Government explain why the *Flaminia* case would not have been dealt with better had a state-contracted ETV and MIRG capability been available.**

43. It is also striking that, having disbanded MIRG, the Government is almost immediately in negotiations with chief fire officers about arrangements relating to fire-fighting at sea. We remain of the view that the decision to end funding of MIRG was short-sighted. **We recommend that the Government provide more details of the scope and timescales for its discussions with chief fire officers about assisting with the assessment of ships seeking refuge; tell us whether the provision of funding from the MCA or DfT is under discussion; and explain how this new area of coordination with fire and rescue services might differ from MIRG.**

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63 *First Report*, chapter 5.

64 *Government Reply*, p12.

65 Ev 33–34, paragraphs 22–24.

66 Ev 35, paragraphs 12–13.

## 5 Conclusion

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44. We concluded our previous report by noting with regret that the Government had made three significant, inter-related changes to maritime safety without prior consultation and without examining the combined effect of the changes. One year on, it is striking that all of the original change proposals have been amended or re-evaluated. The original proposals to reform the Coastguard Service were heavily criticised during the consultation process and significantly changed; the Government was unable to find a commercial alternative to ETVs in Scottish waters; and even though the MIRG has gone, the Government has returned to Fire and Rescue Services to see how their expertise can be deployed to help ships in trouble. Concerns about all of these changes remain strong.

45. Reform of the Coastguard Service is the most controversial of the maritime changes we have examined, affecting coastal communities throughout the land. However, there is a surprising degree of consensus that the Service has to be reformed, with fewer co-ordination centres and greater resilience and inter-operability. The Government's proposals have included an upward grading of all coastguard jobs and a more attractive career structure. Nevertheless, low morale and disillusionment with management were evident in all of the evidence we received from coastguards, and not just from the trades unions.<sup>67</sup> The Minister's remark that coastguards were happier than their evidence to us suggested would have had more credibility if he had chosen to visit a coastguard station rather than simply rely on advice from MCA management.<sup>68</sup>

46. Change processes are never comfortable for staff subject to change. We have every sympathy for coastguards whose stations are closing and who now face a difficult decision between relocation and redundancy. As the Government is already closing stations we have deliberately not sought to examine the rationale for specific closures or make recommendations about which should stay open and which should close. However, this does not mean that we necessarily agree with the Government's decisions.

47. Looking ahead, our main concern is not that the new system, based on a national coordinating centre and inter-linked regional centres, is flawed but that the Government has not yet explained properly how it will work. As a result, coastguards are disillusioned and confused, particularly because the MCA seems to face both ways on the question of whether local knowledge matters, something which goes to the heart of coastguards' sense of professionalism. Too many coastguards are drifting out of the Service, creating a risk that talent and expertise will haemorrhage.

48. In addition, coastguards must be reassured that the present change process has a defined conclusion and that a more settled phase will begin once the MOC is functional after 2014. **We were concerned that comments by Sir Alan Massey about the small number of coastguard stations in other countries - 1 in Norway, 3 in Canada - reflect a view in Government that there should be more MRCC closures in the foreseeable**

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67 For example, see Ev w1.

68 Qq76–78 and Q60.

**future.<sup>69</sup> We call on the Government to rule this out and confirm that the new arrangements for the Coastguard Service are intended to last for a generation.**

49. Given our concerns about these reforms, and the views expressed to us by coastguards in particular, we intend to look again at implementation of the coastguard reform programme and related matters before the end of this Parliament.

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<sup>69</sup> Q93 and Q97.



# Principal conclusions and recommendations

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## How will the new system work?

1. We can see the advantages in having a national MOC to coordinate a major incident which could be too large for an MRCC to manage, even if it worked in partnership with another station. However, we remain unclear about the role the MOC will play in relation to the day-to-day responsibilities of MRCCs. (Paragraph 13). Although we would not expect every dot and comma of the new arrangements to have been decided at this stage there remains a worrying lack of information about what coastguards at the MOC will actually do from day to day. We recommend that the Government urgently address this concern, starting by including in its reply to this report a range of scenarios typically faced by coastguards across the UK and how MOC and MRCC coastguards will be expected to work together to address them in future. (Paragraph 14)

## Timing of station closures

2. It is regrettable that the previous Minister for Shipping and the MCA were not clearer in their statements about the timing of the closure of MRCCs and the opening of the new MOC and appear not to have sought to correct misunderstandings caused by those statements. The morale of coastguards, and coastguards' confidence in the leadership of the service, will not have been enhanced by this episode. (Paragraph 18)

## Local knowledge

3. The MCA's stance in respect of the local knowledge it expects coastguards to have is confusing and contradictory, reflecting a deeper ambiguity about how the Coastguard Service is expected to operate in future (Paragraph 26). Over the next three years, when several MRCCs close, there is a clear risk that local knowledge will be lost. Either local knowledge is a requirement for the role of coastguard in an MRCC or it is not, as Sir Alan Massey suggested. The MCA must clarify and articulate its vision of why coastguards in MRCCs need local knowledge and, if they do, how they should go about gaining and retaining it. (Paragraph 27). We recommend that any work to develop and foster local knowledge should be organised by MCA management, properly scheduled, and remunerated, not left to coastguards to organise themselves when they are off duty. (Paragraph 28)

## Technology

4. There is clearly an urgent need to improve the communication links between Shetland MRCC, mainland Scotland and other MRCCs. We recommend that the Government provide us with details of how and when this will be done. (Paragraph 30)



## Staffing

5. In our view, the loss of experienced coastguards is one of the most significant risks to the successful implementation of the Government's reform programme. Years of uncertainty about the shape of the service, station closures and low morale have acted in combination to drain talent from the service. Finding experienced staff willing to transfer to the new MOC in Fareham may prove particularly difficult. We recommend that the Government provide us with statistics on the age profile and length of service of coastguards at each MRCC and set out its strategy for retaining experienced coastguards, particularly in terms of recruitment to positions based at the MOC. (Paragraph 34)

## Conclusion

6. We were concerned that comments by Sir Alan Massey about the small number of coastguard stations in other countries - 1 in Norway, 3 in Canada - reflect a view in Government that there should be more MRCC closures in the foreseeable future. We call on the Government to rule this out and confirm that the new arrangements for the Coastguard Service are intended to last for a generation. (Paragraph 48)

# Other conclusions and recommendations

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## Emergency Towing Vessels

7. We recommend that the Government clarify by spring 2014 the ETV arrangements it will have in place in Scottish waters from 2015; and confirm whether or not it is in discussions with the Scottish Government to devolve ETV provision. We also recommend that the Government explain how an ETV stationed in the northern isles can effectively serve the west coast, including by providing estimates of journey times to points on the west coast in different sea and weather conditions. (Paragraph 39)

## Fire-fighting at sea

8. We recommend that the Government explain why the Flaminia case would not have been dealt with better had a state-contracted ETV and MIRC capability been available. (Paragraph 42). We recommend that the Government provide more details of the scope and timescales for its discussions with chief fire officers about assisting with the assessment of ships seeking refuge; tell us whether the provision of funding from the MCA or DfT is under discussion; and explain how this new area of coordination with fire and rescue services might differ from MIRC. (Paragraph 43)

# Formal Minutes

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**Monday 26 November 2012**

Members present:

Mrs Louise Ellman, in the Chair

Jim Dobbin  
Julie Hilling  
Kwasi Kwarteng  
Mr John Leech

Karen Lumley  
Karl McCartney  
Iain Stewart  
Graham Stringer

Draft Report (*The Coastguard, Emergency Towing Vessels and the Maritime Incident Response Group: follow up*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 49 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Sixth Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Monday 3 December at 4.00 pm]

## Witnesses

### Monday 22 October 2012

Page

**Steve Quinn**, MCA Section President, PCS, **Brian George**, Liverpool Branch Representative, PCS, **Alex Dodge**, Shetland Branch Chair, PCS, and **Allan Graveson**, Senior National Secretary, Nautilus International

Ev 1

**Stephen Hammond MP**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport, and **Vice-Admiral Sir Alan Massey KCB CBE**, Chief Executive, Maritime and Coastguard Agency

Ev 8

## List of printed written evidence

1	Liverpool Coastguard PCS Union members	Ev 18, Ev 24, Ev 28
2	Department for Transport	Ev 31, Ev 42
3	Nautilus International	Ev 34
4	PCS	Ev 36, Ev 44
5	Shetland Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre	Ev 39

## List of additional written evidence

(published in Volume II on the Committee's website [www.parliament.uk/transcom](http://www.parliament.uk/transcom))

1	Simon Dent	Ev w1
2	Steve Sim	Ev w1
3	Colin Tomlinson	Ev w1
4	FIRE Project	Ev w2
5	Clyde Branch of the PCS	Ev w5
6	PCS member serving at MRCC Clyde	Ev w9
7	Chris Jameson	Ev w10
8	The Scottish Government	Ev w13
9	National Coastguard SOS Campaign Group	Ev w14
10	Ian McLean	Ev w23
11	Toby Reynolds	Ev w23
12	PCS Brixham Branch of the MCA	Ev w24
13	Inverclyde Council	Ev w25
14	Welsh Government	Ev w27
15	Matthew Mace	Ev w28
16	RNLI	Ev w30
17	Louise Pooley and Mike Hillen	Ev w30

18	Dennis Laird	Ev w32
19	Outer Hebrides Coastguard Task Group	Ev w32
20	Save Milford Haven Coastguard Campaign	Ev w34
21	Murdo Macaulay	Ev w36
22	Sandra Beech	Ev w36
23	Martin Caton MP	Ev w37
24	Richard Drax MP	Ev w38
25	Dr Ian Mew	Ev w42

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# List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

## Session 2012–13

Sixth Report	The Coastguard, Emergency Towing Vessels and the Maritime Incident Response Group: follow up	HC 647
Fifth Report	Future programme: autumn and winter 2012–13	HC 591
Fourth Report	Plug-in vehicles, plugged in policy?	HC 239
Third Report	Competition in the local bus market	HC 10 (HC 761) (Incorporating HC 1861–i–iii)
Fifth Special Report	Flight Time Limitations: Government Response To The Committee's First Report Of Session 2012–13	HC 558
Fourth Special Report	Air Travel Organisers' Licensing (Atol) Reform: Government Response To The Committee's Seventeenth Report Of Session 2010–12	HC 557
Second Report	Road safety	HC 506 (HC 648) Incorporating HC 1738
First Report	Flight time limitations	HC 164 Incorporating HC 1838
Third Special Report	Sulphur emissions by ships: Government Response to the Committee's Sixteenth Report of Session 2010–12	HC 87
Second Special Report	Counting the cost: financial scrutiny of the Department for Transport 2011–12: Government Response to the Committee's Fifteenth Report of Session 2010–12	HC 15
First Special Report	Draft Civil Aviation Bill: Pre-Legislative Scrutiny: Government Response to the Committee's Thirteenth Report of Session 2010–12	HC 11

## Session 2010–12

Seventeenth Report	Air Travel Organisers' Licensing (ATOL) reform	HC 1798
Sixteenth Report	Sulphur emissions by ships	HC 1561
Fifteenth Report	Counting the cost: financial scrutiny of the Department for Transport 2011–12	HC 1560
Fourteenth Report	Cable theft on the Railway	HC 1609 (HC 1933)
Thirteenth Report	Draft Civil Aviation Bill: Pre-Legislative Scrutiny	HC 1694
Twelfth Report	Cost of motor insurance: follow up	HC 1451 (HC 1934)
Eleventh Report	Thameslink rolling stock procurement	HC 1453 (HC 1935)
Tenth Report	High Speed Rail	HC 1185–I (HC 1754)
Ninth Report	Out of the jam: reducing congestion on our roads	HC 872 (HC 1661)

Eighth Report	Bus Services after the Spending Review	HC 750 (HC 1550)
Seventh Report	Taxis and private hire vehicles: the road to reform	HC 720 (HC 1507)
Sixth Report	The Coastguard, Emergency Towing Vessels and the Maritime Incident Response Group	HC 948, incorporating HC 752-i (HC 1482)
Fifth Report	Keeping the UK moving: The impact on transport of the winter weather in December 2010	HC 794 (HC 1467)
Fourth Report	The cost of motor insurance	HC 591 (HC 1466)
Third Report	Transport and the economy	HC 473 (HC 962)
Second Report	Financial Scrutiny of the Department for Transport	HC 683
First Report	Drink and drug driving law	HC 460 (Cm 8050)
Tenth Special Report	The proposal for a National Policy Statement on Ports: Government Response to the Committee Fifth Report of Session 2009–10	HC 1598
Third Special Report	The performance of the Department for Transport: Government response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2009–10	HC 549
Second Special Report	Update on the London Underground and the public-private (PPP) partnership agreements: Government response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2009–10	HC 467
First Special Report	The major road network: Government response to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2009–10	HC 421

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# Oral evidence

## Taken before the Transport Committee on Monday 22 October 2012

Members present:

Mrs Louise Ellman (Chair)

Steve Baker  
Julie Hilling  
Kwasi Kwarteng

Mr John Leech  
Iain Stewart  
Graham Stringer

### Examination of Witnesses

*Witnesses:* **Steve Quinn**, MCA Section President, PCS, **Brian George**, Liverpool Branch Representative, PCS, **Alex Dodge**, Shetland Branch Chair, PCS, and **Allan Graveson**, Senior National Secretary, Nautilus, gave evidence.

**Q1 Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to the Transport Select Committee. I am very pleased to see all of you. I know that some of you have had a very difficult journey, but you have overcome all obstacles and got here. Could I ask you, please, to give us your names and the organisations you represent, just to help our records?

**Allan Graveson:** My name is Allan Graveson. I am senior national secretary with Nautilus International.

**Brian George:** I am Brian George, PCS branch chairman of Liverpool coastguard.

**Steve Quinn:** I am Steve Quinn, the PCS SEC president.

**Alex Dodge:** I am Alex Dodge, branch chairperson of the Shetland branch.

**Q2 Chair:** The reorganisation of the coastguard has a long history. This Committee conducted an inquiry last year to look at the concerns expressed, and the proposals were then revised, but from the correspondence we have received clearly there are ongoing concerns. Could you tell us what your major concerns are at the moment and how you see things now?

**Brian George:** One of our main concerns is the safety of the public. The MCA management has recently said that safety is their number one priority—but only recently. There are hundreds of thousands of people who rely on our coastline and coast for their livelihoods, not to mention the millions of visitors who use it for leisure purposes. None of them deserves to be treated like this. At a recent meeting, a senior MCA official was asked what happens to those people other than the professional organisations that use our coastline. There was a shrug of the shoulders and they said, “We have no actual duty of care over the leisure industry.” That is hardly the attitude, I would have thought, whether or not we have a duty of care. To say there is no duty of care isn’t the way forward.

**Q3 Chair:** Could you tell us who made that statement?

**Brian George:** I am not sure. It was at an SEC meeting. I don’t know who was there at the time, but it was a senior MCA official.

**Q4 Chair:** Mr Quinn, would you like to add to that?

**Steve Quinn:** My main concern is that, despite being given assurances to the contrary, we were told that no station would close until the national Maritime Operations Centre was up and running and also until we had a system in place that was at least as robust as, if not better than, we have now.

Forth coastguard closed on 28 September. The problems that we had then and the associated risks when Forth was open are still there, but now we have three or four fewer people on watch at any given time to cover that same area of risk. That is coupled with the fact that for a lot of the staff at Aberdeen there are no structured means by which they can visit Forth’s area to gain local knowledge, which is now lost, because everybody, bar two members of staff who were at Forth, have now left the service. The staff have had the ability to travel to the previous area of Forth, to look round it and get local knowledge, but only off their own bat. No structured methodology has been put in place for them to try to learn the local knowledge that has now been lost with Forth closing.

**Q5 Chair:** Ms Dodge, could you tell us your concerns?

**Alex Dodge:** To add to that, with Forth closing, our area has been extended down into what was Aberdeen’s area—to Brora—and we have taken over the north coast of Scotland. We have had no structured local knowledge visits. On top of that, we have a kind of dial-in type of connection of the aerals with Aberdeen, which is not helping at all. Because of that, two desks are not usable except for pure radio work, and the connection is not stable. Since the beginning of October until Saturday morning, when I came off watch, that connection has failed nine times. That is not good enough if we are in the middle of a mayday, on an aerial source like Ben Tongue or Durness, which we cannot hear from any other aerial.

**Q6 Chair:** Mr Graveson, we were given an assurance that no stations would close until the new system had been tested, but that doesn’t appear to have been honoured. Have you heard of any explanation as to why that is?

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 22 October 2012 Steve Quinn, Brian George, Alex Dodge and Allan Graveson
 

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**Allan Graveson:** May I, first, Chair, beg your indulgence and say that we have concern about the lack of safety in depth? That ties in with the station position. We have lost the maritime surveillance aircraft. The renewal of the rescue helicopters is long overdue. It is a miracle and testament to the people flying them and maintaining them that they are still running. We have lost the emergency towing vessels, in which case in parts of the United Kingdom it is not a question of a market solution; there is no market, particularly for the north and west of Scotland. We have lost the maritime incident response group that gives support to merchant shipping.

Looking to the stations themselves, which drive all this, we are receiving assurances that there will be no closures until the new equipment and technology has been put in place. A wonderful facility has been obtained from the fire services to be used at Fareham, but we are closing stations before that facility has been equipped and is up and running and other stations have been brought up to an equally high standard. We have concerns about safety in depth and the closure of stations, which is far too premature until we have a fully operational national co-ordination centre.

**Q7 Chair:** Have you been given any explanation for the change in policy and the decision to go ahead with closures before the new centre is operational?

**Allan Graveson:** No explanation whatsoever has been given to us. We can only make the presumption that they are looking at costs in the immediate future. Clearly, there will be a significant gap until the stations are fully equipped and the new national centre is fully open. It is extremely dangerous.

I may be at variance with some of my colleagues in saying that, as an organisation, we are quite happy with 11 stations: five in England, three in Scotland, two in Wales and one in Northern Ireland. Given the geographical nature of these islands, the weather conditions and language, and bearing in mind the principles of devolution, we are quite happy with 11 stations. We think that is right and proper, but they have to be supported by a national co-ordination centre that is fully equipped with properly trained staff of high calibre. We are also looking at the calibre of staff, who will be significantly improved through training, and, accordingly, at their remuneration.

**Q8 Iain Stewart:** You have referred to the closure of Forth and the connection problems with the communication system. Have there been any incidents at sea in that period when your ability to respond has been impaired in some way?

**Alex Dodge:** I have not been at the station much because I have been away on a course, but a couple of weeks ago we had an incident off Cape Wrath. Fortunately, the loss in connection occurred when the fishing vessel being towed by the lifeboat was closer to Orkney. If we had lost that connection during communications earlier in the day, we would not have been able to talk to them. That has happened. It has impinged slightly on an incident, so far not seriously, but there is potential for something like that to happen.

**Q9 Iain Stewart:** I understand the potential. I am just wondering whether, in the period since Forth has closed, there has been an incident.

**Steve Quinn:** It has only been three weeks. I think we have been quite fortunate that it hasn't at the moment.

**Alex Dodge:** But we are heading for winter.

**Q10 Mr Leech:** That was the kind of question I was going to ask myself. From what Mr Graveson says, the emergency towing vehicles are no longer available. Have there been any circumstances in which other arrangements have had to be made instead of using the emergency towing vehicles that would have been available in the past?

**Allan Graveson:** There is the documented case of the MSC Flaminia, where the market did eventually respond after deaths on board and the potential loss of that vessel. That is certainly one incident. By the nature of transport, particularly shipping, time comes into the equation. It is not like road traffic accidents. When you are dealing with shipping and aviation, they tend to be potentially large incidents. I appreciate that there are the leisure, coastal and fishing sectors, but for shipping there is a major ferry disaster about every 18.5 years and a major fire every five years. If you don't get the frequency, it is impossible to say in that time, but the MSC Flaminia is a very good example of an incident. The market did respond eventually. There were no MIRGs that could be put out on to that ship. A seafarer on that ship died, and eventually Germany took the vessel. That was potentially an extremely serious incident. You must remember that the United Kingdom has responsibility for a huge rescue area that extends halfway out across the Atlantic. It is not only cargo on the high seas but an increasing number of passenger ships, so time is a factor.

**Q11 Mr Leech:** Are you suggesting that this fatality might have been avoided if the emergency towing vessels had been available?

**Allan Graveson:** We await the full report. I think that if the MIRGs had been available, subsequently the fire could have been brought under control sooner, the vessel might not have needed to be abandoned, and it could potentially have been limited, but we need a full inquiry. We must not prejudge this. We do need to have a full inquiry into that, and I have no doubt that Germany will conduct a thorough inquiry.

**Q12 Mr Leech:** We were told categorically that there would be a market solution to the removal of the emergency towing vehicles. We were also told quite categorically by the opponents of their removal that in some parts of the area there was no market solution. Has any progress been made in having a market solution available across the whole of the UK?

**Allan Graveson:** No, there hasn't. I have no doubt that a market solution would be available in the southern North sea. If you are to cut transport by 21% to 27%, you could probably live with it, but when you are cutting your emergency towing response by 100% you will die. The market will not solve everything, because ultimately you can get market failure. I attended meetings in Edinburgh where there was



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22 October 2012 Steve Quinn, Brian George, Alex Dodge and Allan Graveson

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profound concern in Scotland. They know the potential dangers to their economy of a ship foundering on their coastline. The economic loss can be enormous. There is no market solution to the north and west of Scotland and equally to the Western Approaches, although, there, France has had to step in and reposition its towing vessels.

**Q13 Chair:** Mr George, we are told by PCS Liverpool that the staff remain none the wiser about how the new system will work. Is that correct? When would staff have to be given information on the new arrangements to make the new system safe?

**Brian George:** We would like to find out as much about it as we can as soon as possible. We still fail to understand how the new system will work. We have had no information about it. There is rumour and speculation that originally the MOC would take a lot of the weight from various places round the country, but that now seems to have changed. Again, there is rumour and speculation that the MRSCs—the sub-centres—will do most of the rescue co-ordination, with the MOC backing them up, but we don't know; we are still not getting any information. We seem to be left out of the loop, even as far as our co-ordination role with the Isle of Man is concerned. We were the liaison station for the Isle of Man. The Isle of Man has a new marine operations centre that we deal with on a daily basis. We know the pitfalls and problems of dog-legging and that sort of thing, but no one has asked us about it, or we have not been included in any negotiations with the Isle of Man at all.

**Q14 Chair:** Would you be prepared to work with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency to make these changes, even though you are obviously opposed to what they want to do?

**Brian George:** Yes, if they just tell us exactly how it is going to work. The suspicion at the moment is that they don't know. Sir Alan Massey said previously that it is like sending a new ship to war. First, it has a work-up. You don't know exactly how it will work until the team has put it all together. Then you send it to war. If you take that analogy, we are already at war. You can't do a work-up while you are at war, if you like; it doesn't work, but nobody has been anywhere near us to ask us or talk to us about it.

**Q15 Chair:** I want to go back to the practical implications of closing the existing centres before the new system is operational. Could you tell us what the implications have been for Shetland, because there have been closures before the new system has been put into operation? What has it meant in practical terms?

**Alex Dodge:** In practical terms, it has meant that we have to work over a larger area about which we have no local knowledge with fewer staff. As of tomorrow, we will have 17.5 full-time members of staff. It is difficult when we have so little good local knowledge of the area we have to work in. I mentioned earlier that we had a jury-rigged connection with Aberdeen to try to get the aerals working. Currently, we have 11 channel 16 aerals to monitor. Trying to learn who our CRT teams are and deal with them, work with the

lifeboat people, and find our feet in an area that we know very little about is difficult.

**Q16 Chair:** The whole issue of local knowledge or situation awareness seems to be at the centre of the concerns. The MCA think that is not an issue. Can you tell us in your experience what the problems are and what the difficulties with the agency's interpretation of local knowledge are?

**Alex Dodge:** Local knowledge is not just knowing the name of an area or where it is; it is being able to know which is the nearest team to send; knowing the team you are going to send; knowing the terrain you are dealing with; what lifeboat you are going to send; what the weather will be like and what the harbour will be like. It is not just knowing what a place is called and where it is; it is so much more. Having this knowledge enables you to make decisions far quicker, rather than us having to hunt around, looking up names and wondering if this or that is the best one. In our business we have to make very quick decisions; otherwise, people lose their lives. In many cases we have minutes in which to make those decisions.

**Q17 Chair:** The Maritime and Coastguard Agency have explained how they are trying to capture databases to deal with the issue of local knowledge. Are they doing that correctly, or do you think that is the wrong way to go about it?

**Alex Dodge:** The only database I am aware of in which they are trying to capture this information is an Ordnance Survey project called FINTAN. I am actually part of it. It is trying to get vernacular and local place names on the OS maps. It is really nice to have these local names, but having a name is not just local knowledge; local knowledge is so much more than just knowing the names of places.

**Q18 Julie Hilling:** To be clear as to what you are saying about closures and handover of information, is there a process where the stations are working together? How is it actually happening? Is there just one closing and then another area is supposed to take over the responsibilities?

**Alex Dodge:** A bit of information has passed between ourselves and colleagues in Aberdeen. If we are not certain about something, we can phone them up and ask them, but that is as far as the passing of information goes. We have had no solid, on-the-ground look at things where you go and talk to people.

**Q19 Julie Hilling:** As to future closures, is there a programme in places you know of that will be about joint working for a period of time before closure? How is that handover going to happen? I know there is a question about whether they should close, but clearly the Ministry has decided that they will close. What is that process going to be?

**Steve Quinn:** There has been no definitive word given to the officers in the stations to say, "This is how we are going to do it." There are a number of working parties in place to work out how we are going to get from where we are now to where the MCA wish to be. It is worth saying that the PCS finally called off its industrial action after six years, just a couple of

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weeks ago. After six years of industrial action we have not furthered our cause very much, but to allow our members the best possible opportunity to transit from where they are now to the new system—hopefully, there will be better paid and more secure jobs in the future—that’s why we called off the industrial action.

You asked, Madam Chair, whether we would be prepared to work with the MCA. That is a perfect example of how we are prepared to work with the MCA. We said we will call off the industrial action—actually, we have suspended it—so that our members and all the staff can work through the process to get into the new system and work in the new jobs.

That said, on a practical basis, before they closed Forth on 28 September, if Forth, Aberdeen and Shetland had all been fully staffed, working with the risk assessment tool in place at that time, there would have been 13 officers on watch at any given time. Now that Forth has closed, we will have eight or possibly nine officers on watch to cover the same area and the same risk—in actual fact, an increased risk, because the people with the local knowledge down at Forth have now gone, bar two, and the people at Aberdeen are trying to play catch-up to get that local knowledge, while our colleagues in Shetland are playing catch-up to get local knowledge of the area that has been moved from Aberdeen to Shetland’s area. There are moves afoot and people are trying their best, but as far as I am aware, no document has been produced saying, “This is the road map; this is how we are going from A to B.” That has not materialised.

**Q20 Julie Hilling:** The Department for Transport have said: “A major objective has been a smooth transition...and better paid careers available within the future coastguard. Our discussions with the unions on the staffing roles and responsibilities have been constructive and helpful.” It all sounds very rosy from what they are saying. Is that your experience?

**Steve Quinn:** There are a number of working parties in place to look at shift patterns in the future. The job descriptions and role profiles for the new posts have now been agreed upon. They have not been issued yet; the staff don’t know what they are, but they have been agreed upon. Working parties are trying to transit through that, and the staff will work with the MCA to try to move us forward, but I answered the same question last time I sat in front of you. I didn’t know then and I don’t know now.

**Q21 Chair:** Mr Graveson, when you spoke to us before, you said that you basically agreed with the new structure.

**Allan Graveson:** Yes.

**Q22 Chair:** Do you share the concerns about the process or lack of process involved now, particularly in relation to local knowledge, given that you think the basic objectives are the correct ones?

**Allan Graveson:** I do have some concerns. We have to be realistic and accept some cuts in the situation we are in. We all have to be realistic. We also have to bear in mind how other countries manage this. I didn’t

use the words “local knowledge”; I said “regional knowledge”. That is very important, particularly in Scotland and Wales with language issues, and also the prevailing weather conditions in these islands. I would have liked to see much more constructive dialogue.

I will bow to my PCS colleagues here and say that our people have been employed mainly in what are called the higher-profile areas of Dover, Falmouth and so on. We have people there and they are very willing to co-operate—absolutely willing to co-operate—but we are trying to close stations before we have got the new regime in place, and that is where it is fundamentally failing. We wouldn’t do this in the fire service, ambulance service or indeed the police forces in this country; we would not close control rooms before we had new ones up and running with the new technology and equipment. There needs to be constructive dialogue here with what is the fourth emergency service, where there is the potential for loss of life on a scale you will not find anywhere else.

**Q23 Iain Stewart:** In your opinion, how long would it take for someone in Shetland, for example, to acquire local or regional knowledge of another station? What period of time are we looking at? Is it a couple of weeks or a couple of months?

**Alex Dodge:** It depends on what things you want to do.

**Q24 Iain Stewart:** To be able to cover the area with the same degree of proficiency as the previous station.

**Alex Dodge:** I would say at least a year before you could get to know people. The problem is that it depends on how you go about it. Can you go away and make an intensive visit, or are you just going to pop up and down? It is trying to fit these things in with things like watch-keeping and normal family life as well. It could take anything up to a year.

**Steve Quinn:** I know that some of my colleagues in Aberdeen are planning a visit to what previously had been Forth’s patch as soon as they can. It may not be at the end of this month but the beginning of next month.

To continue what Alex said, they are being encouraged to make these visits, but there is no structured format to them. They are having to do it in their four days off. They work a full round of watches and they have to make these visits in their four-day rest period. They have been told that there are no overtime payments available to do it; they will have to take time off in lieu, which just means that the problem of people getting leave and having enough staff on station to take leave gets pushed further down the line. It doesn’t actually solve the problem.

**Q25 Julie Hilling:** To follow up that point, when people move between stations anyway, because clearly staff will be relocated, how long is it before they are operating a desk, if that is the right terminology for it?

**Steve Quinn:** It is down to the individual concerned, bearing in mind that, if an officer moves from one station to another, there is only one person who doesn’t have that knowledge. He can be tutored and mentored by everybody else who is on watch with

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him, and he can be guided for a period of time until that individual is up and running. What we are talking about now are wholesale areas of local knowledge no longer being available.

**Q26 Julie Hilling:** I understand that, but, surely, it is not a year before that person would be deemed to be confident to be the sort of person who is dealing with a situation on the front line.

**Alex Dodge:** You don't work as an individual; you work as part of a team. If it is just one individual who moves into a new station, as Steve said, that person will be surrounded by other members of staff, who will mentor them and be able to point them in the right direction and help with decision making, whereas when you have a whole ops room full of people who don't know the area it is a different matter.

**Q27 Mr Leech:** All the way through this process I have been very confused about the relationship between the Maritime Operations Centre and the individual coastguard offices. Are you clear as to exactly how the roles will change in your individual stations once the MOC opens?

**Alex Dodge:** No.

**Steve Quinn:** No.

**Q28 Mr Leech:** Has there been any attempt by anybody to explain how the role will change?

**Steve Quinn:** No. If I can expand that a little bit, as I said a moment ago, the new role profiles and job descriptions have been agreed. They have not been issued to the staff yet, because basically, as I am sure you are aware, everybody is potentially out of a job. They are going to have to reapply for these jobs at the newer grade; so at the moment they don't know what the new jobs will entail. As a consequence, they don't really know how they will fit into that system; they don't even know what shift patterns they will be working; they don't know exactly what roles they will take on when they go for promotion. We have asked the question many times: will this MOC take in all the search and rescue incidents and farm them out, or will the people working at the other stations be responsible for their area of responsibility but that area of responsibility can move? So the short answer to your question is no.

**Q29 Mr Leech:** Do we know when the MOC is due to open?

**Steve Quinn:** I believe it is in 2014.

**Q30 Mr Leech:** Is work ongoing to take on staff working in the Maritime Operations Centre?

**Brian George:** Not that I know of.

**Steve Quinn:** The MCA are looking to start recruiting existing staff into the new roles in the new year.

**Q31 Chair:** Mr George, were you trying to come in?

**Brian George:** They can start the process of trying to get experienced officers to go to the MOC, if I can put it like that, but it is like going from here to there when you don't know where "there" is and you don't know how the system works. If we knew that, it might ease some people's worries, and they may even—I

doubt it—get some experienced officers to work at the MOC.

**Q32 Mr Leech:** Has there been any approach to any of your members by the MCA to recruit people into the MOC?

**Alex Dodge:** No.

**Steve Quinn:** No. As I understand it, the system to recruit and promote people into the new roles is due to start in the new year.

**Q33 Chair:** Can I just be clear what your answers are? There was a general "no". I don't know if that was from everybody. Is everyone saying no? So that is a "no", unless somebody says anything different.

**Allan Graveson:** I know one or two individuals— younger members obviously looking to their future—who have said they would be quite happy to transfer and go to work at the MOC, but of course there is a degree of uncertainty in the period to 2014. We really are dragging things out. If this could be effected as soon as possible and in a timely manner so that people can receive the proper training, we would probably save money, but there seems to be no thought whatsoever in this. The older people are very concerned about their future employment, particularly if they are in their mid to late 50s. The younger people have said they are quite happy to go there but they are getting no information.

**Q34 Mr Leech:** In the original consultation process I questioned whether or not, effectively, the maritime operations centres would be glorified call centres. I still don't see how they are going to be anything other than glorified call centres. Am I being very naive or just overly-concerned about what the role of the MOC will be?

**Brian George:** No. That is exactly the point. It would appear that the MOC will become something of a call centre. The system that they want to work is different from the one we have at the moment where we have co-ordinators. We get a bit fed up with various Ministers saying that it is only the co-ordinators who are going. We don't like to be thought of as "only the co-ordinators"; it belittles our role. The co-ordination centres are very important, and the new system, whatever it is, will be different from the role we have at the moment. We just cannot see how a new system, whatever it is, will work, other than the MOC becoming a glorified call centre.

**Steve Quinn:** I don't disagree with anything Brian says. As I understand it, to answer your question, I think the MOC will be a hybrid of both. It will have responsibility for search and rescue within its own area, so it will be an operational search and rescue centre on the one side, but we don't know whether they will take in emergency calls for the whole of the UK and pass them out to other stations, in which case half of it is then a call-handling centre. It could be both.

**Allan Graveson:** We are trying to provide a facility for leisure, fishing and commercial shipping. I think it is a question of degree of magnitude here. Certainly, when we are looking to beach rescue or coastal fishing, local regional knowledge is important, but

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when we are moving out into the deep sea and to the waters around our coast—incidentally, the channel is the busiest in the world—we need much greater capacity to be able to bring more resources to bear in such situations. We are in reality responsible for waters halfway across the Atlantic.

**Q35 Kwasi Kwarteng:** The picture you paint is one of utter confusion and a lot of risk. If what you say is right, presumably there will be a huge disaster at some point once this has been implemented. Would you like to talk a bit more about that? You are prophesying doom, and, as far as I can see, there are no redeeming features in any of these proposals. I want to test that proposition. I am presuming that you want to see the status quo; you don't want to see any change at all. That is my question.

**Chair:** Mr George, could you perhaps clarify what you want to see being done?

**Brian George:** We would like to see anything that improves the coastguard service and makes our response quicker. These proposals don't make it any quicker. In fact, Sir Alan Massey said it was likely to increase response time by up to 10 minutes, but they deem this to be an acceptable risk. I beg to differ; that is not an acceptable risk. You cannot modernise something and make it worse.

**Q36 Kwasi Kwarteng:** They could give all the information they could on how it would work, but that is not your issue. Your issue is that you think this plan is fundamentally more risky—riskier—than what we have now. Is that the issue?

**Brian George:** That is the issue, yes. From the information we have about it, it is far more risky. To try to simplify it, if I am in trouble in the water, on a cliff or wherever, I want the person on the end of my distress call—I don't care how it is made, whether it is by flapping my arms up and down or by some electronic gizmo or other—to sort it out. I do not want him to have a discussion about it with an MOC somewhere else, creating dog legs all over the place; I do not want him to have to get a sector manager out of bed at 3 o'clock in the morning to be involved in the co-ordination of it. This is before we have launched the lifeboats or anything like that. I want that person to sort it out, and that is what we do at the moment. If we get any sort of distress call, we sort it out. This creates dog legs all over the place. That will increase response time, and that is one of our main concerns.

**Q37 Kwasi Kwarteng:** So essentially we are moving from a very good system, as far as you are concerned, to one that has more risk.

**Brian George:** I think so. Obviously, it can be improved. If we can find a way of improving it to decrease response time and make it even more efficient, then good; we are all for it, but this does not appear to do that.

**Alex Dodge:** At the beginning of this whole sorry process Sir Alan Massey made the statement in a radio interview that we were not a very efficient service. I have to say we are a very effective service. We were staffed by some very loyal people in the coastguard.

That loyalty has already gone; we no longer have that. We also rely heavily on volunteers, whether it is from the coastguard rescue service, the RNLI or other lifeboat services. We are going to rely more and more on search and rescue at sea on the cheap, as we are dealing with people like me, who are on the front line of search and rescue. People have the idea in their heads that we just sit there and answer telephone and radio calls. We are at the front line of all this and are being cheapened; we are losing our desire to put the best into our jobs.

**Q38 Kwasi Kwarteng:** But do you think efficiency should be a consideration in the provision of this service?

**Alex Dodge:** When it comes to people's lives it should be effective. We should get the job done as quickly as possible—

**Q39 Kwasi Kwarteng:** You will understand that there is a tension between effectiveness and efficiency. To be really effective, we could double the number of stations.

**Alex Dodge:** We could indeed.

**Q40 Kwasi Kwarteng:** We could do that, and that would be very effective. It would not necessarily be very efficient or something that we could afford. You can see that there is a tension there.

**Alex Dodge:** Yes.

**Q41 Kwasi Kwarteng:** So you would accept that efficiency is something that should be a consideration.

**Alex Dodge:** It could be a consideration, but when you hear that the whole process will save £7.4 million a year net, is it worth it?

**Q42 Chair:** Mr Graveson, do you want to comment on this?

**Allan Graveson:** You can get efficiency and effectiveness, but you have to invest in the people and the technology. For example, if you remove the maritime surveillance aircraft, yes, you can use drones perhaps—technology. We can use image telemetry; we can use a great deal to give us information on the coastline that we currently do not have, but we have to invest in the people and technology and do it up front. Then you will get savings in future years, but you cannot cut now and just hope that by good will you can manage and get by. That is not the way to do it. We can get efficiency and effectiveness, but it needs investment in people and technology.

**Q43 Chair:** I want to ask further about communications technology. Do you need a step change in the communications systems rather than an upgrade of the existing systems? This seems to be one of the contentious points. The agency is saying that communication systems will be upgraded to make this new system work. Does it look like that to you?

**Steve Quinn:** I answered the same question last time I sat in front of you. We do not know what systems are available. We are not communications experts. The system we have got and the one that I understand we will have come 2014 is one and the same. At the



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moment, it is BT telephone lines to and from remote radio sites on hilltops. That is subject to the foibles of any BT hard-wired system. They can and do go down quite often. We work around them, but BT telephone lines can be broken and cut. At the minute, with regard to the system we have now and the one we will have in the future, with enhanced databases, the communications network, as I understand it, will be the same, and it has its limitations.

**Q44 Chair:** We are told that two coastguard stations cannot share the same aerial site. If that is correct, what problems does it cause?

**Steve Quinn:** I have raised this issue on a number of occasions. This goes back to the fact that we do not yet know how the system is going to work in future, but the laws of physics cannot be changed. If station A is getting very busy and is overwhelmed with search and rescue work, the MCA line on it is that they will move the boundaries of that station so that the next one along, or a station on the other side of the country, can take some responsibility, leaving the busy station to concentrate on what it is doing. That is fine in theory, but if that station is busy and is using those VHF aerials to communicate with people in distress and search and rescue assets, while that station is using those aerials they cannot be used by anybody else; they can be used only by one operator at a time. Theoretically, you can move the boundaries around to shed workload, but if the aerials are being used by the station that is busy, nobody else can use them; that is the bottom line.

**Q45 Chair:** Ms Dodge, what are the vulnerabilities in the communication systems between you and other stations?

**Alex Dodge:** A strike of lightning can knock out an exchange. It did that to us a couple of years ago. It knocked out a whole exchange for a good couple of weeks and we had no communications. It is as simple as that. Bad weather is one of our main problems. As for technology, computers fail. We rely on computers an awful lot. It just takes a computer to fail or a server to drop out and we have problems.

**Brian George:** Talking about vulnerability in the system, we had a situation in Liverpool a little while ago where our ordinary telephone lines became intermittent and people could not get through. The 999 system was all right, but the ordinary telephone lines were intermittent and then disappeared altogether. They came back and were intermittent again. During this process it was determined that it was a BT fault. We got in touch with BT, who said they were not able to fix it because we were not paying enough. Apparently we did not have the right system in place to do this; it would have only cost about £200 to £300 to do it. A request was sent up the line to various levels, right to the very top, as far as I am led to believe. Everybody passed the buck and said, "No, we are not authorising that. We can't authorise that", and so it went on. We were told to monitor it and they would sort it out. This happened over a weekend and we were only paying for the system to be sorted out between Monday and Friday apparently. That sort of thing can happen. If the structure is not in place

properly and you are not paying the right money, then it can all fall apart.

**Q46 Chair:** There is a lot of reliance in the proposed new system on retaining the expertise of staff, even if they are moving to another location. What are your views on how many existing coastguard staff will remain in the system, even if they are in another place? Mr George, what is your view about the situation in Liverpool? How many staff are likely to remain in the service?

**Brian George:** At the moment probably one or two people have expressed an interest in maybe staying with the coastguard. A lot of other experienced people are simply looking for other jobs. We have lost four very experienced coastguards in the last four months. If the new system was all it was cracked up to be, the jobs paid properly and it was all going to be wonderful, surely they would stay. I think that is echoed around the coast. From those I talk to round the coast, most people are looking for other jobs.

**Q47 Chair:** Does anyone else want to comment on that or have any other views?

**Alex Dodge:** At the very beginning of this I said that people are not going to move very quickly because, quite often, especially if they are in relationships, the other half of the relationship probably has quite a good job. That has to be taken into account. If they have families, they will be at a good school; they have a house. All of it has to be taken into consideration. Quite often, people do not want to take the risk of moving; to goodness knows what within the coastguard, at whatever level of pay they are going to give us. They stay in the area they know and look for a job within that area, because now is not the time to try to sell a house and move.

**Allan Graveson:** I also believe that you need a blend or a mixture of people to operate both efficiently and effectively. You need people with maritime skills as well to be recruited into the coastguard. It is vitally important to have that blend of people, and you need people with maritime skills to deal certainly with the major issues as and when they arise.

**Q48 Chair:** PCS say that 15% of all operational coastguard posts are vacant. Is that an accurate figure?

**Steve Quinn:** As far as I am aware, that is still an accurate figure. To go back to the previous point, when the Forth closed, out of a staff of 12 or 14 full-time officers, two have come to Aberdeen and the rest have all left the service. When Clyde becomes non-operational in November and closes in December, my understanding is that between two and four have expressed interest in coming to Aberdeen, two or three have expressed an interest in going to Belfast, and nobody has expressed an interest in going to Stornoway. That pool of local knowledge, which will be divided between Stornoway and Belfast, at best will rest with two or three people moving to Belfast and none moving to Stornoway.

**Q49 Chair:** We are about to question the new Minister with responsibility for shipping and Sir Alan

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Massey. What is the most important thing that you think they should be doing now?

**Steve Quinn:** I think they should stop and think about it. We have closed Forth now. If there was a structured plan to closing it, it was never revealed to the staff. It was open one day and next day it was closed. We were given assurances that we would have the correct numbers of qualified staff in place to take up the slack when these stations closed. That is not happening. It has not happened at Forth; it looks like it is not going to happen in Clyde either. We are not against change; we have never been against change. As I said earlier, we are prepared to work with the MCA to move through this process, but at the moment it is being done on an ad hoc basis, and is somewhat forced upon the MCA. In fairness, I will admit that, but the staff are not being taken with them. Forth has closed and Clyde is about to close, and the staff are not being taken with them in any structured format.

**Q50 Chair:** Does anyone want to make any different point?

**Allan Graveson:** If you are making an effective change like this, everybody in business knows how you must do it. You can do it right or wrong. Here, you have to spend money up front to do this properly and engage with your people. Be very clear and precise on what your endgame is and what you wish to achieve. Allocate your resources to do it, use them wisely and get there, but you need to invest in the people. They are the most important asset you have, together with technology, but you have to be prepared to buy the best. It will save you money in the long run.

**Brian George:** I would agree with what both colleagues have said. They must slow down. The Minister should put a stop to it to begin with and just think about what they are doing and not go galloping ahead closing stations all over the place without first having a proper structure in place. When they have the system that they want to work, ask them to tell us what it is, and then everybody will be a lot happier. In the case of Liverpool, the decision to close the

coastguard station at Liverpool is quite shocking in itself. Liverpool, with all its facilities, could help. We do not want them to close a different station and keep Liverpool open; they should keep Liverpool coastguard station open.

**Q51 Chair:** I am looking for just one main point, but they all hang together.

**Brian George:** There you go. There is your point: keep it open.

**Q52 Chair:** Ms Dodge, do you have any key point to put to the Minister?

**Alex Dodge:** We have been concentrating, quite rightly, on professional coastguards in coastguard stations, but as a warning, there is a massive problem brewing within the coastguard rescue service as well. There are many there who have seen what is ahead. They are being relied on for local knowledge and will take on more responsibility, and more paperwork will be taken on. A lot of very experienced people there are saying, "No more. I'm not going to take any more; I am walking away from this." People who have dedicated their lives to the communities feel that, with the pressure on them now, they cannot take any more. This is going to be a huge problem in the future.

**Steve Quinn:** You will no doubt be told by the chief executive and new Minister that, in the new scheme, coastguards will have better remunerated jobs and a better future. That, to some extent, is true, but to put that in context, when we started to take industrial action six years ago over low pay, we were the lowest paid of all the emergency services. Even when staff get these new jobs, which they have to apply for, and get promoted, to put that in context, the coastguard will still be the lowest paid staff of any emergency service. So we have moved on but we have not moved up.

**Chair:** That is a suitable point on which to finish this session. Thank you very much, all of you, for coming and giving evidence.

### Examination of Witnesses

**Witnesses:** **Stephen Hammond MP**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport, and **Vice-Admiral Sir Alan Massey KCB CBE**, Chief Executive, Maritime and Coastguard Agency, gave evidence.

**Q53 Chair:** Good afternoon, gentlemen, and welcome to the Transport Select Committee. I extend a special welcome to Mr Hammond. We hope this is the first of many visits to the Committee in your new capacity and we congratulate you on your position. Minister, you are new in this position. Has the situation in the coastguard service been flagged up to you as a matter for concern—one where you should perhaps call for a pause and have a look at the situation itself?

**Stephen Hammond:** With your permission, Mrs Ellman, I would like to make an opening statement, which I think has been agreed with your officials. If that statement does not cover the question, I will answer it.

As the Committee knows, safety is very much this Government's top priority. Delivery on search and rescue does not change under the modernisation plan. It is the co-ordination arrangements that will change. Your Committee's helpful report in June 2011 highlighted a number of concerns about our original proposals for modernisation, which were published in December 2010. The Government considered that report and other representations before moving to the second round of public consultation in July 2011, and then announcing final decisions about the number and location of coastguard co-ordination centres in November 2011. As part of that consultation process the MCA received 27 sets of alternative proposals. Without exception, those alternative proposals

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accepted the need for change and fewer coastguard co-ordination centres, ranging in number between six and 15, compared with the 19 we started out with.

The blueprint, which we confirmed last November, kept at least one centre open from every existing pair of centres, addressing head-on the concerns raised by this Committee and others about the perceived lack and loss of local knowledge. We also moved away from the original concept of some centres only opening during the day, and all the remaining 11 centres will operate 24 hours. In short, the Government agreed to keep open more centres and retain more coastguards, with only 159 posts being lost nationally.

Since last November the MCA have been working tirelessly on the practical implementation of the modernisation plan, involving the staff and the PCS union at every step. Her Majesty's Coastguard now occupies the new Maritime Operations Centre in Fareham, and arrangements are being made to have that facility operational by April 2014.

On 28 September the Forth centre closed. Two coastguard officers have been redeployed to the centre at Aberdeen. The centre manager has joined the MCA's training team. Another coastguard officer is working locally but for the MCA's headquarters team, and one administrator has joined the MCA marine office in Leith. All other staff have decided to leave the service.

The transfer of Forth's area of responsibility to the Aberdeen centre has been successful. The Stornoway, Belfast and Clyde centres are working together to exchange information and knowledge. Throughout November the Clyde centre's current area will be managed by officers at Belfast centre, with their Clyde colleagues shadowing the operations in case there is any need to step in. That experience will give us the assurance we need in readiness to exit the Clyde centre by the end of December.

Working very closely with the PCS union, the MCA have now completed the detailed work to grade the new roles and responsibilities. In short, that means the jobs in the new structures will be at least one civil service grade higher than the roles that currently exist. The PCS union has consequently suspended its industrial action short of a strike, which has been in place since May 2007.

Let me reiterate that the safety of our citizens is the Government's highest priority. We are committed to ensuring that nothing we do in this changed programme will compromise that principle, put seafarers or the public at greater risk, or reduce the quality of service that HM Coastguard so proudly provide.

**Q54 Chair:** Thank you, Minister. The contents of your statement contrast starkly with the information we have just heard from the PCS union, which you named, and people working in the service. They consider that they have not been involved sufficiently; they are extremely concerned not just about what you are trying to achieve but process. Why do you think that should be? You have just given us a statement implying that everything is proceeding in an orderly fashion and people are broadly content. That is in

stark contrast to what we have just been hearing. Why should that be?

**Stephen Hammond:** I would like to offer two potential explanations for that, and perhaps I will ask Sir Alan to give you greater detail of the meetings that have taken place. It seems to me that any organisational change is always unsettling for members of staff who are directly affected. I think it was accepted in the evidence we gave to the Scottish Affairs Select Committee that there has been a differential approach from people directly and the national unions. If you look outside the public consultation process and indeed within it, there have been a significant number of meetings with the MCA and unions throughout the whole process. My predecessor, Mr Penning, met them in July 2010 and 2012, so there has been extensive consultation throughout the whole period. If your Committee would appreciate it, perhaps Sir Alan can detail in much greater depth what the MCA and PCS have done.

**Q55 Chair:** Maybe he can do that in response to specific questions from members. Your predecessor did give a commitment to the House on 22 November last that no centres will close before the robustness of the system was demonstrated. That has not been honoured. Why is that?

**Stephen Hammond:** We are keeping to the original timetable that we set out last November. My predecessor also ensured that there would be no reconfiguring of the service in any way unless it could be proved to be resilient and robust.

**Q56 Chair:** That has not happened, Mr Hammond. The point is that the House was given that commitment because, despite the changes the Department made in response to our initial report—I acknowledge that some significant changes were made—there were still concerns about safety from widespread sections of the House. In response to that, the specific commitment was given by your predecessor. Despite that, it has not been honoured. The Forth has closed; the Clyde centre is due to close; Brixham and Yarmouth are due to close before the new centre is due to be operational. Why has that commitment not been honoured? Is it something you would look at now, if you haven't been aware of it before?

**Stephen Hammond:** I am aware of it, but I am convinced that we have kept to the timetable he set out. When he gave that assurance, he also gave the assurance that it would not happen if there was not resilience and robustness in the system, as I understand it. The operational pairing that has gone on, the transfer of knowledge and the exercises that have happened between November 2011 and 2012 have proved that the closures that have happened have occurred without incident and according to the planned timetable.

**Q57 Kwasi Kwarteng:** Congratulations on your appointment, Minister. I am very pleased to see you here. Obviously, as a new Minister I am sure you have got to grips with your Department. As someone

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coming new into this, what assurances do you have that the new system will be robust and safe?

**Stephen Hammond:** I am sure your Committee is aware that within 18 days of being appointed I had to give evidence to the Scottish Affairs Select Committee. Therefore, I made sure that I had had two briefings of some length and detail with both the chief executive and my officials at the back.

**Q58 Kwasi Kwarteng:** Have you visited any of these coastguard stations?

**Stephen Hammond:** I have not visited the coastguards. I have visited the Marine Accident Investigation Bureau.

**Q59 Kwasi Kwarteng:** Let me ask the question again. Apart from the briefings given to you by civil servants, what assurances do you have that this new system will be robust?

**Stephen Hammond:** If you are asking whether I have personally visited someone or spoken to—

**Q60 Kwasi Kwarteng:** I have already asked you that.

**Stephen Hammond:** I know you have. Have I personally visited any on the ground or spoken to people in those centres? I cannot say that I have, because that would be wrong. However, I have spoken to the chief executive of the service and also our officials. I am sure in my own mind that the procedures they are putting in place are both resilient and would do nothing to counter the statement I made about safety.

**Q61 Kwasi Kwarteng:** Do you have any plans to make these visits, or are you sufficiently satisfied that the thing will be robust from your office?

**Stephen Hammond:** You can be clear that my diary is full of visits going forward. Of course I will be visiting them, and I am happy to make the date of my next visit available to you.

**Q62 Mr Leech:** You said that no centres would close until there was confidence that the remaining service was going to be resilient. If that is the case, what will the MOC add when it opens in 2014?

**Stephen Hammond:** Sorry?

**Mr Leech:** When the Maritime Operations Centre opens, what difference will it make to the service as it stands at the moment? The previous set of witnesses was unable to tell us what was going to change after 2014 when it opened.

**Stephen Hammond:** I can tell you the high level and I will ask Sir Alan to give you the exact details of the various ways in which the communication system between the various co-ordination centres will take place. It will be the centre of national co-ordination; it will provide a strategic framework for co-ordination. It will be able to oversee national emergencies as well. In terms of the day-to-day changes, perhaps Sir Alan would like to comment.

**Q63 Mr Leech:** Before Sir Alan comes in, what would happen if there was a national emergency now?

**Stephen Hammond:** There is a system at the moment. It would be co-ordinated by each individual co-ordination centre.

**Q64 Mr Leech:** That suggests that, if the system works at the moment and a national emergency arises, there are whatever national emergency procedures are in place. I want to get to the bottom of what difference the Maritime Operations Centre will make.

**Stephen Hammond:** At the moment, as I understand it, the difference in terms of one of the systems is that it is progressive in the way the back-up works, whereas this will be able to co-ordinate resources from across the United Kingdom. Moreover, it will be able to co-ordinate with each centre simultaneously, rather than on a progressive basis.

**Q65 Mr Leech:** On the ground, at the different coastguard centres, what differences will they see post-2014? I assume that Sir Alan would be better qualified to answer a question about the day-to-day running of those centres.

**Stephen Hammond:** If you are happy for Sir Alan to answer that one, I think he should.

**Q66 Chair:** Sir Alan, could you tell us exactly what will happen?

**Sir Alan Massey:** Perhaps I may put the wider context first. We are going from a very dispersed and diffuse organisation of 19 stations that are very loosely connected to each other and operate as fighting pairs, as I think we have explained previously. We are now in a transition phase from that scenario, which is not terribly efficient, does not make the best use of manpower and does not allow us to shed or shift workload according to the situations of highest needs. We have to move from that into our vision, which is one of a centrally controlled national network in which all information will be exchanged and accessible to every coastguard on watch at a time.

The advantages of that are self-evident. If you have a Titanic incident off the south-west and something awful off the north-east but the rest of the stations are not engaged—and they tend not to be engaged for most of the time—in future we will be able to use the resources in all of the stations according to need. So, for example, if something happens off the south-west coast and it overpowers the competence and capacity of, say, Falmouth, you could bring to bear the capacity of workers in Shetland, for argument's sake, Humber or whatever. You can also shed unnecessary workload from a station that is busy doing something really important such that another station can pick that up. At the moment we have no capability to do that and no oversight.

**Q67 Mr Leech:** That is a reasonable explanation, but isn't that a justification for not closing stations until that Maritime Operations Centre is up and running?

**Sir Alan Massey:** No, not necessarily. What the Minister undertook to do was not to close a station until he was satisfied that there was robustness and at least as much, if not more, resilience. We have approached this transition in a sectoral way.



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**Q68 Chair:** Sir Alan, that is not happening. I agree that it is the Minister who has to answer that, but it has not happened. Mr Hammond has just said that he is satisfied in his head. I think the words he used were, “It is measured in my own mind that there is resilience”, but “measured in my own mind” is hardly an assessment, is it?

**Stephen Hammond:** I think it was the evidence presented. I do not think I said “measured in my own mind”. I don’t think it is fair to say that that point about robustness and resilience has not been proven. There may have been a different view expressed to you.

**Q69 Kwasi Kwarteng:** How has it been proven?

**Sir Alan Massey:** First, shall we start in the north-east with Forth, which closed on 28 September to have its duties taken over by Aberdeen? We approached this on a sectoral basis. We took Shetland into account as well, so it is the north-east quadrant. We have strengthened the links between Aberdeen and Shetland; we have shifted aērals so that Shetland has more of Aberdeen’s patch and Aberdeen has more capacity to deal with the Forth patch to the south. Aberdeen and Forth were already umbilically linked as a pair—in fact uniquely so because all the communications and data infrastructure for Forth sits in Aberdeen already. On many occasions in the past Aberdeen has demonstrated the capability of taking over Forth’s area of operation with no problems whatsoever. If you take 24 days in August this year, between the 4th and the 28th, on no fewer than 18 occasions Aberdeen either took, or was invited to stand by to take, the whole of Forth’s area to deal with operations that Forth felt was beyond its capacity. This is completely routine.

What we have done to bolster that north-east quadrant is put in additional dial-up capability between Shetland and Aberdeen and flank stations like Humber, Yarmouth, Stornoway and Belfast. That then gives added resilience. That is exactly what the Minister spoke of.

**Q70 Chair:** Sir Alan, can I say that Shetland has told us that the MCA have not fulfilled their undertakings to provide coastguards with ample opportunity to visit and familiarise themselves with the new areas of responsibility? We have heard directly from Shetland today that the process you are describing has not taken place. How do we equate those things?

**Sir Alan Massey:** There will be a difference of view.

**Q71 Chair:** But these are facts, aren’t they?

**Stephen Hammond:** No; it is a view, surely.

**Sir Alan Massey:** I can be quite honest that in closing Forth we have already based our confidence on the fact that for those two stations, because of their particular umbilical linkage and the number of times on which they substitute for each other, the local knowledge is pretty much a given. We have put much more effort in the north-west quadrant. We are now talking about Belfast, Stornoway and Clyde. Stornoway has never been linked with anybody properly but is now being invited to develop a hard link with Belfast to share Clyde’s residual area when

Clyde closes. We have a very structured way of transferring knowledge and building robustness in both operational and people capacity terms.

**Q72 Kwasi Kwarteng:** You have given a very clear indication of where you think the strength of your new system lies. As you say, there are different views with regard to the people who actually work in the service. I appreciate the fact that any system of change is going to have some resistance, but what is and what should be concerning to the Committee is the level of morale within the service.

There are two things. There is an issue with the safety provision once the new scheme has been implemented, and there is also a sense, which I find very worrying, that people on the ground do not know what you are trying to achieve. This seems to be broadly a political problem, in the sense that you have not won people over; you have not won hearts and minds. Going forward, this is something that people who are interested in this area, which is of vital importance, will be very concerned about. What are you doing to try to redress that?

**Stephen Hammond:** Can I just put on the record exactly what has happened? In the period between November 2009 and 2010 PCS officials and staff met nine times to conduct joint workshops on the proposed modernisation programme. Mr Penning, my predecessor, met the PCS on two occasions. The MCA and PCS continued to have ongoing meetings through the whole process at all levels. PCS representatives have been meeting twice monthly since the November announcement. The CEO of the MCA, Sir Alan, signed a pre-redundancy agreement with the PCS in May 2012, and the MCA and the unions are now working together to develop the associated pay, terms and conditions and training for all the new coastguard roles. As I said earlier, on 8 November the PCS announced their decision to suspend their six years of actions short of a strike.

**Q73 Kwasi Kwarteng:** Was this 8 November last year?

**Stephen Hammond:** No; 8 October this year.

**Q74 Kwasi Kwarteng:** You said “November”.

**Stephen Hammond:** I apologise—8 October this year. That sounds to me like a pretty heavy process of formal engagement. There was, as I mentioned in my speech, an opportunity for everybody to get involved in the second round of consultations. There were 27 submissions, of which the majority were from people currently in the coastguard service. Let us be clear: undoubtedly people at individual stations will be disappointed and unhappy, because any type of organisational change is always unsettling for members of staff, but I do not think it is fair to say on that evidence that there has been no consultation.

**Q75 Kwasi Kwarteng:** I have never said that; the word “consultation” has never issued from my lips. What I am talking about is what I see today. I am not talking about the past; I am not talking about the number of times Mr Penning saw the PCS. As of today, there seems to be some uncertainty, and you

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still have a job, if I may say so, in trying to win hearts and minds. I want to know what you are going to do about that going forward. I am not interested in what happened when your predecessor was the Under-Secretary.

**Stephen Hammond:** We have to reassure people about safety in a hearts-and-minds exercise. There has been, since I took office, a reaffirmation of what we are doing in terms of safety. There has been engagement on social networks as well with members of the coastguard directly who wish to communicate what has been happening from the MCA, so there is an ongoing process to engage people.

**Q76 Kwasi Kwarteng:** It seems odd to me, referring to an earlier answer, that, given the level of disquiet, for want of a better phrase, you have not been to a station.

**Stephen Hammond:** Mr Kwarteng, perhaps the level of disquiet being expressed to your Committee is being expressed less by the people themselves than formally through the union process.

**Q77 Kwasi Kwarteng:** So people are happier than we have been led to believe.

**Stephen Hammond:** You may wish to draw that conclusion.

**Q78 Chair:** Is it your view, Minister, that people are happier than the evidence given to us suggests?

**Stephen Hammond:** All I can say is that I have—yes, that is my view.

**Q79 Graham Stringer:** In terms of the reorganisation, can you tell us in terms of the response times whether the new system will be the same as the old one, inferior to it or better?

**Sir Alan Massey:** In my judgment, the response time will be of an order extremely similar to that which we are enjoying today. It would have to be a hypothetical incident of some sort whereby what we are doing now would in some way disturb that response. I am on record as having said that, under certain circumstances, you might have to endure something like a 10-minute delay because of issues, maybe, of gaining very detailed knowledge of a particular location where in the past a station would have been but now won't be there. That was speculative on my part. My judgment at the moment is that it would be indiscernible.

**Q80 Graham Stringer:** I don't quite understand how you put "indiscernible" with the judgment of 10 minutes. Certainly, the first point of agreement we have had between yourself and the unions is that there might be a 10-minute delay. I would be grateful if you could expand on that point. Is it going to be the same, or is there going to be a 10-minute delay?

**Sir Alan Massey:** I just can't tell you, Mr Stringer, what the actual situation will be. The scenarios are so wildly variable. The 10 minutes came from a notion that perhaps in future, rather than an operator absolutely knowing the location of "Bere spit" 20 miles down the road, he might have to telephone somebody to find out.

**Q81 Graham Stringer:** That takes us to the point of local knowledge, doesn't it? You said earlier, when talking about Shetland, that it was a question of view about giving them an ample opportunity to visit and familiarise themselves with their new area of responsibility. It is not a question of view, is it? It is a matter of fact. Have they been able to do that?

**Sir Alan Massey:** Do you mean the Shetland staff?

**Q82 Graham Stringer:** Yes. The statement was made that those staying and having responsibility for areas of which they previously did not have knowledge were told that they were going to be able to visit and familiarise themselves with the new area. Have those visits taken place?

**Sir Alan Massey:** To my knowledge, the opportunity has definitely been given. I will have to check as to whether people have been there.

**Q83 Graham Stringer:** Opportunity and views are not the same as whether they have been or not been. It was a commitment given. Have they or haven't they?

**Sir Alan Massey:** I will have to get back to you, Mr Stringer. What I can say is that over Belfast, Clyde and Stornoway—<sup>1</sup>

**Q84 Graham Stringer:** Can I say that I find your answer particularly unsatisfactory? We are dealing with matters of safety and something that has been the subject of a report from this Committee and other Committees of the House of Commons. You do not know whether a commitment has been given, but you are happy and content to talk about the attitude of staff there. It is surprising.

**Sir Alan Massey:** I will find that out and report back to the Committee on it, but one has to see this in perspective as well. What does one gain from doing it? I don't know. It is not a sine qua non of developing the system.

**Q85 Graham Stringer:** I have no idea either what you gain from it. All I know is that it was a commitment given. Presumably, if it was a commitment given, it was something worth doing.

**Sir Alan Massey:** We have certainly done it on the north-west quadrant. We are doing it right now.

**Q86 Graham Stringer:** But we are talking about Shetland, which was specifically where the commitment was given about.

**Sir Alan Massey:** I don't know. Okay, I did not give a specific commitment to Shetland. Shetland has taken six aerals from Aberdeen, which gives them the north coast of Scotland and part, if not all, of the Orkneys. I cannot tell you to what extent they have taken the opportunity to go and visit and share local knowledge. What I can say is that the area where we have taken a very distinct interest, because of Stornoway's particular position there, is in making sure that knowledge transfer is happening in a very systematic way.

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<sup>1</sup> See ev 42

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**Q87 Graham Stringer:** Minister, this is the first time I have had the opportunity of congratulating you on your appointment. To follow up Mr Kwarteng's questions, you have relied in your answers very heavily on the advice given to you by officials. I do not think it is saying anything unexpected to say that officials at the Department for Transport at the moment have not got a particularly good record over the last six weeks or so for being accurate with their advice. Can you tell us what efforts you have made to check the validity of that advice?

**Stephen Hammond:** First, you refer to one particular part of the Department. As you know, that is undergoing an inquiry. I think it is unfair to blame or cast aspersions on the quality and professionalism of the whole Department. Equally—

**Q88 Graham Stringer:** What I am saying is that it would be sensible, would it not, to be careful?

**Stephen Hammond:** If you would let me finish, equally, it is important that Ministers do not just take advice. Therefore, I have had the opportunity to question the chief executive of the coastguard quite heavily, so I have not just taken a briefing from officials. I have spoken to Sir Alan on several occasions on these particular matters. As to the point he was making to you about Stornoway, it is also true that there are people from Clyde sitting behind people in Belfast; so around the country those visits are taking place.

**Q89 Graham Stringer:** We are talking about local knowledge being very important and the lack of it potentially leading to extra time being taken to provide a service to somebody in need. What has been the attrition rate? How many people with local knowledge have left, or are about to leave, the service?

**Sir Alan Massey:** If we make the assumption that everybody has some local knowledge, out of my watch-keeping staff in maritime rescue co-ordination centres, by the end of this process 159 will have left.

**Q90 Chair:** At the moment what is the position? We are told there is a 15% vacancy rate. Is that true?

**Sir Alan Massey:** 13.8%.

**Q91 Chair:** Do you think that is satisfactory?

**Sir Alan Massey:** No; I have never said that is satisfactory. That is what we have at the moment. We have a very vigorous recruiting campaign in place to try to make up for that. At the moment 13.8% translates to an average staff at an MRCC of 26, so that takes about 3.5 people out of that, which is manageable, but the issue becomes far less one of vacancies. It becomes an issue of illness, absence and that sort of issue on top. I am not comfortable with 13.8%, which is why we are recruiting.

**Q92 Iain Stewart:** Mr Stringer has already covered some of the questions I wanted to ask. I would like us to look further at the practicalities of the transfer of local knowledge from a station that is closing to the station that is taking it over. Our previous witnesses said that it is not just a technical process of acquiring

new maps and charts, but it would take up to a year fully to understand the intricacies of the terrain and what would be the best response to an incident in a particular part of the coastline. Is that figure of up to a year, one that you would recognise in terms of transferring full knowledge?

**Sir Alan Massey:** No. I just do not believe that you can put any credible quantity on this very slippery issue of local knowledge. Perhaps in context, it is quite interesting to note that part of the evidence submitted to this Committee was from one of my coastguards, who, when he joined the service, had 300 coastguard stations around the UK. That reduced to 28 in the 1970s, and we are now seeking to reduce it to 11. In each of those cases exactly the same sort of discussions could have taken place. There is no way of quantifying it. You take a sensible degree of risk; you do the best you can.

All I would say is that we closed three stations—Pentland, Oban and Tyne—around the turn of 2000. We know that coastguard folklore is quite strong. What I will say is that there is not one shred of evidence to suggest that those closures led to any loss of life, any failure to carry out rescues, or any failure of the quality of service. Funnily enough, what we did at the turn of the millennium with those three stations is what we are doing now—best efforts to transfer local knowledge, to get people to understand, to speak to local operations managers for the lifeboats and speak to sector managers and volunteers to try to transfer knowledge—but it is just not quantifiable.

**Q93 Iain Stewart:** I understand it is possible to have the same proficiency of service with a smaller number of stations; I understand that, but it is a transitional process, making sure that you carry people with you and that knowledge is transferred over. On the evidence that we have heard, that is not happening. As a consequence of today, will you at least go away and revisit that process and have another look at how you can achieve better acceptance of the process?

**Sir Alan Massey:** Those who gave evidence are making very respectable points. I cannot gainsay the fact that local knowledge is an issue. It is an issue that led to our adoption of a less radical blueprint for the future coastguard, but we are making best efforts. I think what we are doing is reasonable. We are reviewing our risks all the time. That is what we do as a dynamic organisation. We are also using technology. We have a very advanced database now in place. I accept that technology is not the complete answer, but we have got to look at this holistically. The people who are joining our organisation now deal with databases in a way that I simply don't. That is where we have got to go in the future, and the fact that we have not gone at that pace with technology accounts for the fact that we still have 19 stations. Norway has one; Canada, with six times our coastline, has three. Pretty much every other nation, apart from employment-creating nations, has radically changed its coastguard because it recognises the power of technology and the capacity of individuals to deal with it over and above local knowledge.



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**Q94 Kwasi Kwarteng:** I do not think the Committee has an issue with the evolution of the service in the way you have described. The problem we have is with the fact that the people working on the ground do not seem to have that much confidence in what you are doing. When Mr Stringer referred to the officials at the Department for Transport in that elusive way, we are talking about this very point. There is a suspicion that this is something that has been driven by the centre and by a policy of cuts, which I accept, or that savings have to be made, and there is not sufficient engagement with what is going on on the ground. The evolution itself is not the problem; it is the way in which it is being done. Clearly, there is a problem with trying to win hearts and minds and win people over. I want to get some more comfort, if you like, first, that you realise there is a problem, and, secondly, to understand what you are going to do to solve it.

**Stephen Hammond:** In terms of the problem you have just outlined, if we go back to the closure of Forth and you look at the fact that there were no compulsory redundancies, there was an engagement process the whole way through with people there. If, Mr Kwarteng, you are clearly not satisfied with what has gone on and you clearly perceive there to be a major problem, I will go back and undertake to review across the country where the engagement is taking place and write to the Chairman of the Committee.

**Q95 Kwasi Kwarteng:** We can only see what we see and hear what we hear in this Committee. I am just relaying to you my impression of what we have seen and heard. You said to me earlier that people out there are much happier than the people giving us evidence.

**Stephen Hammond:** What I said is that it is unsurprising that people associated with specific stations are unhappy, but if you look at how the organisation has engaged, and is continuing to engage, with its staff and the unions, I am suggesting that perhaps the situation is not quite as drastic as you are portraying. But I am giving you the undertaking that after today I will go back, personally review it and write to the Chairman of the Committee.<sup>2</sup>

**Chair:** Minister, it is good that you have given such an undertaking. Clearly, at the end of our sessions we will produce a report and give our views, but it is of some concern that there is such a disparity between what I call the official version of events, where everything is smooth and basically agreed, and what we are actually hearing. The Committee will have to battle with that.

**Q96 Julie Hilling:** Can I just check one thing as well? You talked about the comparison with other countries and the number of coastguard stations they have and so on, but am I correct in saying you said earlier that we have got the busiest shipping lanes in the world around the UK?

**Chair:** Who would like to answer that one?

**Stephen Hammond:** I do not think either of us has said that.

**Sir Alan Massey:** It is true.

**Stephen Hammond:** It is true. I do not think I ever said it today.

**Q97 Julie Hilling:** So, when we are comparing internationally, we have to take into account that we have got the busiest shipping lanes around compared with the number of coastguard stations. Is that true?

**Sir Alan Massey:** Yes, but a classic example is that the busiest area is the Dover strait. Our friends across the water have far fewer stations than we do—the French, for example—and they share exactly the same waters, so the penny has dropped about technology for them.

**Q98 Julie Hilling:** Can I follow up just a little bit around technology? We have heard already from Shetland that their radio signals, telephones, or whatever—their communication signals—are not good at the moment. What is happening in terms of that upgrade of communication across? It was all part of this new world, but it seems to me that we are closing down some of the old world before we have got the technology for the new world. Where are you up to with the technology that means people will be able to communicate with each other?

**Sir Alan Massey:** In terms of Shetland, there is definitely a vulnerability in the fixed link that connects mainland Scotland with Shetland, which is why BT are about to invest millions in a fibre optic link on the seabed. But it was as a result of our going out to Shetland and Stornoway and getting right to the bottom of these issues that we decided in the end, because of the relative vulnerability of their communications trunks to the mainland, that those two islands should retain their coastguard stations so that, if they lose the link, at least you have a headquarters that can co-ordinate incidents around those areas.

In terms of what we are doing, I spoke about the extra dial-up links that Shetland now has. Shetland, as well as talking to Aberdeen, is able to be helped by flank stations to the left, so effectively Belfast and Stornoway when necessary, and also down to Aberdeen and then Yarmouth and Humber. They have got a lot more resilience built in. If, for example, they lose some capability or become overwhelmed, then others can help in a way they were not able to do in the past.

We have increased to four the number of 999 calls that can be taken concurrently in Shetland, again to build up their resilience for exactly this scenario, and on the west coast and north-west we have upgraded the integrated coastguard communication system—ICCS—such that there are better operator displays and capacity to show more radio transmissions on the screen. Again, they have got extra dial-up links to flank stations, so Liverpool and Holyhead can now dial in, if necessary, to Belfast or Stornoway when Clyde closes. We have done quite a bit of work even in advance of the overall MOC national network to make sure that we have got robustness and resilience so that we do not take risk when we close stations. That has been behind it.

**Q99 Julie Hilling:** Categorically, that is all in place now.

**Sir Alan Massey:** It is. As I understand it, the last upgrades have been done. We have been spending

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<sup>2</sup> See ev 42

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every Monday and Thursday of this month with Clyde going quiet, and have been allowing Belfast and Stornoway to run operations there, just to make sure that works and people grow local knowledge. From 20 November to 18 December Clyde will go completely quiet, with its watch manned up but not doing anything—just monitoring what is going on—with Belfast and Stornoway taking over the area, as they will in the future. That is pretty robust testing and trialling. If we get any problems we will sort them out, but the expectation is that by the end of December it will be safe to close Clyde because we will have built the resilience and tested it.

**Q100 Julie Hilling:** I know there have been quite a lot of questions about staff. One of the witness statements we got in was saying: “As yet there is no information on options for staff. Nearly two years into the programme there is no information on relocation or assessment for roles suitable for staff. There has been no attempt to retain experienced staff. There appears to be no plan to encourage staff to stay” with the service.

You have already said that there is now a 13.8% vacancy of staff, but you are also saying that the service is more resilient at the moment. I struggle to see how it can be the case that it is more resilient. What are you doing to prevent the flight of staff with the knowledge, which was something that we certainly raised in our first inquiry? We were concerned about knowledge going, and what we are being told is that that knowledge is going. What are you doing to retain that and inform staff now—because you have said you have agreed new structures—to enable them to stay within the service? How are you making sure that you will have a staff going forward?

**Sir Alan Massey:** That is very clear.

**Stephen Hammond:** As I said in my statement, there has been a complete reassessment and regrading of the whole structure. Therefore, the whole structure should mean that, because of the new arrangements, these are likely to be potentially more rewarding jobs with additional responsibilities. Therefore, the detailed work to grade the new roles is, I understand, now complete, and everybody is looking to be at a civil service grade higher than the previous roles to reflect that. At one level it is accepting that this is not just asking staff to move across; it is accepting there are new roles and responsibilities. There has been quite detailed work in combination and consultation with the unions to ensure that the new grades it offers reflect those responsibilities.

**Sir Alan Massey:** If I may just go back to the question of morale, which I think lies at the root of this, I would be the first to agree that morale could be better in the service. The Minister has already explained that, against the background of change, people are going to be unsettled and in many cases disaffected, particularly if their own station is closing and they have no option to move, for whatever reason.

The biggest concern that I and they have had, I believe, is the sheer uncertainty that has been over their heads for almost two years since we announced that change would happen. It has taken us up to this

point, for reasons which are totally explicable but nevertheless frustrating, to be able to agree a job evaluation system within the civil service constraints on which we can now go public. It has taken a lot of hard work by a lot of very hard-working people, and the unions, to get us to this state, where we have been able to announce, “Yes, by and large, the jobs you will apply for in the future coastguard will take you probably one grade higher than you would have been.” We are therefore now living up to the promise that was made, including by Ministers, to improve pay and conditions as well as infrastructure, because in my view, unless you have a motivated and dedicated work force that has come with you, all the tea and infrastructure in China is not going to help you unless those things are joined up.

**Q101 Chair:** What we are hearing is that people are leaving the service and taking their expertise with them for better paid jobs. Are you aware of that? Doesn’t that give you some concern?

**Sir Alan Massey:** Yes, Madam Chair, very much so, which is why we have been so eager to get to the stage where we can finally say, “This is what the pay structure will broadly look like.” We have now got to work very closely with the union to talk about the allowances, shift hours and all the rest of it, but fundamentally we have crossed a huge Rubicon here. It is clearly for that reason that the PCS union has seen fit to suspend its industrial action, because we have now not only talked about it but delivered something.

**Q102 Julie Hilling:** So do all staff now know what their terms and conditions are? For my information—because I have no idea what civil service pay rates are—what does that actually mean in terms of basic pay and where they were and where they will now be?

**Sir Alan Massey:** The lowest pay grade is administrative assistant.

**Q103 Chair:** Could you perhaps send us that information?

**Sir Alan Massey:** Yes.

**Chair:** We would like to know that.

**Q104 Julie Hilling:** Do all the staff now know that this is the situation? You have already closed a station. They are all closing. People are making decisions about their future. Do they now know what their future could be?

**Sir Alan Massey:** They certainly know in terms of basic pay what the rates will be for the jobs that they will apply for. Of course, because we are downsizing, there is not 100% guarantee of jobs for everybody, but they know that situation. What they do not yet know in truth is what the shift allowances and relocation packages will be and all of those slightly more detailed issues that we still have to thrash out with the PCS.

**Q105 Chair:** But isn’t the issue here that people are leaving and taking their expertise with them?

**Sir Alan Massey:** Yes.

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**Q106 Chair:** The retention of that expertise was a basic part of the case that you put to us before. I do not detect any sense of urgency from you about addressing this.

**Sir Alan Massey:** There is a huge sense of urgency. It is just that process has been so difficult.

**Q107 Kwasi Kwarteng:** On a related point, to paraphrase your words, you said a cloud of uncertainty was hanging over it for the last two years. Do you think that was necessary, looking back?

**Sir Alan Massey:** Looking back, it was unavoidable. It is regrettable. People will take bad news and good news on the chin, but uncertainty really eats away at people's will to work for you. I am completely sold on that. It has been frustrating. We have put lots of dates roughly in the sand to say this is going to happen but we have been delayed.

**Q108 Kwasi Kwarteng:** Would I be right in suggesting that the uncertainty led to the high level of 13.8% that you mentioned? Do you think it was connected with that?

**Sir Alan Massey:** I think it is inevitable that there is some connection. If you know that jobs are being lost and potentially yours as well, and see a fleeting opportunity for something going by, even though it is not something you necessarily want to do for life, the temptation is to grab it. We have got evidence of that at places like—

**Q109 Kwasi Kwarteng:** To repeat the Chair's question in a different way, what are you going to do about it? The attrition rate and uncertainty is a serious problem. Sitting where we are today, what can we do immediately to make this situation better?

**Stephen Hammond:** As Sir Alan has said, there is now some certainty. With all the ongoing closures, there will be a certainty of the new roles going forward. There is a process of negotiation, which I am clear is ongoing—it is not stop, start—on shift allowances and conditions. As Sir Alan has said, anyone now who is in a centre that will close will know what their basic rate will be.

**Q110 Kwasi Kwarteng:** When will they know? That is fair game. At what point do you think this situation will be resolved?

**Stephen Hammond:** They know now what their basic rate will be for the job they are applying for, and, as and when the negotiations are concluded with the unions, they will know what the shift allowances and other arrangements are.

**Q111 Kwasi Kwarteng:** Do you have in mind a time frame as to when you think all this will be resolved in terms of the cloud of uncertainty you described that prevailed?

**Sir Alan Massey:** Yes, I do, and I am ever hopeful that this will be clear before the end of the year.

**Q112 Mr Leech:** Can I ask the Minister how the vacancy rates compare with other agencies related to the Department for Transport?

**Stephen Hammond:** Mr Leech, I will have to write to you on that question. I simply don't have that information.

**Q113 Mr Leech:** Perhaps Sir Alan would know the difference between the vacancy rate now and before the proposed change in the service.

**Sir Alan Massey:** What I can give you is a comparative turnover rate, if that is helpful, between 2010 and 2011.

**Q114 Mr Leech:** I am just interested to know what the vacancy rate was before the whole process started compared with the vacancy rate now.

**Stephen Hammond:** I will make sure that is included in my answer to you.<sup>3</sup>

**Q115 Mr Leech:** Can I move on to one other area? Since the contract on ETVs ended at the end of last year, what provision is now available for emergency towing vessels?

**Stephen Hammond:** It is for the shipping industry to make its own arrangements for towage and salvage using the commercial tug market. These arrangements are working well in the Dover strait and the Southwest Approaches. Scotland Office Ministers have led discussions exploring additional arrangements for the waters around the Northern and Western Isles, and the Government have agreed to continue the provision of a single emergency tug stationed in Orkney to provide capability in those areas.

**Q116 Mr Leech:** Am I right in thinking that that is in place until 2015?

**Stephen Hammond:** You are.

**Q117 Mr Leech:** It was suggested as part of the original consultation that there would not be a commercial alternative in parts of Scotland. If there is still no commercial alternative by 2015, will that contract remain in place?

**Stephen Hammond:** There would be a discussion at the time to see whether a commercial alternative was in place, and there is potential for the Secretary of State to negotiate with his counterparties in Scotland and us at that stage.

**Q118 Mr Leech:** Since the end of the MIRG, what provision is there for support from fire services to help deal with fires on board ships?

**Stephen Hammond:** As you are probably aware, the service was fairly rarely used, but there is a continuing evaluation by the fire and rescue strategic resilience board about their consideration of fire-fighting capabilities on ships. Every ship has its own fire-fighting capability as a necessity. There is provision, if necessary, for rescue services, particularly Kent fire and rescue, to make their fire-fighting at sea resources available as and when they might be required.

**Q119 Mr Leech:** Our previous witnesses suggested that there had been one case in recent times—forgive me, I can't remember the name of the vessel—where,

<sup>3</sup> See ev 42

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had there been a MIRC available, the situation may have had a different outcome and there may possibly not have been a fatality. Is that your understanding of that particular incident?

**Sir Alan Massey:** I don't know which incident you are referring to, Mr Leech.

**Q120 Chair:** Are you aware of any problem of that nature where there was a fatality? It is not yet confirmed exactly whether that could have been avoided or not.

**Sir Alan Massey:** I am aware of three fatalities on board a ship called MV Flaminia, which caught fire off the Southwest Approaches this July, three months ago.

**Stephen Hammond:** It was 700 nautical miles out at sea, and it was brought in by a commercial tug and taken to Germany.

**Sir Alan Massey:** It was beyond helicopter range.

**Stephen Hammond:** Is that the case you are referring to?

**Q121 Mr Leech:** I cannot actually remember the name of the vessel.

**Stephen Hammond:** The Flaminia is quite a different case from that.

**Q122 Chair:** There was also an incident with a laden cargo vessel called Flinterspirit. Do you know about that one?

**Sir Alan Massey:** Yes; that was up in the north-west.

**Q123 Chair:** Is that something that causes you any concern?

**Sir Alan Massey:** No.

**Q124 Chair:** You have mentioned dealings with fire authorities. Minister, when we looked at the specialist group to deal with fires we did not accept that the existing system wasn't doing any work, but that is another issue. But you are now talking to the Chief Fire Officers Association, so you accept that you do in fact need additional support outside the specialist crews trained to deal with fire-fighting. It is chemicals as well as fires; it's not just fires.

**Stephen Hammond:** Indeed. The Chief Fire Officers Association members and their individual fire rescue

authorities liaise, if necessary. If they think that the capability on board a ship is not adequate and an incident required it, that capability is still available.

**Q125 Chair:** So you are in discussion with them about it.

**Stephen Hammond:** My understanding is that that discussion is still ongoing.

**Sir Alan Massey:** We are still in discussion with the Chief Fire Officers Association basically to understand what it is that they might wish to offer from their own resources so that we can take that into account when we deal with an incident.

**Q126 Chair:** Can you tell us if the Government are still trying to find a commercial replacement for the ETV in the far north of Scotland?

**Stephen Hammond:** Yes, that is my understanding, which I think was Mr Leech's question.

**Q127 Chair:** Are you still seeking to do that?

**Stephen Hammond:** Yes. The Government have agreed to fund the ETV for Scotland until March 2015. Thereafter, we would hope that the normal commercial arrangements would be in place.

**Q128 Chair:** Are you actively trying to achieve that? Is this a hope or something you are trying to achieve?

**Stephen Hammond:** The Government are trying to achieve it.

**Q129 Chair:** You are working on that. Sir Alan, does the agency have a duty of care for leisure craft?

**Sir Alan Massey:** Under a couple of conventions we do have a statutory duty to save life at sea, and I don't think it differentiates between leisure and commercial craft.

**Q130 Chair:** So you would be concerned as much about leisure craft as commercial craft.

**Sir Alan Massey:** Absolutely; we do not make any differentiation.

**Chair:** Thank you very much, gentlemen, for coming and answering our questions.



# Written evidence

## Written evidence from Liverpool Coastguard PCS Union members (CFU 08)

### SUMMARY

This is evidence from operational coastguards who have grave concerns over the future coastguard (FCG) plan, its authors and the subsequent actions since the announcement of implementation. There continues to be little regard by the MCA management for the coast using public and maritime organisations. Despite various “tinkering” the future coastguard plan still appears to have no substantial form. If the plan had a sound technical and operational base then progress would be unimpeded. Now, with the first station due to close this month, it being nearly two years since the announcement of a change to HM Coastguard, the staff are none the wiser as to how the new system will work. Not to mention the empty shell of the much trumpeted Marine Operations Centre that Mr. Penning assured everybody would be up and running before any stations closed.

This plan has been driven by a combination of cost cutting measures and political decision making in favour of down grading operation room staff at all costs.

The MCA management still refuses to name the people responsible for devising the plan. If the plan is the best way forward and will enhance the MCA as claimed, then, the authors should be rightfully proud of their efforts and be in the vanguard of the team showing us the way. Instead the project is shrouded in secrecy and rumours abound of management in fighting. The reasons for our conclusions are detailed below.

#### 1. Level of service assessment

There has been no assessment of the level of service each MRCC currently provides. Nor have there been audits or reviews of service levels. How can the MCA assess the current levels? How can the Minister state that the same level of service will be retained<sup>1</sup> if there is no assigned level to begin with? The MCA has refused to conduct a risk assessment on the specific sites that are due for closure, therefore, how can they mitigate any risks? FIOA 1057 states this is being done by basic targets (Annex F)

#### 2. Change

2.1 The CEO says that there has been “no change to the CG in 40 years”. This is incorrect. There have been major changes in operations room working at least every 10 years. Liverpool MRCC has recently had an upgrade of systems and databases in March 2014 so how can we be accused of not changing? Coastguard Operations Room staff have always been trained to carry out SAR missions of any description with or without technology. Relying only on technology is not the safe option.

2.2 Mr. Penning has stated that staff at Liverpool told him that “there should be nine stations”. The Minister may not be aware that the person who made this statement is a senior manager and did not in any way reflect the feelings of the operational staff.

2.3 Drivers for change—there are no clear and defined reasons for change. The change to the Coastguard has been put to Government via the fiscal policy and the spending review. It does not enhance public or maritime safety. Quite the opposite, the new system, such as it is will, in the words of the Chief Executive, “Increase response time by up to ten minutes” “This is, however,” he continues “an acceptable risk”. In our view, any system that increases the risk to the coast user is unacceptable. We are quite sure the coast user would second our view should he be aware of it.

#### 3. Pairing

Liverpool has not undertaken “pairing” with Holyhead since the trials in 2005 when a serious technical flaw was found. The flaw has been rectified at the expense of the useful and practical Radio Direction Finding Equipment.

Since the announcement of closures in November 2011, there has not been any “pairing” undertaken between Liverpool and Holyhead. During the early part of 2012 staff at Holyhead were “instructed” by a senior manager to learn Liverpool’s area of operation as they would be required to “take the area over during the Summer”. This, they were told, would be necessary as “most of the staff at Liverpool would be leaving.” The management’s assertions of staff departures did not materialise and both Holyhead and Liverpool remained, as always, understaffed.

#### 4. MOC testing (broken promise)

The MOC was transferred in July 2012 to the MCA. The Shipping Minister, Mr. Penning promised that no MRCC would close before the MOC was set up, tested and proved to be working properly.<sup>2</sup> The same promise was made by the Future Coastguard (FCG) Programme Director James Findlay on the 8 February

<sup>1</sup> Citation: HC Deb, 13 March 2012, c213W, Citation: HC Deb, 15 December 2011, c845W.

<sup>2</sup> Citation: HC Deb, 22 November 2011, c166.



2012, at the PSC SEC Union meeting at the MOC. This is not the case. The MOC will apparently not now be operational until March 2014. Clyde, Forth, Yarmouth and Brixham are all due to close before that time.

#### 5. *Planning the workforce*

As yet there is no information on options for staff. Nearly two years into the programme and there is no information on relocation or assessment for roles suitable for staff. There has been no attempt to retain experienced staff. There appears to be no plan to encourage staff to stay with the MCA.

#### 6. *Vernacular Database update*

Inexperienced people are updating a system which will be used to replace our staff. There has been no supervision and no verification that the information is correct. Line managers have been omitted from the process. The co-ordinator of this process has stated that he has no idea how many man hours individuals have used to update the system. The database is web-based with no back up offline version and would need the operator to have general local knowledge of an area before they used it. Senior managers are assuming they can denigrate the status, training and experience of watch officers and replace it all with technology.

#### 7. *RNLI Comments*

The RNLI management told local lifeboat stations not to comment regarding the changes in the Coastguard. However, a senior RNLI manager has made defamatory comments about operations room staff in a letter promoting the MCA's plan to members of the public (Annex A). The RNLI is a very influential charity (Mr. Penning has recently boasted its worldwide branding).<sup>3</sup> If this is the RNLI response to the public, what, we wonder, are they saying to people of influence? Is this not an abuse of their position? Should the RNLI not be honest and tell all what their position is.

#### 8. *Costs*

Liverpool staff proposed a MOC situated at the Liverpool MRCC site for less than £720k (excluding VAT) and no yearly rent. The MCA is paying £360k in rent alone per year (Annex D). Why would they choose to move staff from a lower cost of living area to a more expensive part of the country during a recession when they want a National structure and cut costs? The MCA did not send a representative to look at the detailed Liverpool proposal by architects and surveyors even after being asked, which, would have only have cost the equivalent of two years rent of Fareham MOC.

#### 9. *Staff meetings and Senior Staff Movements*

Staff at Liverpool remain unconvinced of the plans viability overall and are completely at a loss to understand why the Liverpool station should be closed when it fulfils all the criteria asked for. Again, two years into the project, no satisfactory explanation has been given. No staff meetings have been arranged. No attempt by senior management to seriously engage with disaffected staff has been made. The opposite seems to be happening. Senior staff have left the project and senior staff appear even more distant than at the beginning. Despite several requests the staff at Liverpool have not had an official staff meeting since 24 September 2009.

#### 10. *Secrecy and lies*

MCA management has called for volunteers to attempt "projects" concerning the FCG plan. However, no information concerning the progress or outcome or even the titles of the "projects" is forthcoming. As from the start all is shrouded in secrecy. This inevitably gives rise to worrying rumour and misinformation further destabilising the Agency. The only "project" that has been made public was a request for feedback on what Coastguards should be called and what epaulettes they should wear! Staff at various stations are being fed misinformation. For example, Clyde MRCC staff have been told that Liverpool MRCC staff will "help out Belfast MRCC" when Belfast assumes responsibility for Clyde's area of operation. This is untrue.

#### 11. *Isle of Man liaison removed*

Liverpool is the co-ordination station for maritime rescues for the Isle of Man, however, since December 2010, when the consultation was first published, there has been no request from the IOM for liaison visits to MRCC Liverpool. Instead HQ staff (Rod Johnson and Keith Oliver) have made several visits to discuss FCG projects without keeping Liverpool MRCC updated. There has been no attempt to engage Liverpool in the process. Liverpool is the only UK Coastguard Station that deals, on a daily basis with a Marine Operations Centre. Staff at Liverpool have a unique knowledge of MOC working. The strengths and failings, the pitfalls and dangerous assumptions, problems of doglegs created during incident working. However, not once during the process has the MCA management thought to ask Liverpool for information or advice.

<sup>3</sup> Citation: HC Deb, 22 November 2011, c174.

#### 12. *Number of staff leaving and overtime*

Over the past 12 months four experienced watch officers have left to find alternative jobs, this puts pressure on other staff and puts the staff levels at below risk assessed levels. Experienced staff are being frightened out of their jobs as their stations are closing meaning they are either not replaced or the MCA is incurring costs for training short contract staff. This is short-sighted and a waste of resources and tax payers money.

#### 13. *JEGS*

Why is it taking so long? If the staff are going to be better remunerated<sup>4</sup> and undertake more work and more responsibility, why have we not yet (nearly two years into the process) been told of the new pay arrangements?

#### 14. *How is it going to work?*

14.1 In 2011 there was a “supporting document” stating how the FCG Service will work. Apparently, the MOC will take over co-ordination from a coastal MRSC if an incident becomes major. However, no one can explain how this will work. We are given examples which make no sense and highlight the complete lack of ops room experience and understanding of incident working. VHF aerals are an open system and conflict with each other. It takes a practiced and experienced operator with a proper understanding of the area and sufficient local knowledge to manipulate the system successfully. Even after six years Liverpool still have aerial difficulties which make it extremely difficult to understand a call.

14.2 The latest rumour is that the MOC will now not be used in this manner but instead take phone calls concerning weather enquiries, routine information and general support. This is not what was in the original plan put forward as a reason to get permission for this project. This will also provide a two tier service of experienced SAR workers on the Coast and call handlers in Southampton. The MOC will have 23 people on watch and the coastal stations four, so what will 23 people be doing if the four people are doing all the work?

Once again, rumour or fact?

#### 15. *Handing over of jobs*

As per 14. The MCA imply that the MOC will take over jobs if they become “major”. FV Aquila High Sheriffs court report 19 March 2012 recommended that this is the most crucial time of an incident and is when mistakes are likely to be made.<sup>5</sup> Since then the MCA has not provided risk assessment training or issued guidance to reflect the Coroners findings.

#### 16. *Language*

The MCA stated that there was a reason to keep Welsh MRCC's due to pronouncing Welsh names and familiarity of the Welsh language.<sup>6</sup> There have been no assessments to see if the staff at those welsh MRCCs can converse in a suitable manner with welsh casualties nor to see the staff at Liverpool in some way lacking in this respect. Liverpool cover Lancashire, Cumbria, Dumfries and Galloway, part of North Wales and the Isle of Man. There are numerous accents, dialects and local spellings (Manx and Scottish). If it is applicable to Welsh then it should also be applicable to Cumbrians, Manx and Scottish people? In fact, the ONLY Welsh MRCC that is staffed wholly by Welsh nationals is Swansea which is closing!?

Liverpool deals with cocklers' who are often migrant workers with little or no English. We use an interpreter service, but, according to the MCA's argument regarding Welsh, we should have Gaelic speakers and Manx speakers on staff. (Annex B) The MCA do not specifically recruit Welsh speakers. If they have any it is by chance rather than design.

#### 17. *Watch risk assessments and strike cover*

The MCA require all stations to do a watch risk assessment as to the level of cover required for specific dates etc. The MCA did not adhere to their risk assessment levels during strikes, leaving one to two people to cover the whole Irish Sea. When MP Maria Eagle questioned this, Minister Mike Penning said the Union had said the staff will come in to cover an incident. This was not the case and obvious arrogance and disregard for safety by the MCA management.

#### 18. *Consultants*

FOIA 1015 (annex C) states no fees where paid for consultants for the FCG programme. The MCA also say in FOIA 1055 that no consultants were used. The Irish Coastguard was reviewed in 2011 in the “value for money” review via an independent consultant (Chris Fisher—Fisher and Associates). Maybe an external review would have been prudent in such a radical change?

<sup>4</sup> Mike Penning HC Deb, 22 November 2011, c165.

<sup>5</sup> (Section 6.1.e.ii (<http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/opinions/2012FAI22.html>).

<sup>6</sup> Citation: HC Deb, 22 November 2011, c161.

### 19. *Personal Development Planning*

The staff at Liverpool remain unconvinced and have no confidence in the Future CG programme or Managers trying to implement it. The Management have now doctored the civil service PDP process to try to make the staff help them implement the programme. Their job profile description has been changed and their objectives to achieve over the next year have been chosen for them without discussion. These are not SMARTA (agreed) objectives. This does not adhere to the staff handbook. This is blackmailing the staff to comply with their demands. If they do not they will not receive their performance bonus next year as they will not have met the objectives. The staff at Liverpool would rather go without than be bullied into helping them destroy the Coastguard.

### 20. *Other services being cut*

The risk assessments have not been done for individual stations that are closing. These stations are busier than ones that are remaining open. Other services that reduce our workload are being cut, for example, Blackpool Lifeguard service and Wirral beach patrols are being cut back and are taking longer to react to jobs (if they can get there at all) and are putting more burden on the volunteer service of the CG Rescue teams, RNLI and independent rescue teams. Eg an incident with a man face down in the water at South Shore, the RNLI and CRT got there before the local lifeguards as they are stretched too thin from cut backs. This should be taken into account for any assessments of CG closures. The quick deployment of the Coastguard personnel meant the man survived.

### 21. *New coastal support*

Under the new system they expect to employ 1 new coastal support member to the team of 4 that currently run the district from Merseyside to Dumfries and Galloway. This does not adequately replace 21 staff who know that district after years of experience. The district is too big for five people (some with very little experience). They cannot be expected to handle all the incidents without them becoming burnt out or stressed. This is not efficient use of staff. By reducing the experienced staff and making them redundant taxpayers money is being wasted.

Considering the MCA are relying on the volunteer Coastguard rescue officers they only allow them paid training of four hours per year to learn their area, one hour every three months!

### 22. *MCA Conference*

The MCA are planning a conference in December 2012 to engage with 200 people who are "positive" therefore this again is a way for the MCA to alienate the people who are not part of their group. Just because we are looking out for the safety of people, like public servants should, doesn't mean that we should be excluded or pushed out of own agency! A conference at an expensive hotel in Daventry (De Vere) when coastguards are being made redundant is not cost effective, disrespectful and insulting.

### 23. *Local knowledge*

In 2010 MRCC Liverpool dealt with 1,803 incidents, of which 530 originated via the 999 system (29.4% of overall). Only 131 incidents (7% overall) had any sort of positional information (co-ordinates of a mobile phone cell tower and error or postal address of a landline). 93% of incidents had no electronic assistance in phone call positions, meaning the emphasis was on the local operator to understand the location. Using databases or contact points to ascertain emergency locations will increase response times potentially putting more lives at risk.

### 24. *CEO claims that only 30 CG needed*

The CEO has stated that he does not need 70 CG on "watch" on a January night watch and only needs 30. This comment is flawed and unsubstantiated. The MCA has not undertaken qualitative analysis of incidents, only quantitative which doesn't differentiate between a child injured on the beach and a major incident like "Chinese cockle pickers". In the Liverpool CG area the major incidents have been in the winter months. Again no one has asked about incidents in Liverpool's area. If the CEO is concerned about the number of people not being "challenged by a workload" then why is he not closing the quiet stations? However, conversely the MCA has chosen to close the busier stations?

### 25. *MOC working and dog-legs*

As previously stated Liverpool MRCC works daily with the IOM MOC. So staff have experience of MOC working. Doglegs and delays will occur. The CEO admitted that he expects a "delay of 10 minutes" to BBC Cornwall interviewer. By slowing down the process, relying on databases and on call officers, the response times will increase. Liverpool staff are aware of this as they already work a version of the system. Again, no one has asked how the system works or the benefits/disadvantages of this arrangement. Why not? It shows, once again a lack of understanding of operation room working by senior management. Ten minutes is a long

time for a person who is in the water drowning. If rescue services are delayed by 10 minutes then members of the public will put themselves at risk trying to save them.

## 26. Drownings

Point 25 will increase the number of drownings. Presently there are approximately 150 deaths by drowning on the coast every year. In the Summer four people will drown every week (Annex E). By increasing the response time it will increase the number of deaths. If this plan is implemented then someone should take responsibility for this.

## 27. Warship analogy

The CEO (being a Second Sea Lord) tells us that he is taking the MCA on a passage like “taking a new warship to sea. There will be problems but my men will batten out the problems on sea trials”. The Coastguard is not a new warship, we don’t have the capacity to launch it and fix it as we go along. It is an emergency service who provides assistance to people at sea. It should be right before it launches. We can not understand why assessments and in-depth investigations have not been done about current workloads and why proper trials and testing of any new systems not carried out.

## 28. Business plan 2012 to 2016

The MCA Business plan page 24 TO1—Modernising of HMCG states that the MOC will be ready for operation by March 2014. That new roles assigned by Mar 2013 and completed systems realigned to new structures and delivering services to the public by 2016. This seems to be moving the timescales forward by a year?

## 29. Geographical, Situational and Resource knowledge

Also known as Local Understanding. Local knowledge is much more than knowing that there is a river or gully between the shore and the person in trouble. It is about knowing where they are, who to send, understanding the severity of the situation, geography, aerial awareness and how best to deal with the situation. Relationships are established and cemented over years of exposure and interactions. The “team” which include the volunteer coastal teams, lifeboats and operations room staff have a relationship of trust and respect. This is built up with experience and no equipment can ever replace this as it is a dynamic process. Databases can assist for verification but they are not a replacement for operationally knowledgeable coastguards.

## 30. MCA Management apathy about service to the public

MRCC Liverpool had a problem with routine telephone lines which affected our management of life saving incidents on a Bank Holiday weekend. This problem needed authorisation by a senior staff member for an engineer to attend, but the Duty Director “did not have the authority” to authorise an upgrade to their service agreement (which doesn’t cover Bank Holiday weekends!). This was not authorised until the next day (15 hours after the fault was raised). The staff at Liverpool were merely asked to monitor the situation and were left dumbfounded by the complete lack of understanding of the situation by senior management. Authority was not sought for a problem which affected 80% of incoming calls. It wasn’t fixed until 20 hours after the fault was notified to Managers. Again, a lack of understanding and experience of ops room working by senior management and directors led to a state of affairs where £300 for a BT package upgrade to allow an engineer to resolve the problem was withheld. In contrast £1,000 per day is being spent on rent for an empty MOC in Fareham.

## Annex A

LETTER FROM HUGH FOGARTY RNLI JULY 2012 TO MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC WHO HAS GIVEN HIS PERMISSION TO USE THIS EXERT

“Local knowledge is, in a few cases, built up over long periods by long serving Coastguard officers if they do not move between MRCCs, and the level of it will decline as one moves further away from the MRCC. In reality, Local Knowledge resides with Lifeboat crew and HMCG Coast Rescue Service volunteers and this is fed into the MRCC during the course of incidents. Very few if any Coastguard Watch Officers have true local knowledge of their operating areas. By retaining some of the “Celtic” MRCCs the revised proposals do address issues of language and pronunciation. Thank you for your observations and for your on-going support for the RNLI and our volunteers.

Regards Hugh F J Fogarty Head of Fleet Operations RNLI Headquarters”

EMAIL FROM HUGH FOGARTY RNLI TO LIVERPOOL CAMPAIGN GROUP IN JULY 2011

“The RNLI did not “recommend” any particular coastguard stations in the original consultation. Our specific responses were in response to direct questions posed: ie—given a choice of either “A” or “B” which would

you choose and why. We also reflected concerns from our Welsh lifeboat stations about the implications of the loss the ability to communicate in the Welsh language.”

## Annex B

### RESPONSE FROM MCA FOIA REQUEST

If the MCA does not hold records of incidents involving the use of the Welsh language, please explain why, in respect of the decision to close the MRCC at Liverpool and retain the MRCC at Holyhead the Maritime & Coastguard Agency state:

“We decided to keep Holyhead given the strong concerns raised in the first consultation over the risk of a loss of familiarity with the Welsh language and Welsh place names hampering the timely responses to incidents”.

### *Freedom of Information Act 2000: Request for Information, Reference F0001014*

In respect of the use of the Welsh language during distress calls the Maritime and Coastguard Agency does not hold the information you have requested as HM Coastguard does not record which language was used by a caller during a distress call.

In respect if the tasking of RNLI Lifeboats I can advise that English is used as it is the International language for all Search and Rescue missions; Standard Marine Communications Phrases are used.

## Annex C

### *Freedom of Information Act 2000: Request for Information, Reference F0001015*

To date there has been no spend on consultancy fees for the modernisation of HM Coastguard.

### *Freedom of Information request 1055*

I can advise that no consultants were used on the Future Coastguard Programme in the five years running up to December 2010.

## Annex D

### *FOIA 2000—Reference 1056*

Under the terms of the memorandum of terms of occupation (MOTO) MCA's occupancy of the site took effect from 12 June 2012 ... the MCA will pay an annual rent of £360,000 beginning 12 June 2013.

## Annex E

### MCA EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES MAY 2012

“Around 150 at sea or coastal drownings annually. This is small compared to the numbers of fatalities on the roads or accidents at home. But the number does compare to fires in the home or deaths at work”.

## Annex F

### *FOIA request 1057 (attached as a PDF for full version)*

Over the past three years the MCA has assessed via:

*Ministerial target 1*—maintain the quality of maritime emergency co-ordination and responsibility by Coastguard.

*Operational Priority 1*—Maintaining a national maritime emergency response capability including co-ordination of Search and Rescue (SAR).

It should be noted during the above reporting periods ... service standards could not be reported on due to incomplete data as a result of on-going industrial action.

August 2012



### Further written evidence from Liverpool Coastguard PCS Union members (CFU 08a)

Local Knowledge is a concept which is talked about in the Future coastguard and past TSC evidence sessions. We believe that the evidence shown below, which is an extract from the MCA's performance guidelines shows exactly what it is and how important it is within the MCA. We believe that this will not be replicated in other sites that do not have the exposure and experience that has been built up over many years in Search and Rescue. It is not just about knowing the location. We believe a computer system cannot dynamically assess all the variables shown below with an incident whilst people are in real threat or distress. Each officer is required to visit the whole area of their district at least every five years. Therefore the officers at Fareham (Southampton) should also visit every part of the UK to ensure the same level of capability as there currently is in Liverpool and other threatened Coastguard stations.

#### BASIC REQUIREMENT

All grades of Coastguard Officers must acquire and maintain a thorough local knowledge of all available Declared and Additional SAR facilities, navigational hazards, coastal features, shipping activity and potential SAR problems within their station's area of responsibility. Local knowledge competence is assessed on station by formal test

#### LOCAL KNOWLEDGE TESTS

##### *New Entry Officers*

All new entry Coastguard Watch Assistants and Coastguard Watch Officers are to be tested in the local knowledge of their MRCC's area of responsibility. Successful completion of this is a requirement of the new entry training, and no new officer can be established in their respective grade without having passed a local knowledge test.

Rescue Co-ordination Centre Managers (RCCMs) are to arrange for new entry Officers to be given the opportunity to acquire local knowledge through coastal patrols and visits. They should also arrange for local knowledge to be tested via informal local knowledge training exercises whilst on watch.

The aim of such exercises should be to prepare the officer for the formal test and identify areas of weakness so that the officer can bolster such knowledge where needed. Additionally, it is important that the Watch Manager and the New Entry Officer can establish from these exercises whether the required level and depth of knowledge is being attained.

Guidelines for the local knowledge test are given below and new entry Officers should familiarise themselves with the content.

##### *Officers on Transfer*

RCCMs are to set tests which assess the local knowledge of Watch Managers, Watch Officers and Coastguard Watch Assistants (Ops) within three months of arrival at their new MRCC. They are to ensure that an acceptable level of local knowledge is achieved, which as a minimum, is to be taken as that expected of a new entry officer—see The Test and Pass Mark below.

##### *Knowledge Maintenance*

All staff must ensure that their local knowledge is kept up to date. Apart from direct study, this can be achieved by assisting others who are new to the service or Co-ordination Centre or as a watch training exercise.

All officers are to be re-examined in local knowledge at least once every two years and the results recorded

If RCCMs are in any doubt as to the level of local knowledge of any officer, at any time, that officer is to be re-examined immediately.

#### PREPARATION AND TESTING

##### *Gathering Local Knowledge*

Local knowledge is accumulated over a period of time by a combination of studying maps, charts, data retrieval systems, emergency plans and local orders, and also visiting the areas concerned. Study sessions may take the form of reviewing individual assets throughout the Area ie RNLI, CRTs, air assets, topography and harbours. Eventually, the officer must be able to describe all the SAR assets and significant features within the Area.

#### THE TEST AND PASS MARK

For New Entry Officers the bulk of the test will be the same for all candidates to ensure that there is a sound knowledge of basic assets and features. However, where possible RCCMs should have a bank of different sets of questions from which they can draw to prevent the test from becoming too predictable.

Test papers should be made up of 17 questions covering the 17 areas identified in the 'Guidelines' section below. There should be a mark allocation of 10 marks per question, making a total of 170 marks per paper.

*A mark of 80% (136/170) or more is required for a pass*

For the more senior the officers being tested, in addition to basic local knowledge expected of the junior officer, they must be able to demonstrate a more detailed knowledge of emergency and contingency plans, call out procedures for emergency towing arrangements etc. and action in major pollution and salvage incidents.

#### *Failure to Achieve the Required Pass Mark*

If an officer fails to achieve the required pass mark, they should be re-tested within a month where practical.

If an officer fails to achieve the required standard on a second attempt, the RCCM is to make a recommendation to the CSM regarding the subsequent course of action.

#### LOCAL KNOWLEDGE VISITS

All new entry Officers, and those new to an MRCC, should make a familiarisation visit to the whole operational Area.

Existing staff should make re-familiarisation visits at regular periods to keep in touch with changing circumstances.

#### PRACTICALITY OF LOCAL KNOWLEDGE VISITS

It is appreciated that it may not always be possible for new entry officers, officers on transfer, or existing personnel to visit all locations either initially or as part of re-familiarisation training. Nevertheless, this does not absolve them from attaining and maintaining a good working knowledge of those places. Where it has not been possible to make local knowledge visits, officers should attend District Operational Profile Presentations made by the Sector Managers.

#### LOGISTIC CONSIDERATIONS

Local knowledge visits are to be made wherever possible during the officer's normal shift. Such visits should be regarded as a Positive Duty in the event of residual staffing. Flexible rostering and the use of paired stations should be considered to maximise numbers making visits and optimising the use of vehicles. Wherever possible, MCA vehicles should be used for the visits. In extremis, private transport may be used (on road driving only) and mileage will be paid at the Public Transport Rate, subject to the RCCM's prior approval.

Officers making local knowledge visits should report to the Operations Room prior to setting out. They must be logged as being on duty at the start and off duty on completion. They are to brief the watch of their intended journey and are to maintain a radio watch in vehicles fitted with a radio, maintaining regular communications checks. If they are the closest unit to a reported incident, they may be tasked by the SMC to proceed and report.

If using a Coastguard vehicle, officers are to be familiar with, and follow the instructions in CG3 Vol 5 Chapter 4—Section 1. On completion of the visit, attention is to be paid to the state of the vehicle ie the vehicle should be refuelled and cleaned ready for the next user.

#### PRE-VISIT PREPARATION

Prior to making a local knowledge visit, the officer should first study the topography, the assets and names of key personnel within the area to be visited and consolidate this knowledge during the visit. The officer should have a clear idea of, and brief their WM on, what they hope to gain from the visit. Opportunity should also be made to address any questions relevant to the area to the Sector Manager or person acting as guide.

#### OPERATIONAL PROFILING

It is important for SCMs, RCCMs and Sector Managers to maintain a high level of local knowledge in order to undertake day to day management and planning tasks. A practical means of acquiring local knowledge for these roles is by Operational Profiling which should be part of the officer's Personal Development Plan.

#### *Concept*

An Operational Profile consists of a review of CRT's and other SAR resources, local authorities and emergency services, communications significant geographical and navigational safety changes. Prevention activities and any other matter of operational interest relevant to the Area or Sector. It is an opportunity to identify areas of weakness with suitable recommendations and should be used to highlight examples of successful initiatives and best practice.

### Application

Sector Managers should provide an annual briefing to the Area CSM, RCCMs and Watch Managers, each giving an up to date profile of their Sector. From these briefings, Area managers should prepare a composite Area Operations Profile for presentation to their RD. The presentation should include any recommendations for changes or developments to the current basing, coverage and equipping of MCA and other's SAR resources, including communications, Major Incident Plans and other initiatives. This should not however become an onerous undertaking and presentations should be brief and to the point and form part of normal District and Area Management meetings.

### GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL KNOWLEDGE TEST

The following areas are those that should be covered in a local knowledge test. Stations should make up a bank of questions for each of the 17 subjects areas and compile a number of different tests from this bank:

Subject Area	Test Coverage
1. Area SAR Units	List all SAR units within own Area, together with capabilities and limitations, callout procedures, response times and states of readiness: RNLI Lifeboats/hovercraft(Lifeboat Operations Manager, Coxn) Independent Rescue Boats/hovercraft(Launching Authority, Coxn) Military Helicopters Coastguard Helicopters ETVs other vessels aircraft that may respond at any time to a request for assistance
2. SAR Units Available from Adjacent MRCCs	Know which SAR units are available from adjacent MRCCs
3. Sector Organisation	List the Sectors, call out procedures, and the Sector Organisation within the Areas: Sector Managers Sector Bases Types and disposition of vehicles and boats CRTs/CRT(I)s designation CRT or CRT(I), size of team capability ie search, cliff, mud etc where based ie CRE Station or otherwise Details of any alternative units that can provide resources for coastal incidents eg Volunteer Life Brigades, Local Fire Brigade
4. Other organisations/ Authorities	List any other organisations within the Area that could be called upon to assist in a SAR incident: National Coastwatch Institution and National Coastal and Inshore Services stations Beach Lifeguard Units Local Authority Patrol Craft Locations of Coastguard Reporting Members where appropriate
5 Geographical Features/ Dangers to Navigation	Describe all the main geographical features within your own Area and show an appreciation of the dangers associated. Know where to find additional information about any of them. headlands cliffsbeaches bays harbours rivers islands dangerous wrecks, rocks and shoals oil/gas installations marinas major navigational marks—lighthouses, prominent landmarks, significant beacons, buoys, etc. traffic separation schemes, and reporting points (MAREPS) tides and significant local tidal anomalies safe anchorages bombing/firing ranges dumping grounds (ordnance) submarine exercise areas pipelines and submarine power cables wind generator turbines (wind farms)



<i>Subject Area</i>	<i>Test Coverage</i>
6. Dangers and Potential Incidents	<p>Be aware of specific dangers/incidents associated with the above features;</p> <p>tidal cut offs</p> <p>cliff incidents</p> <p>suicide black spots</p> <p>swimming, surf boarding, wind surfing, jet skiing, water skiing, diving hot spots</p> <p>grounding</p> <p>pollution</p>
7. Shipping and Other Waterborne Activities	<p>Appreciate the various types of shipping and waterborne activities which occur within your own Area and problems which are likely to arise together with a suggested SAR response:</p> <p>commercial shipping transiting deep water routes and ports</p> <p>small local ferry services *</p> <p>major ferry services *</p> <p>high speed passenger ferry services *</p> <p>cruise ship traffic **</p> <p>offshore support vessels</p> <p>fishing vessels</p> <p>fish farm tenders</p> <p>angling parties</p> <p>dive tenders and diving parties</p> <p>sail cruising and racing</p> <p>yachts</p> <p>air beds and other inflatable toys</p> <p>* Familiarity in general terms with the SAR plans for these vessels held on station;</p> <p>** Know how to find details of the SAR Plans for these vessels regularly operating in your district.</p> <p>All of the above vessels/activities vary enormously in the demands they will place on the SMC, from numbers of people involved to speed of response. Decide which of the above are relevant to your Area, and determine for yourself the particular problems they pose, and what the most likely response would be</p>
8. Other Assets and Sources of Information	<p>Describe other assets, sources of information in detail, or be aware of and know where to find out further details of:</p> <p>other emergency services including their force/brigade boundaries</p> <p>harbour authorities, port control, pilot authorities</p> <p>sailing clubs</p> <p>diving clubs</p> <p>nearest hyperbaric chamber</p> <p>interpreters</p> <p>location of emergency telephone boxes in prime foreshore locations</p> <p>fish farms including shore side contacts</p> <p>MOD firing ranges and safety vessels</p> <p>tugs and towing companies</p> <p>local arrangements for other emergency services to respond to an offshore emergency</p> <p>agents, owners, major shipping/offshore companies based within your district</p>
9. Major Incident Plans	<p>Describe the composition of the Major Incident Plan (MIP) within your own Area and understand any liaison and contact arrangements for obtaining assistance from on-shore authorities</p> <p>CWAs should be aware of the content of such plans, so that they will know where to look for future reference. More senior officers must be familiar with the content in detail</p>
10. Pollution	<p>Understand the local procedures and contacts for dealing with all types of pollution, washed up or sighted ordnance, and for bye-law infringements</p>
11. Sector Visits	<p>Visit all Sectors where practicable and other SAR organisations, and relevant emergency services, to achieve an overview on a rolling 5 year schedule. Those with Workbooks should ensure that the relevant section is signed off and detailed reports are written where appropriate</p>
12. Radio Coverage	<p>Appreciate radio coverage within own Area, blind spots, selection of the most appropriate aerial for different coverage and know how to carry out daily checks and line tests, and operate ECP equipment</p>
13. Ops Room Equipment	<p>Demonstrate familiarity and ability to operate all the equipment within own operations room and know the procedures in the event of failure/fault</p>

<i>Subject Area</i>	<i>Test Coverage</i>
14. Receiver of Wreck	Understand the role of the Receiver of Wreck, and the arrangements for dealing with (and disposal where appropriate) reports of royal fish, buoys, seismic equipment, drums, timber etc.
15. Charts and Publications	Use the correct scale chart for a particular incident and know the range and use of publications kept in the operations room
16. Emergency Towing	Understand the CAST Agreement and where cast tugs are located, along with the correct means of tasking. Understand how to contact Tug Brokers and what they can provide
17. Controlled Air Space and Flying Restrictions	Be aware of any controlled air space within the Area and the effect of establishing flying restrictions

October 2012

#### **Supplementary written evidence from Liverpool Coastguard PCS Union members (CFU 08b)**

Q53

The Shipping Minister stated that the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) had received 27 submissions in the second consultation. The Head of the Office of the Chief Executive sent an email to Liverpool CG in September 2011, stating that they (the MCA) would not be considering any alternatives for the second round of the consultation. When we questioned that the first consultation also did not formally invite alternatives, he did not respond. In fact, the MCA would not even attend a presentation of the proposal for the Maritime Operations Centre (MOC) to be located on the current MCA facility at Liverpool. A proposal which would have seen substantial savings in the cost of converting/building a Maritime Operations Centre.

Q72/73/74/75/76

When it was put to the Minister that the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) had failed to win hearts and minds of staff and was asked what they intended to do to redress that, he stated that they were reassuring people about safety, and directly communicating what is happening through Coastguard (CG) social networks. The MCA has a very strict social networking policy, which does not allow anyone to make any form of negative comment about the Agency on Social Media. In fact the MCA, through its IT policy, does not allow the use of Social Media. Once again, we fail to understand how the MCA intends to use social media with this policy in place. The Minister appeared to be misinformed.

Q80

On several occasions in the past The Chief Executive (CEO) has stated that he is aware that the new system will be an entirely different way of working and will, in some circumstances, cause a longer response time. Possibly, occasionally, up to 10 minutes and that this is an “acceptable risk”. We still maintain that any system that increases response times, even if only occasionally, is unacceptable.

Since the oral evidence session we are now lead to understand that the process for tasking a team to an incident seems to be as follows:

1. MRSC receives incident details.
2. MRSC calls Coastal Safety Officer.
3. Coastal Safety Officer obtains necessary team details.
4. Coastal Safety Officer “smart” pages team with details. (hopefully their will be only one set of details and/or instructions).
5. Next stage is unknown...Does the team liaise with the CSO or the MRSC or both? What happens in the case of several incidents happening at once?
6. Incident working...Collating and using information obtained during the incident: Who co-ordinates the incident? The CSO with a laptop or MRSC staff?

At present the procedure is:

1. MRSC receives incident details.
2. MRSC, having full knowledge of the area, call the appropriate team who carry out the task liaising directly with MRSC staff. (MRSC staff means that there are enough staff to deal with multiple incidents).

A whole raft of unnecessary dog legging.

Q90

Sir Alan has stated that the vacancies in the Coastguard are at 13.8%. We would submit that this does not give an accurate account. The 13.8% figure includes uniformed staff at Headquarters. In addition it does not show the problem individual stations face. For example Liverpool MRCC has a 25% vacancy; Humber has a 25% vacancy; Aberdeen some 22%. These figures are from a few weeks ago but more staff have left since. It is difficult to get accurate figures as the situation changes from day to day. For example as of today there are 3 Watch Officers at Swansea awaiting to the outcome of recent interviews at the Fire Control Centre.

Q93

The Chief Executive stated that Norway has one MRCC and Canada with six times our coastline has 3. It is wrong to compare our arrangements with other countries. Coastlines are unique. We are an Island nation. We have a different type of coastline to either Norway or Canada and the remits of all three are different. Sir Alan has previously stated that the French Coast Guard had made reductions in their MRCC cover and the "penny had dropped with them" concerning local knowledge being overcome by technology. In fact, the French have five MRCC's. Their coast line is 7,330km in length. A ratio of 1 MRCC per 1,466km. Our coastline is 19,717km in length. Using the same ratio, this would mean we would need 14 MRCC's to cover our coastline. Also, the French Coast Guard Service has no remit to respond to coastal incidents that involve cliff and mud rescue. They only co-ordinate maritime related incidents. It is wrong to compare foreign SAR arrangements with those of the UK.

Q98

Alan Massey commented that Shetland and Stornoway were retained due to the fragile links with the mainland. Shetland PCS stated that there had been nine occurrences where they had lost communications within the past three weeks. Knowing this, the MCA has allowed both Shetland and Stornoway to increase their area and take over responsibility for sections of the mainland.

We have learned recently that there is no new technology planned for HM Coastguard. The future coastguard plan will proceed with existing basic equipment, reduced staff and reduced co-ordinating centres. So, all that will be achieved by the planners is less Coastguard Stations.

At this time we have learned that Belfast, who are conducting pairing trials with Clyde have requested six further staff. This increase has been agreed, but the extra staff must come from the existing coastguard headcount. This will be difficult to achieve due to the rate we are losing experienced staff. A problem not of the CEO's making but one created by those responsible for planning the Future Coastguard.

(All this contrary to the Future Coastguard Plan which states 23 ops room staff per MRSC.)

Q100

Sir Alan agreed that moral is low in the service and that people are unsettled with many leaving for better paid jobs elsewhere. Over the past two years the MCA management has trumpeted the change as a way of ensuring Coastguards are paid a suitable rate for their work.

To date we have been told the grades and number of posts that are required for each location which are:

OPS STAFF	
AO	62
EO	198
HEO	29
SEO	19
COASTAL STAFF	
HEO	78
SEO	18

The Committee will note that the numbers of posts, (due to station closures) are vastly reduced. But the Civil Service grades, as you would expect remain the same.

So If one was to apply to join the service now the posts they can apply for are Admin Assistant (AA), Admin Officer (AO), Executive Officer (EO), Higher Executive Officer (HEO), and Senior Executive Officer (SEO). In the future coastguard (with reduced numbers) are AO, EO, HEO, and SEO. All that has changed is the reduced numbers of posts and the abolition of the AA grade. *All Coastguards* will have to apply for one of these posts so the only people who might benefit are those few AA grade staff that are lucky enough to secure a position.

Further, people applying for an AO post will be subject to rigorous testing and interviewing, long periods away from home, constant testing and examinations in several different subjects before qualifying. Then, once qualified, will be subject to Operational Readiness Inspections and further periodic tests. All this on only AO pay. The same pay as the agencies (and other parts of the Civil Service) office staff. Discussions with many

colleagues in various parts of the country indicate, contrary to the information the CEO receives from his managers, that many experienced staff intend leaving the agency.

Q129

Alan Massey was asked by the Chair if they owed a Duty of Care for leisure users. His answer seemed to state that the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) did have duty of care over all seafarers. What he actually said was that “*Under a couple of conventions we have a statutory duty to save life at sea*”. Which is true, but contradicts comments made at a Public and Commercial Services (PCS) Section Executive Committee (SEC) meeting on February 8th by a Senior Manager (who we can now confirm as the Head of Organisational Development, Human Resources within the MCA) who stated, during a group discussion about vessel traffic management and the MCA’s use of the Automatic Identification System (AIS), that they do not have a Duty of Care for small craft under 300 tonnes. When pressed by a PCS representative as to how that statement could be reconciled with the leisure industry, he merely repeated his statement.

It is important that the MCA maintains its policy (and continues to state that policy) of responding in a positive and timely manner to *ALL* incidents within its area and that they do not start quoting regulation as a reason for not responding to distress calls.

#### FURTHER INFORMATION

##### *CEO visit to Liverpool MRCC. 2 November 2012*

During a recent visit to Liverpool MRCC by the CEO, it became apparent that he was under the impression that Liverpool MRCC had 26 ops room staff at present. Liverpool has only ever had 21 staff and at present we have only 16.5 with no plans by the management to recruit. He now, obviously, has the correct information, but this is indicative of the incorrect information he is receiving from his senior staff.

Sir Alan also stated that he was surprised by how few people from Clyde MRCC and Forth MRCC wished to remain in the agency as these stations closed. Again, experienced Coastguard Officers from all parts of the coast have been telling the Future Coastguard Team since the plan was first put forward some two years ago that retaining staff would be the biggest problem.

With reference to Q80, Sir Alan was asked the procedure for calling out a CG team. He stated that it would not be significantly different to the present system. This seems to be at odds with the information received at MRCC’s which indicates the procedure to be adopted would be that previously stated.

During the brief presentation it became apparent that they (the MCA management) expect all serving officers who wish to stay with the agency will apply for grade higher than the one they currently occupy and it is on this belief that they base their claim to be significantly increasing Coastguard officers pay.

In truth there are no significant pay rises other than the normal increase an officer would expect when moving up a grade.

It also became apparent that the “plan” is changing from its original radical format to one that closely resembles the system being worked at the moment, with less Coastguard Co-ordinating centres, significantly less staff and no new technology.

This would indicate that our original belief was accurate; that this whole exercise is driven by cost cutting with concern for public safety taking a back seat.

We would urge the Committee to:

1. Seek assurance from the CEO that he (or his successor) will ensure that all incidents are treated with the same measure of urgency and regulation will not be used as an excuse for excluding anybody, from whatever section of the community (maritime or otherwise).
2. Instruct the senior management of the MCA to name the persons responsible for formulating and implementing the Future Coastguard plan as a start to rebuilding the trust between the management and the workforce.
3. Request the vacancy figures for each individual station and ask the CEO to explain the 13.8% figure.
4. Look carefully again at the decision to close Liverpool MRCC and urge the MCA to change that decision. As Belfast have urgently requested six extra staff to handle some of the Clyde MRCC area, they will presumably require further staff to handle the part of Liverpool area designated to them. (Liverpool handles a similar amount of incidents to Clyde).

If extra staff is needed for this area as well then there will be little or no financial benefit. Liverpool should remain open as a co-ordinating centre for the foreseeable future, or at least for a further period of five years after April 2015 to allow the new system (whatever it is) to become fully operational. The station will continue to remain as a hub and a marine office in any event, so it would be beneficial to keep Liverpool open as a contingency. Contingency being the Ministers main reason for endorsing the plan.

5. Ask the CEO how many of the staff moving from Forth and Clyde to other stations intend staying with the MCA beyond six months. Most of these staff view their posts as a temporary arrangement until they retire, except redundancy or find other positions outside the agency.

November 2012

### Written evidence from the Department for Transport (CFU 15)

#### MODERNISATION OF THE COASTGUARD

1. The Government issued its response to the Transport Select Committee's sixth report of Session 2010–12 (The Coastguard, Emergency Towing Vessels and the Maritime Incident Response Group—Sixth Report of Session 2010–12) on 7 September 2011. That response highlighted the outcome of a first public consultation on the modernisation of the Coastguard and outlined further proposals to address concerns identified in the first consultation over resilience and capacity of the future service.

2. Following a second public consultation in which we again listened to and took on board comments from coastguard officers, other emergency services, unions, the shipping industry, the public as well as Members, the Department announced the final decisions on the future of Her Majesty's Coastguard Service in the House in November 2011.

3. The new structure for a modernised coastguard will place UK maritime search and rescue for the first time into a coherent national co-ordinated activity. It will comprise a maritime operations centre at Fareham, with a back-up facility at the existing Dover coordination centre, both operating on a 24 hour basis; and eight Coastguard Centres, all operated on a 24 hour basis, located at Falmouth, Milford Haven, Holyhead, Belfast, Stornoway, Shetland, Aberdeen and Humber, together with the retention of the small station at London. This structure has been specifically designed to enable delivery of all of the UK obligations with higher capability, resilience and flexibility and to respond to the many points made in consultation.

4. Since November, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) have made substantial progress to deliver on our planned programme of work. This statement outlines the key areas. An integral part of the programme has been the direct involvement of staff. As the various work packages associated with the programme progress, over 160 staff, some 30% of the Coastguard service, have volunteered to take part. Over 40 officers are, or have been, active in work package delivery, demonstrating the commitment of the MCA to practitioner involvement. The expertise they bring to the work is highly valued and this process is also contributing to informing and developing staff across the organisation.

#### MARITIME OPERATIONS CENTRE

5. Following negotiations with the Department for Communities and Local Government, we took responsibility on 5 July 2012 for the facilities at Fareham where the National Maritime Operations Centre (NMOC) will be established. Already tailor made as a command centre, we are beginning the fit out of the premises to deliver the specific requirements for the command, control and strategic oversight of all coastguard operations around the UK as a whole.

#### STAFF

6. A major objective has been a smooth transition for the staff, both for those who intend to leave the Service and for those who want to take advantage of the more satisfying and better paid careers available within the future Coastguard. Our discussions with the unions on the staffing roles and responsibilities have been constructive and helpful. In particular the MCA and PCS have worked to agree a pre-redundancy agreement which was signed by the Chief Executive of the MCA, Sir Alan Massey, and representatives of both the PCS and Prospect unions on 11 May 2012. This agreement sets down the processes and steps MCA will follow before considering compulsory redundancy. PCS representatives meet with the MCA programme managers twice a month and are involved in the full range of work packages underway as well as the Business Assurance Group.

We are actively designing new training courses to meet the requirement to upskill staff into enhanced roles with greater responsibility and variety. A contract has also been let with Working Time Solutions Ltd (WTS) to examine options for working patterns for the future that will enable flexibility in working procedures. This will involve externally led working groups to explore with staff, unions and management, options that address the needs of the service and the expectations of Coastguard Officers. WTS bring with them a wealth of experience in supporting such change, including clients within the emergency services environment. They will provide an independent voice of expertise mapping working patterns against business need and staff expectations.

#### LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

7. One of the key concerns identified in the consultation and by the Committee was that local knowledge would be lost by the move to a nationally networked system.



8. As we made clear in announcing the final modernisation plans, the decision to keep one in every existing pair of the Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centres (MRCC) and both Stornoway and Shetland maintained, all on a 24 hour basis, was designed to ensure that local knowledge will be retained. MCA is also working collaboratively with the Ordnance Survey on the development of a vernacular place name database. This database allows multiple names to be applied to any coastal feature or place in order that local as well as Gaelic or Welsh names are available for search.

9. In addition to this, Coastguard officers are taking part in training including exercises with their counterparts in other MRCCs to share and capture situational awareness and operational links across the maritime domain for future reference, periods of duty in flank operations rooms, familiarisation visits to relevant coastal areas and expert input from officers residing in the various coastal communities.,

#### VOLUNTEERS

10 The modernisation plans include specific steps to bolster the leadership for the Coastguard Rescue Service. There will be an increase of 50% (from 64 to 96) in the number of regular officers available to volunteers for operational attendance, leadership and advice. This will enable increased flexibility in the management, support and training of our volunteers. It will give a greater presence of HM Coastguard Officers in coastal communities and provide improved liaison with SAR partners such as the RNLI and Local and Regional Resilience Fora. These regular officers will operate in area based teams with an Area Command Office (hub). We will continue to use the vital local information and intelligence our volunteers can provide, but a system of on duty/on-call officers will provide an additional resource to ensure that the changes we are implementing to the overall structure place no greater burden on our volunteers. The work to define area boundaries for these new leadership teams is well advanced and, as far as is practicable, is aligned with local government and devolved administration boundaries. This alignment exercise is designed to facilitate and improve collaborative working with other emergency service and civil resilience partners. Work is also underway to establish the Area Command Bases (Hubs) from which the additional officers will be directed.

#### COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

11. Under our modernisation plans the communications technology to be used is the latest upgraded versions of existing core equipment located and configured to provide the integrated national network. This will provide real-time visibility and access to all information and systems to all officers on duty. There is no reduction of the communications infrastructure or coverage available for all maritime users and there will be no compromise in HM Coastguard's capability to respond to persons at risk in our waters or on our coastline. As part of the UK's commitment to the Vessel Traffic Monitoring Directive, HM Coastguard will also have networked its ability to monitor all vessels of 300 gross registered tonnes and above that are obliged to carry Automatic Identification System (AIS) equipment. An additional benefit to the leisure user is that where they are operating such equipment the ability of HM Coastguard to locate them will be enhanced. The prime benefit of the national network is that, regardless of incident working, other operational loading or unforeseen events, the Coastguard will be more able to ensure that all coastguard duties are addressed by being able to move work to centres which have more capacity at that time, thereby freeing up critical resource to deal with larger or more intensive tasks.

12. The securing of a purpose built facility for the National Maritime Operations Centre at Fareham will reduce implementation risk and provide the maximum time available for testing. The first installation of equipment will start in November this year with technical followed by operational simulation testing commencing in June 2013. This will continue for a total of nine months before live operations in April 2014. These operations will take the form of a progressive integration of all facilities into the final networked structure allowing robust testing throughout. Although no problems are envisaged in the planning, this process allows for mitigation and elimination of issues if they should arise.

#### TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

13. The transition to the new structure is now progressing in line with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's blueprint published last November. Consequently in July we announced that the closures of Forth and Clyde MRCCs would take place at the end of September and December respectively, with coverage of the Clyde and Forth areas of responsibility being managed through enhanced provision from the MRCCs that flank them. This will ensure that the current work and duties of these centres are covered in the interim period leading to integration into the national network. Measures to facilitate these changes have, and will include:

- Training of staff across all of the MRCCs involved (Clyde, Forth, Belfast, Stornoway and Aberdeen) including deployment of officers across the centres to share expertise and experience.
- Live operational testing in the form of parallel running where the Clyde and Forth areas have been managed from flank centres whilst keeping Forth and Clyde fully staffed, connected and available for support.
- Capacity on the Integrated Command and Communications Systems (ICCS) in Belfast and Stornoway MRCCs being increased to enable these systems to handle the additional Clyde aerial sites.

- Additional operator desks being created at Belfast and Stornoway, and resourced by staff on detached duty from Clyde.

14. This robust and rigorous testing will continue throughout the transition to ensure that safety is not compromised. In addition, following closure, additional officers (drawn from Forth and Clyde) will be deployed to work in the flank centres.

15. All of the programme output is subject to an internal, practitioner led Business Assurance Group as well as external audit conducted by Price Waterhouse Cooper on behalf of Audit and Risk Assurance, OGC Gateway Review by Cabinet Office major Projects Authority and the NAO. The OGC Gateway Review 0:Strategic Assessment in May 2012 found the Future Coastguard Programme to be well developed and well-led and had confidence that the programme was capable of being delivered successfully.

#### EMERGENCY TOWING VESSELS (ETVs)

16. In our response last September to the Transport Committee's recommendations, we explained that we continued to believe that the responsibility for the operational safety of ships was a matter for the commercial shipping industry. However, we acknowledged that there were concerns from Scottish groups about availability of suitable commercial tugs in the waters around Scotland. We also noted that we were supporting a Scotland Office led ETV Working Group to see whether the means of funding could be found from within Scotland.

17. Consequently the Scotland Office led efforts to secure a long-term replacement for the ETV service in waters surrounding Scotland. This work resulted in the announcement on 12 June 2012 that the Government, recognising the limited availability of commercial tugs in the waters around Scotland, would continue funding of an ETV for the duration of the spending review period. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) subsequently tendered a requirement to meet this need through annual contract awards, with the extant contract running until 31 March 2013. In a written statement made to Parliament, the Secretary of State for Scotland explained that this commitment would sit alongside our ongoing efforts to secure an additional vessel under a commercial call-out arrangement.

18. The MCA funded ETV is positioned off the north coast of Scotland to optimise its ability to cover the waters around both the Northern and Western Isles. Its tasking is managed by HM Coastguard in response to operational need.

19. As the Government said in the statement on 12 June, we believe that this model will deliver a proportionate solution, balancing risk, operational considerations and value-for-money, including costs of an incident.

20. The Scotland Office remain in discussion with the offshore oil & gas industry to identify alternative commercially based provision of emergency towage capability. In addition Coastguards will continue to monitor tug availability in the waters around the UK and will encourage ship masters, owners and their insurers to take early action to summon tug assistance should ships get into difficulty or become disabled. The MCA is also pursuing a more active approach to monitoring of shipping using the Automatic Identification System (AIS), for earlier contact with ships, and has led a review of the Coastguard Agreement on Salvage and Towage (CAST). This provides a ready made set of terms against which commercially operated tugs can be hired to assist vessels that get into difficulty and which require towage in an emergency. The new terms resulting from the review are close to final agreement by the stakeholders.

#### THE MARITIME INCIDENT RESPONSE GROUP (MIRG) AND FIREFIGHTING AT SEA

21. The Government Response to the Transport Select Committee on 7 September indicated that the Maritime Incident Response Group (MIRG) arrangements would cease. This took effect with the final date of operational availability being 14 December 2011.

22. In the course of its review on the MIRG arrangements, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency had established from the shipping industry that the most valued service provided by the MIRG is their initial fire assessment advice. As a result the Government has established alternative arrangements for such fire assessment advice service using commercial salvors. Under these new arrangements, qualified and experienced personnel will be deployed to an incident to make an assessment of the status of a fire and to provide advice on the best course of action and, as in many cases today, reassure port authorities that a ship can be safely accepted into a port so that shore based fire fighters can attend to the fire. This approach recognises that international legislation already requires that all ships' crews are trained and equipped to fight fires in ships. This new service will not require funding from the public purse as costs will be recoverable.

23. In accordance with International Maritime Organization guidelines on Places of Refuge, when appropriate and if time allows, the Secretary of State's Representative (SOSREP) will request an inspection/assessment team board at sea for the purpose of evaluating the condition of the ship. The team will be comprised of experts appropriate to the situation and may include salvors, harbour masters, a MCA Marine Casualty Officer together with representatives of the local Fire and Rescue Services should they wish to be included. The MCA will arrange for the safe deployment of the team and part of their assessment will be to make a comparison between the risks involved if the ship remains at sea and the risks that it would pose to a place of refuge and

its environment. In developing the best plan of action to manage the ship the SOSREP will always consult with the relevant stakeholders, including the Fire and Rescue Services and the Harbour Authority. Where it is appropriate a Fire Risk Management Plan, specific to the incident, may be developed.

24. The MCA is currently in discussion with representatives of the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) to consider whether shore Fire and Rescue Services could develop suitable arrangements to provide a fire assessment capability that could be called upon by the SOSREP as an alternative to the inspection and assessment activity outlined above.

September 2012

#### Written evidence from Nautilus International (CFU 17)

1. Nautilus International is the trade union and professional organisation representing some 23,000 ship masters, officers, officer trainees and other professional staff working in the maritime sector, at sea and ashore, including marine pilots, harbour masters and vessel traffic services staff.

2. The Union welcomes the committee's decision to conduct a further review of the UK Coastguard service. We gave written and oral evidence to the committee's previous inquiry into the work of the Maritime & Coastguard Agency and consider it is extremely appropriate and timely to revisit the issues that were raised at that time.

3. In our previous evidence, we expressed concern at the original proposals for sweeping change in the structure of the Coastguard, which originally envisaged reducing the number of MRCCs from 18 to eight, of which five would run on a daytime-only basis. We feared these proposals owed more to cost-cutting considerations than to the claimed rationale of reflecting advances in technology. It was therefore of some reassurance to see the proposals being substantially modified and changes made to address the concerns over the potential loss of valuable local knowledge and expertise as a result of redundancies and centralisation of the MRCCs.

4. Nautilus reiterates its position on the necessity for 11 full-time MRCCs, with five in England, three in Scotland, two in Wales and one in Northern Ireland. It is essential that the introduction and implementation of the new structure is done in such a way as to ensure the continuity and enhancement of Coastguard services. It is also vital that existing facilities are not closed until new facilities are fully operational.

5. Nautilus welcomes the acquisition and development of new facilities and equipment to deliver the Coastguard services, in particular the new Coastguard operations centre near Fareham. We would expect that all Coastguard centres are of a similar high standard, to ensure a high quality working environment and unified standards of service. For this to be effective, it is essential that there is substantial capital investment in newly acquired or existing stations.

6. Furthermore, there is a critical need to ensure the recruitment and retention of suitably skilled and experienced personnel. This imperative has been acknowledged for a considerable period, and was identified in the 1990s during the investigation by Lord Donaldson, which expressed caution over the need to retain such expertise. There is an increasing challenge to recruit and retain specialist staff, and Nautilus believes it is essential that the remuneration package for Coastguard staff reflects the increased responsibilities and workloads associated with the new working arrangements, lower staffing and the use of more sophisticated systems and technologies.

7. In order to complement the new command and control structures of the Coastguard, it is essential that frontline assets are substantially improved. Of particular importance is the replacement of the existing ageing Royal Navy/RAF and Coastguard helicopters by a modern and unified fleet. Nautilus believes that two types of helicopters should be deployed, so as to deliver greater efficiency and flexibility, depending on the type of emergency and rescue operation. Furthermore, should there be any operational problems with one type of helicopter that requires it to be grounded or withdrawn from service, some operational capabilities can be maintained.

8. Nautilus also believes it is of critical importance that the UK has a long-range search capability, which could be supplemented by a rescue capability, through the use of vertical take-off and landing aircraft. This need is all the more crucial given the considerable scope of the UK's search and rescue area, which extends out into the mid-Atlantic.

9. We also consider that the Coastguard should be able to operate a fleet of high-speed cutters that can be used to assist other government agencies in maintaining maritime safety, protecting the marine environment, deterring illegal activities, combatting terrorism and undertaking other security-related work.

10. The auxiliary Coastguard should be maintained and developed to an adequate level, not only to provide effective support around our coast but also, where necessary, inland in order to assist in responses to emergencies on rivers and lakes.

11. Nautilus believes the demands upon the Coastguard service are likely to increase in the years ahead. There are concerns about the safety of the ageing offshore oil and gas infrastructure, as well as the new



challenges presented by the rapid and marked expansion of renewable energy offshore, including windfarms, wave and tidal systems. Although shipping traffic densities have been relatively stable over the last few years as a result of the economic downturn and the reduction in seaborne trade volumes, they are expected to increase as economic growth returns and demand rises. Whilst ship numbers may have diminished, their average size has increased dramatically and this has created new and substantial challenges for search and rescue and salvage teams. The need to provide specialist support to merchant vessels is also increasing as a consequence of the reduced number of onboard personnel who are able to deal effectively with emergencies.

12. Against the background outlined above, Nautilus unreservedly condemns the removal of the Maritime Incident Response Group (MIRG) which we believe was the result of the government's cost-saving programme. It must be remembered that MIRG was established in 2006 for good reasons, following long-running concerns over the decline in the number of fire brigades capable of delivering emergency support at sea. At one stage before MIRG was launched, only nine of the 39 fire and rescue services around the whole of the UK had the capacity to provide services to shipping. Research for the Maritime & Coastguard Agency commissioned a research project which identified the need for a more formalised integrated strategy that also brought in other shore-based emergency responders, such as paramedics, to provide a coordinated national network of trained personnel to respond to fires, chemical releases and other accidents at sea.

13. The government sought to justify the withdrawal of funding for MIRG on the basis that it had not been involved in any significant incidents since its launch. "All ships' crews are trained in basic firefighting techniques and there is little evidence that MIRG has changed the outcome of ship fires," the DfT argued. Nautilus disputes these claims and considers the thinking behind the withdrawal of funding for the service to be utterly incomprehensible. For a relatively modest amount, MIRG created a coherent network of emergency support for shipping which could not only provide direct assistance to vessels in trouble at sea, but also to supplement emergency services in ports. If properly utilised, Nautilus believes that this could have saved substantial resources at a local level.

14. The need for the sort of service envisaged in the creation of MIRG has been repeatedly demonstrated by incidents—the most recent of which was the fire and explosion onboard the container ship MSC Flaminia, and the subsequent loss of life. The incident shows the huge potential complexity and severity of incidents onboard large, modern and sophisticated merchant ships.

15. MSC Flaminia also demonstrated the need for emergency towing provision around the UK coast. It was, in some respects, fortuitous that the ship was in a region where towing capacity—albeit limited—was available. Nautilus continues to be extremely concerned by the withdrawal of emergency towing vessels from key locations around the UK coast, and we believe that the stop-gap solution in Scotland has not addressed the fundamental problem of the extremely limited availability of commercial towing vessels in more remote locations.

16. Nautilus continues to believe that the UK is gambling with the safety of lives and the environment by removing a vital resource that provided crucial salvage back-up in the event of shipping accidents. It must not be forgotten that the ETVs were brought in as a direct response to the Braer and Sea Empress tanker disasters. Another incident on the scale of those disasters would cause economic and environmental damage that would far outstrip the £32.5 million savings the government expects to accrue over the spending review period by ending the ETV service.

17. Nautilus believes the UK must be more mindful of the necessity to play a full part in the development of broader-based European policy relating to maritime safety and Coastguard services. This will require increased cooperation and pooling of assets in order to ensure a more effective response to potentially significant incidents—incidents that may lead to serious marine pollution or, if involving ro-ro ferries or passenger ships, major loss of life.

18. Nautilus remains profoundly concerned that the UK's maritime "safety net", of which the Coastguard service is an integral part, faces potentially disastrous consequences as a result of the government's programme of public spending cutbacks. There is a fundamental clash between the proposed 21% reduction in the Department for Transport's budget over the next four years and the adverse trends in maritime safety. Nautilus is by no means the only maritime organisation expressing concern about the problems identified in a series of recent incidents and we believe it is essential that seafarers are given the back-up and support of properly trained specialist teams to handle the huge challenges that can arise in emergency situations.

19. The savings that are sought through the cuts in the DfT budget represent a drop in the ocean in terms of the department's overall expenditure, but Nautilus believes the resulting diminution in the emergency services to shipping could make the difference between life and death, or a major environmental disaster that would cost the region billions in economic losses and clean-up costs.

## Written evidence from the PCS (CFU 18)

### 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) represents around 280,000 members in the civil and public services, non-departmental public bodies and some commercial areas. PCS represents over 500 members in the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), the vast majority of whom are employed at Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centres (MRCCs) around the coastline of the United Kingdom. These members are therefore directly affected by MCA plans to restructure Search and Rescue operations around the UK Coastline.

1.2 In the past PCS has submitted both oral and written evidence with regard to Coastguard reforms and we welcome this chance to submit further evidence. PCS believes the planned reforms do not have the support of the Maritime community and do not address the public's concerns about safety.

1.3 The reforms of the Coastguard Service were drawn up without full and proper consultation with PCS and we are extremely disappointed that the government have gone ahead and announced a number of MRCC closures and reduction of staffing levels at other stations, ignoring concerns raised by PCS and the general public.

1.4 Even after the Transport Select Committee was extremely critical of the MCA about the lack of consultation with operational Officers, the Government and MCA have pressed ahead with proposals that have not been discussed with our members. It appears incredible that an organisation that says it relies on the professionalism and skills and claims to be a world leader in Search and Rescue has not consulted its staff.

1.5 We continue to believe that the planned closure of one station in each pairing (except for Stornoway and Shetland) with a reduction of staffing in some of the remaining stations, will lead to serious operational understaffing that will impair the ability of staff to carry out Search and Rescue operations in a timely and professional manner.

1.6 PCS believes the early closures of MRCC Clyde, Forth and Yarmouth have not been properly thought through and are driven by cost savings rather than provision to the public maritime users of a safe and reliable Coastguard Service during the transitional period.

1.7 There is still cross party opposition to the MCA plans. Our members continue to campaign against the plans along with local communities and politicians. Members of the public have written to the Secretary of State of Transport and the Minister for Shipping expressing their concerns about the plans and asking for reassurances that the new structure will be safe and will not put people's lives at risk. To date no reassurances have been received.

1.8 PCS believes that the original and the second consultation processes were flawed and did not give the respondents the full opportunity to oppose the MCA proposals.

1.9 PCS believes that the planned new structure has been devised to meet the needs of the commercial user and the requirements set out by International Maritime Organisation with little regard being taken to provide a service for the unregulated leisure users who generate approximately 70% of all incidents.

### 2. OUR EVIDENCE AND RESPONSE

2.1 PCS supports a national structure as opposed to the current paired structure.

2.2 We believe that a national network retaining all current MRCCs within a national network providing 24 hour cover to their local communities and supported by a Maritime Operations Centre would provide further resilience to the present system.

2.3 The current proposals do not hold credibility with staff that will have to deliver Search and Rescue. This is reflected in the fact that:

- 86% of Coastguard staff said that they had no confidence in the plans or their ability to protect the public—driving through change that is not accepted by those that deliver the service is fraught with danger.
- Indications from our members are that very few are intending to move to Fareham to staff the MOC. PCS believes this will lead to a shortage of experienced officers in this location with the resultant long term loss of experience.

2.4 There is already evidence that staff are not happy with proposals and are leaving the MCA:

- The MCA currently should have a Complement of 489 Coastguard Officers working within MRCC. At present they have only 416.6 Full time equivalents. 15% of All operational Coastguard Posts are vacant.
- Of those 416.6 officers, 101 are on fixed term contracts and the vast majority have less than two years experience in the job, many are still under training, and some have been recruited at a lower grade but are replacing staff at a higher grade. Of the 416.6 posts filled 24% are filled by officers on fixed term appointments.

- 36 members of staff are on “Temporary and Geographical” promotion and therefore are working above their substantive grade. More than 50% of these are carrying out the hugely important role of Search Mission Co-ordinator and taking charge of Maritime SAR operations.
- The MCA has major staffing shortages at the following MRCCs—Aberdeen, Clyde, Dover, Forth, and Thames.
- At present all stations are below complemented levels, these figures do not take into account those of sick leave, maternity and special leave.

In our opinion this loss of experienced staff this will lead to the MOC and operations centres having, for many years, to rely on inexperienced staff which will lead to mistakes being made and possibly lives being lost.

2.5 It is evident that the MCA will be able to make its agreed staff reductions by not filling vacancies and the use of fixed term appointments. What worries PCS however is that once the modernisation of the Coastguard finishes then there will not be enough Coastguard Officers with experience to take up the new posts.

2.6 MCA management seem to be expecting staff to move to the MOC. This is a flawed assumption and PCS believes that it could well be the case that before the MOC can be fully operational the MCA will have to recruit numerous new staff and train them to take on the new roles. This will take time and will increase the risks to the public during the transitional phase.

#### *Local Knowledge*

2.7 Local knowledge is essential to the effective and rapid deployment of search and rescue units around the coast. We have countless examples of where our member’s “local knowledge” has been instrumental in saving lives.

2.8 Local knowledge cannot be replaced by technology as local knowledge is not just about geographical locations but about knowing where to contact when there are no lifeboats, helicopters or coastguard rescue units available, when to bypass the nearest facility because it is not suitable, and knowing that the nearest lifeboat is not necessary going to get them the quickest response because of environmental factors. Local knowledge is unique to each Coastguard District but this has not been addressed by the consultation process or the MCA

2.9 MCA and the Government assert that local knowledge has been passed on by the paired station. PCS can only find one example of where pairing has been used on a regular basis and even then in the vast majority of incidents the co-ordination was passed back to the MRCC that covers that district.

2.10 The MCA hopes to replicate local knowledge by using Local Coastal Safety officers (CSO) on call. This is not practical as often a few minutes can make the difference between life and death and having to contact the on-call CSO for guidance will only add a further delay to any response.

2.11 A second flawed assumption on part of the MCA management is that staff at closing MRCCs will move to other stations. Evidence at both Clyde and Forth which are the first two closure stations would suggest that the majority will take redundancy rather than move their families. (Also see transitional arrangements.)

#### *Technology*

2.12 The MCA stated that new technology was going to be installed. In reality this is only an upgrade to the existing equipment. This technology does not allow two stations to use the same aerial site. This means that passing co-ordination from one to station to another can cause errors to occur. PCS has examples of handing co-ordination from one to station to another having caused vital information to be lost.

2.13 The present upgraded systems continue to have a large numbers of faults that will effect day to day operations.

2.14 MF Radio equipment in both the NW quadrant and the SW quadrant has not worked properly since the new equipment has been installed. Incidents have had to be passed to foreign SAR authorities because HM Coastguard was unable to communicate.

2.15 DF technology has been removed from operations rooms and not replaced. On occasions this technology was used to locate vessels in distress. The MCA answer is that they cannot afford to replace this equipment and to task RNLI lifeboats or Search and Rescue helicopters.

2.16 PCS believes it is negligent to introduce a new structure into an emergency service unless it is fully tested prior to implementation. However MCA intends to close 50% of those stations scheduled to close, prior to the new structure being put in place.

#### *Estate*

2.17 MCA states that they have no choice in closing Clyde and Yarmouth due to lease issues. In the case of Clyde this is a government owned building and in the present economic climate the MoD is unlikely to be able to sell the land. In the Case of Yarmouth the floor space is sub-let from government departments who

have pulled out of the building. PCS is sure that if MCA wanted to they could come to an arrangement with the private landlord to extend the lease.

2.18 Under the present plans a number of sites will lose Coastguard officers but will retain Marine Surveyors. This will leave these sites being under-utilised but the ongoing estate cost will remain the same.

#### *Transitional period*

2.19 PCS believes that the vast majority of staff at closure stations will not relocate and become part of the new structure.

2.20 Staff at both Clyde and Forth have already gone through an “expressions of interest” exercise. This resulted in no member of staff willing to move to Stornoway or Shetland. Only four members of staff are willing to move to Belfast and two members of staff have informed PCS that they are only going on a short term basis and are unlikely to remain with the service during the important summer months next year.

2.21 PCS believes the costs in moving equipment and paying for staff to work on detached duty are greater than the costs of retaining stations prior to the MOC becoming operational.

2.22 As mentioned before, staff are already leaving because they do not support the reforms but also many are leaving as they do not believe that the new structure meets their aspirations in relation to pay and grading. In certain locations staff are leaving to work for private sector employers paying £15,000 per annum more whilst not having to gain any further qualifications to undertake new roles.

2.23 During the transitional period staff at those stations having to take over responsibility from closure stations will have to take on additional areas of responsibility covering the same area with fewer staff than presently are on watch. The technology being used to achieve this will not have the same functionality as the present equipment, ie no 999 caller information will display on the equipment at Belfast or Stornoway from calls that originated in the old Clyde Coastguard district.

2.24 In Scotland and Northern Ireland the present risk assessed levels of staffing for the busy summer months, are 27 staff on duty. Post closure taking into account those that are planning to move, this will reduce to approximately 18. PCS believes that this will not be safe. PCS assumes this will take place in the east and south east coasts of England when Humber and Thames have to take over the operational responsibility for the Yarmouth area.

#### *Equality Impact Assessment and Risk Assessments*

2.25 No Equality Impact Assessments have been carried out. The criteria for choosing stations for closure appear to be political or expedient due to leases coming to an end rather than sound operational decisions. Some of the stations closing are located in areas of high unemployment and the loss of professional jobs in these areas will have a much larger and detrimental impact on the local economies.

2.26 No risk assessments have been carried out prior to MCA planning the closures of Clyde, Forth and Yarmouth. There appears to be no contingency plans or plan B if plan A fails.

#### *Resources*

2.27 The MCA continues to cut resources. Over the last few years MRCCs have seen a constant removal of dedicated SAR units that assist them in prosecuting Search and Rescue operations. MRCC have had the removal of direction finding equipment. Tasking of Volunteer Coastguard teams especially during the day has become more difficult as volunteers are not available. The Tugs have been removed from the NW Scotland, SW England and the Dover Straits. MCA has ceased funding of the Maritime Incident Response Group.

2.26 Many MRCCs are unable to meet risk assessed levels of staffing even when over 1,000 hours of overtime is being worked. This situation will get worse unless the ongoing pay dispute is settled and the correct remuneration for the job has been achieved.

2.37 Freedom of Information requests have indicated that the cost of the MOC from next year will be in the region of £360,000, not including staffing costs. Whilst we agree with a national network we believe that the cost of the MOC at Fareham will cost more in the long run than the alternative sites.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

3.1 PCS believes that the original and the second consultation process were flawed and did not allow for full consultation on the modernisation of the coastguard service.

3.2 The planned closure and the reduction of staffing in some operational centres will put lives at risk especially as the MCA is going ahead with closures prior to the Maritime Operations centre being operational. We believe that the cost of closing stations prior to the national network being available is a false economy.

3.3 MCA should be addressing the faults that are occurring with the system at present rather than continuing to push on with modernisation with simply a hope that the technology will come right in the end.

3.4 The transitional period is flawed and has not been adequately risk assessed. MCA is already losing experienced staff meaning that new staff recruited to the MOC are not gaining from the depth of knowledge that was held within existing staff. This will lead to a long term legacy of knowledge being lost that will take many years for the MCA to recover from.

3.5 PCS believes rather than cutting costs within Search and Rescue operations that the MCA and Government should adequately fund the service.

September 2012

### Written evidence from the Shetland Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre (CFU 19)

#### PREFACE

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your enquiry and we hope that the following will be given your due and urgent consideration.

Firstly, may we bring to your attention the serious nature of the situation which now afflicts our agency. It provides us with no pleasure to report that so many of our fears as submitted and understood by your Committee have now come to pass. As we have said before, we, as Coastguards are not against change or modernisation per se, but that must be done in an orderly and SAFE manner and there are a number of matters that give us, as operational coastguards, cause for concern.

#### SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

- A significant number of experienced Coastguard Officers have already left the service leading to degraded levels of experience and local knowledge around the coast. Many stations are operating at or below current risk-assessed manning levels which is clearly dangerous and unacceptable.
- Despite it being pointed out previously by many Coastguards as a strong likelihood, MCA Management seems to have made little preparation for and is currently doing very little to, alleviate the current manpower shortfall during the transitional period from the current set-up to "Future Coastguard," leaving the UK coastline dangerously under-manned.
- Despite assurances from Ministers and MCA Management that our reasonable pay claims would be addressed and that Coastguards would be rewarded for the demanding, professional job that we do, as yet there has been no offer forthcoming. Officers are being expected to take on extra work and responsibility with no commensurate increase in pay and they will soon be placed in the ridiculous and invidious position of having to apply for their own jobs, leading to resentment and uncertainty which is fuelling the departure rate from HM Coastguard.
- Despite reduced manpower levels, stations such as Shetland Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre (MRCC) are adopting greatly increased operational areas and responsibilities with fewer staff. This has led to spiralling overtime, much reduced leave opportunities and much greater levels of responsibility being placed on unqualified staff, with a consequent impact upon morale.
- Despite the welcome u-turn on the provision of Emergency Towing Vessels for Scottish waters, we are still in the position of there being only one tug to cover virtually the entire North of Scotland from Ardnamurchan Point in the West to Aberdeen in the East and this is only a temporary measure. The positioning of one tug in Orkney makes it virtually useless in an incident occurring either to the West or East of Scotland.
- Our colleagues in the Coast Rescue Service (formerly Auxiliaries) have serious concerns about the increasing burden of administration and additional responsibilities being placed upon them. They will be responding themselves to this enquiry.
- Serious concerns remain about the reliability and resilience of Coastguard communications equipment. New methods of interconnecting stations are being implemented but are still clearly not as reliable as we were told they would be.

#### DETAILS OF THOSE INVOLVED IN THIS SUBMISSION

The current staff of 19 personnel at Shetland MRCC have had input into this document. Between them, they have amassed many years of operational coastguard experience and many have other maritime experience and related qualifications making them ideally placed and qualified to comment.

#### EVIDENCE SUBMISSION

##### *Low manning levels in the current transitional phase*

1. As stated, many, if not all of the current configuration of MRCC around the UK are operating, at times, at or below currently risk-assessed minimum manning levels, leading to a potentially dangerous lack of manpower around the UK coastline. Many Coastguards are voting with their feet, due in part to the continuing lack of a concrete pay and conditions offer (resulting in continuing industrial action) and also due to the



disillusionment, uncertainty, animosity and disgruntlement generated by the current process. Many of those leaving are experienced coastguards and this is leading to a serious degradation of the experience and local knowledge levels around the coast.

2. During the previous consultation exercises, it was highlighted by many, that the foregoing would be a highly likely scenario in the event of the MCA management proposals going ahead and since ordinary coastguards were able to envisage such, why was it that neither Ministers nor MCA management could not? There seems to have been little or no thought given to the idea that perhaps many staff and their families would not be as enamoured of their plans and that many would seek alternative employment. Especially in areas where, for example the expanding renewables industry (such as wind farms) are operating. These are readily absorbing qualified, experienced coastguard operations staff whilst offering significantly higher levels of remuneration. It is also very obvious that such jobs do not have the significant stress-levels and aggravation which are attached to that of being a Coastguard. We earnestly hope that both MCA Management and Ministers clearly understand that many experienced coastguards are now waiting to see what the pay and conditions offer will provide. Should these not meet our expectations the current steady flow of departures from the organisation will become a flood, as coastguards seek enhanced, rewarding re-employment. Could any organisation effectively counter such a loss of experience, talent and local knowledge in the short to medium term? We doubt it very much.

3. As far as Shetland MRCC is concerned, our current manning level should be 22 staff. Our actual manning level in the Operations Room is 18 full time staff and one part time. five of the full time staff are CWAs under training. Effectively we only have 12.5 fully qualified Operational Coastguards, not including the Rescue Co-Ordination Centre Manager (RCCM) who as well as his normal daily duties carries out on-call duties as the Duty Operations Manager. The shift pattern is 12 hrs of two days followed by two nights then four days off divided between four watches (which actually means a sleeping day off and three days off). What this means in practice is that due to sickness, absence, leave, courses etc., often the manning level per watch can be below the risk-assessed level (which may be different at each station) with below minimum levels of qualified staff on watch. The contemporary addition of the enhanced responsibilities of the enlarged areas is further exacerbating the situation, (albeit that this is viewed as being a short term scenario as staff become au fait with their enhanced duties). It also means that opportunities for leave are much reduced, if not impossible. The staff are having to work greatly increased amounts of overtime and opportunities for experience elsewhere through secondments etc are seriously diminished. We will go into more detail about the extra responsibilities/areas we have to cover later in this document.

4. We believe that all of the above has led to a dangerously low manpower situation around the coastline of the UK, at a time when, as the MCA themselves stated in their original consultation paper, "our seas are getting busier and the weather conditions becoming more extreme due to climate change". We fundamentally believe that this is dangerous and that little or nothing is being done to address the situation.

#### *Loss of local knowledge*

5. As previously stated the current loss of experienced and talented staff presents particular problems for HM Coastguard in terms of not only the skill and qualifications lost, but also the local knowledge that these officers have built up over their many years of operational service.

6. As previously recognised by Honourable Members of the Committee, local knowledge, also referred to in the last enquiry as situational awareness, is regarded as vitally important. We, as operational coastguards agree wholeheartedly. The MCA has adopted a "sticking plaster" approach to this problem via projects such as the Vernacular Database Project or "FINTAN" in conjunction with the Ordnance Survey (which is collecting local vernacular and dialectal place names which are not already on maps). Such databases are meant to cover for the loss of local knowledge from the coast that the closure of so many current MRCC will create. This essentially and entirely misses the point of local knowledge being an intricate weave of various strands of information being tightly woven in an orderly pattern. It is not enough to know where a place is or indeed what the locals call it. Where is the detailed local information about what is available in the local area to effect the best and fastest possible outcome? It is all very well having computerised databases but such databases cannot be the repository of intimate local operational knowledge. What value are these databases if you don't then know how to efficiently apply the information which they contain?

7. MCA appear to be keen to dismiss the value of local knowledge for one reason and one reason only—it undermines what lies within their plans. In reality it is the single most important factor in the speedy and effective resolution of Search and Rescue incidents and it is also the single most important factor that undermines their plans for widespread station closures. We suggest that anyone who ignores the importance and value of local knowledge does so at enormous risk to peoples' lives and our environment.

#### *Ongoing industrial action/pay dispute*

8. As has been outlined, we are still in the position of undertaking industrial action both strike action and ongoing action short of a strike, due to the lack of progress on our dispute over current pay and conditions. This has been ongoing now for several years. To date there is little sign of a resolution with no formal offer having been made, despite assurance from the Minister, Mike Penning, that Coastguards deserve better rewards



for the responsibilities, qualifications and rigorous training and examinations which they undertake simply in order to do their job. What has become abundantly clear during this whole process is that while Coastguards are attached to standard Civil Service Administrative Pay Grades, little will change. It must be recognised by senior management and Ministers that the work we do as Coastguards is unlike anything other Civil Servants do and should be justifiably recognised by specialist pay and reward. The suggestion that this simply cannot be done is a complete nonsense. Where there is a will there is a way.

9. It is very clear that the current flow of departures from the MCA is largely related to the current poor remuneration and the ongoing dispute surrounding this. MCA management and Ministers need to firmly grasp the fact that should any future pay offer not meet the expectations of Coastguard staff, this current flow will become a flood, leaving the already depleted organisation, desperately short of experienced, qualified staff, with all the ramifications that will have for Maritime Safety.

10. In the interim, we the ordinary operational staff are, as has been pointed out, being asked to take on much larger areas of operational responsibility and increased workload without any increase in pay or conditions whatsoever. No attempt has been made to offer any interim pay or bonuses to reward staff for the extra additional workload and responsibilities they have been asked to take on.

#### *Increase in operational areas/workload*

11. Several MRCC around the coast are already feeling the effect of the MCA's proposals during this transitional phase in as much as we are having to take on much larger operational areas and a much heavier workload, whilst at the same time suffering staff losses to the extent where watches are being manned below risk-assessed manning levels and often with unqualified staff. To use the Shetland area as an example, we have recently taken on the responsibility of taking transit reports for the busy Pentland Firth (known as MAREPS) from our colleagues in Aberdeen, as a prelude to taking over a much larger area of operations as Aberdeen MRCCs area expands further south, to cope with the closure of Forth MRCC. This has resulted in an almost 40% increase in the number of reports being taken from vessels whilst at the same time we have only 57% of the qualified staff we should have.

12. On 6 September 2012, Shetland MRCC took on operational responsibility for much of the northern coast of Scotland, including the busy and often dangerous Pentland Firth. This additional area will stretch from Cape Wrath at the North-West tip of Scotland down to Brora Point, at Latitude 58 degrees North. This will be approximately an extra 6,000 sq nautical miles of sea to cover, plus several hundred miles of coastline. This has involved taking over operational control of a further two RNLI all-weather lifeboats plus the entire Wick Sector of the Coast Rescue Service, comprising of a Sector Manager plus seven Coast Rescue Teams. Again we would stress that all of this will be with a much reduced staffing level which is set to fall further with the retirement of a long serving and very experienced Coastguard Officer in October. In order to try and compensate for this shortfall it is now proposed to open up overtime and allow unqualified and inexperienced members of staff to "make up the numbers." Without any disrespect to our unqualified colleagues, is this any way to run a safety of life service? There has also been limited opportunity for officers to gain any knowledge, other than to look at maps and internet data and a visit from the local Sector Manager, of their extended district. In response to questions from yourselves, the MCA clearly stated that staff taking over new areas would be given ample opportunity to visit and familiarise themselves with their new areas of responsibility. This simply HAS NOT HAPPENED. We believe this could potentially have a detrimental effect on safety.

#### *Problems with communications equipment/resilience*

13. Despite various improvements to the communications infrastructure that have either been implemented or are in the process of being implemented and these are welcome, we are still faced with reliability and resilience problems which we feel are unlikely to improve, once the programme of closures starts to be implemented.

14. A new method of connecting between stations has been established and it is currently being tested to confirm its resilience and viability. So far, the experiences of ourselves and our colleagues at Aberdeen and Forth have not instilled us with confidence. We currently have two communication terminals "connected" to Aberdeen from Shetland. However, this link has been subject to fairly regular interruption and there have also been problems whereby there have been repeated complete failures of the equipment at Forth MRCC.

15. Despite assurances given by senior BT staff who attended a public meeting in Shetland during the initial consultation process that the links between Shetland and the mainland would be significantly improved with the addition of a cabled link, this has not materialised and there is no indication of when this will happen, if at all. There has been no real improvement in our communications situation as reported to you in our previous submission. We are still subject to the vagaries of microwave relay links to the mainland. Furthermore, as stated above, we have taken over a much larger operational area earlier this month and in order to do so we should have had access to several radio aerials along the north coast of Scotland. The re-routing of the connections to these aerials has still not been done. We are left with the situation where we have had to take operational responsibility for this area and communicate with vessels and resources via the often interrupted two desk link to Aberdeen MRCC. This gives us some cause for concern.

*Emergency towing vessels*

16. Whilst the extension to the provision of an Emergency Towing Vessel stationed in Orkney is welcome, this is only a temporary measure and in any case is not really sufficient for the job at hand. We are now in the position of having only one vessel to cover the entire North-West, North and North-East coasts of Scotland. The vessels positioning in Orkney is such that were an incident to occur, say, off the Western Isles, the time it would take the vessel to get to an incident would be such as to render it virtually useless. The MCA/Government need to recognise that one vessel simply is not sufficient to cover such a vast area with such a high level of vessel traffic, much of which is either petrochemical related or cruise liners. Surely the cost of the provision of two such vessels as before would far outweigh the clean-up costs in a serious tanker incident or indeed the potential loss of life were the casualty to be a large cruise liner? They also need to recognise that the availability from the private sector simply is not there. On occasions when we have had to enquire of tug brokers for a suitable vessel for towage duties we have been informed either there isn't one or the soonest one could get here would be about 14 hours, all but useless in a time-critical situation.

*Coast rescue service*

17. Our colleagues in the Coast Rescue Service, the volunteers who form our Coast Rescue Teams, have made it clear to us that they now have serious concerns about what is being proposed/implemented in their part of the Coastguard service. As volunteers they have concerns about the amount of extra responsibility they are being asked to take on under the new set-up and also the increasing burden of administration and paperwork that is being imposed upon them by the MCA. Experienced members have told us that they feel this will drive away volunteers, leaving the Service with an acute shortage of manpower to draw on in the future. This is particularly acutely felt in remote areas such as Shetland where any reluctance on the part of local people to join the CRS will likely have severe repercussions for the future. We as operations room staff are also deeply concerned about how the new set-up may very well disrupt the current close working relationship which we have with our colleagues in the CRS, where the two organisations could become somewhat distant from each other, with potentially serious consequences.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

18. We respectfully recommend that the Honourable Members of the Committee consider:

- Recommend a complete halt to the current process which is clearly being done in a piecemeal, ad-hoc basis so that a through review can be carried out involving ALL interested parties and stakeholders so that a clear, coherent and INFORMED future for HM Coastguard can be agreed upon.
- Recommend that the MCA URGENTLY addresses the shortfall in manpower around the UK coastline which has the potential to lead to loss of life.
- Recommend that the Government and MCA urgently deal with the ongoing pay dispute as this is contributing to the many experienced Coastguards leaving the service and is creating ill-feeling and resentment.
- Recommend that the Government and MCA look again at ETV provision around the Scottish coast such that there is adequate, capable coverage on a long-term basis upon which the Coastguard and the maritime user can rely.

September 2012

**Supplementary written evidence from the Department for Transport (CFU 15a)**

Sir Alan Massey and I appeared before your Committee on 22 October and I undertook to provide further information to help your inquiry into the Coastguard, Emergency Towing Vessels and the Maritime Incident Response Group.

I would like to start by reiterating what I said in my opening statement: safety is very much this Government's top priority. Frontline services and delivery on search and rescue will not be affected. It is the coordination arrangements that will change as part of the modernisation plan.

In light of the views expressed by members of the PCS Union, you asked about opportunities given to Coastguard Officers at Shetland Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) to familiarise themselves with their revised area of responsibility as part of the arrangements for closing the Forth Centre at the end of September. I understand, however, that the enlarged area of operational responsibility is predominantly sea, coupled with some coastline centred around the village of Brora to Cape Wrath. Shetland-based officers have always been and will continue to be very familiar with that coast and its associated rescue resources. Calling out those resources in severe weather conditions is an already established practice.

The Shetland Rescue Centre Manager and a Watch Manger have attended monthly meetings at the Aberdeen Centre. The local Coastguard Sector Manager for Dornoch, who has an in-depth knowledge of the local terrain and available rescue resources, has been to the Shetland MRCC for an extended period to brief operators in detail. There is also an ongoing exchange programme for operational staff from both sites to bolster familiarity.

It is important to remember that officers at the Shetland MRCC have taken on responsibility for an area that was previously in the Aberdeen MRCC patch, but Aberdeen remains open and operational and officers there can be called upon for any additional information or expertise if necessary.

I said that I would look again at the level of engagement with Coastguards in coordination centres. The MCA has embarked on a full programme of management engagement with staff throughout this modernisation programme. Since January this year 55 visits to MRCCs have taken place involving one or more members of the MCA's senior team, including 15 visits by Sir Alan Massey. Each visit has given staff the opportunity to share their concerns and to be updated on the modernisation programme.

Given my relatively recent arrival in post, I have not yet had the opportunity to visit an MRCC. I have now made arrangements to meet staff and to speak at the Agency's Development Event planned for mid-December for more than 150 delegates. I will use that opportunity to talk to operational Coastguards and others and to hear their views and concerns. I have arranged a visit to the Solent MRCC on 9 January. The Committee might also like to note that during my visit to the Southampton Boat Show in September, I was able to spend some time discussing the modernisation programme with Coastguards from Stornoway and Aberdeen who were on the MCA stand delivering public safety messages. I can assure the Committee that no issues of concern were raised with me.

Further staff engagement efforts include written communications in the form of regular Chief Executive and Director-level messages and updates to local managers for them to cascade to their teams, with the opportunity to hold discussions, ask questions and air concerns. The Agency also created a bespoke microsite in November 2011 that provides easy access in one place to all information about the modernisation programme. In the first two months of it going live, the site's individual pages received 170,919 hits. During 2012 it has continued to prove popular with over 830,000 hits to date, including the chance for Coastguards to volunteer to get involved with the practical implementation of the planned changes. So far, 164 staff have offered their skills and expertise in taking forward the modernisation programme. Those volunteers are being used in a variety of tasks from determining the uniform and nomenclature of the new organisation to detailed analysis of incident records, and putting together a learning and development capability framework.

The Coastguard operational management teams (which include MRCC and Coastal Area Managers) are regularly brought together to discuss implementation issues, to share information and views from the staff at the Coordination Centres and to be given updates for them to cascade to all officers.

Since November 2011, there has been an open invitation to all staff to visit the new Maritime Operations Centre at Fareham. Representatives from all MRCCs have taken up the invitation and 278 people have so far taken part in guided tours designed to explain the operating potential of the facilities and to answer questions about the future operating model.

There have also been frequent meetings between the MCA and the PCS Union representatives, including at Chief Executive level. Programme managers and PCS representatives have been meeting twice monthly since the November 2011 announcement. That detailed work has led to the agreement of new job descriptions and gradings for the revised roles and responsibilities in the new structure and, as a result, the PCS Union announced on 8 October its suspension of the industrial action short of a strike that had been in place since May 2007.

The Agency has an increasing presence on social media sites and is using those channels to reinforce messages about the modernisation programme, including the development of a photo story board to illustrate how HM Coastguard deals with an emergency call. Although this is clearly not the primary route for engaging with staff, undoubtedly some of the current 10,000 MCA followers on Twitter and Facebook will be Coastguards in coordination centres.

Against that background of activity, I am clear that the Agency is, intentionally and with considerable determination, doing a great deal to engage with its staff and to keep them up to date with developments. This reinforces the view I put to the Committee that the level of engagement is much greater than suggested to you by other witnesses. I acknowledge that some Coastguard Officers fundamentally disagree with the planned modernisation programme, and some others are uncomfortable with its likely consequences for them personally. This is probably inevitable, and completely understandable. Nevertheless, I am satisfied that the MCA has taken reasonable and conscious steps to involve and engage staff in a continuous and constructive manner.

More generally, the MCA's communications plan for the full closure programme up to March 2015 includes factual and reassuring messages through the media and other channels to inform the public that the modernisation of HM Coastguard is about changing how rescues are coordinated with no change to the front line rescue services or the 999 system. Those communications are timed for when closure dates are announced (as we did recently in the case of Great Yarmouth) and at the time of closure (as we did for Forth at the end of September and as we plan for Clyde in December). The Agency also sends targeted information to stakeholder groups and its emergency service partners.

The Committee asked for more information about the new Coastguard pay structure compared to the current rates of basic pay. The following table illustrates how many operational staff will be at each Civil Service grade compared to now. You can see that the new profile has a significantly higher grade mix with the salaries that reflect the increased responsibilities of the new roles. The full salary package including allowances and

related terms and conditions are currently subject to formal negotiation and agreement with HM Treasury, Cabinet Office and the Trade Unions.

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Current Complement</i>	<i>Future Complement</i>
AA and Equivalent	£13,594.00	£14,730.00	130.5	0
AO and Equivalent	£15,171.00	£19,168.00	239	62
EO and Equivalent	£20,321.00	£25,676.00	146	198
HEO and Equivalent	£24,543.00	£31,006.00	19	107
SE0 and Equivalent	£31,518.00	£39,878.00	0	37
G7 and Equivalent	£41,161.00	£52,081.00	12	12
Total			546.5	416 (314 in Centres and then 102 supporting the Coastguard Rescue Service)

The MCA's current vacancy rate is 13.8%. Immediately prior to the announcement of the consultation in December 2010 the rate was 6.9%. The MCA is working to reduce the current level through a combination of recruitment activity and retention incentives. At the time of writing, the current vacancy rates in the other DfT Executive Agencies are:

HA	3.5%
DVLA	3.0%
DSA	3.5%
VOSA	7.0%
VCA	5.2%

Finally, I thought I would take this opportunity to clarify what my predecessor said on closures. You said in the hearing "Your predecessor did give a commitment to the House on 22 November last that no centres will close before the robustness of the system was demonstrated." It is certainly the case that in response to a question from Sherry! Murray MP, Mike Penning said that "...no centres will close before the robustness of the system is demonstrated. Should there be any blips in the system, I can assure my hon. Friend that no station will close until we have the level of resilience that we do not have today." However, that response should be properly viewed within the context of the opening statement that the Minister had just read to the House in which he said we were publishing the Blueprint for the modernisation programme and that "This timetable remains our best estimate of when these centres will close, although clearly it will need to be kept under review to match operational requirements." Those operational requirements, as set out in the Blueprint, always recognised that the centres at Forth, Clyde and Great Yarmouth would close ahead of the Fareham Maritime Operations Centre being fully up and running.

November 2012

#### Supplementary written evidence from PCS (CFU 18a)

At the Transport Select Committee evidence session on 22 October 2012, the Committee heard evidence from three representatives from PCS, all operational staff within the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA). The Committee also heard evidence from the Minister Stephen Hammond and from Sir Alan Massey.

*At Q76 to the Minister, he was asked why "given the level of disquiet, for want of a better phrase, you have not been to a station".*

*The Minister replied that "perhaps level of disquiet being expressed to your committee is being expressed less by the people themselves than formally through the union process".*

*At Q76 the Minister then was asked whether people were happier than the committee had been led to believe (by PCS representatives). The Minister replied that "You may wish to draw that conclusion":*

*At Q78 the Minister was asked "Is it your view, that people are happier than the evidence given to us suggests?" To which the Minister replied "All I can say is that I have—yes that is my view":*

I think it is important for the Committee to know that far from staff/workers being "happier" than our representatives led the committee to understand, they are deeply unhappy. Some evidence of this is that in a consultative ballot to ascertain how our members felt about the MCA proposals. Not only did 86% of our those responding say they had no confidence in the proposals or that they would protect the public's safety but 99% of those responding said they supported the PCS demand for full an open consultation on the plans. Despite the Minister's reference to numerous meetings our members do not feel there has been full and open consultation with them on these matters.

In addition as an example of how our members are not “happier” than our representatives led the committee to believe they were, all of the staff at the Liverpool coastguard submitted a collective grievance in December 2011—that is 20 staff—of whom five have subsequently left due to complete dissatisfaction with how the MCA have handled proposed changes.

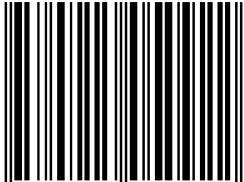
To date this collective grievance has not been concluded—a timescale of 11 months when in fact grievances should be dealt with within a maximum of 60 days (please see annex 1 to this letter which is an extract of the staff handbook). PCS did agree that the 60 day maximum could be extended given the complex nature of the grievance but we do not accept that some 11 months and counting is an acceptable extension particularly when we are aware that the management side do have the report from the investigating officer but have refused to release it over the last few weeks. We believe this is because they did not want that report released before the Transport Select committee had concluded hearing evidence from our representatives. Far from being “happier” our representatives did not mention this grievance at this site to the committee as they concentrated on the specific questions they were asked. I mention it here as PCS are deeply unhappy that the minister would portray our representatives as not giving accurate information about the level of disquiet in the service currently. If the minister had been briefed correctly about the MCA’s own survey of staff he would know of the level of dissatisfaction and concern for the future of the service and the public’s safety. I attach at Annex 2 survey results from the 2012 staff survey at Liverpool.

November 2012

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