



House of Commons  
Transport Committee

---

**The Coastguard,  
Emergency Towing  
Vessels and the  
Maritime Incident  
Response Group:  
follow up: Government  
Response to the  
Committee's Sixth  
Report of 2012–13**

---

Tenth Report of Session 2012–13





House of Commons  
Transport Committee

---

**The Coastguard,  
Emergency Towing  
Vessels and the  
Maritime Incident  
Response Group:  
follow up: Government  
Response to the  
Committee's Sixth  
Report of 2012–13**

---

**Tenth Report of Session 2012–13**

*Report, together with an appendix and formal minutes*

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed 4 March 2013*

**HC 1018**  
Published on 13 March 2013  
by authority of the House of Commons  
London: The Stationery Office Limited  
£6.50

## 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.

### Current membership

Mrs Louise Ellman (*Labour/Co-operative, Liverpool Riverside*) (Chair)  
Steve Baker (*Conservative, Wycombe*)  
Sarah Champion (*Labour, Rotherham*)  
Jim Dobbin (*Labour/Co-operative, Heywood and Middleton*)  
Kwasi Kwarteng (*Conservative, Spelthorne*)  
Karen Lumley (*Conservative, Redditch*)  
Karl McCartney (*Conservative, Lincoln*)  
Lucy Powell (*Labour/Co-operative, Manchester Central*)  
Mr Adrian Sanders (*Liberal Democrat, Torbay*)  
Iain Stewart (*Conservative, Milton Keynes South*)  
Graham Stringer (*Labour, Blackley and Broughton*)

The following were also members of the committee during the Parliament.

Angie Bray (*Conservative, Ealing Central and Acton*), Lilian Greenwood (*Labour, Nottingham South*), Mr Tom Harris (*Labour, Glasgow South*), Julie Hilling (*Labour, Bolton West*), Kelvin Hopkins (*Labour, Luton North*), Mr John Leech (*Liberal Democrat, Manchester Withington*) Paul Maynard, (*Conservative, Blackpool North and Cleveleys*), Gavin Shuker (*Labour/Co-operative, Luton South*), Angela Smith (*Labour, Penistone and Stocksbridge*), Julian Sturdy (*Conservative, York Outer*)

### Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

### 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), Richard Jeremy (Committee Specialist), Adrian Hitchins (Senior Committee Assistant), Eldon Gallagher (Committee Assistant), Nyree Barratt-Hendricks (Committee Support Assistant) and Hannah Pearce (Media Officer).

### Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Transport Committee, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6263; the Committee's email address is [transcom@parliament.uk](mailto:transcom@parliament.uk)

# Contents

---

<b>Report</b>	<i>Page</i>
<b>Report</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Annex: Letter from the Chair of the Committee to Stephen Hammond MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The Coastguard, Emergency Towing Vessels and the Maritime Incident Response Group: Follow up: Government response to the Sixth Report of 2012-13</b>	<b>5</b>
Role of the Maritime Operations Centre (MOC)	5
The National Network: National Maritime Operations Centre and Coastguard Operations Centres	5
Coastguards role at the MOC	6
Low Level Routine Activity – (e.g. 0630 to 1030 on a typical weekday in Summer)	7
Higher Intensity Operations With Increasing Activity (e.g. 1030 to 1430 on the same typical Summer day)	7
Major Incident (say 1430 on the same typical Summer day)	7
Timing and closure of Maritime Rescue and Co-ordination Centres (MRCCs) and opening of Maritime Operations Centre (MOC)	8
Local knowledge	9
Technology – communication links between Shetland, Mainland Scotland and other Maritime Rescue and Co-ordination Centres	11
Staffing – recruitment, loss of experienced coastguards – talent drain	11
Emergency Towing Vehicles (ETVs)	14
Emergency Towing Vehicles and FLAMINIA	15
Maritime Instant Response Group (MIRG)	16
Reform of Coastguard Service – ministerial visit to an Maritime Rescue and Co-ordination Centre	16
More settled future	17
Annex to the Government reply	18
<b>Formal Minutes</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament</b>	<b>20</b>



## Report

---

On 12 February 2013 we received the Government reply to our Sixth Report of 2012-13, The Coastguard, Emergency Towing Vessels and the Maritime Incident Response Group: follow up. We publish this reply with this report. The Government has responded comprehensively to our recommendations, particularly in relation to how the Coastguard Service will operate once the new Maritime Operations Centre is opened. However, we continue to receive worrying information from coastguards about staffing levels, management culture, morale and the arrangements for closing MRCCs. We note that the Government has changed its plans for the winding down of Yarmouth MRCC so that it opens only in the daytime from 4 March, despite earlier ruling out MRCCs operating only during daytime. We have written to the Minister to pursue these matters: our letter is also published with this report. We have applied for a debate in the House of Commons on the Coastguard Service to ensure that these issues are properly addressed during the reform process.

## Annex: Letter from the Chair of the Committee to Stephen Hammond MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport

---

I am grateful for timely receipt of the Government reply to our follow up report on the Coastguard Service and related matters. The Transport Committee discussed the reply at its meeting this afternoon and we agreed to publish it along with this letter and a short report.

We continue to receive correspondence from coastguards which raises concerns about the detailed implementation of the Government's reform programme. There are persistent complaints about low staffing levels at particular MRCCs. For example, we have been told that there are 9.5 full-time-equivalent vacancies at Aberdeen and that there are only 6.57 full-time watch officers at the Shetland MRCC compared to a complement of 12. I would be grateful for your observations on this situation and how it is possible for a safe service to be provided when some MRCCs are significantly under-staffed.

Particular concerns have been expressed about staffing at Belfast MRCC. We have been told that the station has run with just 3 staff on watch at times due to staff sickness. We would be grateful for confirmation of how many staff are scheduled to be on watch at Belfast MRCC, how often fewer staff have been on watch there since 1 January, and your view of the safety of the service provided by Belfast MRCC given these staffing problems.

In your reply to our report you say that Yarmouth MRCC is going to be "moving ... to day time-only operations from 4 March 2013 in the light of its staffing profile which has made 24 hour operations untenable". The Government had previously told us, in its reply to our first report on this issue, that it had decided against operating MRCCs in this way in view of strong concerns about day-time only working, particularly in relation to the handover of incidents. Can you explain in more detail why 24-hour operations at Yarmouth MRCC are considered to be untenable, what the MRCC's working hours will be, and what arrangements have been put in place to manage the Yarmouth district when the MRCC is closed, particularly in relation to the handover of ongoing incidents.

Could you also provide details of the arrangements in place to train Humber coastguards in the local knowledge necessary for them to take over responsibility for the coastline currently covered by Yarmouth MRCC.

Finally, we note the information provided about the Grampian Frontier. Could you explain whether any public money is or might be involved in the work of this vessel and also what its area of operation is likely to be, particularly in relation to the area of the operation of the ETV based in the southern part of the Fair Isle Channel.

*4 March 2013*

# The Coastguard, Emergency Towing Vessels and the Maritime Incident Response Group: Follow up: Government response to the Sixth Report of 2012-13

---

## Role of the Maritime Operations Centre (MOC)

1. **Recommendation 1 (paragraph 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.

### *The National Network: National Maritime Operations Centre and Coastguard Operations Centres*

2. From April 2015, Her Majesty's Coastguard (HMCG) will operate as a single national network consisting of a national Maritime Operations Centre (MOC), nine 24-hour Coastguard Operations Centres (CGOCs) and London Coastguard (the small Unit co-located with the Port of London Authority operations centre, overseeing activity on the tidal Thames). These Centres will use a networked data and communication system and each Coastguard Officer will have access to any radio site and to all operating platforms and data.

3. Coastguard Officers across the national network will be trained, practised and capable of delivering all functions, broadening their expertise in terms of variety, frequency and quality of work. That will add to resilience and the flexible deployment of staff to meet demand.

4. The MOC will manage the national network strategically. It will be the hub from which all the Coastguard functions are overseen. Those functions include Search and Rescue, Pollution Response, Vessel Traffic Management, Maritime Safety Information, Maritime Security and Emergency and Disaster Management.

5. The UK operational region will be sub-divided into more than 30 operational zones, which a senior officer (the National Maritime Operations Commander) based in the MOC will aggregate into flexible areas of responsibility to be assigned to teams at the CGOCs and the MOC based on risk-assessed factors, including:

- predicted levels of activity;
- known events;
- staff resource and capability;
- intelligence from partner organisations; and
- environmental information (weather, tide etc).

6. Under routine working, incidents will be handled by teams at the CGOCs or the MOC for their assigned area of responsibility. The MOC in Fareham would cover the majority of the south coast of England, for example.

7. The management team of senior officers based in the MOC and across other centres (led again by the National Maritime Operations Commander) will ensure that all functions are delivered nationally, taking account of the ebb and flow of operational demand. The management team can redistribute routine work across centres, reallocate tasks, or adjust the size of operational areas and their teams. Those decisions will be based on the same risk-assessed factors as for the initial allocation of areas of responsibility.

8. Under the current arrangements, a major incident could overwhelm the resources at a responding Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) and other work can be suspended for considerable periods. The MOC will have 96 officers, divided into shifts to provide 24 hour coverage. It will have enough people to absorb the very heavy initial demand that might be presented by a major incident or civil emergency, or to take on other safety critical roles to support Coastguards coordinating incidents at any location.

## Coastguards role at the MOC

**9. Recommendation 1 (paragraph 14): 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.**

10. Information about the delivery of Maritime SAR Coordination, the future Coastguard structure, hierarchy and detailed description of the roles are available to all staff on a dedicated Future Coastguard microsite on the MCA's intranet. This microsite was set up following the announcement in November 2011, and the information it contains is regularly updated and communicated to staff. The site also offers a dedicated facility for questions, to which the HQ staff team responds directly. On average the site is visited by 300 people each month.

11. All Coastguards will use the same information systems and be connected to the national communications infrastructure. What follows are three operational scenarios managed under the new nationally networked system.

### ***Low Level Routine Activity – (e.g. 0630 to 1030 on a typical weekday in Summer)***

12. Teams on duty in each of the CGOCs (and a number of teams in the MOC) will be covering an assigned area of responsibility for search and rescue and other work. Vessel Traffic Management would be provided by a team of seven officers, comprising two in Dover plus five, which in these circumstances would be with one in the MOC, one in Aberdeen, one in Stornoway, one in Belfast, and one in Falmouth. Command Control is the responsibility of the national Maritime Operations Commander and two Maritime Operations Controllers, all of whom are in the MOC. Operational staffing at this time would consist of three in all centres and 12 in the MOC, plus one in London and four in Dover, giving a total in the network of 41.

13. Activity at this point in the day is likely to be light, on an average day there might be two minor incidents, for example a fishing vessel that has broken down and needs a tow, and a yachtsman reported as slightly late.

### ***Higher Intensity Operations With Increasing Activity (e.g. 1030 to 1430 on the same typical Summer day)***

14. At this point in the day we would expect activity to have increased with something like 12 incidents underway around the UK, perhaps with a small cluster of localised activity. This would be in line with predicted levels of incidents, so the distribution of areas of responsibility remains the same. Staffing levels at each centre will have increased as the planned day shift takes up duty with sufficient resources to match the predicted seasonal and diurnal demand. With the increase of activity, command and control would now be the responsibility of the national Maritime Operations Commander and two Maritime Operations Controllers in the MOC, supplemented by Maritime Operations controllers within three of the CGOCs, which in these circumstances would be one in Milford Haven, one in Stornoway, and one in Humber. There will be one Maritime Operations Specialist working in each centre, plus two in the MOC. There will be five officers on duty in all centres and 20 more in the MOC, plus one in London and six in Dover. This gives a total of 67 across the network.

### ***Major Incident (say 1430 on the same typical Summer day)***

15. A major incident has been reported. For example a report of a ferry with an engine room fire off the north coast of Northern Ireland. Several Agencies would be engaged including Fire, Police and Ambulance as well as local authorities. In such circumstances, the Maritime Operations Commander, in consultation with their Maritime Operations Controllers, would be likely to have reduced the area of responsibility for Belfast to focus solely on the incident. In addition Vessel Traffic Management and Maritime Safety Information work for the area would be likely to have been redistributed to Shetland. A Maritime Operations Controller at any location might be given overall responsibility for the incident, with the Mission Coordinator function being delivered by a Senior Maritime Operations Officer at the nearest centre, in this case Belfast. Staff in the MOC would be handling general enquiries. They would also prepare a pollution response plan with Counter Pollution colleagues and in consultation with the Secretary of State's Representative for Maritime Intervention and Salvage. Once the situation had been

resolved, for example with the fire being extinguished by ship systems, and the ferry at anchor, the areas of responsibility will be held “as is” for a period whilst staff at Belfast conclude incident working. Operations would then return to the previous state.

16. An organisational structure and staff numbers at each location are contained in Annex A.

### **Timing and closure of Maritime Rescue and Co-ordination Centres (MRCCs) and opening of Maritime Operations Centre (MOC)**

**17. Recommendation 2 (paragraph 18): 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.**

18. The final decision to modernise HMCG was announced in November 2011 and the supporting blueprint document, published at the same time, clearly outlined proposed closure dates in terms of financial years for MRCCs. There have been no changes to these proposed timescales.

19. As set out in the published blueprint, transition to the new structure will happen progressively up to March 2015. We have always been clear that specific dates and the sequence of closures will be driven by operational requirements during the implementation of the programme and, as such, are subject to ongoing review.

20. Since the 2011 announcement the MCA and the PCS have been in constructive discussions about handling the operational and people issues associated with transition to the new HMCG structure. This is borne out by the successful transition of operational responsibility in the preparations for the closure of Forth in September 2012 and Clyde in December 2012.

21. Operational requirements for the closure of Great Yarmouth, and the future transfer of its current area of responsibility to Humber MRCC in May, are already underway. We are using the experiences we have gained from the closures at Forth and Clyde to develop the management plan for this closure. For example, we are taking steps both to improve the technical interoperability and resilience of Humber MRCC, and to give its Coastguard Officers greater knowledge and experience of the Yarmouth area in the run-up to closure. We are also moving the Yarmouth MRCC to day time-only operations from 4 March 2013 in the light of its staffing profile which has made 24 hour operations untenable.

22. A national “Expressions of Interest” exercise was initiated in November 2012 to gauge the preferences of HMCG staff for further employment or voluntary redundancy. This non-contractual exercise, set out options to move to another location, or leave under a Voluntary Redundancy Scheme (VRS). The VRS option is non-binding, but the responses are helping management and staff to develop a coherent plan.

23. PCS representatives, MCA local and national management and MCA Human Resources professionals are involved in fortnightly meetings, and have signed a pre-

redundancy agreement which sets out the steps the MCA will take to avoid the potential for compulsory redundancies.

24. The MCA has also published guidance about applying for the new HMCG jobs. This provides an opportunity for those people aspiring to these jobs to better understand the roles that will exist, including a 'reading list' of key documents and sources of information. We have also delivered a website designed to help staff find out about housing and facilities within the area of the MOC in Fareham.

25. The Government is encouraged that the PCS Union has suspended industrial action short-of-a-strike within the MCA which has been in place since May 2007. We are also encouraged by the results of the 2012 Civil Service People Survey which shows an increase in the staff engagement index for HMCG. But we will of course, as we have from the outset, put considerable effort into keeping staff fully informed as the implementation continues.

## Local knowledge

**26. Recommendation 3 (paragraphs 27 and 28): 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. 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.**

**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.**

28. Local knowledge remains important, but we need to move away from information being held by a few individuals in specific locations to it being a nationally managed resource available to all Coastguards at all times.

29. Modern technology and systems offer new methods for acquiring, assessing, storing, retrieving and sharing data and knowledge to supplement the capacity of individual intellect and memory, including:

- location-specific data linked to the source of an alert message (for example via telephone, radio or beacon); linked to:
- map, charting and geographical information systems that include overlays showing assets, resources and geographical/topographical data; linked to:
- databases storing contact details of, for example, local resources and sources of more detailed local information.

30. In the future local knowledge will be continuously collected, stored and shared within these systems and will enable geographical information to be enriched by:

- information on environmental factors;
- community characteristics;
- the availability, capabilities and limitations of SAR assets; and
- any other significant features that allow Coastguard officers to fully understand the scene of action remotely.

31. These tools will enable Coastguard officers to extend their existing skills to understand all the relevant systems applicable to their area of work, how to access those quickly and correctly, and how to interrogate them for detailed knowledge, including multiple place names (Welsh/Gaelic, local and phonetic).

32. While working towards this aim, we are using a range of initiatives to deliver a Coastguard service in which information is configured to a national standard and is accessible to all officers.

33. Ministers have already decided to retain one of each of the paired MRCCs to ensure that knowledge held by individuals is retained and built into our new arrangements.

34. A vernacular place name database is being developed with the Ordnance Survey (OS) to collect multiple local names for any coastal feature or place, including Gaelic or Welsh names. Coastguards are trialling this database and working collaboratively online with the OS, who are verifying the data.

35. When it comes to searching for people on the coast, our key asset has always been the people who live and work in our coastal communities. HMCG will continue to use the experience and intelligence of the volunteer Coastguard Rescue Officers and other search and rescue partners such as the RNLI.

36. It is not the case that Coastguard Officers are being left to organise the transfer of local knowledge. Operational managers are leading this work. During the transitional stage, before the national network is in place, the MCA is increasing Coastguards' familiarisation with their new areas of responsibility. We are using the experiences gained from the closures at Forth and Clyde. Our approach includes:

- exercises and full pairing days between closing and remaining MRCCs to operate the closing MRCC's area;
- visits for remaining MRCC staff to the MRCC which is closing; and
- visits and briefings for remaining MRCCs from RNLI Lifeboat Operations Managers and HMCG sector Managers about the area of the closing MRCC.

37. All Coastguards taking on new areas of responsibility will be assessed in their understanding of, for example, local rescue facilities, incident hotspots and the communications systems in place.

## **Technology – communication links between Shetland, Mainland Scotland and other Maritime Rescue and Co-ordination Centres**

**38. Recommendation 4 (paragraph 30): 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.**

39. During January 2013 the MCA has completed work to provide an enhanced permanent link between its communications systems at Aberdeen and Shetland; this link is now fully operational.

40. The Fibre System fixed link provided by BT between Shetland and mainland Scotland went live for the general public in late December 2012; subsequently BT migrated MCA's circuits onto its new Fibre System on 17 January 2013. We expect a significantly reduced number of millisecond outages as a result.

## **Staffing – recruitment, loss of experienced coastguards – talent drain**

**41. Recommendation 5 (paragraph 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.**

42. The following table sets out for each MRCC, the number of staff within each age profile; and their length of service.

	Age Profile (years)						
MRCC	<21	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60+	Total
London CG		2	2	2	5		11
Aberdeen		8	13	4	4	2	31
Belfast		6	9	4	9		28
Brixham		1	6	5	11	3	26
Dover		7	4	8	12	3	34
Falmouth		3	5	11	12	2	33
Holyhead		1	4	6	8	1	20
Humber		3	6	2	13	3	27
Liverpool		3	3	6	9		21
Milford Haven		3	2	7	8	3	23
Portland		3	2	7	12	2	26
Shetland		6	1	8	5		20
Solent		4	7	6	5	8	30
Stornoway		3	8	11	6		28
Swansea		3	8	6	4	1	22
Thames		2	5	5	8	3	23
Yarmouth	1	3	5	2	4	4	19
Grand Total	1	61	90	100	135	35	422

	Length of Service (years)								Total
	<5	5-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	
MRCC									
London CG	7	2	1		1				11
Aberdeen	7	8	4	6	4	2			31
Belfast	7	9	4	3	5				28
Brixham	7	6	4	7	1	1			26
Dover	13	13	4	2		1	1		34
Falmouth	10	8	6	6	1	2			33
Holyhead	4	5	5	5			1		20
Humber	4	6	8	4	2	3			27
Liverpool	4	3	5	4	5				21
Milford Haven	6	7	4	4	2				23
Portland	8	7	5	3	3				26
Shetland	8	3	2	5	2				20
Solent	8	7	8	5	2				30
Stornoway	8	5	6	6	1	2			28
Swansea	7	4	7	4					22
Thames	12	6	2	1	1			1	23
Yarmouth	4	5	3	3	1		2	1	19
Grand Total	124	104	78	68	31	11	4	2	422

43. The MCA is working with staff and the Trade Unions to put in place future terms and conditions which will encourage all current Coastguards to remain within the organisation.

44. The new organisational structure has been designed to provide an enhanced career path and improved roles. Ministers have stated that the new Coastguard structure will also include improved pay and career opportunities to reflect new responsibilities. This should also assist in the retention of experienced staff. The new structure will enable a renewed focus on better management and leadership which will improve both morale and efficiencies.

45. We are currently putting in place selection and ongoing development processes which give staff the best opportunities to progress in to and within the future organisation.

46. We are also developing, in conjunction with staff and Unions, a new set of shift patterns. These both fit the operational requirements of the Coastguard and provide a better work life balance for staff, full and part time, existing and future.

47. In attracting staff to the new MOC, we are putting in place a specific relocation package. This will provide additional assistance for members of staff considering a move to the MOC in Fareham who have working partners or children in school. In a recent

non-contractual “Expressions of Interest” exercise, 69 Coastguard officers expressed a desire to work at the MOC. We have held regular events and working groups with over 100 Coastguard officers to progress operational detail.

48. Other beneficial activities include operational secondments into project work, Senior Officer visits to all Coastguard Centres, and the MCA national training centre, supplemented by a regular programme of visits to the MOC.

## Emergency Towing Vehicles (ETVs)

**49. Recommendation 7 (Paragraph 39): (a) 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. (b) 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.**

50. Normally ship salvage around the UK should be a commercial matter between a ship's operator and the salvor. From October 2011 the DfT has put in special arrangements for Scotland by committing to fund an ETV around Scotland until the end of the current spending review period in 2015. Provision beyond this will be considered as part of the next Spending Review.

51. On 18 February 2013, the Secretary of State for Scotland, The Right Honourable Michael Moore MP announced a new agreement with the oil industry to make available one of BP's vessels to respond to an incident in waters around Scotland, if requested. An operational and commercial model has been brokered allowing HM Coastguard to call on a BP-chartered vessel, the GRAMPYAN FRONTIER, to provide support in the event of a pollution incident. This Emergency Response and Rescue Vessel operates west of Shetland. Oil and Gas UK, who helped to broker the agreement, will work with the MCA to evaluate its operation and explore the possibility of other industry vessels that may be suitable to register for the scheme, the first of its kind in the UK. An assessment of how well this arrangement is working will help inform future decisions on the provision of any Government funded ETV.

52. The DfT funded ETV is stationed in the sea area around the Orkney Islands in the southern part of Fair Isle Channel. From this location, in moderate sea conditions we would expect it to be able to arrive at a position between North Minch and The Little Minch in approximately 8 – 9 hours. In heavier weather the transit time would increase to approximately 11 – 12 hours. These timescales are within the response times suggested as appropriate for the Minches on the basis of a risk assessment provided for the MCA by independent nautical consultants in 2008. The consultants noted then that the principal activity for the ETV at that time located in the Western Isles was to escort tankers through the Minch, that the routine use of an ETV for this purpose offered marginal risk benefit, and that this allowed the possibility of locating a single ETV in the Southern part of the Fair Isle Channel, able to secure a tow within 12 hours. The current arrangements are in line with this recommendation.

53. No discussions are currently taking place with the Scottish Government on the subject of the devolution of ETV provision neither has dialogue been sought. The Scottish Government were involved with the discussions led by the Scotland Office on developing commercial solutions to ETV provision in the waters around Scotland, including the possibility of co-funding a multi-purpose vessel but these discussions did not progress beyond the initial ideas stage as the Scottish Government declined to provide funding.

## Emergency Towing Vehicles and FLAMINIA

**54. Recommendation 8 (paragraph 42): 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.**

55. An explosion occurred on the MSC FLAMINIA container ship, on 14 July 2012, whilst it was 750 nautical miles (nm) south west of Falmouth. The owners contracted commercial salvors (SMIT Salvage) and three ocean-going tugs, fully equipped for onboard and off-board firefighting at sea, proceeded to the location of the casualty. The three tugs arrived on scene from 17-21 July 2012 and undertook several weeks of salvage activity. This succeeded in getting the post explosion fires under control and managed to stabilise the list of the MSC FLAMINIA. The source of some onboard fires was never reached at all whilst the vessel was at sea (deep in hold three and hold seven), and it took several weeks after the vessel was alongside in Germany for the last of the fires to be fully extinguished.

56. Had a Government contracted ETV been available, it is most unlikely that it would have been tasked to support the MSC FLAMINIA. It would have had to be tasked some 650-700 nm outside of its area of responsibility and for an extended and, at the time, undefined period. A decision to approve this absence could not have been justified given that:

- the casualty vessel was far outside the UK Pollution Control Zone;
- there was no danger of significant pollution;
- there was no risk to life. The crew had taken to the lifeboats almost immediately after the initial explosion and had been picked up by a merchant vessel which responded to the MSC FLAMINIA's distress call; and
- the decision by SMIT Salvage to contract and commit three appropriate salvage vessels was rapid and their subsequent deployment timely.

57. Had there been a South West Approaches ETV, its deployment would not have saved time; neither would it have been able to make any difference to the near and long term salvage operations that ensued.

58. Similarly, the role of the Maritime Incident Response Group (MIRG) team, when it existed, was to assist the crew of a casualty vessel to bring an onboard fire under control. MIRG would have normally been transferred by helicopter to a casualty vessel, though transport by ship could have been a secondary method. In the case of the MSC FLAMINIA, transfer via tug would have been the only option for the MIRG team, but the

onboard fire situation was outside of their capability. They were specifically not to be used for fires onboard container vessels - MSC FLAMINIA carried approximately 2500 containers.

59. Much of the early firefighting centred on the tugs spraying the hold areas of the MSC FLAMINIA. The salvors used this method for about three weeks, and on occasions during the incident, when the deep-seated fire re-ignited. Even when the professional salvor firefighters were able to board the casualty, they were unable to reach the source of two of the fires, and could only prevent the fire spreading by containing the boundaries of these areas.

### **Maritime Instant Response Group (MIRG)**

**60. Recommendation 8 (paragraph 43): 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.**

61. During the latter part of 2012 MCA officials discussed the possibility of local Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) providing an 'at sea' capability with representatives of the Chief Fire Officers Association, and the Local Government Association. From an MCA perspective this envisaged a fire assessment and reporting capability rather than the more extensive fire fighting and containment capability that MIRG originally offered. By operating as a declared facility to the MCA, this service would be able to act in support of, or in place of, other arrangements provided by commercial salvors.

62. Neither the Department for Transport nor the MCA intended to provide any direct funding for these arrangements. By way of payment in kind to support the service, the MCA would be agreeable to the use of a certain number of SAR helicopter training hours by participating FRS.

63. For the time being, we understand that four local Fire and Rescue Services - Kent, East Sussex, Strathclyde and Humberside are continuing to provide an at-sea fire response capability that is similar to the previous MIRG.

### **Reform of Coastguard Service – ministerial visit to an Maritime Rescue and Co-ordination Centre**

**64. 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.**

65. On 9 January, the Minister visited both the new Maritime Operations Centre in Fareham, meeting with Sector Managers from around the UK; and Solent MRCC, where he talked at length with Coastguard officers on duty. He also visited Dover MRCC briefly on 30 January to meet Coastguard officers on duty.

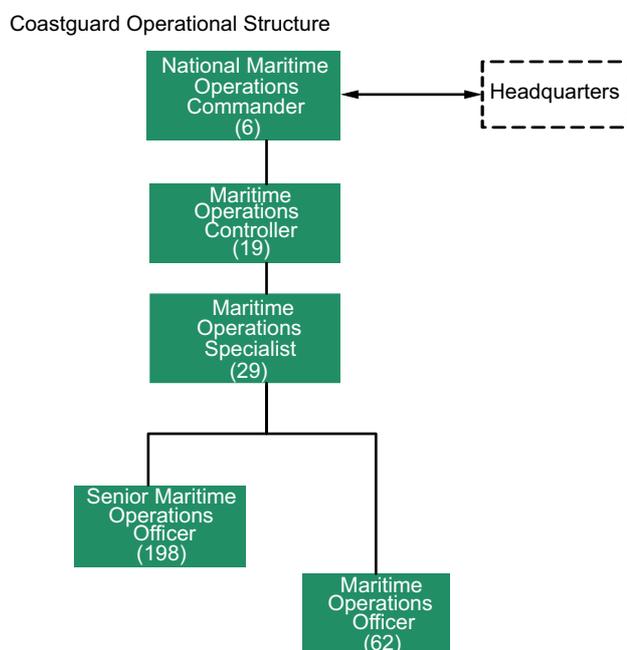
## More settled future

**66. Recommendation 6 (paragraph 48): TSC call on Government to rule out further MRCC closures in the “foreseeable future” and confirm that the new arrangements for the Coastguard Service are intended to last for a generation.**

67. As the then Minister for Shipping explained in the foreword to the consultation about Coastguard Modernisation launched in December 2010, one reason why the changes to the Coastguard coordination service have needed to be so extensive was that successive Governments and Ministers “have ducked the question of reform” for so long. The Civil Service Reform Plan published in June 2012 describes how important it is that the operational delivery of public services keeps pace with innovation about new ways of working, using technology to achieve efficiencies, developing the talents of staff and always looking for continuous improvement. HMCG will take advantage of those factors over the coming years and is likely to evolve and change progressively just like any other part of public service. No Government committed to excellent public services could guarantee that there will be no further change “for a generation”.

## Annex to the Government reply

### FUTURE COASTGUARD STAFFING STRUCTURE



### FUTURE NUMBERS AT EACH LOCATION

Location	Maritime Operations Officer	Senior Maritime Operations Officer	Maritime Operations Specialist	Maritime Operations Controller	Maritime Operations Commander	Total
MOC	16	54	10	10	6	96
Aberdeen	5	15	2	1		23
Dover	6	18	3	1		28
Falmouth	5	15	2	1		23
Milford Haven	5	15	2	1		23
Belfast	5	15	2	1		23
Humber	5	15	2	1		23
Shetland	5	15	2	1		23
Stornoway	5	15	2	1		23
Holyhead	5	15	2	1		23
London		6				6
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>314</b>

# Formal Minutes

---

**Monday 4 March 2013**

Members present:

Mrs Louise Ellman, in the Chair

Sarah Champion  
Kwasi Kwarteng  
Karl M<sup>c</sup>Cartney

Lucy Powell  
Iain Stewart  
Graham Stringer

Draft Report (*The Coastguard, Emergency Towing Vessels and the Maritime Incident Response Group: follow up: Government reply*), proposed by the Chair, brought up, read the first and second time, and agreed to.

Annex agreed to.

A Paper was appended to the Report.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Tenth 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 11 March at 4 pm]

## 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

Tenth Report	The Coastguard, Emergency Towing Vessels and the Maritime Incident Response Group: follow up: Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report of 2012–13	HC 1018
Ninth Report	Marine Pilotage	HC 840
Eighth Report	Cancellation of the InterCity West Coast franchise competition	HC 537
Eighth Special Report	Plug-in vehicles, plugged in policy?: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2012-13	HC 884
Seventh Report	Rail 2020	HC 329
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