From Lord de Mauley
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Natural Environment and Science

Thank you for your letter of 22 October 2014 and accompanying documents about the Ballast Water Management Convention, for which the Department for Transport has lead responsibility. I apologise for the delayed reply.

The UK Government continues to fully support the principles of the Ballast Water Management Convention. However, a number of outstanding issues remain, including the complications and uncertainties surrounding the sampling and analysis of ballast water, which require attention before ratification by the UK can take place. Without confidence in the scientific processes used to enforce the Convention, there is no guarantee that it will provide the biological and environmental safeguards it has been developed to offer.

The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) continues to work on these outstanding issues. At the last meeting of the Marine Environment Protection Committee, the IMO agreed to review the guidelines that have been developed to ensure that technologies developed to meet the requirements of the Convention are robust enough to protect the environment and continue to reduce the presence of non-native species in ballast water throughout their operation and lifetime. This work is due to complete its preliminary phase by January 2015 and, along with a study to collect data on the implementation of the Convention, should help to improve confidence in the science surrounding the treatment, sampling and analysis of ballast water on-board ships.

The UK recognises the importance of the Convention, and will accede to it once the issues above have been resolved and it has come into force, rather than ratify it in advance of its entry into force internationally.