Dear Minister,

Recent developments in the Strait of Hormuz have highlighted the vital role that the Royal Navy plays in securing the UK's strategic interests. I know that you agree that it is the Government's responsibility to ensure that our Navy has the necessary capabilities to respond to this evolving maritime threat. In order to ensure recruitment and retention of personnel, it is equally important that all those who serve in the Royal Navy feel recognised for their service.

The recent announcement that RFA Wave Knight will be deployed to the Gulf in August 2019, further demonstrates the essential support that the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) provide to Royal Navy and Combined Maritime Forces ships. For the 70 RFA personnel onboard, the ongoing pay dispute has the potential to undermine morale and may negatively affect future recruitment and retention of RFA personnel.

The 2,000 merchant seafarers of the RFA provide essential logistical and operational support to all Royal Navy operations. The service, commitment and loyalty of these personnel is evident most recently in their sacrifice in the Falklands conflict in 1982. More recently, RFA Cardigan Bay has already been deployed in support of HMS Montrose and HMS Duncan in the Gulf of Oman and in the Strait of Hormuz.

RFA Ratings and Officers are of course classed as civilian employees. As such, they are not covered by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body: the terms of their pay are dictated by Cabinet Office and HM Treasury Civil Service Pay Guidance. The Defence Committee welcomed the Government's decision to lift the 1.5% cap on Armed Forces personnel through a 2.9% pay increase during 2018-19. However, the fact that no such offer was made to RFA personnel is of increasing concern, given the deterioration in industrial relations in the RFA.

RFA personnel received a below-inflation pay increase of 1.5% in 2018-19 and current Cabinet Office and HM Treasury guidance for 2019-20 is for a maximum pay increase of 2% for civil servants. It is estimated that the cost of bringing RFA pay in line with the recently announced 2.9% increase for 2019-20 awarded to Armed Forces personnel would be £400,000. While I am confident that the ongoing industrial action of RMT members at the
Royal Fleet Auxiliary will not interfere with the RFA’s vital contribution to Royal Navy operations, I am writing to ask what role the Ministry of Defence is playing to help resolve this pay dispute.

In the light of recent and planned future deployments, I would be grateful if you could tell us as soon as possible how the Ministry of Defence is contributing to the resolution of this damaging dispute.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Mark Elliot