Dear Nusrat

Re: Fishing vessel and crew safety

You may be aware that the Transport Committee has been considering the issue of fishing vessel and crew safety.

I wrote to the Chief Executive of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), Sir Alan Massey, in October last year about concerning reports in The Times of a potential link between the closure of Coastguard Operations Centres (CGOCs) as part of the Coastguard modernisation programme in recent years; related loss of experienced HM Coastguard staff and their expert local knowledge; and allegedly poor and slow coordination of search and rescue responses to some fishing vessel incidents, including the FV Solstice, off Plymouth in September 2017.¹

Colleagues on the Committee visited Falmouth CGOC in April to discuss these and related issues. To a large extent, we have been reassured by Sir Alan’s reply to my letter, and by our discussions with the MCA managers and HM Coastguard operational staff we met in Falmouth, that the closure of CGOCs has not widely compromised fishing vessel search and rescue response times.² We wait to read the Marine Accident Investigation Branch’s report on the FV Solstice incident.

However, the visit to Falmouth emphasised some broader safety issues, particularly the need to foster a greater culture of safety within the industry itself, including by:

- facilitating and encouraging much wider use of lifejackets and personal locator beacons (PLB);

¹“Lifeboat crew warn of fatal delays amid cuts”, The Times, 14 October 2017
²Letter from Sir Alan Massey, 30 November 2017
• discouraging the practice of fishing vessels failing to use, or switching off, satellite tracking devices in certain circumstances, thereby hampering search and rescue efforts; and
• addressing the growing problem of fishing vessel stability, and compliance with related MCA inspection regimes, for example where fishing gear has been relocated on a vessel, often to pursue an alternative catch.

I was therefore very pleased to read your comments, to coincide with the publication of an updated fishing safety management code on 13 July, that these issues will be considered by the Fishing Industry Safety Group (FISG) as it develops its plan to eliminate preventable deaths by 2027.3

We are also aware that the Government plans to bring forward a Fisheries Bill, intended to create a “sustainable, responsible and responsive” policy framework as the UK moves away from the EU Common Fisheries Policy. I note that DEFRA’s white paper says it intends to “consider safety throughout the policy development and implementation process for new management systems, practices and technology.”4

I should be grateful if your reply to this letter could set out in more detail steps being taken or planned by the DfT, the MCA, the FISG and/or partner organisations to:

• increase fishing crews’ use of lifejackets and PLBs;
• encourage, mandate and enforce use of vessel tracking devices in all circumstances; and
• address the apparently growing problem of fishing vessel stability, and increase compliance with related inspection regimes.

I would also be interested to know how you have been working jointly with DEFRA on these issues; the extent to which you expect any or all of them to be addressed in the forthcoming Fisheries Bill; and when you expect the Bill to be published.

Thank you and we look forward to working with you improve safety in the fishing industry.

Yours sincerely,

Lilian Greenwood MP  
Chair of the Transport Select Committee

---

3 “Minister urges UK fishermen to sign up for safety improvements”, DfT press release, 13 July 2018
4 DEFRA, Sustainable fisheries for future generations, July 2018