Dear Sir Alan

You will be aware of concerns raised in Parliament and the media recently about delayed deployment of RNLI lifeboats and search and rescue assets to help vessels in trouble, and the part these delays may have played in lives tragically lost at sea, including in the sinking of the fishing vessels Louisa, in July, and Solstice, in September.

On 14 October, The Times reported that experienced RNLI lifeboat crew involved in the Solstice incident believed that these "tasking" delays were a result of a combination of poor operating procedures and shortage of experienced staff within the MCA. The article then makes a link to the staff reductions and HM Coastguard station closures that have taken place as part of the "modernisation" programme over recent years.¹

Committee colleagues with coastal constituencies have reported to me that these issues and recent incidents may be leading to a breakdown of trust in the Coastguard amongst the general maritime community, and within the fishing industry in particular. You will therefore appreciate our need for urgent reassurance that individual incidents do not indicate broader, systemic problems in relation to the MCA’s capacity and capability, and that lives are not being put at greater risk as a result.

To that end, we ask that you supply the following information as soon as is practicable:

1. What is your latest assessment of the effects of the modernisation programme on the effectiveness of responses to incidents at sea?
2. What operational lessons have been learned from recent incidents, particularly in relation to the sinking of fishing vessels?

¹ “Lifeboat crew warn of fatal delays amid cuts”, The Times, 14 October 2017
3. An overview of your Vision 4 live information reporting system and your latest assessment of its effectiveness
4. A list of relevant Marine and Accident Investigation Branch recommendations that are yet to be implemented
5. Current operational guidance on "safe manning levels" for the Coastguard Operations Centre (CGOC) network (and for each individual CGOC) and, for comparison, the guidance used prior to the modernisation programme
6. Full-time equivalent (FTE) CGOC network staffing levels in each of the last 10 years
7. FTE MCA staffing levels in each of the last 10 years
8. The current number and proportion of CGOC staff with length of service longer than: 1 year; 2 years; 3 years; and 5 years

I look forward to receiving your reply.

Many thanks for your cooperation, and I look forward to developing a close and positive working relationship over the course of this Parliament.

Yours sincerely

Lilian Greenwood MP
Chair of the Transport Committee