Dear Lilian,

Marine Accident Investigation Branch – FV SOLSTICE Report Publication

I am writing to you to highlight the publication today of the Marine Accident Investigation Branch’s (MAIB’s) report and recommendations following completion of its investigation into the tragic accident involving the Fishing Vessel SOLSTICE on 26 September 2017. The report is available from MAIB’s web site\(^1\).

I know the Committee has expressed a particular interest in this incident and has received letters from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) explaining its response in the immediate aftermath. The Committee also visited the Coastguard Operations Centre in April this year to understand more about how HM Coastguard task assets in emergency situations and spoke to local managers and operational staff in Falmouth who were present during the search and rescue operation.

MAIB’s report recognises the considerable work which has already been completed by the MCA including:

- updating of the Coastguard Training Programme to include visits to other search and rescue organisations, RNLI stations and joint live exercises;
- reviewing staffing levels resulting in a revised watch pattern which will be implemented in January 2019;
- over-recruiting as a temporary solution to offset retention issues;
- updating guidance and operating procedures on overdue vessels; and
- updating IT systems for location searches to include maritime locations.

The report notes the work undertaken by the Irish Coastguard in undertaking an independent peer review of the response to the incident at the MCA’s

request, the results of which were laid in the libraries of both Houses in May. It also notes the introduction by the RNLI, prior to the accident, of a workshop to increase understanding of respective roles, processes, decision-making and operational capabilities in order to optimise partnership working.

MAIB has addressed two recommendations to the MCA:

2018/132 Commission an independent review of UK SAR operational capability and HM Coastguard network functionality to assess the effectiveness of the actions taken as a result of the lessons identified in the MAIB and Irish Coast Guard Solstice investigation reports.

2018/133 Conduct a thorough review of SAR IT systems to ensure a reliable network function with accessible information exchange between CGOCs and the NMOC, identifying areas for improvement within the SAR IT systems infrastructure.

The MCA expects to complete these recommendations during 2019.

MAIB has also today published a safety flyer circulated to the fishing industry noting the safety lessons it has identified including the importance of understanding vessel stability, carriage of an AIS transceiver, emergency position indicating radio beacons (EPIRBs) and/or personal locator beacons (PLBs). The safety flyer is also available from MAIB’s web site.

The MCA has accepted the recommendations made by MAIB from previous fishing vessel accident investigations and has set a target date of 2020 for implementation with a large number of these being addressed significantly in advance of this deadline and, in particular, following the introduction of ILO 188 in December.

Implementation will address a wide range of issues but I recognise that the fishing sector remains the UK’s most dangerous industry. That is why we have set an ambitious target, in partnership with the Fishing Industry Safety Group, to eliminate preventable fatalities within the sector by 2027. I wrote to you on 18 October outlining in detail the initiatives we already have in place to support that aim and we will continue to seek further opportunities to drive forward continuous improvements in safety performance.

I am copying this letter to Luke Pollard MP, Johnny Mercer MP and Gary Streeter MP, who each have a particular constituency interest in this accident.

NUSRAT GHANI