

13th March 2018

Proposition 7/18: Jersey Lifeboat Service

Dear Senator Gorst,

I have been informed that the Council of Ministers will be considering its position on this proposition, and amendments made to it, at its meeting tomorrow. I thought therefore that it would be dutiful of me to set out some key aspects of how the Harbour Authority has sought to approach matters with regard to the Jersey Lifeboat Association.

As you know, the Jersey Harbour Authority, which was constituted when Ports of Jersey was incorporated in 2015, has statutory responsibility for the coordination of search and rescue activity (SAR) within Jersey's territorial waters. The Safety of Life at Sea Convention is extended to Jersey and so we are a Coastal State for SAR purposes and work accordingly with all neighbouring countries.

This responsibility is reflected in a public service obligation placed on Ports of Jersey Ltd by the States in 2015, and which is written into the Incorporation Law. It is a responsibility that, as you would expect, we take very seriously indeed.

You will have seen the brief sent a week or so ago by the Harbour Master to all States members, in which he outlined the obligations adumbrated above and the key place within those of an effectual SAR system compliant with all relevant international rules and codes of practice issued by the International Maritime Organisation. He extended an invitation to all Members to visit the control centre at Maritime House to see for themselves how the Coastguard manages SAR coordination and I understand that a number of members have already taken this up.

There are two main points to make.

The first concerns the importance of regulatory compliance in respect of any SAR asset. This is not only about our international obligations but also our reputation as a Coastal State in our regional maritime community.

The Harbour Master has sought to provide clear compliance guidance to the Jersey Lifeboat Association. You will, I believe, have seen his initial letter sent to the Association just after Christmas 2017. He has since sent several further communications iterating his advice and asking to be kept informed of plans. He has also had one meeting with representatives of the Association. Save, however, for what is in the public domain, he has not so far been made aware of any detailed plans on the part of the Association. No doubt they have them in preparation but it needs to be emphasised that the process of ensuring compliance of any new facility will have to run its proper course so that the Harbour Master is, eventually, able to confirm that full compliance is assured. Where safety of life at sea is concerned there cannot be any shortcuts and if compliance is not, or has not been, assured then the given asset could not properly be called upon by the Coastguard in any incident situation.

While the Harbour Master will be helpful in assisting and guiding, ultimately it is up to the Association to develop their operational frameworks to the Harbour Master's satisfaction.