

Statement by Deputy Steve Luce:

Last year I was asked by the Chief Minister to lead the States' response to the issues over lifeboats. Safety at sea, and on our beaches, is of paramount concern to all islanders. Unfortunately, over the last twelve months we have heard a lot of negativity about lifeboats and the brave people who man them, whatever uniform they wear.

There is a lot of information in the public domain that confirms that this lifeboat dispute began over petty and trivial matters. These were operational disputes rooted in personal squabbles. All parties made mistakes. We already know and acknowledge this. However, States Members, mariners and the public at large are now being pressured to choose sides by the Jersey Lifeboat Association (JLA), when the most important components of search and rescue at sea are cooperation and team work.

This frankly unacceptable situation has gone on for far too long. The coordination of search and rescue is a professional activity, albeit with many of our rescue personnel operating in a volunteer capacity. Jersey is hugely fortunate to have these world class search and rescue services. Those lifesavers include not only lifeboatmen, but members of the Jersey Fire and Rescue Service, the States and Honorary Police, and Ambulance personnel, to mention only a few.

We cannot go back. The RNLI and many of the former crew have gone their separate ways and there is nothing to be gained in forcing them to re-engage. Both sides have concluded that their relationship is broken. We have to move on. A Committee of Inquiry will only prolong the animosity. It will neither change nor improve the current situation.

The RNLI have successfully reopened the St. Helier Station with committed local volunteers. Regardless of the managerial mistakes the Institution made in the past, and have admitted to, there is no question that they are providing an excellent service in full accordance with international standards. Cooperation and coordination between the various SAR services is now at an all-time high. Our Search and Rescue community is in a strong place and is working well on everyone's behalf.

Providing a Search and Rescue asset requires two equally important elements: meeting high standards of compliance together with the ability to work in a properly coordinated way with other partners under the direction of Jersey Coastguard. We are yet to see the JLA providing evidence of either. We must all remember that it is Jersey Coastguard that has delegated legal responsibility for coordinating search and rescue at sea. The same Jersey Coastguard the Jersey Lifeboat Association (JLA) suggest is complicit in some form of 'cover up'.

If the JLA can stop their attacks on others in the SAR community and work towards providing our island with additional resources, working with Jersey Coastguard and alongside other SAR assets including the RNLI, then they will continue to receive my support. However, if they persist in their stated aim of replacing the RNLI in St. Helier and Jersey more widely, then I will oppose them.

The JLA must desist in trying to replace the RNLI in Jersey. I cannot see how this could possibly be in the interests of islanders. If the JLA really wish to make a genuine contribution then they should re-focus their efforts on working with the existing search and rescue partners to establish where they can add value to the existing provision around the island.

The public are sick and tired of hearing negative stories about lifeboats. It is time for this to stop. We have world class search and rescue assets crewed by brave and experienced people wearing a number of different uniforms. It is time we started giving them the respect and praise they deserve.