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4-8-1-2

14 August 2020

Dear Tobias

Thank-you for your letter of 28 July 2020 regarding the accident report from the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) on the incident between a Royal Navy submarine and the *Stena Superfast VII*.

I of course share your concern and fully support the MAIB Report's recommendation of an independent review into this and previous similar events. As you know, the MOD takes safety very seriously and it will do all it can to learn from these incidents. Actions have already been taken to prevent re-occurrence and a system of assurance is in place with the Navy's Safety Management System. To deliver the MAIB's recommendation, the Fleet Commander, on behalf of the First Sea Lord, has directed an independent review of the actions taken to provide assurance that such mitigation actions, to prevent re-occurrence, have been effective. You are of course aware of the independent Defence Safety Authority (DSA) and they are already conducting the review and will report accordingly in due course. Additionally, they will monitor progress on any recommendations they make.

To answer your specific questions:

Have the Navy accepted the Recommendation? Yes, and the Fleet Commander has asked the DSA to conduct the independent review.

What are the terms of reference of the review? The review will investigate actions conducted in response to recommendations made during previous investigations into similar incidents. It will examine the sufficiency of the actions taken by the relevant organisations and whether those responses justify the continued closure of the recommendations. It will look at any persistent or ongoing actions and independently judge their sufficiency. Finally, the review will also comment on where the DSA feel that more could be done to reduce the risk of collision between dived submarines and surface vessels.

Who will lead the review? The review will be led by the 1* head of the Defence Maritime Regulator (DMR), part of the independent DSA.

What resources will they have to carry it out? The review will have whatever resources are required to conduct a thorough and timely audit. This is envisaged to be three suitably experienced personnel from DMR and an independent submariner.

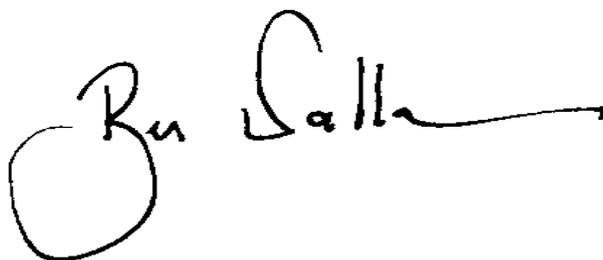
The Rt Hon Tobias Ellwood MP
Chair, Defence Committee
Committee Office, House of Commons, London
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How long will it last? It is difficult to determine how long the review will last, as only during the audit itself, and what it finds, can such a timespan be more accurately defined. However, the review will endeavour to be complete during Autumn 2020. I should point out that if any emerging critical safety recommendations are highlighted, during the review, they will of course be shared immediately with Navy Command, so that the appropriate action can be taken quickly.

Will you keep the Committee updated on the progress of the review? Should the review extend beyond the Autumn then an update will be provided. Of course, in the meantime please contact me should you require further information.

Will the review's conclusions be made public? We continue to be as transparent as we are able with regard to the release of reports into the public domain. In this case, whilst the review is ongoing, it is difficult to determine what information may be released, with consideration of the necessary security constraints. However, we will endeavour to provide a redacted report or executive summary, as appropriate, for disclosure to the public.

I hope the above information is helpful in demonstrating the seriousness with which we take this incident and I will write again in due course.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Wallace'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, rounded 'B' and a long, sweeping horizontal line at the end.

THE RT HON BEN WALLACE MP