
STATES OF JERSEY



MINISTERIAL RESPONSE TO R.110/2024: STATES OF JERSEY COMPLAINTS BOARD FINDINGS

Presented to the States on 17th September 2024
by the Chief Minister

STATES GREFFE

REPORT

As the report of the Jersey Complaints Board explains, there has been a long-running series of disagreements involving the Island's volunteer lifeboat organisations, Ports of Jersey and the Government.

The report provides a detailed account of the procedural and administrative concerns that have been expressed, and it illustrates the strength of feeling of those who have been involved.

It is a matter of regret that the disagreements have continued for a protracted period and that matters were not dealt with as swiftly or effectively as they could have been.

When it comes to safety of lives at sea, we must ensure there is absolute clarity of understanding for all sides to enable stakeholders to maintain their commitment to the highest standards of governance, transparency and accountability.

We acknowledge the findings in the Board's report and have carefully considered their three recommendations:

- 1. To amend the Public Service Obligation agreement with Ports of Jersey in order to clarify when the Harbourmaster – in his capacity as Chief Coastguard – should communicate directly with the Minister.**

All parties need to have a clear understanding of procedures and responsibilities, both legal and practical. Should roles and requirements need further explanation in order to avoid similar disputes in future, then further discussions should be undertaken in this regard and, if necessary, the agreement with Ports could be amended.

Given his responsibilities for maritime matters, the Minister for Sustainable Economic Development can provide clarification on the more complex aspects of the legislation if it is required

- 2. That the Chief Coastguard prepare a regular report directly to the Minister on activities of the Jersey Coastguard:**

This is accepted. The Minister for Sustainable Economic Development holds quarterly meetings with the Harbours and Airport Committee, which oversees the public service obligations of the Ports of Jersey. The Minister meets regularly and as required with the Harbourmaster, who reports on a range of maritime activities, including those undertaken by the Jersey Coastguard.

- 3. That complaints related to maritime public service obligations should be heard by the Minister rather than the Board of Ports of Jersey.**

This recommendation needs further careful consideration. It is important that transparent complaints procedures exist in all areas of public service to provide

appropriate accountability. Islanders are already able to contact the Minister at any time with their concerns – or any States Member – and many do so regularly. However, there are risks that a Minister or Department might be conflicted in addressing concerns about the service they effectively provide, even through an arms-length organisation. The Minister will provide an update in due course.

I am pleased that good progress has been made to strengthen the relationships between all the organisations named in this complaint.

A Water Safety Forum group has been re-constituted by Ports of Jersey. It met in May for the first time and includes members of all search and rescue organisations. The aim of the group is to improve communication and create better cohesion, collaboration and understanding across the maritime rescue community.

Since taking office in January, I have visited both lifeboat teams at their harbour bases, met their volunteers and toured their vessels. Their dedication to duty is unquestionable and both teams expressed a desire to move forward positively and collaboratively.

As the Board acknowledges in its conclusion, progress has been made to ensure the JLA remains a core asset in local search and rescue operations.

Jersey finds itself in the fortunate position of having two volunteer search and rescue services at our disposal, each with a dedicated team of volunteers.

I am sorry that this series of events has caused so much concern and disruption. I would like to apologise to those men and women involved in this matter who regularly put their own lives at risk and go to sea in the most treacherous conditions to save others.

Given what we have learnt from the past and the strong progress that has been made, I hope we can now all move forward.

The Island's maritime environment can present some of the most challenging conditions. Our maritime search and rescue organisations are therefore a critical part of island life.

The Jersey Lifeboat Association and the RNLI are crewed by some of our most courageous islanders and Jersey is extremely grateful and proud of what they do.