



**PUBLIC PETITION NO.**

**PE01389**

### **Name of petitioner**

Dave Macbeth

### **Petition title**

Adverse impact of Coastguard station closures

### **Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to make representations to the UK Government about the future of all coastguard stations in Scotland given the adverse impact which the closure of any station would have on the safety of the marine environment and capabilities of local agencies to respond to all incidents.

### **Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition**

A response to the Maritime & Coastguard Agency's (MCA's) consultation document has been made using the MCA's response document. Due to the constraints of a document that lacks detail, the time limits of the consultation period, and the fact that no other submissions are invited, a petition to the Scottish Parliament is being raised.

MP Angus MacNeil for the Western Isles is taking up our case with the UK Government. Mr MacNeil is currently pursuing our case but to date has not had a substantive response. MSP Alasdair Allan is also giving us his wholehearted support and has raised the matter in the Scottish Parliament. The Council for the Western Isles has formed a task group and together with Shetland Islands Council is fighting the closures. MCA management will not respond until after the consultation period, which closes on 24 March 2011 – a date we believe to be too late to raise objections. We currently have over 4000 signatures in the Western Isles alone raising objections to this plan.

Staff at Stornoway and Shetland have posted their own Websites at [www.stornowaycg.co.uk](http://www.stornowaycg.co.uk) and [www.shetlandcoastguard.info](http://www.shetlandcoastguard.info).

### **Petition background information**

On 16 December 2010 the Maritime and Coastguard Agency announced its plans to make sweeping cuts to the UK coastguard services. These plans involve major changes, including closure of many stations and downgrading of the majority of those that remain to daytime only operations. The MCA's proposals are currently under a period of consultation, which closes on 24 March 2011.

Stornoway and Shetland Coastguard stations are under threat of closure or being downgraded to a daylight only station. The effect of the changes will severely cut the

ability of HM Coastguard to respond promptly and effectively to persons in distress.

If the MCA is successful in its savage cuts there will only be one 24 hour fully manned station in Scotland, located in Aberdeen, and one daylight station to support it at either Stornoway or Shetland, the decision of which is dependent on the consultation process. Three of the five Coastguard stations currently operating in Scotland will be closed: Forth, based at Fife Ness, in 2011/12, Clyde in 2012/13 and either Stornoway or Shetland in 2013/14.

In addition, should Stornoway be closed, there will be no maritime coordination centre for the entire west coast of Scotland, the nearest coastguard stations being Aberdeen on the east coast and either Belfast or Liverpool on the west coast. Combined with the closure of Clyde Coastguard, this leads to what we believe is an unacceptable situation.

As a result of the closures, operational staff numbers would be cut from 113 to 74, not including administrative staff whose numbers would also be drastically effected. The only station to see an increase in staff would be Aberdeen, from 29 to 64. However, many current staff in stations faced with closure will be unwilling or unable to relocate to Aberdeen, especially given house prices in this area are significantly higher than most other locations in Scotland.

We believe this would result in staff shortages and reduce the cover in Scotland to untrained and inexperienced staff, which will put lives at sea and on the coast at risk. Furthermore, the lack of staff with local knowledge and experience would severely hamper local agencies to respond to incidents. A recent incident involved a fishing vessel reporting that they were aground on the "chicken", which to local experienced staff gave the position a few miles outside Stornoway Harbour. Would an operator in Aberdeen or elsewhere be able to make the same rapid pinpointing of the distressed vessels position?

Lack of local knowledge and resources could also have had a devastating impact on the environment when the nuclear submarine "Astute" went aground off Skye. It was through local knowledge that the correct units were despatched to assist and a catastrophe was averted.

Finally, it is alarming to note that no formal risk assessment has been carried out on the proposed plan to ensure that safety is not compromised.

#### Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01389>

#### Related information for petition

#### Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

NO

#### How many signatures have you collected so far?

266

#### Closing date for collecting signatures online

N/A

**Comments to stimulate online discussion**