



Sent on behalf of Coastguard Rescue Officers of the Maritime & Coastguard Agency

24th July 2026

Open letter to:

Lord Simon Stevens
Chair, Maritime and Coastguard Agency Board
Maritime and Coastguard Agency
Spring Place
105 Commercial Road
Southampton
SO15 1EG

Subject: Formal Expression of No Confidence in the Leadership of Chief Executive Virginia McVea

Dear Lord Stevens,

We are writing to formally express our lack of confidence in the leadership of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency under Chief Executive Virginia McVea and to request that the Board undertake an independent review of the concerns outlined below.

This letter is submitted in the interests of maintaining public confidence in the Agency, protecting the wellbeing of Coastguard Rescue Officers (CROs), and ensuring that the MCA continues to fulfil its responsibilities to maritime safety, emergency response, and the communities it serves.

The basis for this expression of no confidence relates to concerns regarding the treatment, management, support, and engagement of Coastguard Rescue Officers. In particular, we believe there has been a significant deterioration in confidence between frontline CRO's and senior leadership, resulting in damage to morale, retention, trust, and operational effectiveness.

The concerns raised include:

- A perceived failure to adequately engage with and listen to the experiences and concerns of Coastguard Rescue Officers.
- Insufficient transparency in decision-making processes affecting frontline personnel.
- A culture in which legitimate concerns raised by Coastguard Rescue Officers are not addressed in a timely or meaningful manner.
- Decisions and policies that have negatively affected morale, recruitment, retention, and confidence within Coastguard Rescue Teams.
- Concerns regarding leadership accountability and responsiveness to issues raised by frontline operational personnel.

Coastguard Rescue Officers are the public face of HM Coastguard in communities across the United Kingdom. They willingly give their time, skills, and commitment to support search and rescue operations, often in difficult and challenging circumstances. Any erosion of trust between the Coastguard Rescue Officers and the Agency's senior leadership inevitably affects the resilience and effectiveness of the service.

We are concerned that under the current leadership there has been a failure to rebuild confidence and foster a culture of openness, collaboration, and mutual respect with frontline Coastguard Rescue Officers. In our view, this has reached a stage where intervention by the MCA Board is now necessary.

Accordingly, we respectfully request that the Board:

1. Formally consider this expression of no confidence.
2. Commission an independent review of leadership culture and engagement with Coastguard Rescue Officers.
3. Seek direct evidence from current and former Coastguard Rescue Officers regarding their experiences.
4. Review the impact of current leadership decisions on Coastguard Rescue Officer recruitment, retention, morale, and operational capability.
5. Consider whether the current leadership arrangements continue to command the confidence of the Coastguard Rescue Officer community.

The removal of Coastguard Rescue Officers remuneration raises significant concerns that extend beyond financial considerations and into the areas of political accountability, health and safety, risk management, and public protection.

From a political perspective, the decision may be perceived as diminishing the value placed on the contribution of CROs and could attract scrutiny regarding the impact on resilience, community safety, and emergency preparedness. At a time when public services are under increasing pressure, any measure that risks reducing engagement, retention, or recruitment within the CRO community may be difficult to justify to stakeholders and the public.

There are also important health and safety implications. CROs play a critical role in supporting operational response, particularly during periods of heightened demand or major incidents. A reduced and less sustainable CRO workforce could increase pressure on remaining personnel, potentially affecting welfare, fatigue management, and the ability to maintain safe systems of work. This creates a risk that essential operational support may not be available when required, with consequential impacts on both staff and public safety.

Effective risk assessments must consider the potential long-term effects of a diminished CRO community. The removal of remuneration is likely to negatively influence recruitment, retention, and overall resilience capacity. Any reduction in available trained personnel could weaken organisational capability to respond to emergencies, manage operational risks, and maintain service continuity during significant incidents.

Ultimately, public protection is the key consideration. CROs provide an important layer of resilience that supports frontline operations and contributes directly to the protection of communities. A decline in CRO numbers and experience levels could reduce the organisation's ability to respond effectively to emergencies, increasing risk to life, property, and the wider community. As such, any decision to remove remuneration should be subject to a robust assessment of the associated risks and the potential consequences for public safety and organisational resilience.

This letter is submitted in good faith and in the belief that strong governance requires concerns of this nature to be openly examined and addressed. We would welcome acknowledgement of receipt and information regarding any process through which these concerns will be considered.

Yours sincerely,

Coastguard Rescue Officers of the Maritime & Coastguard Agency