

House of Commons: Written Statement (HCWS272)

Department for Transport

Written Statement made by: **Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport (Keir Mather)** on 16 Jul 2026.

Coastguard Rescue Service

I am making this statement to provide an update on the Coastguard Rescue Service. I would like to begin by recognising the extraordinary contribution made by Coastguard Rescue Officers (CROs) across the United Kingdom. For generations, HM Coastguard's coastal response has depended on people from local communities who choose to serve with professionalism, commitment and courage. That tradition remains at the heart of the Coastguard Rescue Service today.

On 14 January 2026, the Court of Appeal found against the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) in the case of the MCA vs Groom. This clarified that by providing modest remuneration, the MCA had inadvertently created a worker relationship with Coastguard Rescue Officers. A change was therefore required to restore the volunteer model, or enact the worker model, to ensure compliance with the judgment.

On 1 June, it was communicated that the Coastguard Rescue Service would change to an expenses-only volunteer model from September 2026. This was judged at the time to be the best option, based on the advice provided by the MCA, taking into account a variety of factors.

I have listened to the views and testimonies of Coastguard Rescue Officers about how these changes might affect them. I visited a Coastguard station in Southampton, met officers from Hill Head and Portsmouth teams, and heard first-hand the impact that changes could have on CROs and their families.

MPs across the House, on behalf of their constituents, have raised concerns through parliamentary questions, a Westminster Hall Debate and an Urgent Question. This engagement has been invaluable. I have also heard the deep concerns from many in the Coastguard Rescue Officer Community about this change.

Given these concerns, my department has undertaken further work to scrutinise the information that was provided to inform decision making. Having done so, it has become clear that parts of the information gathering process to inform MCA operational decisions, in particular, the two surveys undertaken, were not sufficiently detailed to properly reflect the impact of these changes.

I can therefore confirm that plans to move to the expenses-only volunteer model in September will not go ahead, and current arrangements will remain in place.

CROs must feel that their views have been heard, and that they are valued, respected, and empowered to carry out their duties and I am committed to ensuring that we now take the time to robustly gather the information required to understand the full operational implications of future decisions, as well as the impact on individual Coastguard Rescue Officers and the choices they

will make. This will involve engaging with CROs directly, and ensuring that their views inform the decisions that we will take on the shape of the Coastguard Rescue Service.

Over the coming months, the MCA will carry out further engagement with trade unions, Coastguard Rescue Officers, and members of Parliament, to understand more deeply the potential impact of changes on individuals and operations. The insight gathered from this engagement will support the MCA's understanding of operational implications, and inform future decisions on the shape of the Coastguard Rescue Service.

In the longer term, the Department for Transport will explore options for how Coastguard Rescue Officers can continue to be rightfully recognised and rewarded and have the flexibility to continue to serve their communities.

Ensuring the safety of the public along our coastline and continuing to properly recognise those who protect our communities through their vital work remain my key priorities.