

## **STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION**

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A year after the report was published into the grounding of the tanker “Samothraki” in Gibraltar waters the Government has still not fully implemented its recommendations. The latest shipping accident on the east side involving the “Fedra”, to which the severe weather was probably a major contributory factor, should nonetheless not be taken to be an isolated freak event.

It is also important to note that some of the safety issues which were identified in the “Samothraki” report had been made previously in other reports and ignored. For example, the “Samothraki” report recommended a port control policy aimed at providing a navigational assistance service. This same recommendation had been made previously in the report into the grounding of the ro-ro cargo vessel Azzahra on 2 December 2005. The report into that incident also identified as a safety issue the fact that port policy at the time did not place emphasis on a navigational assistance service.

In answer to questions from Shadow Minister with responsibility for the Port Dr Joseph Garcia, the Government confirmed in Parliament recently that

they had accepted this recommendation. However, it could not be implemented until the Port Department had been provided with an upgraded Vessel Traffic Management and Information System (VTS). This will mean a further delay.

It will be recalled that the “Samothraki” ran aground on the eastern side off Europa Point on 17 March 2007. A report prepared by the Maritime Administration was submitted to the Government in September of that same year. Over 12 months have elapsed since the report and 18 months since the accident and the Government has, by its own admission, still not fully acted.

In 2001, the Government did indeed purchase a VTS, to monitor shipping traffic, at a cost of over £30,000, and it became operational that same month. Nonetheless, the report into the collision of the passenger vessel “Van Gogh” and the tanker “Spetses” in September 2004, some three years later, still highlighted the lack of an effective, independent VTS facility at the Port as a safety issue.

Even though the VTS was upgraded in 2005, this criticism was again repeated in September 2007 in the report into the “Samothraki” grounding which pointed to the “lack of an effective VTS system for Gibraltar waters, capable of providing accurate monitoring and control of shipping movements and effective navigational assistance”. The Minister told

Parliament in answer to questions last month that a further review of the VTS system was underway.

The Government also told Parliament that the Port has been relying on a link to the MOD for live radar coverage of the East Side. However, the “Samathraki” report makes it clear that the information link from the MOD to the Port “is subject to signal interruptions and delays and the displayed data is not in real time”. The Minister attempted to excuse this by describing the delay as “seconds”, without considering that “seconds” is all it can take for an accident to happen if the Port Department does not have eyes of its own on the east side and has to rely on a signal which is subject to “interruptions” and “delays”.

Commenting on the matter, Shadow Minister responsible for the Port Dr Joseph Garcia said:

“The Government must ensure that the Port is adequately resourced to be able to exercise a proper measure of control over all the territorial waters of Gibraltar and this includes the east side. The emergency services and others did an excellent job in relation to the latest incident. However, the Government must ensure that when experts make safety recommendations time and again over the years, that these are not simply shelved until the next incident. There must be prompt action to tackle the areas of concern.”

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