

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

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It is a mark of their increasing desperation that the Government continue to respond to the legitimate observations made by the Opposition with insults and abuse instead of concentrating on the issues. Their reply to the comments made by Shadow Port Minister Dr Joseph Garcia is the latest example of this.

The Government press release has confirmed that two of the three recommendations made only to the Gibraltar Port Authority in the report into the "New Flame" accident have still not been implemented. The third recommendation has not been implemented in the way in which was originally explained. This was the main thrust of Dr Garcia's statement. The Government response simply imputes motives and is littered with insults in order to try and cloud the issue.

It is a fact that the absence of an adequate VTS system for the control of shipping in the territorial waters of Gibraltar and the lack of a navigational assistance service have been highlighted time and again in past reports into shipping accidents in the area. This recommendation was made in the report into the collision of the passenger vessel "Van Gogh" and the tanker "Spetses" in 2004, it was made again in the report into the grounding of the ro-ro cargo vessel "Azzahra" in 2005 and into the "Samothraki" incident in 2007. It was repeated again in the report into the "New Flame" accident because the requested action had even then still not been taken by the Government.

The Government told Parliament in March that the new VTS system should be fully implemented by the end of the year. It is clear from their latest statement that this is now not going to happen and that the delays will go on into 2010.

The Government have also changed the goalposts in relation to the second recommendation made in the report to encourage Masters of vessels to engage pilots when outbound from the Western Anchorage. In Parliament this recommendation was accepted in principle and the only concern expressed was that it meant a doubling of the resources of the pilots and acquiring additional vessels. The Government now say that a final decision has not been taken on whether this new regime will apply to all vessels or just tankers or vessels over a certain size, when this is something that was not mentioned before. Even then, the fact remains that it has not yet been implemented. The Minister did say in Parliament that this would take time. However, he said this in March which is nine months ago and therefore far from "recently" as the Government claims in their statement.

The third recommendation was the question of the exclusion zone at Europa Point. A Notice to Mariners was indeed issued on 23 November 2009 establishing the restricted zone. This is public information and is available to all and sundry on the internet, although the Government have not drawn attention to its existence until now. However, what the Minister Joe Holliday said in Parliament in relation to the exclusion zone is that he would "implement that by

statute". The word "statute" in the normal meaning of the English language means a written law passed by a legislative body. The use of this terminology by the Minister has created the confusion and he has nobody but himself to blame.

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

"The plain fact is that the GSD Government have nothing left to offer. More and more people are sick and tired of their attitude. The notion that public statements issued by the Opposition should be checked with Government Ministers first reflects very poorly on the democratic credentials of those who have made such a suggestion. Moreover, the irony is that it is Port Minister Joe Holliday who does not know what he is talking about to the extent that he has even got wrong the date of the "New Flame" report in the reply that he issued last week!"

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