

Coastguard ‘investigating themselves’



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WITH winter behind us, and warmer weather approaching, I thought that this would be a good time to give an update in respect of the Jersey Lifeboat Association, of which I am the chairman.

Our all-weather lifeboat was involved in an accident last November and while I cannot comment on the investigation by the Coastguard, I can give an honest summary of the outcome of our own investigation.

Working on the basis that all accidents are avoidable, we put our hands up and admitted mistakes had been made, and lessons have been learnt. In hindsight, we perhaps launched too quickly and some of our standard procedures have now been tightened. The location of the chart plotter behind the coxswain has now been rectified and we have dealt with the brightness of the screen which caused distracting glare.

Independently, a full audit of our systems and post-accident procedures was carried out by the Yacht Designers & Surveyors Association (YDSA), the independent certifying authority, and the report was extremely positive.

Therefore, the repaired boat should be back in Jersey and ready for action soon

and, together with our inshore boat, we are now an operational search and rescue asset again.

There are a few things that have come out of this that concern me. There were two parties involved in this rescue – the Coastguard, who were co-ordinating the response, and the JLA. I thought the Coastguard's investigation would be independent, but this is far from clear cut.

The Coastguard are effectively investigating themselves, and while we initially went through an independent body, this avenue was closed after we criticised the Coastguard on one aspect of the operation.

With no other avenue to go down we have asked the States police to investigate our concerns.

The other concern relates to the governance of Ports of Jersey and the execution of their duties by both the current minister with responsibility (Senator Lyndon Farnham) and the board of directors. One of the key responsibilities of a board of directors is to ensure that they act legally at all times.

We took legal advice on the ability of the Coastguard/Ports of Jersey to investigate incidents such as this. The law is unambiguous since such an investigation must be authorised by the minister. Senator Farnham has confirmed in writing he had not authorised it.

It appears that there are numerous laws that have not been delegated correctly to Ports of Jersey, potentially leading to unlimited financial liability for the taxpayer.

The lack of proper delegation of responsibilities is serious and this needs to be rectified with urgency, and questions need to be asked of both the minister and the board.