

DAVID LIDINGTON MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

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Mr J. Norris
10 Parrs Road
Stokenchurch
Buckinghamshire

1 June 2009

DL/su

Dear Mr Norris,

I have now received a response from ofcom regarding use of a portable VHF DSC radio when sea kayaking. I enclose a copy of the letter.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'DL', with a large loop and a long horizontal stroke.

For details of constituency advice bureaux please contact:
Conservative Office, 100 Walton Street, Aylesbury, Bucks HP21 7QP
Tel: 01296 482102

Our Reference: 20090446
Your Ref: DL/lc

18 May 2009

David Lidington MP
100 Walton Street
Aylesbury
Bucks
HP21 7QP

27 MAY 2009

Dear Mr Lidington,

Re: Mr John Norris, 10 Parris Road, Stokenchurch, Buckinghamshire,

Thank you for your letter to Ed Richards dated 17 April 2009 on behalf of your constituent, Mr John Norris, who is disappointed that he is not able to use a hand portable VHF DSC radio when he is kayaking around the coast of the UK. Mr Richards has asked me to reply.

Digital Selective Calling (DSC) is a type of maritime radio that allows stations to call ships and maritime coast stations, using digital technology. Stations are identified by a Maritime Mobile Service Identity (MMSI) number, much like a telephone number. To call another station, the operator enters that station's MMSI and the radio at the receiving station alerts the operator to an incoming call. The call then proceeds as normal on a separate voice channel. DSC also allows operators to send distress alerts. The radio can transmit its identity, details of the emergency and the vessel's position, if the set is linked to a GPS (global positioning) receiver.

To be placed on the market, hand held marine radio sets, intended for smaller vessels, must comply with the Radio Equipment and Telecommunications Terminal Equipment Directive ("R&TTED"). This provides, for example, that apparatus must not cause interference to other uses of radio. Manufacturers must declare compliance with the R&TTED and operator manuals often contain a facsimile Declaration of Conformity, signed by the company to show this. EU member states usually agree a harmonised technical standard for a given type of apparatus. This can be applied by manufacturers to their products *inter alia* as the basis of their declaration.

To be used under a UK ship radio licence, apparatus must also be operated in compliance with an Interface Requirement ("IR"). This is a technical document, drafted by us, which allows individual member states to take account of local operational variations that cannot be covered by the relevant harmonised standard. At present, there is no specific harmonised standard or UK IR available for hand held DSC. It is unlikely that we shall develop an IR until a harmonised standard has been agreed across the EU or a specific Recommendation developed at the International Telecommunication Union ("ITU") and it will consequently not be possible to use hand held DSC radio apparatus under a UK ship radio licence until such time as we have. There is unlikely to be a European harmonised standard available until

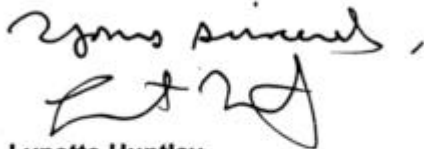
agreement has been reached over hand held DSC in the wider international community. This is currently under discussion at the ITU where the international community agrees the regulation of radio. IRs, harmonised standards and the international agreements that underpin them are designed to minimise the risk of harmful interference between radio services.

The UK could decide to develop an IR, without waiting for a harmonised standard or ITU recommendation to be developed. This could allow the apparatus to be used under a UK ship radio licence. However, pre-empting the outcome of the discussions at the ITU in this manner could create uncertainty for manufacturers and users that would be unhelpful. For example, if apparatus were manufactured to our IR it may not be operationally acceptable to other states and those using it could face difficulties when overseas.

Some years ago, we did have an IR for hand held DSC VHF apparatus, but the European consensus was that it did not comply with international requirements. We have thus withdrawn it and are awaiting agreement on a harmonised standard or ITU Recommendation. At present, we anticipate that agreement should be reached in the course of the next year. When it is, we shall be pleased to develop an IR, so allowing hand held DSC VHF radios to be used under a UK ship radio licence.

I understand Mr Norris' frustrations, but with maritime safety equipment, it is imperative that we achieve consensus before proceeding. As I am sure he is aware, there are many hand held non-DSC VHF marine radios available, including light weight and compact examples, which I suspect will be important considerations in a kayak. I also wonder whether Mr Norris has considered equipping himself with a manually operated Personal Locator Beacon (PLB), with a homing facility. Again, I am aware that there are light weight and compact examples available. A PLB would enable him to send a distress alert via satellite which will then be forwarded to the relevant UK Search and Rescue (SAR) authority, giving his position and alerting the coastguard that he was in distress. A homing signal from the PLB, together with a hand held VHF radio would then enable him to guide local SAR teams to his assistance.

I hope that this is helpful, but if you have any further questions please don't hesitate to contact me.



Lynette Huntley
Director of Public Affairs
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