

Minute note - Cross Party Group on Oil and Gas

Briefing on the Sumburgh Helicopter accident on August 23, 2013

18.00 – 20.00, Wednesday 9th October, 2013, Meeting Room P1.02, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

In attendance:

Lewis Macdonald MSP (Chair) Maureen Watt MSP (Chair)
Maureen Watt MSP
Nanette Milne MSP
Tavish Scott MSP
Richard Baker MSP
Mark McDonald MSP
Christian Allard MSP

John Taylor, Unite the Union
Malcolm Webb, Oil & Gas UK
Rev Gordon Craig, Chaplin to the UK Oil & Gas Industry
Alix Thom, Oil & Gas UK
Muriel Roberts, Chevron
Roger Esson, ICR
John Walker, Technip
Graham Rettie, Lombard – Royal Bank Group
Kristian Whitaker, Pinsent Masons LLP
Hannah Burdell, Stork Technical Services
Malcolm Ricketts, Wood Mackenzie
Calum Lancaster, Scottish Enterprise
Emma Clark, Nanette Milne's office

Apologies:

Liam McArthur MSP
Alison McInnes MSP
Stuart McMillan MSP
Jenny Marra MSP
Jackie Baillie MSP
Margo MacDonald MSP
Alexander Johnstone MSP
Murdo Fraser MSP

Ally Rae, BP
John Taylor, National Grid
Andrew Bright, ERM
Alastair Ross, Pinsent Masons
David Rennie, Scottish Enterprise
Shirley Allen, Pinsent Masons

Carol Barbone, CNR International
Fiona Bayne, Shell
Rachel Elliott, Aberdeen and Grampian Chambers of Commerce
Craig Harrow, MD MHPC (Scotland)
Christine Jones
Willie Park, Pinsent Masons
Sue Roaf, Heriot Watt University
Iain Brotchie, TOTAL E&P UK Limited
Babette Brown, TOTAL E&P UK Limited

Group administration:

Maureen Watt MSP welcomed the group and outlined the theme of the evening.

Ms Watt paid tribute to the four victims of the helicopter crash on August 23, Gary McCrossan, George Allison, Sarah Darnley and Duncan Munro.

A moment of quiet reflection was observed in their memory.

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved.

Presentations:

Malcolm Webb provided an overview of the oil and gas industry's footprint in the UK and highlighted that the use of helicopters is the only and safest means of servicing this infrastructure.

Mr Webb praised the work of the Helicopter Safety Steering Group (HSSG), and their response to the accident on August 23.

Mr Webb provided a summary of the Air Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB), Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), helicopter operators and Oil & Gas UK inquiries.

Mr Webb stated that the greatest challenge facing the industry presently was the need to build confidence among the workforce.

John Taylor, Unite the Union, praised the HSSG for the speed in which they reacted to the accident on August 23 and highlighted how diverse the group is.

Mr Taylor said helicopters were the only and safest method of transport for the offshore industry but added that workforce confidence was still a significant issue, specifically in relation to the EC225, something his union was working hard to address.

Mr Taylor expressed concern in relation to the CAA inquiry and questioned whether there were some smaller helicopter operators that wouldn't be covered by under CAA regulations.

Mr Taylor said questions marks remained on life jackets, lighting on windows / doors and seat configurations but added that the maintenance regime was very well controlled.

Mr Taylor concluded by calling on the Scottish Government to update safety at Sumburgh airport which, he said, would cost around £2-3m

Open discussion and Q&A:

Maureen Watt MSP asked John Taylor for more details regarding the smaller helicopter operators that he believed did not fall under the CAA regulations.

Mr Taylor said he was referring to small those who are based in Europe who did not fall under CAA standards but EU standards which, he said, were not as robust as those of the CAA.

Tavish Scott MSP asked Mr Taylor to elaborate on why he had less confidence in the CAA inquiry compared with others.

Mr Taylor said he had concerns relating to the width of the inquiry's remit and the time frame within which it was to report.

John Walker, Technip expressed concerns that helicopter safety training had become less realistic in recent years and suggested that this should be addressed.

Mr Taylor said that regularly reviewing of the training should take place but that it was important to have a full understanding of the recent accident before making any calls and that any "knee-jerk reactions" would be unhelpful.

Hannah Burdell, Stork told the group that the HSSG support and information sharing was vital in assisting Stork in responding and coping with events.

Mark McDonald MSP highlighted the issue of family pressure on the workforce, asking what was being done to address this. He also asked whether the industry would assist in communicating the helicopter safety messages to those people living in the helicopter flight paths.

Mr Taylor said, in relation to family engagement, there were plans to restart "family days" and "open days" to allow better engagement with concerned relatives and friends. He added that ensuring the industry communicated its safety record among relatives and friends was additionally important if the industry was to continue to attract people to work for it.

Mr Taylor also clarified that flight path approaches to Aberdeen airport were "controlled approaches" – where the helicopter pilot followed instructions – whereas the approach to Sumburgh airport was an "uncontrolled approach" – where the pilot makes the decisions on the approach.

Ms Watt and **Mr McDonald** committed to working together to communicate this to residents who live on the helicopter flight paths around Aberdeen.

Rev Gordon Craig provided his personal thoughts and reflections. He said that he had been impressed by the industries response to the Sumburgh accident, particularly the willingness to act where required.

Rev. Gordon concurred that workforce engagement was now essential but added to do this successfully the industry needed to regain the trust of the workforce and address misconceptions held by them in relation to helicopter transportation.

Mr Taylor added that improving workforce understanding and reducing confusion would require communicating information to them and reassuring not by statements but by deeds.

Richard Baker MSP asked whether either of the speakers supported calls for a public inquiry into helicopter transportation in the North Sea.

Mr Webb said that it was right that the industry was focused on supporting those inquiries already launched as their success will be vital should a public inquiry never begin. **Mr Webb** added that that the industry did not object to the idea of a public inquiry and would lend its full support if one was launched.

Lewis Macdonald MSP commented that a public inquiry could serve to gain the trust of the workforce that was so badly needed.

Mr Taylor agreed with this and raised concerns that the CAA inquiry would not serve to reassure the workforce.

Christian Allard MSP asked what role there could be for the families of the victims immediately following incidents such as the Sumburgh accident.

Both **Mr Webb** and **Mr Taylor** agreed that consideration should be given to facilitating more of a role for the families in the days and weeks following an accident. Both also agreed that direct involvement between the industry and the families immediately following an event may not be beneficial as the added emotion may hamper immediate progress.

Muriel Roberts (Chevron) said that some of Chevron's personnel had expressed a preference for smaller airports as relationships were more quickly established between the offshore workforce and flight crew.

Mr Taylor said that there were a range of competing views on what the workforce preferred in terms of flight routes and that it would be impossible to satisfy everyone's preference.

Maureen Watt asked how the industry dealt with those personnel who refused to fly.

Mr Taylor said counselling and support was offered.

Mr Macdonald (Ms Watt) then closed proceedings by thanking the presenters and attendees and inviting everyone to stay for informal drinks and networking.

Date, time and topic of next meeting to be advised

ENDS.