

# Government is wrong over coastguard – MP

by **KAREN PERROW**



*Contributed*

**Dr Sarah Wollaston,  
MP for Totnes**

TOTNES MP Dr Sarah Wollaston has repeated a call for the Government to scrap its proposals to close more than half its coastguard stations around the country – and start again.

Brixham's busy search and rescue centre is one of the stations under threat of closure, which would mean the loss of 24 jobs.

Dr Wollaston this week welcomed findings by the cross-party transport select committee, which concluded that significantly reducing the number of maritime rescue co-ordination centres would jeopardise safety at sea.

'The TSC have unequivocally called on the Government to scrap the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's proposals and start again,' she said.

'When they do so they should look at the proposals submitted by the coastguards themselves, drawing on the expertise of frontline officers.

'They should listen to the clear evidence that local knowledge and round the clock opening are vital if the coastguards are to be able to continue with their current professional and dedicated service.'

Dr Wollaston said the TSC rightly stressed that coastguards are not only there to look out for commercial shipping but to safeguard leisure users and our fishermen.

They also criticised the MCA's proposals to rely heavily on a new technology system rather than continue the current updating of

the existing integrated coastguard system.

The TSC was critical of the attempts by the minister to prevent coastguards from giving evidence to the committee on the grounds that they were junior civil servants.

'This kind of interference in the work of parliamentary select committees has to stop, as clearly no thorough enquiry is possible without hearing from the relevant professionals – it would be like trying to conduct an enquiry into the NHS without speaking to the doctors or nurses,' Dr Wollaston said.

Last year Brixham co-ordinated more than 1,300 search and rescue incidents, assisted more than 1,900 people and saved more than 350 lives. 'These were incidents that needed local knowledge,' said Dr Wollaston.

'This week I took the opportunity, along with Sheryll Murray MP, to discuss Brixham's case with the minister Mike Penning, to stress the critical importance of retaining Brixham Coastguard.

'I would like to add my support for the select committee's findings and call on the Government to scrap the MCA's original proposals and start again, and start with serving coastguards and volunteers.'