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Our ref: D/Min(AF)/NH MC02940/2012
Your ref: MM/CHAM02004/02121164

12 July 2012

Thank you for your letter of 20 June enclosing an email from your constituent, [REDACTED], about the deployment of the Long Range Acoustic Device (LRAD) for the 2012 Olympic Games.

I note your concern about how the Police might use LRAD during the Olympics and so it is perhaps worth providing some context about LRAD. LRAD is an all-weather hailing and warning device designed to communicate with authority, affect behaviour and determine intent. It does not have a public order utility in the UK and it will not be used by the Police on the streets of London during the Games. It will however be deployed as part of the joint Metropolitan Police Maritime Police Unit and Royal Navy/Royal Marines maritime operations on the Thames.

LRAD is a non-lethal device and would be used, by the military only, as part of a graduated response in support of the Police. It has two settings, low power and high power, and it is primarily in the low power setting - the loud-hailer mode - that it would be used. This is required to ensure verbal instructions can be heard in the closed cabins of boats travelling at speed, where the combination of wind and engine noise limits conventional loud hailers. LRAD is fully tested, including during the series of joint exercises with the Police this year.

I offer the following additional points by way of reassurance:

Frequency of use - LRAD is intended to be used in exceptional circumstances in response to an emerging threat. This is most likely to be in the low power loud-hailer mode.

Conditions warranting use of the high power mode - LRAD is part of a graduated series of response levels. It is not expected that it will be used in its high power

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mode, however that capability does exist. If needed, it could be deployed against any deliberately disruptive and uncooperative waterborne craft - this would be done prior to resorting to physical contact, such as barging or using disabling shots to stop the craft. In all responses, the potential for collateral damage would be assessed and the most appropriate response used.

Authorisation to use the high power mode - where LRAD, in its high power mode, is judged to be the most appropriate response, an officer at Lieutenant Commander (Royal Navy)/Major (Royal Marines) level would authorise its use, within agreed rules of engagement, and only when requested in support of the Police.

Safeguards - First and foremost the operators are fully trained, competent and conversant with both modes of LRAD use including the agreed rules of engagement and necessary authorisations to use. Operators will use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and the equipment is positioned and operated on board giving due consideration to safeguarding ships' staff hearing. As is normal practice, a Safety Case was developed to support operational use and this included risk assessments. Standard Operating Instructions (SOI) have also been developed. If use in the high power mode is being considered, it is important to recognise that this is not a step that would be taken lightly, that the equipment is designed for highly directional communication, that collateral damage would be assessed prior to use, and that authorisation to use in the high power mode would be in direct response, within agreed rules of engagement, to a determined disruptive attack. Use in the high power mode is also likely to be preferable to other escalatory responses which would involve the use of force to effect a stop on the water.

I hope this response is both helpful and reassuring.

[ORIGINAL SIGNED]

NICK HARVEY MP