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Dear Ray,

During questions on Thursday 14 June, you asked whether the UK has had discussions with Italy regarding its decision to close its ports to NGO vessels, and regarding the recent Search and Rescue incident involving AQUARIUS more specifically. I am sorry that I was unable to respond to you at the time and I promised to write to you.

I can assure you that UK and Italian officials have discussed Search and Rescue in the Central Mediterranean – including incidents involving NGO vessel AQUARIUS – regularly, at operational level, during normal diplomatic business between close partners. There have been no formal bilateral or high-level discussions focusing on AQUARIUS exclusively. The UK government remains committed to working closely with Italy and other partners to tackle illegal people smuggling and trafficking along the Central Mediterranean Route, and to ensuring that when migration does take place it is safe, legal and of benefit to countries of origin, transit and destination, as well as to migrants themselves.

I hope you find this letter helpful. I will also place a copy in the House library.

Yours Sincerely,
Annabel

BARONESS GOLDIE

Lord Collins of Highbury
House of Lords