8 February, 2016

Your Ref:   M1/0915

Mr.  Tom O’Neill

Meeting Administrator, Corporate Services Department

South Dublin County Council

County Hall

Tallaght

Dublin 24

Dear Mr. O’Neill

I have been asked by Mr. Simon Coveney, Minister for Defence to refer again to your  letter regarding Irish Naval Service operations in the Mediterranean and Ireland’s assistance to refugees.

The Minister has noted the motion passed at the recent meeting of South Dublin County Council.

The role of Irish Naval vessels in the Mediterranean was to provide a search and rescue capability and to undertake humanitarian search and rescue operations at sea in the Mediterranean.  Assistance to persons in distress at sea was provided in accordance with the applicable provisions of international conventions governing search and rescue situations. Co-ordination of search and rescue efforts and the provision of humanitarian assistance were achieved through close co-operation with the relevant Italian authorities.

The Irish Naval Service deployed to the Mediterranean on 16 May last following a Government Decision on 12 May and remained in the Mediterranean until the end of November.  The success of the operations carried out by L.É. Eithne, L.É. Niamh and L.É. Samuel Beckett involving the rescue of 8,592 migrants demonstrates clearly the value of Ireland’s participation in this important humanitarian response.

The question of a further deployment to the operation in the Mediterranean this year is currently being evaluated and will be considered in the context of the ongoing situation in the Mediterranean and the overall EU response thereto, the demands on the Defence Forces, our overseas commitments and available resources.  Subject to the outcome of the review and Government approval, the Minister has indicated that he would intend to deploy a further naval vessel to the Mediterranean probably sometime in early 2016.

The Minister has asked me to assure you that Ireland will continue to play its part in addressing the Migration Crisis facing Europe.  We will work closely and collaboratively with our EU colleagues as part of this response.

Your comments in relation to refugees arriving in Ireland will be addressed by my colleague, Ms Frances Fitzgerald, Minister for Justice.

Yours sincerely,

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**VINCENT LOWE**

**PRIVATE SECRETARY**

**MINISTER FOR DEFENCE**.