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The Cranston Inquiry

Day 3

March 5, 2025

1
                    Wednesday, 5 March 2025
2   (10.00 am)
3   SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Well, good morning, everyone, and good
4   morning, Mr Gibson.
5   I directed that Neal Gibson be screened during his
6   evidence from attendees at the hearing, both in person
7   and online. He's not screened from me, members of
8   the Inquiry team, nor from representatives of
9   the Full Participants who are in the hearing room with
10   me.
11   Mr Gibson, before we start, first of all, I'm
12   wondering if you can read the affirmation.
13   NEAL GIBSON (affirmed)
14   Now, Mr Gibson, before we start, if at any time you
15   want a break, you must indicate to me and we'll then
16   have a break, but what we normally do is we try to go
17   until about 11.15, but if, before that, you want
18   a break, then, you know, please indicate that.
19   So you're going to be questioned by
20   Ms Sarah Le Fevre.
21   Questions by MS LE FEVRE
22   MS LE FEVRE: Thank you, Chair.
23   Mr Gibson, would you start by giving the Inquiry
24   your full name, please?
25   A. Yes, my full name is Neal Simon Gibson.

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1   Q. Thank you.
2   And you're employed by His Majesty's Coastguard; is
3   that right?
4   A. Yes, I'm employed by His Majesty's Coastguard.
5   Q. Which is part, as we know, of the Maritime and
6   Coastguard Agency.
7   You've been so employed for over ten years now?
8   A. That is correct, yes.
9   Q. Thank you.
10   And you have made a witness statement for
11   the Inquiry, signed on 9 January of this year, which
12   runs to 101 pages; is that right?
13   A. I believe it's 110 pages.
14   Q. Thank you. It's probably my maths.
15   A. No, that's all right. I forget, but it was over
16   100 pages, yes.
17   Q. Thank you.
18   And you also produced a timeline, running to three
19   pages, of the key events as you remember them?
20   A. Yes, and that was at the time as well, a couple of days
21   after the event.
22   Q. Thank you.
23   Your role then. You are currently, is this right,
24   the or a Rescue Coordination Centre Manager? Is that
25   right?

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1   A. That's my correct ——
2   Q. Are you based at Dover?
3   A. Based at Dover, yes.
4   Q. And is that a role that existed in November 2021 when it
5   was described as "Commander of Dover MRCC"?
6   A. Yes, the previous title was Maritime Commander and Dover
7   MRCC.
8   Q. Thank you.
9   As at, though, 23 November 2021, you were, within
10   Coastguard, a Search and Rescue Mission Coordinator; is
11   that right?
12   A. At the time in 2021, my role was a Maritime Operations
13   and Team Leader.
14   Q. Thank you.
15   A. The role of Search and Rescue Mission Coordinator is
16   a qualification for the SAR.
17   Q. I see. So you were qualified, I think, as an SMC in
18   February 2020?
19   A. That's correct, yes.
20   Q. And you were promoted to Team Leader in June 2020, so an
21   additional function; is that right?
22   A. So the Team Leader was the oversight of the team. So
23   the Search Mission Coordinator role —— sorry,
24   qualification is about the prosecution of SAR incidents
25   and the Team Leader role is about the supervision of

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1   a team and then obviously your SMC qualification is
2   valid and refreshed every five years.
3   Q. Thank you very much, that's really ——
4   A. As of this date, I am still a qualified search mission
5   coordinator as well.
6   Q. And are you still operational in that role?
7   A. No, I'm —— my role is not operational currently, it's
8   the management and oversight of —— of the staff.
9   Q. Thank you.
10   A. However, if called upon, I can give tactical advice from
11   the perspective of a Search and Rescue Mission
12   Coordinator.
13   Q. That's very helpful.
14   I'd like to show on our scene now an extract from
15   your witness statement. It's {INQ010392/3} and page 3
16   of that witness statement, please. I think at
17   paragraph 9 of that witness statement, which we're
18   looking at now, you have described for us the duties of
19   an SMC. You tell us that they're set out in the IAMSAR
20   manual, and then you tell us, in the second sentence,
21   that:
22   "The SMC is the person in charge of a Search and
23   Rescue ... Operation until a rescue has been [e]ffected
24   or until it has become apparent that further efforts
25   would be of no avail ... "

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1   And that was as true in 2021 as it is now?
2   A. Yes, the IAMSAR guidance is the international guidance
3   which underpins all Coastguard activity worldwide.
4   Q. Thank you.
5   If we move on to the following page, please, to
6   page 4 {INQ010392/4} and paragraph 10, you tell us there
7   what the SMCs primary responsibilities are and were:
8   " ... to: gather information about distress
9   situations, develop accurate and workable SAR action
10   plans and dispatch and coordinate the resources to carry
11   out SAR missions."
12   Thank you.
13   If we scroll down on that page just to pick up
14   the roles of a Team Leader, you have set them out for us
15   at paragraph 12, (a) to (e), and if we turn the page to
16   page 5 {INQ010392/5}, we can see that you had
17   responsibility for managing the maritime operational
18   officers, senior and standard, within your operational
19   teams for ensuring their competence and that their
20   training was up to date and so on. That's part of
21   the role of a Team Leader?
22   A. Yes.
23   Q. Thank you.
24   So far as you're aware —— that can come off
25   the screen, thank you —— had you received, by

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1   November 2021, all training considered necessary and
2   appropriate from Coastguard to carry out those roles and
3   functions?
4   A. As far as I'm aware and can recall, yes.
5   Q. Thank you.
6   And is it right —— you've told us this in your
7   witness statement —— that at the time, at the time you
8   qualified as an SMC, there was no specific small boat
9   training incorporated within that training?
10   A. There was not. Small boats were, in maritime terms, in
11   their infancy of —— of a new type of incident, so we
12   didn't have specific training. However, a lot of
13   Coastguard principles and other things applied.
14   Q. Yes, thank you. Well, we'll come back, I'm sure, to
15   that.
16   Can I ask you about this next, about the small boats
17   generally. You've been employed as a SAR officer since
18   2014. You've told us through your witness statement
19   that in those years since employment, you had seen
20   a "rapid and significant", in your words, increase in
21   small boat activity; is that right?
22   A. Yes, I mean, an increase —— again, how do you
23   define "rapid"? But certainly an appreciable increase
24   from when they first started to where we are currently.
25   Q. Thank you.

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1   Before 23 November 2021, had you worked night shifts
2   that had involved significant small boat activity?
3   A. As far as I can remember, I can't say definitively, but
4   I had prosecuted multiple days and night shifts which
5   involved small boats.
6   Q. Thank you.
7   Any idea how often before November 2021?
8   A. Can you rephrase that question? Sorry.
9   Q. Any idea —— can you give us any indication how commonly
10   you prosecuted those sorts of shifts before
11   23 November 2021?
12   A. Yes, so if you like, for context, the first small boat
13   crossing I think we recorded at HMCG was in
14   November 2018, possibly earlier. Certainly throughout
15   2020, it became more and more common. And, again, from
16   2018, the method of crossing, the construction of
17   the craft and then the frequency and the numbers of
18   people involved increased. So I would say, in
19   a standard 12—month cycle of shifts, I would say
20   probably 50% would have involved some form of small boat
21   crossing, predominantly in the period from the end of
22   May to late November.
23   Q. Thank you.
24   You have told the Inquiry as well that that increase
25   had had an impact on nearly every aspect of your role

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1   and at MRCC Dover in general. Can you summarise what
2   you mean by that impact?
3   A. So the role of officers at Dover, we were dual skilled
4   officers. So obviously search and rescue is
5   the Coastguard's primary function —— primary function,
6   apologies, Vessel Traffic Services, which is
7   the provision of save navigation of traffic through
8   the Dover Strait, and also the approaches to Harwich,
9   Felixstowe, Port of London, so 95% of the UK's trade
10   goes through that stretch of waterway. So you're dual
11   skilled in providing that service, which is a 24/7
12   continuous service, and also search and rescue.
13   So the impact of having an increased SAR load
14   affected, you know, our staffing levels. You know, we
15   were busy, you know. HM Coastguard delivers a service
16   24/7, 365 days a year, and it is demand—based, it is not
17   forecastable for what we would call general SAR.
18   The small boat SAR is a bit more forecastable because it
19   was based on the weather. So you could anticipate we're
20   in for a busy period. So it affected everything from
21   training, so, again, there was a big demand on staffing
22   levels to be good and consistent; SMCs to be present at
23   Dover, because the oversight is a lot easier from
24   the room, we can do it remotely. However, being in
25   the room just is a bit easier for the ——

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1   Q. Yes.
2   A. —— you know, technology is good, but it is not
3   the answer to everything.
4   Q. Thank you.
5   Can I ask you to help us with what the main points
6   of difference were in dealing with a small boat
7   requiring SAR and a more standard form of SAR?
8   A. Yeah, so obviously there are four sea areas across
9   the world, sea area A1 covers everywhere within 50
10   nautical miles of a VHF base station. Each commercial
11   craft/pleasure craft should carry the appropriate
12   equipment to operate within them sea areas.
13   A commercial craft is bound by all the GMDSS regulations
14   and SOLAS, so carrying a lot of equipment, including
15   navigation, communications, things like that.
16   Dealing with small boat search and rescue,
17   sometimes, in the early days, they didn't even have
18   phones or there would be one phone on board. Their
19   position fixing isn't accurate, their information passed
20   is not always reliable, whether it be by wanting to be
21   covert or just generally not understanding where they've
22   come from, what they've done. Passage of time. If
23   they've not got an anticipation of how long they've been
24   at sea it makes that location difficult. So
25   the location of a small boat in the Dover Strait, for

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1   those who are looking at the map and obviously it's not
2   that big a bit of water, essentially when you're
3   a pinprick on that map, it's a very big bit of water.
4   So it's generally the location ——
5   Q. Yes.
6   A. —— and the quality of the information being passed, or
7   being understood and being able to be transmitted due to
8   language barriers.
9   Q. Thank you.
10 A. That would be the biggest change, shall we say. But the
11   lack of communication and position fixing would be
12   the hardest.
13 Q. So accurate location and accuracy of the information
14   gathered?
15 A. Yes.
16 Q. Thank you.
17 A. And, to add, quantifiable and being able to assess and
18   corroborate that information.
19 Q. Thank you.
20   I want to ask you just a little now about policy and
21   process and you've touched on this already.
22   The starting point adopted by Coastguard generally in
23   developing responses to small boat SAR in particular
24   was, I think this is right, to apply the internationally
25   agreed principles of SAR as set out in IAMSAR?

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1   A. That's correct, yes.
2   Q. And adapt those principles as necessary?
3   A. Principles and Standard Operating Procedures.
4   Q. Thank you.
5   Did or does IAMSAR provide any assistance specific
6   to dealing with or responding to small boats?
7   A. At the time when this became a problem, no. Recently,
8   the IAMSAR guidance has been updated. Don't quote me on
9   the date, but certainly within the last 12 months, if
10   I want to give an accurate representation to cover what
11   is the phenomenon of small boat rescue, which isn't just
12   unique to the UK ——
13 Q. Yes.
14 A. —— obviously the American Coastguard have a big problem
15   with it as well and also the Mediterranean states have
16   dealt with it for a lot longer than we have.
17 Q. Thank you.
18   But, at the time, it was silent on —— on ——
19 A. At the time, it was silent on it. However, IMO guidance
20   requires the signing of 196 nations to agree on things,
21   so ...
22 Q. Yes, thank you.
23   And you referred to Coastguard Standard Operating
24   Procedures. Were those reflective of the IAMSAR
25   guidance?

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1   A. Yes, they are based round what the delivery of IAMSAR
2   requires.
3   Q. Thank you.
4   And a suite of procedures ranging all over
5   the Coastguard's functions, but which you also applied
6   as appropriate to small boat SAR?
7   A. Yes.
8   Q. Thank you.
9   I think it's right though, too, that some SAR small
10   boat specific process had been developed by
11   November 2021?
12 A. Yes, we were working towards it. Basically, we have
13   incident tapes, which have a Standard Operating
14   Procedure to match with it, and, again, we were
15   developing a specific incident type to cover what was
16   small boats at the time.
17 Q. Thank you.
18   And you have told us that you contributed or made
19   contributions to that development of that policy; is
20   that right?
21 A. Yes, that's correct.
22 Q. Thank you.
23   I'd like to show on the screen now {INQ000428/1},
24   please. That, I hope, is a Standard Operating Procedure
25   for "Incidents Involving Migrants", and is that an

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1   example of a procedure that had been developed specific
2   to small boat SAR?
3 A. Yes, and as you can see, the document is dated
4   6/10/2021.
5 Q. So a matter of weeks before 23 November ——
6 A. A matter of weeks before, yes.
7 Q. Can I ask you, it's marked as well "Version 12.0". Were
8   there previous versions or was this the first effective
9   iteration of the document?
10 A. I would imagine there was a version 1. I can't say ——
11   however, versions would be where we've changed things,
12   and it might be spelling mistakes, something as simple
13   as that, but we do keep versions of everything, so if we
14   have spelt something wrong or added bits in, then
15   obviously it is updated, hence the different version
16   types.
17 Q. Thank you.
18   If we move on to page 2 of this document
19   {INQ000428/2}, we can see, in the second half of
20   the page, that there are specific instructions here
21   dealing with relevant to "Information Gathering", so the
22   second of the two challenges that you've identified
23   specific to responding to small boats, information
24   gathering in respect of the vessel, looking for
25   the location, description, whether it's underway or

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1   making way, whether it's —— what its course and speed
2   are, and if it's not underway, whether it's broken down
3   or taking on water.
4   Was that an important distinction for you,
5   the condition?
6 A. Yes. The phasing of an incident is quite important. It
7   determines the actions under IAMSAR. So, again,
8   the more information you have, the more assessment,
9   the different your response will be. You know, if it's
10   sinking and taking water, that is a very much grave and
11   imminent danger of people entering the water. So,
12   therefore, if there was multiple incidents, you would
13   grade them which were the most severe first so
14   (inaudible) stuff like that. So, again, it's knowing
15   what needs to be dealt with and when.
16 Q. Thank you.
17   We can see at the foot of the page, moving on
18   to "Persons on Board", looking to establish the numbers
19   of persons on the vessel. And then perhaps over
20   the page, please, to page 3 {INQ000428/3}, whether
21   they're wearing life jackets, whether they have access
22   to other life saving equipment, whether medical
23   assistance is required, whether anyone is already in
24   the water or missing, what nationalities are on board.
25   And all of this is information that you're looking

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1   to gather from a small boat; is that right?
2 A. Yes. What I would like to say at this point is, we
3   don't ask leading questions. So this is information
4   we're looking to gather, but we would not be asking
5   the leading question, "Has anyone fallen in the water",
6   because it's very easy with that language barrier for
7   that answer to be, "Yes". You know, "Yes" can be an
8   answer. So it is open questioning, not leading
9   questions, but we are asking the questions in an attempt
10   to gather this information rather than physically asking
11   these questions.
12 Q. Thank you.
13   And just on that point, had you been given, you or
14   any of your team been given any training as to how to
15   answer questions?
16 A. Yes ——
17 Q. Ask questions.
18 A. —— that's —— that's very much part of the initial
19   training that you undertake when you join
20   the Coastguard, the operational and communication
21   [Inaudible] training covers 999 telephony, routine
22   telephony, radio telephony and the type of questioning
23   to ask.
24 Q. Thank you.
25   And we can see, we go on in the "Information

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1   Gathering", "Report[s] from Migrant Vessel". Is that
2   information you're looking to gather directly from
3   the occupants of a small boat?
4 A. Yeah, pretty much, to be honest, yes. Again, the second
5   point there around, I'm going to say EISEC information
6   is how it's pronounced for us, but that's stands for
7   Enhanced Information for Emergency Service Calls. So
8   that is basically whereby the mobile and telephony will
9   tell us which mast it's connected to, an error radius so
10   we do get some geolocation potentially from a mobile
11   phone signal. But that is not something the persons on
12   board the vessel would provide, that's provided by
13   the mobile networks.
14 Q. I see.
15 A. It doesn't occur when we receive phone calls through
16   international emergency roaming, so if you're not
17   connected to your home network on your phone, we won't
18   receive that information.
19 Q. I see. So it's partly reliable, but it's partly
20   dependent on the location that the call is made?
21 A. Yes, there is a —— there is an error radius on it and we
22   get the error radius, so that can be anything up to two
23   to three miles so depending on the accuracy of it.
24 Q. Thank you.
25   And then you're looking to obtain the original

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1   caller's phone number as well?
2   A. The caller's phone number, yes.
3   Q. And why do you need that?
4   A. If we need to get back in touch. So obviously it ——
5   whether you're in a small boat or fallen over on a cliff
6   and broken your hand, you know, if we can get back in
7   touch with you, that's very important. We may want to
8   come back, ask some further questions. So a Maritime
9   Operations Officer, or MOO, would generally take
10   the initial calls, and the SMC would then review it and
11   maybes highlight some further information.
12 Q. Thank you. And so you might need to make contact?
13 A. Might need to call them back, yeah.
14 Q. Thank you.
15   All right, can we take that document off the screen
16   then, please.
17   Did you find that policy, that SOP, that process and
18   the supporting training helpful to you in learning how
19   to obtain information from small boats?
20 A. General Coastguard training covers information
21   gathering. It's a good aide memoire to assist it.
22   However, information gathering is our core skill in our
23   operations room, so it —— it assists. However, you
24   should have that pretty much ingrained in you about,
25   you know, the six Ws of a 999 call is how we work our

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1   information gathering, and then just adaptation of
2   questioning for language barriers, things like that.
3   Q. Thank you.
4   And the six Ws, for those who don't know?
5   A. So what, where, when, weather, watch, and I always
6   forget the last one, unfortunately, but they're ——
7   Q. (Overspeaking — inaudible).
8   A. —— they're written down in my statement somewhere ——
9   Q. All right, thank you.
10   Can I ask you this. A SOP of this type, incidents
11   involving migrants or otherwise, how would those be
12   brought to the attention of MOO operation staff?
13 A. So any changes to guidance relating specifically to
14   operational work was always either published on OMS at
15   the time, which was the operational management system,
16   or it has since been replaced by the Coastguard
17   information portal, and they appear as hot topics with
18   an acknowledgement usually, so they have to read it and
19   then click a button to say it's been acknowledged.
20 Q. And were all staff required to read new SOPs as they
21   were published?
22 A. Yes. There is an element of self—learning, and again,
23   it is duty bound to them. And again, as a Team Leader,
24   you would check that your staff had —— with a verbal
25   sort of start of watch, any new updates, can you make

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1   sure you —— you know, it was a general start of watch
2   chat, make sure any new information on CIP is read and
3   understood.
4   Q. Thank you.
5   I'd like to ask you now a little bit about
6   the Coastguard mobile phone, the iPhone. Is this right,
7   that in October 2020, the Coastguard had decided to
8   adopt a dedicated, standalone iPhone in addition to
9   the standard communications procedures?
10 A. The —— the adoption of the standalone Coastguard mobile
11   phone was in response to a change in information
12   gathering from small boats. Believe it or not, I'm not
13   great with technology, I did not know you could share
14   your location from WhatsApp until someone showed me when
15   we got this phone. So we had previously gathered a lot
16   of information from questioning, you know, getting their
17   positions from Google Maps, you know, because again
18   Google Maps gives you a latitude and longitude. So
19   the standalone mobile phone was to aid, at the request,
20   shall we say, of these callers to, you know, provide ——
21   I can provide you this information via WhatsApp. And up
22   until we got that mobile phone, we couldn't receive that
23   information, so it was acknowledged that, if they're
24   prepared to transmit it that way, we need to be able to
25   receive it in some matter of way, and that was

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1   the quickest solution I believe. I wasn't responsible
2   for the enacting of that solution however. If you want
3   something, you want something quick; that was probably
4   the easiest way to achieve it.
5   Q. Thank you.
6   I think it was standalone in the sense that it
7   wasn't integrated into Coastguard's other communication
8   systems?
9   A. No, it is just a standard personal mobile phone which
10   had WhatsApp for business on it. It wasn't tied into
11   any of our recording software and it was purely just for
12   that passing of positions via WhatsApp, which seemed to
13   be quite a prevalent method of communication among
14   the persons crossing the Channel.
15 Q. Thank you.
16   So, effectively, sole purpose, to enable
17   communication with persons in small boats with
18   the specific purpose of obtaining WhatsApp messages
19   which would allow the geolocation of the small boat?
20 A. Yes.
21 Q. Thank you.
22   And the Inquiry's seen some training or guidance
23   that was issued as to how to use WhatsApp on that
24   iPhone?
25 A. Yes. I'm middle—aged in terms of Coastguard personnel.

                              20

1   So the youngsters are much better at the tech relating
2   to WhatsApp. So, yeah, we had guidance to make sure
3   everyone could operate it.
4   Q. Thank you.
5   Was that then —— once Coastguard had the standalone
6   iPhone, was that the most reliable way for Coastguard to
7   obtain geolocation information from a small boat?
8   A. It was a way of obtaining and maybes tying up
9   information that we'd gathered through call collections.
10 So it shouldn't have been the only way of doing it,
11 however, it did give you a very definitive geographical
12 latitude and longitude in decimalised format. However,
13 good call collection and questioning would corroborate
14 that latitude and longitude.
15 Q. So the iPhone, coupled with the questioning of
16 the occupants of the small boat, and that was the best
17 way of locating a boat?
18 A. Potentially. There are pitfalls in WhatsApp. You know,
19 is it a live location or was it a previous location,
20 what time was that location? Same with any call
21 collection regarding position information, it's only as
22 accurate as the position given and the time given.
23 Again, an example of that would be a yachtsman maybes
24 records his position once every hour in his log. If he
25 passes his position an hour ago, it's only accurate an

21

1   hour go. So you've got to be ——
2   Q. I see.
3   A. —— understood with is this live or is this a position
4   the last time they connected to a network which gave
5   them position information.
6   Q. Thank you. So a recognised need within the Coastguard
7   to constantly reflect on how up to date that geolocation
8   that had been provided ——
9   A. Again, yes, it's assessing that. You know, if they give
10 a position and say they were near a certain ship with
11 a name, you can then cross—reference that ship's
12 position at that time and the time of that position.
13 Q. And the other options you've referred to, EISEC,
14 the emergency service route, potentially a route to
15 triangulate?
16 A. Yes, so EISEC gives us, like I say, a geographic area.
17 So it's —— it is not as accurate as we would like.
18 There are enhancements in that service which is advanced
19 mobile location, that requires good connectivity for
20 phone calling, that's a technological thing, but it can
21 be more accurate. But, again, it depends how many masts
22 you're connecting to, WiFi networks, things like that
23 so ...
24 Q. Thank you. So it had its own limitations, as you've
25 said?

22

1   A. EISEC has its own limitations, but it gives us a rough
2   area, however it depends which masts it's connected to.
3   Q. Thank you.
4   So we've heard about the guidance on how to use
5   WhatsApp, but in November of 2021, were there any other
6   written procedures explaining how that mobile phone was
7   to be used?
8   A. Not that I recall. I believe it was accepted that it
9   was there for the purposes of receiving positions via
10 WhatsApp and that was the accepted practice of
11 the phone. But whether there was a written guidance
12 that said, again, it was not to be answered, it was for
13 the purposes of using WhatsApp communications, which was
14 written positions —— well, shared positions and a text
15 message, but not to be used for phone calls due to
16 the fact it wasn't recorded.
17 Q. Where was the information about geolocation then to be
18 recorded? If you received via WhatsApp, where was it
19 supposed to be written down?
20 A. Any information received via WhatsApp would pertain to
21 a specific incident and therefore that geolocation
22 information would be recorded in that incident.
23 Q. And by "in that incident", do you mean the ViSION log
24 set up specific to that particular incident and given
25 its own global information number, GIN number?

23

1   A. That's correct, it would be recorded in the ViSION
2   incident management system.
3   Q. Thank you.
4   And was it anybody's job in particular to record
5   that information in the ViSION log, or was it the person
6   who picked up the co—ordinates, their job to record it?
7   A. It would be whoever picked it up would record it ——
8   Q. (Overspeaking — inaudible).
9   A. —— and obviously then make myself aware, as SMC or
10 another team member if I was engaged in other work, of
11 and update that incident.
12 Q. Thank you.
13   Was it likely, do you think, that a person in
14 a small boat who had been given a mobile number for
15 Coastguard might try and communicate further via that
16 mobile phone once they had that telephone number?
17 A. I guess it depends person to person. Some people prefer
18 picking up the phone and ringing, some people prefer
19 just texting these days. So, again, the number being
20 out there we know was shared amongst other persons. We
21 had received texts before people even left the beaches
22 sometimes on that phone, so it was obviously shared
23 amongst the community that was involved in small boat
24 crossings. However, also calls were received to Dover
25 Port Control, so that number had obviously been Googled,

24

1 because it's not an emergency services number, it's
2 purely the number for commercial traffic entering
3 the Port of Dover. So I don't think it influences it
4 one way or the other. You know, there is a website
5 which helps assists the small boat —— the migrants
6 crossing, which tells them what to do, you know, that
7 sort of thing, and again, it does refer to the emergency
8 numbers, 999 and obviously the French 112, I believe it
9 is.
10 Q. 112 and Port Control as well.
11   But to my —— to my question, once a person on
12 a small boat was in receipt of a number that they knew
13 they could use to communicate with the Coastguard,
14 was it foreseeable, at least possible, that they might
15 try and make further contact via that telephone number,
16 whether by WhatsApp, text, telephone?
17 A. It's possible.
18 Q. You've told the Inquiry that no training had been
19 provided to you or I think anyone else for whom you were
20 responsible regarding monitoring or checking the mobile
21 phone. Was that right?
22 A. In effect, no. There was no, "You must check it every
23 half an hour or 20 minutes". It was there to be used
24 during active SAR incidents; however, it is not
25 a primary means of engaging with our customers, for want

25

1 of a better phrase.
2 Q. So was anything supposed to happen if the mobile phone
3 did receive a call or a text message?
4 A. The guidance was not to answer it. We believe it was
5 originally supposed to be forwarded to the Dover number.
6 So if a call was made to it, it should have been
7 forwarded. Now, I don't know whether that was
8 following, but certainly we had done that in the future
9 to record any calls that came through it.
10 Q. And who had given that guidance?
11 A. I'm not sure. I can't remember.
12 Q. But there was an instruction, to the best of your
13 recollection, that the phone wasn't to be answered if it
14 rang?
15 A. Yes. Whether I'd made that on the night of, "Listen
16 it's not recorded, so we shouldn't communicate by that
17 method", because it's not a recorded line, which is very
18 important in our terms of communication that everything
19 is recorded that comes into the operations room.
20 Q. Do you think there was any scope for confusion amongst
21 members of SAR teams, your team or otherwise, as to how
22 exactly the mobile phone was to be used?
23 A. The primary purpose of the mobile phone I don't think
24 was under any confusion. However, there could have been
25 more consideration for what ifs.

26

1 Q. So what if somebody called the phone, what if somebody
2 messaged the phone, what to do in those circumstances?
3 A. The call would be the main one. The message is fine,
4 because actually we sent a message or —— and expecting
5 the reply, but obviously that —— that is recordable,
6 because it is a written message. The phone call is more
7 of a challenge.
8 Q. Thank you, that's very ——
9 A. I don't know whether that was considered or not, but
10 certainly I wasn't privy to that.
11 Q. And just pushing a little further, a message that's sent
12 when you're expecting it would be picked up, but
13 a message that was sent when you weren't necessarily
14 expecting it might go unnoticed?
15 A. An unsolicited message from a boat we weren't aware of,
16 you know, the phone pings, and it is just a ping, may be
17 missed if we're not expecting ... Again, a solicited
18 message, where we've sent that message for —— request
19 for information, we're waiting for a reply, we're not
20 expecting unsolicited messages in, because we were in
21 control of the number.
22 Q. Thank you.
23   Do you remember ever giving instruction to a person
24 on a small boat, "Don't send us follow up messages"?
25 Was that the sort of instruction that was given?

27

1 A. No, I think it was fine to receive messages because,
2 again, it would be timestamped via the WhatsApp when it
3 was delivered. Checking it was delivered was part of it
4 as well, the ability of WhatsApp to check it's delivered
5 is ——
6 Q. The two blue ticks?
7 A. Yes, sorry, however many it is, yeah. Yes, that was
8 part of, you know, it's been delivered, that's good;
9 they haven't read it yet, so that gives us they're not
10 in signal possibly or they haven't got round to reading
11 it. So that sort of to and from messaging was expected.
12 Q. Thank you.
13 A. Because it covers the language barrier a bit.
14 Q. All right.
15   I want to take you then to the start of your watch
16 or shift on 23 November of 2021. You were scheduled to
17 work a 12—hour shift, is that right, 7.30 in the evening
18 through to 7.30 the following morning?
19 A. That's correct, yeah.
20 Q. You were to be based in the operations room at Dover?
21 A. That's correct.
22 Q. You were leading your team, team 3?
23 A. Yes.
24 Q. That's a search and rescue team?
25 A. Yeah.

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1   Q. That team, on the night, consisted of yourself,
2   Stuart Downs, from whom the Inquiry expects to hear
3   evidence, I think, next week, and a trainee MOO; is that
4   right?
5   A. That's correct, yes.
6   Q. There were two further team members, but they were
7   dedicated to the VTS, vessel traffic scheme, that you've
8   explained already?
9   A. Yes, that's correct. So in the July of 2021, we'd begun
10   to separate search and rescue and VTS in response to
11   the increased workload. So there was a Team Leader who
12   managed VTS, which was the same grade as myself, and
13   another vessel traffic service officer who was covering
14   the VTS desks.
15 Q. Thank you.
16   You have told the Inquiry through your statement you
17   were two members of staff down that night; is that
18   right?
19 A. Yes, one of my staff was on leave and the other one had
20   unfortunately called in sick.
21 Q. And were those staff due to be in the SAR team or
22   the VTS team?
23 A. The member of staff on annual leave was a SAR team
24   member, and the member of staff who called in sick was
25   a VTS team member.

29

1   Q. Thank you.
2   I think both those functions were based at the time
3   in the same operations room?
4   A. That's correct, in the operations room at the time there
5   was 11 desks and three were dedicated to VTS.
6   Q. And it's because of that sick leave that you effectively
7   had to double hat yourself that evening; is that right?
8   A. That's correct. Whereas I would have arrived at work
9   and known that the VTS was complemented by the three
10   VTSOs, as designated by IALA for the VTS requirement,
11   I would have been free to maintain search and rescue all
12   night.
13 Q. Thank you.
14   But as it turned out and because of that sick leave,
15   you had to be dedicated, I think, to VTS for a period of
16   three hours?
17 A. Yes, I had to cover the VTSOs' breaks, so they had
18   a break from their duties.
19 Q. And that was 10.30 in the evening on the 23rd to 1.30 or
20   thereabouts the following morning?
21 A. It was there or thereabouts.
22 Q. Thank you.
23   You have told the Inquiry that in the weeks leading
24   up to this shift, you were working an altered shift
25   pattern, that's six on and two off, the standard being

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1   four on and four off. How did that affect you?
2   A. So the —— the extra two shifts were to cover vessel
3   traffic service officers mainly. So obviously I was
4   just doing more hours than a standard four days off
5   would be. Resting in between was fine. The two extra
6   shifts usually consisted either of a full night shift or
7   maybes just three to four hours of break cover on that
8   shift so ... But, again, sleeping during the day and
9   resting as I would normally. In some cases probably
10   sleeping more than if I was going about my four days
11   off.
12 Q. On this particular shift, you have told us you were
13   unable to take your own break in the course of
14   the shift; that's right, isn't it?
15 A. That's correct, yes. I went without a break that night
16   shift.
17 Q. So that was 12 hours and no break?
18 A. 12 hours and no break.
19 Q. I want to ask you a little more about the team, the SAR
20   team, and their qualifications.
21   Stuart Downs hadn't yet completed his incident
22   response qualification; that's right, isn't it?
23 A. I believe so. If it's written in his statement. But
24   I believe he was still under training as a Maritime
25   Operations Officer.

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1   Q. So was he, strictly speaking, a trainee as well?
2   A. He would have shown on our watch bill as being
3   a trainee. Whether he'd completed the training, but not
4   sat the assessment module of the IR, I can't recall.
5   Q. Thank you.
6   A. But he would have been trainee ——
7   Q. Pending.
8   A. In the training —— the training takes about nine months,
9   and obviously you're operational from when you've
10   received your communications training. So he was
11   progressing through training.
12 Q. I see.
13 A. And a lot of the training is ——
14 Q. So it's the communications training that renders you
15   operational?
16 A. That makes you count as operational, yes.
17 Q. Thank you.
18   Were there any tasks or functions of a MOO that
19   Mr Downs was unable to carry out on that night shift?
20 A. Not —— nothing that he wouldn't be able to carry out,
21   because he was under supervision from an SMC.
22 Q. Was he under supervision during the period of time that
23   you were carrying out the VTS function?
24 A. He —— he was under a direction of another SMC, which was
25   remotely from the JRCC. So I was still within the room,

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1   however my role was not to manage the SAR at that time,

2   it was to deliver the VTS function.

3 Q. Thank you.

4   The trainee, she was non—operational; that's right?

5 A. She'd been with us 30 days at that point, so she was new

6   to the Coastguard, she'd done her initial training and

7   she was learning a lot of the —— you know, a lot of

8   the learning we can do in the Ops room and actually

9   being exposed to seeing what's going on and learning it

10   is a good part of learning the job before going on the

11   formal training.

12 Q. Yes.

13   But she was 30 days into a nine—month training

14   regime; is that right?

15 A. That's correct, yeah.

16 Q. Thank you.

17   And what did non—operational mean for you as

18   Team Leader in practical terms? What could she actually

19   do?

20 A. So administrative tasks. We could direct her to update

21   bits of information which were non—critical. Again, we

22   have SAR partners ring in, and the way our system works

23   is it identifies who our SAR partners are. So they

24   would take a function of various calls from SAR partners

25   who would be delivering routine information, so not

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1   search and rescue information, but routine information.

2   The maritime safety information broadcast is part of

3   the work we do, which is about maritime safety. She was

4   able to record that information and update it

5   appropriately, and it's —— it's a pre—recorded

6   broadcast, so therefore it can be —— it can be reviewed

7   and checked before it goes out. Updating trackers as

8   directed. Again, updating documents. By trackers,

9   I will —— I need to emphasise, I mean the spreadsheet,

10   not a geolocation method ——

11 Q. Yes.

12 A. —— it is a spreadsheet in overview ——

13 Q. The Coastguard shared tracker. Is that what you're

14   referring to?

15 A. I —— it referred to anything really, it's just referred

16   to as a "tracker" in this Inquiry, because it is

17   genuinely a spreadsheet with an overview of

18   the information.

19 Q. Thank you.

20 A. The synonym "tracker" maybes construes that people

21   believe that these boats are tracked in some form of

22   method.

23 Q. Oh, I see, so that's the distinction in your mind?

24 A. In my mind the word "tracker" is possibly the wrong use

25   of the word. "Document". It is a spreadsheet, but it

<div align="center">34</div>

1   was called a tracker because actually it was for sharing

2   information so people could keep a track of what was

3   going on.

4 Q. Thank you.

5 A. It's a conflict of the English language where one word

6   means six different things.

7 Q. Yes, of course. Well, thank you for that.

8   Just going back to your trainee on the evening. She

9   was to carry out administrative tasks?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. And learn by observation?

12 A. And learn by observation, and again, getting her to do

13   entries in ViSION is a good skill set.

14 Q. (Overspeaking — inaudible).

15 A. You've seen the type of entries we use for brevity, so

16   the message is in there, but quickly and efficiently.

17 Q. And that and you was the whole of the SAR team in

18   the operations room on that shift?

19 A. That was the complement of people based in MRCC Dover.

20 Q. Thank you.

21   Are you aware that the trainee was involved in

22   a call directly with the French Coastguard in the course

23   of that shift?

24 A. I became aware of it. I was on the VTS at the time.

25   Again, it rang as a routine line, and, again, we would

<div align="center">35</div>

1   generally —— the trainees could answer the routine phone

2   calls, because a lot of them would be maybes enquiries

3   from the public. The French Coastguard do have

4   a dedicated line to ring which informs us that it is

5   the French Coastguard calling us, however they obviously

6   rang on the routine line for, whatever reason, I do not

7   know.

8 Q. In normal expectation then, a trainee wouldn't be

9   speaking directly to the French Coastguard; is that

10   right?

11 A. No, not without some form of communications ticket.

12 Q. And why not? What are the risks associated with that

13   sort of communication?

14 A. If, for whatever reason, it turned out to be an

15   emergency situation, they wanted to pass information on,

16   it's again managing risks and expectations, and again,

17   if it did happen, they were coached to pass it over to

18   an experienced operator.

19 Q. And do you know whether in fact that was passed over to

20   an experienced operator?

21 A. I do not know, unfortunately, because I was engaged with

22   the VTS operations.

23 Q. The Inquiry's been separately told that the trainee was

24   in charge of the standalone mobile phone in the course

25   of that shift. Do you agree with that, or —— is that

<div align="center">36</div>

1   right?
2 A. I think she may have been asked to operate it under
3   the direction of either myself or Stuart Downs, so, "Can
4   you send a message to this incident on this telephone
5   number", which is a division of labour, to make it
6   easier.
7 Q. And to receive the messages in response?
8 A. If she received a message, it would be to make us aware
9   that a message had been received.
10 Q. So in your mind, she was functioning effectively as
11   a post box?
12 A. Without sounding too disingenuous to her, because she's
13   a quite capable person, but, yes, fundamentally, there
14   was no responsibility on her. However, she was utilised
15   to assist, and again, feel useful in delivering what was
16   a busy night of search and rescue.
17 Q. Did she understand that, do you think?
18 A. I believe so, yes.
19 Q. Was it appropriate, do you think, for a trainee to be
20   handling communications directly with small boats by
21   mobile phone?
22 A. What was requested I feel was capable of her abilities,
23   which was to compose a message and send that message.
24 Q. But that far and no further?
25 A. Correct.

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1 Q. All right.
2   Then team 3 in the operations room. You would ——
3   when you were the SAR team and part of the SAR team, you
4   were physically, is this right, sitting closely enough
5   together to speak, catch each other up between calls and
6   communications; is that right?
7 A. Yes, as —— our room was organised in what I would
8   describe as a horse shoe shape, so three desks, two
9   desks, three desks. So we were sat in a line of three,
10   and our VTS colleagues were not too dissimilar from my
11   colleague there on a bank of three desks. So we were
12   all in verbal sharing distance.
13 Q. Thank you.
14   And were you in the habit of verbally sharing in
15   the course of a shift?
16 A. Yes, it's part of my role. You know, the brief of
17   a mission is shared verbally, as well as the mission
18   plan being recorded in ViSION.
19 Q. And those verbal updates would improve your situational
20   awareness ——
21 A. Yes.
22 Q. —— is that right? An important part of your situational
23   awareness?
24 A. A massive part of situational awareness and also
25   confirmation that people understood what was expected of

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1   that mission and their roles.
2 Q. Thank you.
3   And in your recollection and to the best of your
4   recollection, were you able to update each other in
5   the course of that shift, 23 to 24 November?
6 A. As far as practicable.
7 Q. By that you mean what?
8 A. Basically operational demand. This was a busy shift and
9   sharing information in between being on phone calls
10   myself, be it with SAR partners, emergency calls, again,
11   it was as quick as possible and as briefly as possible.
12 Q. Thank you.
13   You had remote support, you've alluded to it
14   already, throughout the shift, is this right?
15 A. Yes, there —— there was —— HM Coastguard's network is
16   a virtual network of ten stations joined together. So
17   Zone 14 is a maritime zone which encompasses from
18   Ramsgate Harbour out to the median line, and then
19   obviously down to Jury's Gap Sewer, which is west of
20   the Lydd Firing Range, and south, again, to the median
21   line.
22 Q. Thank you.
23   So a virtual network. And the support you had
24   primarily came from the JRCC at Fareham; is that right?
25 A. That's correct, the Joint Rescue Co—Ordination Centre at

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1   Fareham.
2 Q. And is that where the remote SMC was based who covered
3   effectively for you whilst you were involved in VTS?
4 A. On this night, yes, it was allocated from the Joint
5   Rescue Co—Ordination Centre.
6 Q. Thank you.
7   You've referred to some of them already, but explain
8   them now, if you would. Are there downsides and what
9   are they, of remote rather than in—person support?
10 A. So on the night in question, the channel 16 watch,
11   that's the listening watch for the international calling
12   and distress channel, so all calls from commercial
13   shipping whether it be a routine call or a distress
14   situation are broadcast on that channel. That was being
15   carried out by Solent on our behalf. I refer to Solent
16   as the Joint Rescue Co—Ordination Centre because that's
17   its physical location and its call sign on the radio.
18   They were maintaining that watch, so, again, we didn't
19   have that in the Ops room at Dover, so calls through
20   channel 16 were intercepted —— not intercepted, were
21   recorded by that team which I would usually hear, so
22   obviously that sort of makes you a bit blind as the SMC
23   to traffic information on channel 16.
24   Again, the small boat nature isn't using VHF radio
25   because they're not fitted with VHF radio, so in terms

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1   of the overall SAR picture for the areas I'm responsible
2   for, if there was any Mayday broadcast from commercial
3   shipping or other SAR related matters, that would have
4   been —— had to be relayed to me either via a flash
5   message or a phone call or a VHF talk box, which we've
6   got so ... ——
7 Q. What about the verbal updates between calls and
8   the improved situational awareness amongst the team ——
9 A. So ——
10 Q. —— was that affected?
11 A. It is affected, because obviously in our standard
12   situation, we'd say, "Can I just get everyone's
13   attention" and brief everyone. You end up with a double
14   brief basically. You brief your team in the room and
15   then you're having a brief with someone either on
16   the phone. So updates via the phone on —— it's a phone
17   call, it ties an operator up, as simple as that.
18   You know, it's an interruption. If someone takes
19   a phone call in this room now, they're not paying
20   attention to what's going on, because that is just how
21   it works. So there is limitations. It's good because
22   we don't have to have that physical presence. There are
23   a lot of benefits.
24   Again, during this period, let's not forget, we were
25   still in the height of COVID, with social distancing and

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1   things like that, the isolation policy was five days
2   from a positive test, so if you took out an entire Ops
3   room in HM Coastguard, we could still function and
4   deliver our services from somewhere else where we had
5   the capability of staff who weren't off sick. So there
6   was a lot benefits, and COVID was quite a significant
7   challenge for a lot of the emergency services and
8   HM Coastguard involved.
9 Q. What about supervising staff? You've told us about
10   Stuart Downs almost through his training and your
11   trainee, both of whom required supervision. How easy
12   is it to supervise as SMC remotely or from a remote
13   location?
14 A. So in terms of supervision, it's not they have to have
15   their hand held through the whole incident, they just
16   have to have their work approved. So, "I'm going to
17   task an asset", "Yeah, that's fine"; you know, it's just
18   seeking that confirmation. So it can be done. They can
19   use the VHF talk box to say, "SMC, I need to make you
20   aware of incident —— Global Incident Number X, Y, Z, and
21   my intentions are a lifeboat, Coastguard rescue team,
22   aircraft", and then the SMC can come back and say,
23   "Concur with your decisions", or, "Actually,
24   additionally, can you do this".
25   So the supervision is —— is achieved, and again it's

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1   not a, "I need to check everything you've done",
2   everything goes in ViSION, their thoughts, their
3   requests, and then it can be approved, signed off,
4   enhanced.
5 Q. All right.
6   I'm going to ask you now some questions about the
7   information that was available to you at the start of
8   that shift. You've explained to the Inquiry through
9   your statement that you received an oral handover from
10   the outgoing SMC; is that right?
11 A. Yeah, that would be correct.
12 Q. That you think there might have been a written record,
13   but you've been unable to find it?
14 A. So the handover, the general practice for the handover
15   is we have a PowerPoint document which lists any —— I'm
16   going to use the term "generic" ongoing matters, be
17   that: search and rescue assets which may have a limited
18   capability or are off service, mention it now; a list of
19   the known hoax callers we have and their general
20   telephone numbers and what they'll ring up saying;
21   vessels of interest, so, again, part of the coastal
22   monitoring is done by His Majesty's Coastguard, so any
23   vessels of interest would be in that handover; and then
24   there would be a list of all the ongoing SAR incidents.
25   So the general document gives you an overview of

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1   what's going on with the building, silly things, even
2   including like does the hot water work, you know,
3   the coffee, you know, it's broken, some domestic things,
4   and then also very specific SAR ——
5 Q. Specific SAR, and that would include of course any
6   ongoing small boat SAR as well?
7 A. Yes. And again, that would be briefed from ViSION.
8   You'd note them in the document just for noting them,
9   because, again, you use that document to jog your memory
10   on: this is done, this is done. So a SAR incident that
11   may be complete, or it's the casualties have been
12   rescued safely and maybes the SAR assets are en route
13   back to base. So the SAR action is complete, however
14   our duty of care still extends to the search and rescue
15   units still at sea or transiting back to base.
16 Q. Thank you. Or, for example, this is an ongoing incident
17   and you need to be particularly aware of?
18 A. Very much so, and you would brief the SMC of where you
19   were up to through the ViSION log. You'd run through
20   the ViSION log with the start and the middle, and over
21   to you for the end, as it were.
22 Q. Thank you. All right.
23   But you've been unable to find, or nobody has shown
24   you a copy of the written PowerPoint that you think you
25   would have received?

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1 A. No. And, again, it was a live document, so we would
2   have probably been up to version
3   1,006,200—and—something. So, again, it's there as
4   a document, but it is just a —— it's a document template
5   almost, rather than ——
6 Q. Thank you.
7   So that's the handover. The Inquiry has heard about
8   a network briefing, or a system for giving a network
9   briefing at the start of shifts, and that's something
10 that was recorded, is this right, in the —— by
11 the maritime —— or the marine tactical commander —— my
12 apologies —— in the national network maritime log; is
13 that right?
14 A. So there is a 0900 and 2100 network brief.
15 Q. Thank you.
16 Let's look at the one that was relevant to you at
17 the start of your shift. Can I have {INQ000233/1},
18 please. Now, this is the log that's valid for
19 the 24 hours of 24 November 2021, but it incorporates,
20 if we scroll down please towards, firstly, the bottom of
21 the page, we can see the beginning there of the network
22 briefing or the headline for the network briefing that
23 was given at 2100 on the 23 November. So that's
24 the network briefing that you're referring to; is that
25 right?

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1 A. Sorry, we're on 24th at midnight at the minute. We
2   might need to scroll.
3 Q. Yes, but if we look ——
4 A. Oh, sorry.
5 Q. —— on the right—hand side, do you see, the references to
6   23 November, somebody has helpfully incorporated into
7   this log the briefing from 2100 the previous evening?
8 A. Yes, so the reason for this being is the —— it's a daily
9   incident and therefore it's just that nature of ——
10 Q. Thank you.
11 A. —— 9 o'clock last night we had a brief and we carried it
12 forwards to that next 24—hour period until the ——
13 Q. We can see it's entered by ——
14 A. —— next briefing happens.
15 Q. —— "DJONES", who was that night and for that shift
16 the Marine Tactical Commander?
17 A. Yes, that's correct.
18 Q. Can we go to the next page {INQ000233/2}, please, and
19 see what this briefing says. We can see there's detail
20 at the top of the page, and it comes in various points,
21 tells you about the various staffing levels and so on.
22 And scrolling through, please, to {INQ000233/3}
23 where we can pick up, I hope —— thank you —— at point 9:
24 "Incidents of National Interest: Migrants."
25 Yes?

<div align="center">46</div>

1 A. Yes.
2 Q. And then:
3   "Guidance from the Tactical Commander —— where there
4 are teams of 2 or 3 please consider getting through
5 breaks to ensure maximum numbers in Ops rooms when we
6 face maximum demand. If you are getting at all
7 overwhelmed alert me by whatever means available that
8 you need support, it is better to go big early and
9 retract, than try to bring support in late."
10 Did you see this briefing?
11 A. Yes.
12 Q. What did it mean to you?
13 A. This —— this is quite a —— you know, it's just sensible
14 workforce planning, to be honest. In my mind, Dover had
15 already anticipated breaks getting done as soon as
16 possible, anticipating a midnight start based on the Op
17 Deveran forecast. So we were very aware of Dover,
18 you know, early hours of the morning is when we are
19 going to start to hit our maximum demand.
20 Q. What planning had you done for your own break during
21 this shift?
22 A. My own break was going to be covered by the remote SMC.
23 The general rule is breaks shouldn't start within an
24 hour and a half of shift commencing, so we started at
25 7.30, so I shouldn't really be starting breaks any

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1   earlier than 9 o'clock. Again, a 9 o'clock break would
2   have been an exceptionally early break, and again, of
3   what benefit it would have been ... I certainly wouldn't
4   be sending my VTSOs off on a break at 9 o'clock, because
5   that —— their job obviously is the safe and efficient
6   navigation of traffic through the Dover Strait and if
7   they're tired or fatigued, them having an incident due
8   to that would have been a significant major maritime
9   event. So, again, it's managing people's breaks at
10 the appropriate time.
11 Q. Thank you.
12 But for your own break, Mr Gibson, when did you
13 expect that to happen?
14 A. My own break was going to be tagged on. So we kind of
15 worked on starting breaks about 10.30 and then running
16 four and a half hours forwards. So I ensured
17 the welfare of, you know, my subordinates first from
18 the VTS, and then obviously my break would have ran on
19 from then. However, by the time I was about to take my
20 break, small boats had started to increase in their
21 intensity, so ——
22 Q. So events overtook you and you'd hoped for a break,
23 what, at about 1.30 or something like that?
24 A. Potentially, yes, with the intention of returning
25 approximately by about 2.30/3. Again, I think the plan

<div align="center">48</div>

1   was to get all the breaks done by about 2 o'clock at
2   the latest.
3   Q. Did you in fact get to a stage during this shift where
4   you did come to feel overwhelmed?
5   A. Yes. Naturally, 12 hours of work at quite an intense
6   pace does cause fatigue at some point.
7   Q. Thank you.
8   Can we take that off the screen, please.
9   SIR ROSS CRANSTON: I'm just wondering. It's 11 o'clock and
10   it may be appropriate to have a break now. It's a bit
11   earlier than I thought, but would you like a break now?
12 A. Yeah, we can go for a break now.
13 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Yes, okay, let's have a break. So just
14   wait a minute, because we're to be told that the camera
15   is off.
16 VIDEO HEARINGS MANAGER: Confirming that cameras are now
17   off.
18 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Thanks very much.
19   (The witness withdrew)
20   So shall we say at 10 minutes past, we'll resume.
21   Thanks very much.
22 (11.02 am)
23   (A short break)
24 (11.12 am)
25   (The witness returned)

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1   SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Welcome back, Mr Gibson.
2   MS LE FEVRE: Thank you, Mr Gibson.
3   So we were looking at the network briefing of
4   9 o'clock in the evening on 23 November, and that was
5   a briefing that was given by the Marine
6   Tactical Commander, who on that night was David Jones.
7   You've explained to us in your witness statement what
8   the role of an MTC is. You've explained that they
9   provide tactical oversight and support to SMCs, and that
10   they are responsible for ensuring that every incident
11   receives an appropriate response with necessary assets
12   accorded to it; is that right?
13 A. Yes.
14 Q. Thank you.
15   In the course of a shift then, what support did you
16   generally expect to receive from the MTC?
17 A. Support I would generally expect to receive is oversight
18   of the incident, so that would be by various means, it
19   would either be an entry from them in the incident, or
20   if I required more specific guidance, they would be on
21   hand to receive a phone call and chat through an
22   incident. Common practice is if there was any incidents
23   which were significant, you would brief them verbally
24   rather than just picking it up from the incident log.
25 Q. Thank you.

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1   A. They —— they have set targets for distress phase
2   incidents and the actions they need to take.
3   Q. I see. So they're working on their own timeline, but
4   you would expect them to be monitoring the ViSION logs;
5   is that right?
6   A. Yes, their primary area is the distress phase incidents,
7   so they are monitoring distress phase incidents and
8   providing a RAG status, which is review, action and
9   guidance, that's what that RAG status means.
10 Q. Thank you.
11   And what matters then would you expect to report,
12   bring verbally to an MTC's attention?
13 A. Anything which would overwhelm resource. So any major
14   incident, anything involving a large maritime search
15   with multiple assets and multiple coordination, or
16   multiple assets to coordinate, or any incident involving
17   a fatality.
18 Q. Thank you.
19   Things that were out of the ordinary, unexpected,
20   unforeseen?
21 A. Yes. Anything which, I would say day—to—day Coastguard
22   business, it's very easy as a coastguard to —— you know,
23   we deal with a lot of emergency situations on
24   a day—to—day basis, so for a normal member of
25   the public, you know, for us, it's just —— that's

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1   just —— that's just business as usual. An example of
2   a big thing would be piracy.
3   Q. I see.
4   A. The Grande Tema was taken over by some hijackers who got
5   on board, they were obviously trying to gain entry to
6   the UK, and that's the sort of thing that you would
7   definitely bring to the attention, because, again, it's
8   going to involve a multi—agency response.
9   Q. I see.
10 A. So anything which would overwhelm the local assets in
11   place or the number of people within the Ops room. So,
12   again, if you end up with a major incident in one of
13   your maritime zones, you would speak to the commander
14   and say, "Could we offload some of our other zones
15   because we need to focus all our attention on this".
16 Q. Thank you.
17   And you'd had that invitation, standard, you say, in
18   the network briefing, "There's a risk of overwhelm, tell
19   me sooner rather than later"?
20 A. Absolutely. You know, we can be as flexible as we need
21   to be, however SAR is always reactionary, unfortunately,
22   so if you can do anything to make it less reactionary,
23   from his perspective, much better.
24 Q. Thank you.
25   All right, so that's the network briefing.

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I want to ask you now about a call that Christopher
or Tom Barnett made to you at 19:39, so shortly after
you'd started your shift. And I think Mr Barnett is
the remotely based SMC who provides that additional
layer of cover whilst you're taken away to VTS duties;
is that right?

A. That's correct, he is a Team Leader on SMC based at
the JRCC.

Q. With equivalent rank at the time and qualification to
you?

A. Yes.

Q. Thank you.
Can I have then on the screens please {INQ01028/1}.
This is —— we can see that's the first page of it. This
is the transcript of the call made between the two of
you, Tom Barnett, Christopher Barnett formally, and
yourself at that date and on that time.
Can we move over to {INQ010128/2} of the transcript.
We can see you introducing yourselves and you are
asked how you're doing, and you say I'm:
"Running around like a headless chicken. But apart
from that, okay."
" ... I'm trying to work out a plan for this
evening", says Mr Barnett, and you talk about the fact
you would like all this staff in a freight car to you.

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It's a jovial remark, but is that a reference to
a preference for staff in person rather than remote
staff?

A. Yeah, I mean, we —— I've arrived at work this evening,
so I'd actually been on leave two days previously, so
again, as we discussed, I was doing extra shifts. I did
actually have the opportunity to take some leave on
the two day shifts, so I'd actually come into this night
shift quite fresh from when I was on leave. However,
what we had, which the Inquiry may or may not be aware
of, is a period of unsettled weather, so wave heights in
excess of 1 metres in the English channel, for about
the preceding two weeks, and this is now rated as amber
for the first night, followed by a couple of red days.

Q. Thank you.

A. So ... ——

Q. And those are the ratings given by Operation Deveran?

A. That's correct, yeah.

Q. The likelihood, partly and significantly based on
the weather forecast, of crossings or attempt crossings
in that upcoming ——

A. That's correct. The Met Office provided that product to
the best of its ability, because again, all weather is
a mathematical model, so don't always blame them when
the weather's wrong. But they were there to provide us

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with an overview of what would be a potentially,
you know, achievable crossing for the small boats
involved or totally unachievable because of
the conditions' expected.

Q. Thank you.
When you tell us about the previous two—week period
of wave heights, were you expecting that that night was
going to be a particularly dense one in terms of attempt
crossings simply because it had been impossible for
a period of time?

A. From experience, over the year previously and leading up
to that point, if there was ever a significant period
whereby crossings couldn't take place because of
the weather, the demand is there. You know, it is very
much, keeping to the theory of supply and demand, if
there is demand, they will supply it. So I was under no
illusion that, although this night is only rated as
Amber, there is a big urgency and drive to go.

Q. Thank you.
And so Mr Barnett asks you, in the middle of that
page:
"Are we expecting lots this evening?"
And you say:
"It's amber, and who knows?"
Is that what you're referring to?

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A. Yes. I mean, I don't have a crystal ball, but,
you know, if I had to put a bet on it, I was expecting
to be busy for the potentially 36 hours from
midnight—ish, possibly earlier. Again, it's hard to
predict when they will leave and when they'll not leave.
However, experience has told us previously when to start
expecting.

Q. It's your expectation based on experience?

A. Yes.

Q. Thank you.
You go on to say:
"Border Force have stood up all their assets to call
us if you need us, rather than we'll go out and have
a look."
What are you referring to there?

A. So they, all their assets have readiness capabilities,
and I believe the main HMCC cutter Valiant was ready to
go in Dover as required. So sometimes on a —— on an
amber forecast, they would be at maybes 30 minutes'
notice to move 90 minutes' notice to move. Again, it's
a 42—metre Damen class cutter, you don't just turn
the key and go, you know, the engines have to be
pre—warmed and checks carried out ——

Q. I see.

A. —— as per any maritime code so ... But they were aware

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1   and ready to deploy to sea, so they could have been out
2   patrolling on a routine patrol. Again, the Customs
3   cutters, and I infer that it is a Customs cutter, not a
4   migrant rescue craft, they were there for customs work
5   as well as small boat work.
6 Q. Yes.
7   Your reference, though, to "rather than we'll go out
8   and have a look", did Border Force, their assets, their
9   vessels, sometimes do just that, go out and have a look?
10 A. They would be on a patrol. So they may have been
11   undertaking other work. So they would be undertaking
12   their other core work, which is around maritime
13   security.
14 Q. I see.
15 A. So they may have been out doing patrols. On that,
16   sometimes they were pre—deployed to sea, transiting
17   through, so sometimes a Border Force vessel will be
18   a vessel of opportunity, so obviously they display their
19   AIS, unless they're working covertly, similar to
20   military vessels that operate in the Dover Strait.
21 Q. I see. So they might have been having a look ancillary
22   to another one of their functions?
23 A. Yeah, basically, I've said not having a look, by that
24   I mean they may have been on patrol carrying out another
25   function as per their ——

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1 Q. Thank you.
2 A. —— missions.
3 Q. But on this night they weren't?
4 A. No, they were alongside in Dover.
5 Q. Thank you.
6   All right. Can we go to the next page of this
7   transcript {INQ010128/3}. You say to Mr Barnett:
8   "I'll be keeping a large ear on channel 16 in
9   the French channels ... to get heads up early, because
10   they've not been playing ball."
11   Now, channel 16 is the channel that you've told us
12   was in fact being picked up and monitored remotely, not
13   by you in your SAR room; is that right?
14 A. Yes, but when we did that, I can't comment. We may have
15   handed it over as we went on break, because at that
16   point, if —— if there was no search and rescue going on,
17   either myself or Stuart listening to 16, and one being
18   there to answer phone calls would have been sufficient.
19   It's as incident demand increases, we would look at
20   division of labour. And again, so we, at the start of
21   the night, probably had channel 16, I can't remember for
22   definite, but more than likely, one of us would have had
23   it monitored, but maybes not been actively —— if we'd
24   passed it over, they would have been dealing with
25   the comms on it, however we could still monitor

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1   the channel to hear any comms.
2 Q. Thank you.
3   And is it right, as you suggest here, that
4   monitoring, "keeping a large ear on channel 16", was one
5   way to keep up to date with activity by the French
6   Coastguard?
7 A. Potential, to be honest. You know, any —— any activity
8   going on, if they're doing broadcast action, speaking to
9   their vessels, they would go on channel 16 and then go
10   to a working channel.
11 Q. Thank you.
12   So just to read your comment then in full:
13   "... large ear on channel 16 in the French channels,
14   just to get a heads—up early, because they've not been
15   playing ball."
16   Mr Barnett says:
17   "Are they not letting us know again?"
18   You say:
19   "Sometimes they just seem to keep it quiet. Like
20   we'll not get anything, and then we'll get a tracker at
21   3.00 in the morning with 15 instances and then they will
22   go these are mostly in your search and rescue reach'.
23   Wonderful."
24   "Yeah. It's a grenade bomb", says Mr Barnett.
25   And you say:

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1   "Yeah, pretty much."
2 A. I'm going to correct that because that's —— I think
3   there's probably a little bit of my dialect and Tom's
4   dialect confusing things there. So it would be search
5   and rescue "region", rather than "reach".
6 Q. Reach?
7 A. So region. So, the UK Search and Rescue Region partners
8   right up nicely with the French Search and Rescue
9   Region. So from the perspective of HMCG, we don't need
10   to take any action until it crosses into our Search and
11   Rescue Region. So if the French tell us in advance,
12   it's actually a bonus, because if a fishing vessel sinks
13   in the UK SAR, we don't know about it until someone
14   tells us. So actually, we are —— if the French tell us
15   early, it's getting a little bit of a heads—up, so we
16   can actually start doing some proactive planning for
17   search and rescue, rather than the usual, typical
18   reactive to all the other search and rescue that we do
19   in UK waters.
20 Q. Yes, thank you.
21   Now, the ——
22 A. And, "It's a grenade bomb", so obviously the French
23   Coastguard's based at CROSS Gris—Nez. Well, sorry,
24   CROSS is their service, and Gris—Nez is the location, so
25   it's, yeah, we don't throw bombs at each other. It's

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1   Gris—Nez, so it would be —— but, again, I can understand
2   why on a transcript it would sound like "grenade bomb"
3   but it would be "a Gris—Nez bomb".
4 Q. Thank you very much.
5   You make reference here to the tracker. You've
6   explained your hesitance in using the word "tracker",
7   but it is a word that was used and is used for
8   spreadsheets or tables exchanging information about
9   migrant crossings?
10 A. Yes, that's correct, basically.
11 Q. Thank you.
12   And the Inquiry's aware of course, as you tell us
13   about in this transcript, that the French Coastguard
14   operates its own tracker for migrant boats and that
15   delay in the Coastguard providing their tracker was
16   a long—standing, a regular problem for His Majesty's
17   Coastguard?
18 A. Yes. And on that, the context of it is, we use
19   the term "tracker", it's a spreadsheet. So, call
20   collection, if you take it from a single vessel
21   casualty, is one call, one incident, so the reason it's
22   done as a tracker or a spreadsheet is because they want
23   to tell us about multiple incidents at the same time,
24   rather than ringing us and saying, "I'd like to make you
25   informed of this, this and this". So they basically

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1   have, for want of a better explanation, provided us with
2   multiple call collections of information they hold via
3   a spreadsheet.
4 Q. Yes, thank you.
5   And on this particular night, the first version of
6   the French tracker received by His Majesty's Coastguard
7   was sent at 0057 hours on 24 November of 2021, so early
8   hours of the second day of the shift?
9 A. First night shift.
10 Q. First night shift?
11 A. Yeah. Sorry, yeah.
12 Q. Yes.
13   And that included, is this right, information about
14   small boats in motion, active, from about 9 o'clock on
15   23 November?
16 A. From what I remember from the evidence, I believe, yes,
17   it had a number of boats and the times they departed.
18 Q. Thank you.
19   You've just told us, you told us in your witness
20   statement, that really the earlier information is
21   provided about small boat activity, the more chance His
22   Majesty's Coastguard has to prepare for when
23   the incidents actually reach English waters, English SAR
24   area; that's right, isn't it?
25 A. That's correct, yes.

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1 Q. And that includes —— that preparation might include
2   alerting UK Border Force as to approximate timings, it
3   might include allocation or reallocation of staff, if
4   necessary?
5 A. Yes, correct. It's all about preparing a plan.
6   You know, the SMC's job is to prepare a plan, and
7   the more time —— time is also our greatest enemy,
8   because we're usually working against a timescale which
9   is ticking away from us. So the small boat search and
10   rescue is quite different to some of the SAR we do,
11   because actually, a lot of the time, we can prepare,
12   providing we're given accurate, timeously, information
13   to assist.
14 Q. And on this shift, by 1 o'clock in the morning, in fact
15   the boat with which this Inquiry is primarily concerned,
16   Charlie, was very close to the median line, very close
17   to crossing into UK waters; is that right?
18 A. The Incident Charlie, which relates to a boat. I'm very
19   specific that it's not boat Charlie, it is
20   Incident Charlie, which relates to the boat this Inquiry
21   is interested in, was at or around close the median
22   line ——
23 Q. Thank you.
24 A. —— when that information was received.
25 Q. Did you consider yourself, in the early part of your

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1   shift, before you went to VTS, directly chasing, making
2   contact with Gris—Nez, with the French Coastguard, for
3   information about small boat activity on that evening?
4 A. I don't recall, is the answer.
5 Q. In your witness statement you tell us that that's
6   something that you regularly did; is that right?
7 A. It's something that we would do regularly. For whatever
8   reason, I may have directed it or not directed it.
9   I think possibly, if I have to speculate, possibly some
10   —— you know, I was dealing with a member of staff being
11   sick, so there was that welfare perspective of,
12   you know, doing that paperwork. So that planning for
13   coming in and then finding I'm a member of staff less
14   than I'd hoped to be, maybe distracted my mind from what
15   I would call a practice that we did sometimes.
16 Q. Thank you.
17   So you can't remember whether you yourself directly
18   did it and you can't remember whether you instructed
19   anybody else to do it?
20 A. No, I can't.
21 Q. All right.
22   If you had received information about
23   Incident Charlie, in particular, earlier, could you,
24   Coastguard, have tasked Border Force to send an asset
25   earlier?

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1 A. Yes. I mean, we —— if we were given timescales, we
2   would have looked at what assets were available, and
3   again, given information, came up with a plan, be that
4   a Border Force asset, an RNLI asset, to be aware and
5   start making way.
6 Q. Thank you.
7   So effectively to proactively or preemptively task
8   and direct?
9 A. Yes, basically. Unfortunately, what a lot of the people
10   attempting the small boat crossings are told is, "You
11   only have to make it halfway", which, I think,
12   unfortunately, is —— is true, you know, we are
13   predominantly now much better at having enough asset to
14   manage the demand.
15 Q. Had you made such a request of Border Force previously
16   to preemptively or proactively proceed towards
17   the median line?
18 A. Yes, so we've worked closely with Border Force, and
19   again, if there was an opportunity where we knew there
20   was a vessel and we could give a timescale, then
21   obviously that request would be made via the Maritime
22   Cutter Command to task one of their vessels.
23   The request would be, "Have you any vessels available"?
24   Again, they would declare what was their on—call vessel,
25   shall we say. I think, certain times, they had multiple

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1   vessels in the area that could be called upon, and other
2   times they just had a single vessel, again, depending on
3   their other missions and demands. But we would
4   obviously make that request and proceed from there.
5 Q. Thank you.
6   And had Border Force ever declined a request to
7   proceed proactively or preemptively?
8 A. Not that I can recall, to be honest.
9 Q. Thank you. We can take that from the screen now.
10   So you are away from SAR duties for a period of
11   about three hours, give or take, 10.30 to about 1.30.
12   A separate role entirely and no part in SAR during that
13   period; is that right?
14 A. No part at all. No legal responsibility part of SAR.
15   However, as a human being and a Team Leader, "Are you
16   all right guys", "Yeah, yeah, we're good, we're getting
17   support from Tom". You know, it's —— we're in the same
18   room, you know, it's —— we're not sat in silence.
19 Q. Thank you.
20   And you come back to the SAR function at about 1.30,
21   about the time when you might have been hoping to have
22   a break?
23 A. Yes.
24 Q. Thank you.
25   How would you update yourself if you had to take

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1   a period of time out of SAR functions mid—shift like
2   this, what would you do to update yourself as to what's
3   happened since?
4 A. So, generally, you would receive an SMC —— SMC handover
5   from whoever was remotely SMCing, making you aware, very
6   similar to start of watch handover, but it would be
7   purely focused on active search and rescue. So you are
8   SMC for an incident, not a geographical area, so you
9   would assume the SMC role for each incident, and again
10   that could be one incident, it could be ten incidents,
11   and again, you would receive a brief from the SMC you
12   were going to assume coordination for.
13 Q. So were you briefed by Mr Barnett that evening, that
14   shift?
15 A. I don't recall, unfortunately.
16 Q. I want to look briefly with you at the events that had
17   taken place during that VTS shift and I'm going to start
18   by asking you to look at a document that calls itself
19   the "Migrant activity tracker".
20   Before we look at that on screen, is it right that
21   that is a form of log also kept on the ViSION system?
22 A. The migrant activity tracker would be a spreadsheet
23   document which would be separate to the ViSION incident
24   management system.
25 Q. I'll call it up ——

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1 A. Yeah.
2 Q. —— and we'll look at it and you can tell me.
3   {INQ000235/1}, please. This is the calls itself, as we
4   can see at its head, the "Migrant Administration
5   Incident 24th November" or "Migrant Activity Tracker".
6   Is this the ViSION log?
7 A. This is a —— this is a ViSION —— a ViSION log. You'll
8   see the GIN at the top is listed as 41382 of
9   24 November 2021.
10 Q. So this is the log for the whole of that 24—hour period;
11   is that right?
12 A. Yes.
13 Q. Thank you.
14   And was this the document where information of
15   general relevance to all small boat crossings should be
16   recorded?
17 A. That's correct. So the purpose of this document was for
18   anything we couldn't tag, so the word "tag" relates to
19   when we add an asset or a resource to an incident.
20 Q. Yes.
21 A. ViSION is limited, so if you add a resource to an
22   incident, it is with that incident until you release it.
23   So if it's doing multiple things —— the nature of small
24   boat crossings all occur in a very similar area, and
25   again, a search and rescue asset may see three incidents

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1   at the same time, however you can only log
2   the information they provide in the incident you're
3   assigned to.
4   Q. I see. So if a particular asset, and we'll probably see
5   an example of this, a particular asset is assigned to
6   a particular incident with its name, Charlie or Hotel or
7   whatever it is, that asset can only be recorded against
8   that particular incident until it's released from that
9   tasking; is that right?
10 A. That's correct. We update what we call their incident
11   narrative for that asset and that populates it into
12   the incident. And you will see, in the source document
13   there will be a name, so if there's an asset which we're
14   updating their asset information, it automatically ——
15   whichever incident they're linked to, it updates it. So
16   this document was used for any proposed flight flying
17   times. So the aerial surveillance patrols under
18   Op EOS would have been recorded in this document because
19   that was a patrol, rather than a search and rescue. So
20   it was a patrol flight, rather than a search and rescue
21   flight, so they would be patrolling, so we would say
22   there will be aerial coverage between these hours in
23   this document.
24 Q. Thank you.
25   And so I'm clear, this tracker was created and

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1   maintained on the maritime or marine side of
2   Coastguard's work. Is it right that the aerial team,
3   aerial tactical commander, wouldn't have access to
4   the maritime ViSION logs at this time?
5   A. From memory ——
6   Q. Yes.
7   A. —— we operated ViSION 4, which was the ViSION service we
8   were using back in 2021, and ViSION 5, the reason being
9   is ViSION 5 was an upgrade with enhanced capabilities
10   which was being tested by the aeronautical team.
11 Q. I see. But there was a disconnect. The two teams
12   couldn't see each other's ViSION entries at the time; is
13   that right?
14 A. That's correct, yeah, aeronautical incidents relied on
15   a formal handover from a maritime perspective in
16   a formal request. They wouldn't see what was in an
17   incident, it had to be requested. To supplement that
18   though, aeronautical rescue is based within the JRCC,
19   hence the title Joint Rescue Co—Ordination Centre,
20   because it's a maritime and aviation coordination
21   centre, so they were in the room, so there would have
22   been the capacity for them to go and speak to one of
23   their maritime counterparts, which —— the room is not
24   much bigger than this, so they could go and double—check
25   if there was any conflict. The same with the Aviation

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1   Tactical Commander and Maritime Commander, they could ——
2   they were based in the same room and could discuss.
3   Q. But their chains of communication as between the teams
4   were verbal at that stage because they couldn't —— their
5   ViSION systems couldn't speak to each other?
6   A. Yes, they couldn't update each other's ViSION systems.
7   Q. Thank you.
8   All right, then if we move on within the document to
9   the bottom of page {INQ000235/2}, please, and we can see
10   an entry made by Dave Jones again, the MTC, at 00:41:35.
10   That's the start of his entry, but I'd like to look with
11   you at part of page {INQ000235/3} and the balance of
12   the entry. Can we look at that second full paragraph on
13   that page:
14   "JRCC commanders maritime' & air have discussed ...
15   their concern is that with poor visibility ' and our
16   surveillance aircraft being limited to conduct mission
17   we are effectively blind. Both commanders' agree that
18   caution of allowing ourselves be drawn into a relaxing
19   and expecting a normal migrant crossing night whereas
20   this has the potential to be very dangerous."
21   Yes?
22 A. That's what it says, yes.
23 Q. Was this controller entry, or controller message entry
24   in this log the way in which this information was

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1   communicated to you, the SMC?
2   A. I don't remember reading this message. Obviously I was
3   still carrying out VTS duties at this point. The admin
4   log was administrative, so, again, it was recording
5   things. There was concern around fog. I think that was
6   discussed in the 9 o'clock brief as well around aerial
7   assets and limited visibility.
8   Q. You don't remember seeing this on shift though?
9   A. I don't remember reading this on the shift, no.
10 Q. Would you not normally have refreshed or looked at
11   the trackers, the ViSION logs, to see what had happened
12   whilst you had been away?
13 A. When I came back, my main focus would have been
14   the distress phase or any alert phase incidents that
15   were active on ViSION. This incident, as you'll see,
16   the next paragraph down, is in small letters. So to
17   make it aware for the Inquiry, the way our ViSION system
18   works is anything written in capital letters is not
19   HM Coastguard shouting, it denotes that as a human
20   input. Anything the system automatically creates for us
21   is entered in lower case, which is an important
22   distinction. And you'll see it moves from "Incident
23   Grade changed from I to N". So "I" stands for
24   information, and "N" is non—search and rescue.
25 Q. Thank you.

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1 A. So that is just to make sure that when we look at our
2   ViSION list, anything that shows as a green incident
3   type, you know, it's not a distress phase incident. So
4   my eyes, when I came back, were drawn to multiple
5   distress phase incidents, and I probably asked the team
6   at the time, "Is there anything else I need to be aware
7   of from the admin log", and I think the answer was, "No,
8   not really, the flights are probably not going to get
9   off the ground because of the fog".
10 Q. Is it unusual for an updating message such as this to
11   refer to the potential for danger?
12 A. The —— from my perspective, I was not expecting
13   a normal, relaxed night at all. I can tell you, I was
14   very aware of what I was expecting and the response that
15   would be required. And with the talk of fog, again,
16   that was already going, this is going to be more of
17   a challenge than usual without aerial support to give us
18   that positional information. So they've discussed it
19   and obviously they've voiced their concerns with each
20   other. These were concerns which were already massively
21   within my head, looking at: it's going to be busy
22   because of the timescale of the weather beforehand and
23   it's going to be further —— harder to coordinate an
24   effective overall SAR picture without that aerial asset
25   involved.

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1 Q. Was a briefing recorded in this way or a message
2   recorded in this way, was that the normal way of
3   bringing such a situation to your, the SMC's, attention?
4 A. In terms of pre—planned stuff, possibly. Again,
5   the ViSION system is there to record our thoughts and
6   feelings. Is this —— this, I would say, is them
7   recording their thoughts in their contemporaneous notes,
8   and this is them going, you know, we need to keep
9   ourselves on guard. And this is them recording then
10   their feelings in a —— in a logical incident, and again,
11   it's quite difficult to find the right incident
12   sometimes. So if it's a generic statement like this is,
13   it's not particular —— to one particular SAR incident,
14   it's where do you put that? Should it have gone in
15   the Network Management Log? Possibly. But, again, this
16   is specific to the Zone 14 area that Dover coordinated,
17   so, again, I guess it's: where do you put that
18   information? We want to record it and note it.
19 Q. Would you have been more likely to see it if it had been
20   recorded in the Network Management Log?
21 A. Yes, probably, because, generally, what we used to do as
22   a practice was you would record when SMCs were on and
23   off break in the Network Management Log, which gives
24   the maritime commanders overview of where people were,
25   or their capabilities.

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1 Q. Can I ask you very specifically, to the best of your
2   knowledge and recollection, how common was it, back at
3   the tail end of 2021, for scheduled surveillance flights
4   to be cancelled/put off?
5 A. Again, aviation is very weather dependent. It's —— and
6   in some respects, it's a lot more critical than
7   maritime. So, you know, when a ship runs out of fuel,
8   it's fine, it just bobs around there. If an aircraft
9   runs out of fuel, it's a little bit more intense for
10   them on board. So, again, the whole margin for error
11   with aeronautical stuff is critical compared to that.
12   So if there was any risk, then that is deferred to my
13   aviation colleagues.
14 Q. Thank you. All right, that can come off the screen,
15   please.
16   I'd like to ask you very briefly and in just very
17   general terms about RVL, or Reveal. Were you aware that
18   there was an asset operated by a company called
19   RVL flying that night between about 10 o'clock in
20   the evening and about 4.30 in the morning?
21 A. I wasn't aware. So RVL was another one of
22   the aeronautical contractors. So Bristow Helicopters
23   supply all the search and rescue rotary aircraft, and
24   2Excel were the other part of our flight programme.
25   RVL were tasked mainly, from my understanding, with

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1   counter—pollution work, so I wasn't aware of that
2   aircraft. And if it was up I would have assumed it was
3   doing counter—pollution work because that was what they
4   were contracted for. That's my understanding.
5 Q. And so if I were to ask you why that asset wasn't tasked
6   to assist with Incident Charlie, that would be your
7   answer, that would have been your understanding of what
8   it was doing and what it could do?
9 A. That —— that's correct. And also I wouldn't have tasked
10   an asset like that, because that would have been
11   a request to the aeronautical rescue for air support.
12 Q. I see. Thank you.
13   All right, we've talked about the French tracker,
14   which arrived in its first iteration of the shift at
15   0057 hours. The Inquiry knows that a call from
16   the French Coastguard was taken by Mr Downs at 1.06, and
17   we'll ask him about that when he comes to give his
18   evidence. And then he had opened a specific log on
19   ViSION for Incident Charlie and I'd like to look with
20   you at that now. That's {INQ000237/1}, please. And we
21   can see, at the header of that page, the unique GIN
22   number; is that right?
23 A. That's correct, yes.
24 Q. Top left—hand corner.
25   We can see that the incident has been

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1   named "Charlie", and that what's known about it is that
2   there are "30 POB", persons on board, and 13 of those
3   are women, eight of those are children, 14 of
4   the persons on board have life jackets, and the "dinghy
5   appears to be in good condition". That information,
6   the dinghy appearing in good condition, is the only fact
7   in those capitals that doesn't appear in the French
8   tracker. Do you know where that information came from?
9 A. I don't, unfortunately.
10 Q. Was the condition of a small boat important to
11   Coastguard?
12 A. It's —— it's —— it's amplifying information. So any
13   extra information which helps us ascertain the risk
14   involved is —— is amplifying information.
15 Q. And is the condition of a small boat relevant to
16   the risk presented to its occupants?
17 A. Very much so. A commercially constructed craft, rather
18   than a homemade craft, is, you know, going to present
19   different risks.
20 Q. Thank you.
21   And so is it right to say that a correct recording
22   of the information that is accurately known as to
23   the condition of a small boat is really important?
24 A. Yes. Again, condition's a really hard one to quantify,
25   but things like: is it properly inflated, is it fully

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1   inflated, does it seem to be sagging in any places.
2   Again, anything we can get which helps us understand
3   the status of the boat, basically.
4 Q. Thank you.
5   But Incident Charlie, or the dinghy involved in
6   Incident Charlie, is described as appearing to be "in
7   good condition"?
8 A. Yes.
9 Q. All right.
10   Can we move on to page {INQ000237/4}, please,
11   I think, of this log, and we'll see, at 0124 hours,
12   the entry made by Stuart Downs that:
13   "UK [Border Force] MCC advised of this migrant ——
14   HMC Valiant will probably be deployed [and] will advise
15   when the decision [is] made by UK [Border Force]."
16   And then we see that Valiant is turned out at
17   0130 hours, yes?
18 A. Yes, that's correct.
19 Q. Thank you.
20   And assigned to this particular incident also at
21   0130 hours, yes?
22 A. Yes. Like I say, you can see all the bits in small
23   case. These are system generated prompts. And, again,
24   you assign an asset to an incident and it will generate
25   10 or 12 lines of information like this.

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1 Q. Thank you.
2   The Inquiry understands that the next thing that
3   happened of significance is that Mr Downs took a call
4   directly from the occupants of the boat in
5   Incident Charlie at 01:37.
6   Then if we move on to {INQ000237/5} of this log,
7   please, we can see your first entries on it. 01:42:38:
7   "Incident Grade changed from M to D."
8   Now, that's in small or lowercase text. Would you
9   explain that entry to us, please?
10 A. Again, so, yes, the incident grading is a box. As
11   I said before, we have I, N, U, A, D and M. So
12   "M" stands for "monitoring". So anything not within
13   the UK Search and Rescue Region at this point would be
14   graded as a monitoring incident, because we are only
15   monitoring it and waiting to see if it makes it.
16   The "to D", that means "distress", and again, that is
17   where I have gone into the system and changed it from
18   monitoring, which appears as an orangey—peach colour in
19   this incident number, to a bright red "D" for distress.
20   So, yes, it's —— it is me. You'll see that "NGIBSON" is
21   the user op that has activated that change. However,
22   I've just made it distress, because we believe it to be
23   approaching the UK, or within UK Search and Rescue.
25   And then you'll see, at 01:43:50, I put my rationale

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1   in for that, because I do it, and then I start typing
2   that message, and that's me putting my SMC, coming in to
3   say the reason this has changed from monitoring to
4   distress is the location of it places it.
5 Q. Thank you.
6 A. You'll also see "SDOWNS" puts a coordinate change from
7   1.77 ... 51 ... That is a decimalised latitude and
8   longitude, which will have either been provided via
9   the WhatsApp or whatever method, but that is just where
10   we change the physical position of that incident, so
11   it —— representative on a map of this location.
12 Q. So that's where the co—ordinates are updated?
13 A. Yes.
14 Q. Thank you.
15   Let me ask you about the comment that you record at
16   01:43:50:
16   "Upgraded to distress as location update places
17   vessel in UK [search and rescue area].
18   "Unknown condition of craft and persons on board no
19   French assets on scene with vessel."
20   So you record an "unknown condition". Where do you
21   get that information from?
22 A. So my —— my thought process here is, a bit like an
23   MOT on a car, it's valid for the day it's issued. At
24   0900, or whenever the French were given the information,

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1   it appeared in good condition. I don't know what's
2   happened to the status of that craft as it has proceeded
3   across the English Channel. So I don't know its current
4   condition of the craft because I have no current French
5   asset with it to give me an update on its status or
6   aerial observation of it, so I've basically gone with
7   I don't know, it started off all right, but how is it
8   now, that's an unknown. So this is me saying my
9   unknowns are: I don't know what condition it's in now.
10   Q.   Thank you.
11   A.   Again, persons on board 30, about 30. So back in 2018,
12   up to about 2020, most of the craft were sourced by ——
13   from commercial means, and again, they would carry
14   approximately between 10 and 15 people and this could be
15   easily counted by heads from either an aerial
16   surveillance or a boat surveillance. As we got into
17   2021, the average number of persons per craft increased
18   to about 38 to 40, and when you're counting heads of
19   people who are all cramped, if you imagine 40 people in
20   a dinghy between myself and Sir Ross, that's a lot of
21   heads to count and the opportunity to miscount
22   people is —— is high.
23   Q.   Yes.
24   A.   So, again, if it's a round number, it's plus or minus.
25   Q.   All right.

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1   A.   And fast—forwarding where we are now, the maximum amount
2   we've ever had in a boat is approximately 97 people,
3   and, again, when it's been reported leaving by
4   the French they say approximately 60 people. So,
5   you know, there is a variance now of potentially up to
6   30 people in some cases.
7   Q.   30 or 40 people, yes.
8   A.   So, again, it's very hard to go, yeah, 30 people, that's
9   definite, because, again, just the numbers involved and
10   actually how was that counted. You know, they haven't
11   all purchased —— yes, they've purchased a ticket, but
12   it's not a formal manifest, shall we say.
13   Q.   Thank you. That's helpful.
14   All right, I'll take that from the screen now. I'm
15   going to ask you about the first call that you took from
16   the boat shortly.
17   Let me ask you though first about this. You —— and
18   you're not alone in this amongst witnesses —— have told
19   the Inquiry that callers from small boats sometimes
20   exaggerated their level of distress. Was that your
21   experience?
22   A.   Yes. Again, this goes back to people asking closed
23   questions or potentially leading questions. You know,
24   there was obviously things said, like I've referenced
25   earlier, there is a website where they were told to say

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1   this once you get halfway, the boat's taking water,
2   you know, someone's died in the boat. Again, all facts
3   that can't be corroborated over the phone, so it makes
4   it quite difficult to understand the level of what's
5   actually going on. I think the best example of that is
6   one of the questions from a previous incident, he said
7   there's water in the boat, and I ask how much water and
8   he informs me there's 3 metres of water in his boat.
9   Now, a small inflatable, that means they're going to be
10   a metre and a half under water if they're sat down. So
11   it's —— we know there's questions, but it's —— it's very
12   hard to gather that information accurately and be
13   confident of what you're being told.
14   Q.   So a particular challenge and you've told us about
15   the particular challenges in gathering and assessing
16   information ——
17   A.   Yeah.
18   Q.   —— accurate information.
19   Do you have any sense at all of how often callers
20   exaggerated the level of distress they were
21   experiencing?
22   A.   It's a very difficult question to answer. Experience
23   tells me, from previous ones, there is that expectation,
24   again, you ring, we'll be there to pick you up; if we're
25   not there in five minutes, another phone call comes in,

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1   I'll speed this up potentially. So, again, I guess
2   the delay from their first phone call to when they're
3   actually rescued can generate —— I don't —— they're not
4   coming quick enough, you know, perhaps that is part of
5   it, to be honest. So it's a really hard question to
6   answer, because again, I'm second—guessing other
7   people's thoughts. But certainly if we receive multiple
8   phone calls from craft, it tended to be, "Oh, it's
9   getting worse, it's getting worse", because again,
10   I think some of our things were, when we got that
11   initial information, and it's the worst possible thing,
12   you've received an emergency phone call from any member
13   —— any member or person who's in difficulty and you know
14   you've got this timescale between when your vessel
15   leaves to go and rescue them and them being rescued, and
16   it's like you can't speed that time up, it's just what
17   it is. So I think obviously the longer it goes from
18   the initial phone call to a rescue asset arriving on
19   scene, you know, it's —— we haven't got the capacity to
20   ring them back and say, "Don't worry it's going to be
21   ten minutes, 20 minutes, 30 minutes", because invariably
22   what will happen is, maybes a higher priority dinghy
23   would take over and then you might have to redirect that
24   search and rescue asset. So it's a very difficult
25   question to answer.

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1   Q. Yes.
2   A. But I would imagine, you know, we all know we've been
3   sat in traffic or stuck somewhere and, you know, you
4   want to get something done, you add a bit more credence
5   to why you should be priority.
6   Q. Do you think that belief, that callers from small boats
7   did sometimes exaggerate their level of distress, do you
8   think that belief was widely shared within
9   the Coastguard?
10   A. I think it was in people's minds, of can we —— can we
11   take what we're told at face value. You know, is —— is
12   everyone on fire and sinking? No, probably not. But
13   I think it was, basically, just be mindful when you
14   gather the information, analyse it, assess it, verify
15   it, to get what you can. And that could be from
16   the plane flying overhead and going, "Information
17   Coastguard ..." —— you know, they're not getting rescued
18   by the plane, but the plane can give us a visual
19   observation —— "... oh, they're all sat there quite
20   happy, there's no bailing going on". If a plane flies
21   over or a passing ship goes, "They are bailing for their
22   lives", you know, then you've got a bit of verification
23   of that information. So it's gathering the information,
24   assessing what you've been told and then getting some
25   sort of visual confirmation, or eyes on, whether that be

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1   from French Coastguard, our planes, passing commercial
2   shipping, stuff like that. It's —— it's about verifying
3   what they've told us.
4   Q. Had you received any guidance or training in how to
5   assess information being provided from small boat
6   callers?
7   A. Not in specifically small boat callers; however, general
8   search and rescue, you know, you're analysing and
9   verifying the information. Some of the worst customers
10   we have are fishermen, who, "Yeah, it's not too much of
11   a problem, I've got a bit of water in the boat", and
12   what they mean is they're about to get in a life raft
13   because it's about to sink. So, you know, you've got
14   the fishermen, who will, literally, last minute.com,
15   it's time to get off. So, again, you use your general
16   SAR procedures to analyse, again, people's inflections
17   in voices, you can understand when something's a bit
18   more serious and not, so, general SAR training gives you
19   the skill set you need to make it.
20   Q. And did there come a time, any time during the course of
21   this particular watch, this particular night watch, that
22   you believed those on board incident boat Charlie had
23   exaggerated their level of distress?
24   A. So the initial —— the initial phone call, which
25   I believe we'll probably get into discussing my phone

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1   call, something in my gut —— and, again, I'm asked to
2   describe what that gut feeling is, it's just a gut
3   feeling that this doesn't feel quite as usual. As we
4   progress through the night and we're starting to effect
5   rescue after rescue after rescue, there is a possibility
6   in my mind that actually maybes it wasn't as exaggerated
7   as they said because the boats we're recovering all
8   seemed to be in good condition and so forth. So
9   the initial phone call gives me concern, and then
10   obviously as we progress through the night, we're
11   rescuing people and, you know, the levels of, you know,
12   it's —— you know, we've come to a point where we go,
13   yeah, okay, that's —— yeah, because, again, other
14   vessels said we're taking water, we're sinking, and then
15   we recover them and they're not, so its ...
16   MS LE FEVRE: All right, thank you.
17   Chair, it's midday, I don't know if that's ...
18   SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Yes, what do you —— I think we'll have
19   another break.
20   A. Yeah, okay, no problem.
21   SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Just for ten minutes. So that will be
22   12 minutes past midday to come back. So if you leave
23   first.
24   A. Yeah, okay.
25   SIR ROSS CRANSTON: You leave first.

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1   A. No problem.
2   MS LE FEVRE: We need the announcement.
3   SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Oh, sorry, we need the announcement.
4   VIDEO HEARINGS MANAGER: Cameras are now off.
5   (The witness withdrew)
6   SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Thanks very much.
7   (12.03 pm)
8   (A short break)
9   (12.13 pm)
10   (The witness returned)
11   SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Yes, well, welcome back, Mr Gibson.
12   MS LE FEVRE: Thank you.
13   So, I'm taking you to a point in time 0148 hours on
14   24 November. At this time, two things happen.
15   The French tracker is provided in updated form, and you
16   take a call directly from the small boat
17   Incident Charlie.
18   The French tracker contains a little more
19   information now. It tells us, again, that there are 33
20   persons on board, 30 women and children, likely into
21   the UK SAR at 01:30 —— we knew that already —— but not
22   very much information beyond that which was already held
23   by Coastguard. And so it's your call from Mubin, who
24   was a 16-year-old boy who was on board the small boat
25   Incident Charlie and it's a called that's passed to you,

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1 I think, from the French Coastguard; is that right?
2 A. I'm not sure how the phone call is received, but
3 obviously, yes, I assume the phone call. I can't
4 remember whether it was a 999 phone call or whether it
5 was passed from the French, but, yes, it is me on that
6 call with Mubin.
7 Q. Thank you.
8 It's a long call, 21 minutes. Mubin had good
9 English; is that right?
10 A. Yes, a level of English that was understandable and
11 conversable.
12 Q. Thank you.
13 In the course of the call, you could hear multiple
14 other voices in the background; is that right?
15 A. Yes.
16 Q. Was there shouting?
17 A. There was a level of noise which made it difficult for
18 me to fully hear everything Mubin was saying at times.
19 So whether it was shouting or just general background
20 noise, things going through a headset can be
21 transmitted. I can hear that typing quite clearly,
22 despite I'm talking. So, again, it's your perception.
23 But it was quite a lot of background noise.
24 Q. Thank you.
25 And were there voices speaking in languages other

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1 than English that you could hear?
2 A. Yes. I couldn't identify which language, but there was
3 conversation which was not in English.
4 Q. Thank you.
5 In the course of the call, I think it's right that
6 you did manage to give Mubin the number of
7 the Coastguard standalone iPhone?
8 A. Yes.
9 Q. And you managed to take two mobile telephone numbers
10 from those on the boat?
11 A. If it's recorded in the incident, probably. I can't
12 remember. Like you say, it was 21 minutes ——
13 Q. Thank you.
14 A. —— and quite an intense phone call.
15 Q. And I think it's right that via that iPhone and
16 the WhatsApp messaging system, you managed to take
17 a geolocation from and for the boat, time stamped at
18 0201 hours?
19 A. Yes, there was some form of WhatsApp message with
20 the location.
21 Q. Thank you.
22 And I think that was a location that was close, or
23 quite close to the Sandettie Lightvessel?
24 A. It was in —— for broad terms, within the vicinity of,
25 yes.

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1 Q. Yes, thank you.
2 You tell Mubin a boat is coming and you told him it
3 was going to take a bit of time, and he told you that
4 there were 40 people in the boat.
5 I'd like to look just at some brief extracts of
6 the transcript of that call now, please. It's
7 {INQ007630/1}, and we can see that's the introductory
8 page, introducing you and the speaker and the timing.
9 And I'd like to look with you at page {INQ007630/16} of
10 this transcript, please.
11 So we know, Mr Gibson, the text that shows in red
12 has been translated from another language into English
13 for the purposes of this transcription exercise. This
14 is towards the end of the transcript, and we can see
15 that you say:
16 "... like I say we'll be coming to be shortly.
17 We're getting a boat. It's going to take a bit of time
18 to get the boat to you because obviously you're a long
19 way off the shore."
20 Mubin says:
21 "We are in water UK, right?"
22 And you say:
23 "Yeah, I believe so. I'm just checking your
24 position now. Bear with me. There is a boat coming.
25 It is going to take a bit of time, you know."

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1 And then Mubin says:
2 "Okay, okay. I'm waiting."
3 Then he says:
4 "I see a light."
5 And turn to {INQ007630/17}, please:
6 "I see a light. I see a light ...
7 "...
8 "Look my left. Look my left. Please. Please.
9 Please. Please ... "
10 And then:
11 "It's finished ... it's finished ... Look [to] my
12 left ... Look my left, please."
13 And you say:
14 "Is there a boat to your left, did you say?"
15 The speaker says:
16 "Look my left ... Can you see the light?"
17 And you say:
18 "There's a light, okay."
19 The speaker says:
20 "To my left ... "
21 Over the page, please {INQ007630/18}.
22 And then the speaker goes on to say:
23 "Please ... Everything['s] finished ... Look [to]
24 my left ... "
25 You say:

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1   "... I ... hear a lot of shouting ... "
2   The speaker says:
3   "Yeah, it['s] finished. Come here, please ... It's
4   finished. Finished."
5   And you say:
6   "Right, Mumin."
7   And he says again, "we finish":
8   "Come here, please, we finish."
9   All right. Can we take that off the screen, please.
10   Is it right that during this call and as we've seen
11   in that part of the transcript, it became apparent that
12   Mubin and those on the boat could see the lights of
13   another vessel?
14 A. They don't ascertain what the light is. Within
15   the Dover Strait, there's multiple navigation marks
16   which all have characteristic lights flashing, all
17   commercial vessels, by its size, have to display certain
18   lights, a port light is red, which is the left−hand
19   side, green light for starboard, a stern light which is
20   white, and then their length lights, they'll carry two
21   white lights. So, again, trying to get what the lights
22   are would help you identify whether the ship was coming
23   towards them, going away. But unfortunately, I think
24   that level of explanation would have exceeded the level
25   of English on board. It's quite −− for a maritime

1   professional, it makes a lot of sense. For the general
2   member of the public, who's not trained to identify
3   a ship, it's a bit more to say could you describe
4   the light sort of thing. Fixed navigation marks, some
5   of them flash white. You know, again, is it a flashing
6   light, is it not a flash light. However, you've also
7   then got the risk of if the vessel is rocking and
8   rolling, the light can appear to be flashing as it's
9   obscured from view and then comes back.
10   So, in that point, I almost feel that they thought
11   I was on −− they'd called for help, and they assume, you
12   know, you call for help, someone's coming. "We are
13   coming to help you", and it's that language barrier of,
14   oh, cool, he's on his way. I fully think Mubin probably
15   thought I was going to turn up on a boat and pick him
16   up. I don't know whether he understood how coordination
17   and rescue works so ...
18 Q. No.
19 A. And they could see a light and it was probably
20   a commercial vessel, but ...
21 Q. Did you take that possibility seriously, though, that it
22   might be a vessel and they might be able to see
23   a vessel?
24 A. Yes. At the point in time, so one of the Coastguard
25   systems we have is called C−Scope, which is our

1   AIS client, and also within that system for
2   the Dover Strait, primarily for the VTS function, is
3   a radar overlay. So AIS is the Automatic Identification
4   System, which a vessel transmits gross −− vessels over
5   300 gross tonnes, by law, have to display their AIS and
6   that gives us their −− there's three types of data:
7   vessel data, static data and dynamic data. So there's,
8   like, the vessel's names, call signs, MMSIs, their
9   speed, their course, their destination, and all that's
10   transmitted, which gives better overall maritime
11   awareness.
12 Q. Yes.
13 A. So other vessels can look on their AIS system and go,
14   "Right, we probably want to go north of him because he's
15   going to want to go off to starboard because of where
16   he's heading to his next port." So it gives −−
17 Q. It's a powerful tool and it's a powerful tool to
18   understand what and where vessels and other objects
19   are −−
20 A. Yes, very much so.
21 Q. I see.
22 A. So we could see that there was −−
23 Q. Did you interrogate that then −−
24 A. −− vessels in the area −−
25 Q. −− having received that information from Mubin, did you

1   interrogate C−Scope?
2 A. We looked at C−Scope, and I think there was about five
3   or six vessels. And again, it would have been too hard
4   to go, "I wonder if it's that vessel, I wonder if it's
5   that vessel". The VTS team, they broadcast an
6   information service broadcast, and in that broadcast
7   there is a, you know, for any sightings of small
8   vessels, you know, at this point, I think we were
9   probably doing a proactive broadcast, "There are small
10   vessels in the Dover Strait, all vessels are advised to
11   maintain a sharp look out and report any sightings".
12 Q. Thank you.
13   Is it right that you identified one potential
14   candidate as that vessel as being the Gaschem Shinano?
15 A. Yes, I mean, I believe certainly that vessel was in
16   the area at the time and I believe questions were then
17   asked of it.
18 Q. Did you ask those questions?
19 A. No, I think I requested it either through the VTS
20   team −− again, division of labour, trying to keep myself
21   free to make the important SMC decisions −−
22 Q. Thank you.
23 A. −− that I'm required to make.
24 Q. Do you know that the Gaschem Shinano said that it
25   couldn't see anything?

1 A. I think that was reported back to me.
2 Q. Yes. And it was let to continue on its passage?
3 A. Yes.
4 Q. Thank you.
5 A. So another point around this is the —— the south—west
6   lane of the Dover Strait is obviously monitored by Dover
7   Coastguard and the north—east lane is monitored and
8   managed by Gris—Nez, under the call sign "Gris—Nez
9   Traffic". In terms of the Search and Rescue Region,
10   from where they enter the north—east lane at
11   the Greenwich Lightvessel, up to and including, just, by
12   the Mike Papa Charlie buoy, which is the mid—part of
13   Calais, so essentially halfway between Dover and Calais,
14   the Search and Rescue Region then extends, the British
15   one extends into the north—east lane, so the vessels
16   transiting the north—east lane are under the supervision
17   of Gris—Nez Traffic, but obviously we can still call
18   them on 16 and then get them to 11 and chat to them ——
19 Q. Thank you.
20 A. —— rather than having dog—leg of going to Gris—Nez
21   Traffic to ask them the same question, we —— it's an
22   understanding, they're reporting to Gris—Nez, however,
23   if it they're called by Dover, it's for a reason.
24 Q. You can see them and you can speak to them if you want
25   to?

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1 A. Yes, exactly, yeah.
2 Q. Thank you.
3   Now, in the transcript that we've just looked at ——
4   we won't look at it again —— Mubin repeats several
5   times, "It's finished, we're finished, finished".
6   You've told the Inquiry and you've told us about it ——
7   told us about this already today, that you had a gut
8   feeling that this wasn't an exaggerated case, wasn't
9   a case of exaggeration. Did you in fact consider at
10   this stage that this call was a genuine case of serious
11   or severe distress?
12 A. The actions I take following the call I think highlight
13   that I had genuine concern for this vessel.
14 Q. Did you understand that this was or might be a boat that
15   was taking on water?
16 A. That wasn't verbalised in the call. "We're finished,
17   we're finished", again, I didn't go —— because that
18   would have been jumping to a conclusion, again,
19   the analysis of it didn't lead me to say it's sinking.
20   It was, you know, there is —— I have a concern for this
21   boat, I don't know what that concern is, but there is
22   concern from a feeling I've got from this phone call.
23 Q. Thank you.
24   Well, we'll look at your —— the actions you took
25   next almost immediately. I just want to ask you about

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1 some WhatsApp co—ordinates that were sent to Coastguard
2 on that standalone mobile phone. I think it's right
3 that there were two further WhatsApp positions sent at
4 0220 and 0221 respectively. They were sent to
5 the Coastguard iPhone, but nobody in Coastguard saw
6 those until about an hour later. You've told us about
7 that in your witness statement. And it's you, in fact,
8 that records them into the Incident Charlie ViSION log
9 at about 3.28 or so.
10   Why were those coordinates missed?
11 A. I —— I can't recall why they would have been missed.
12   However, what the Inquiry needs to understand, and
13   the greater audience, is we weren't just dealing with
14   one small boat, there was I think seven or eight on
15   the French tracker at this point, so coordinating
16   multiple incidents in the Channel, and again, whether
17   that phone had been put down, the ping had been missed,
18   and again I'm going to give an example here, Sir Ross
19   just mentioned it was 12 o'clock and I felt like
20   five minutes had passed, so the passage of time when
21   you're very busy is quite easy to —— to miss in some
22   cases.
23 Q. Right.
24   Do you know whether those updated positions were
25   ever passed to the Valiant?

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1 A. I can't recall, unfortunately.
2 Q. Should they have been?
3 A. In terms of the Valiant's response, once the Valiant was
4   requested and tasked through Border Force Maritime
5   Command, it was then under our coordination and we would
6   have tasked it to the most likely position for —— for
7   the vessel. So, as and when the Valiant was closing in
8   on the position, we would have probably updated them
9   with the updated positions as required.
10 Q. But you don't know whether that happened?
11 A. I don't know whether that happened, but I think
12   the Valiant was tasked to the vicinity of the Sandettie
13   Lightvessel. The rationale for that was the tide in
14   the Dover Strait goes north—east and south—west bound
15   and the tide was setting to the north—east, so therefore
16   any drift would have been towards the Sandettie
17   Lightvessel, so ...
18 Q. Thank you.
19   But is it right that, ideally, Valiant should have
20   been provided with the most up—to—date
21   co—ordinates/geolocation available to Coastguard?
22 A. Potentially, yes.
23 Q. Right.
24   And I'm going to move forward to your next acts,
25   which is I think the Mayday relay; is that right?

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1   A. More than likely I would ——
2   Q. In relation to ——
3   A. —— (overspeaking — inaudible) —— yeah.
4   Q. —— this particular incident?
5   So this is a relay that was created by you at 02:26
6   or 02:27, depending on which log we're looking at.
7   I think it's right, you'll correct me if I have this
8   wrong, but Mayday relays are the highest level of alert,
9   they're only to be used in severe distress situations
10   and only to be used where there's a grave or imminent
11   risk —— risk to life?
12 A. So the Mayday relay is —— it's just any distress phase
13   situation is —— the proword is "Mayday", which amplifies
14   that to all mariners. The use of broadcast action for
15   a Mayday is discretionary from the SMC and there are
16   times when we will not use a Mayday broadcast because
17   it's not required or it's not going to elicit a response
18   from what we need, basically. An example of that would
19   be mid—Atlantic. We're not going to issue a Mayday
20   broadcast for the middle of the mid—Atlantic because
21   there is just not that response out there, we will do
22   other means. Again, it's about the audience you're
23   transmitting to. The Dover Strait is a densely
24   populated traffic, so therefore you're going to get lots
25   of responses. And the nature of the Mayday relay was to

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1   get any vessels that could respond to respond and then
2   any vessels with sightings to give updated position. So
3   this is where we're going out for information about
4   the small boat. We know there's one there, we want to
5   get eyes on, further information from it. A commercial
6   tanker is not going to effect the rescue of a small
7   8—metre rubber dinghy.
8   Q. No.
9   You say that the issuing or the decision to issue
10   the relay, the Mayday relay, is in Coastguard's
11   discretion?
12 A. Within the SMC's discretion.
13 Q. SMC's discretion, thank you.
14   Your discretion was influenced, is this right, by
15   the level of distress you discerned in the course of
16   the call that you yourself had taken; is that right?
17 A. So from the level of the call I took, as I said, I had
18   this feeling. What I wanted was some sort of visual
19   confirmation of what the level of distress was.
20   You know, what is the issue which is causing me to have
21   this concern for their —— this grave and imminent
22   concern for their safety.
23 Q. Thank you.
24   And you tell us that through your witness statement.
25   You say it's the level of distress, the level of panic

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1   and fear, and the lack of information, and those are
2   the factors that influenced, is this right, your
3   discretion?
4   A. Yes, that's correct, yeah.
5   Q. How unusual was it for you to do, if that's the right
6   terminology, a Mayday relay in respect of a small boat?
7   A. It wasn't a very common occurrence. Again, because
8   we've had that prior awareness from being notified,
9   we've had aerial patrols, so, again, we're not needing
10   to ask for anyone and everyone to tell us what's going
11   on, we are communicating directly with an aircraft and
12   therefore we've got that information, the aircraft's
13   tasked, they're in this position, "Go, give us updated
14   positions". It was to do with a lack of aerial
15   surveillance. You know, it was —— you know, it's not as
16   prevalent if we've got an asset which can fulfil that
17   evidence—capturing role.
18 Q. Had you yourself ever broadcast, or caused to have
19   broadcast, a Mayday relay before this in relation to
20   a small boat SAR incident?
21 A. Not that I recall, but I may have done.
22 Q. Is it fair to say it was an unusual step for you to
23   take?
24 A. Again, going to general SAR principles, it's not an
25   unusual step if it's the right course of action.

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1   Q. Yes.
2   A. And I felt that more information from passing ships was
3   the right course of action whilst I was awaiting
4   the Valiant transit in and arriving on scene.
5   Q. Thank you. But in relation to action planning in
6   respect of a small boat incident, fair to say that it
7   was unusual as part of that plan?
8   A. It was unusual because of the usual asset complement
9   that we normally would utilise for small boats.
10 Q. Thank you.
11   And in particular the lack of aerial picture?
12 A. Yes, correct.
13 Q. Thank you.
14   As it was unusual, did you think about alerting
15   the Maritime Tactical Commander, Mr Jones, about
16   the relay?
17 A. I didn't. Again, his is tactical oversight, again,
18   the distress phase action checklist is there, and again,
19   it wouldn't be unusual for him to —— you know, there ——
20   for a Mayday broadcast to be going out. If a vessel
21   calls Mayday, then we would do a relay as per normal.
22   So it's not an unusual action to go along with
23   a distress phase action.
24 Q. Was it not directly related to his information provided
25   to you about the dangerous situation created by the lack

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of aerial picture?

A. It could have been. However, again, it wasn't —— again,
I was carrying out my actions as I saw fit, and he would
review that incident at some point.

Q. I see.
Let's look at the Mayday relay itself then
{INQ007660/1}. That's the first page of it. We can see
it's timed at 2.27.
On to the next page, please {INQ007660/2}:
"Mayday relay, Mayday relay, Mayday relay, all
stations, all stations, all stations ... Dover
Coastguard. Dover Coastguard, Dover Coastguard.
"Mayday information number one. Small craft with 40
persons onboard in position ...
With the decimalised coordinates and a description
of location in relation to the Sandettie Lightvessel:
"Taking water and requiring immediate assistance.
"Any vessel that can assist to contact Dover
Coastguard."
That's the message that is the Mayday relay?

A. Yeah.

Q. Does it follow that it was your belief, at least a real
possibility, that this boat was taking water at this
stage?

A. So without viewing the ViSION log, whether I requested

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the Mayday broadcast to be compiled or whether
I compiled it myself, I can't confirm.

Q. I see.

A. So because 16 —— the Channel 16 function has been
performed by Solent, I may have made that request to
Solent to compile it, and whether I would have reviewed
it before it was broadcast I can't comment without
checking the incident. So they may have put in "taking
water", I don't know. But, again, looking at this,
the "taking water", I don't know. I don't think I had
that information at that point. However, it could have
been one of the facts and deductions I made from what
could be causing them to panic so much.

Q. Thank you.
Would you take that off the screen please.
I think it's right that you were aware at the time
you caused the relay to be broadcast that the closest
vessel to this small boat was a French vessel,
the Flamant?

A. Yes, so obviously when we were analysing and assessed
the information, we can see a light, the Gaschem Shinano
was in there, but also the —— the French vessel Flamant
was also displaying its AIS, so I was aware of its
position in relation to the position of this incident.

Q. Thank you.

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Did you have any sense then of how far away, in
time, the Flamant was at the time that the relay was
broadcast from this —— from this small boat?

A. So, from memory —— and I think this is also noted in my
witness statement —— I think I estimated the distance
was about 2.5 nautical miles. Again, time ——
distance/speed/time calculation, if you want me to do
one off the top of my head, probably quite close, in
terms of giving me an instant picture. So I'd say
probably 15 minutes, if that, if they were making best
speed. Again, their best speed probably somewhere in
the region of 15 to 20 knots.

Q. That's really helpful. Thank you very much.
Did you hope that the Flamant would respond to this
relay?

A. Yes, so the Mayday relay is —— you know, is, by law, all
vessels who can respond should respond to a Mayday
relay. That is a law of the sea.

Q. So you expected it to respond?

A. Yes.

Q. Did it respond?

A. No.

Q. Other vessels did respond?

A. Yes.

Q. Were any of those able to assist?

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A. There was a couple of vessels transiting the south—west
lane that responded. They —— they, because of their
nature of their course, couldn't assist, so they were
thanked for responding. The reason they couldn't
respond was, for them to go where this position was, it
would have put them going in the —— well, they would
have contravened Rule 10(b)2 of the collision
regulations, which would be proceeding in the wrong
traffic lane against the flow of traffic, so ——

Q. And would have been dangerous in its own right?

A. Pretty dangerous, yes.

Q. Thank you. All right.
The relay then was repeated every 20 minutes; is
that right? Is that normal?

A. Again, that's in my witness statement.

Q. All right.

A. Generally, with distress, we'd be somewhere between
15 minutes and 30 minutes depending on where it was and
what it was.

Q. Thank you.
And it comes to an end, I think, at about
0339 hours. I'm going to ask to have up on the screen,
please, {INQ000238/11}. That will be the vision log for
Charlie.
(Pause)

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THE EPE OPERATOR: It's only five pages.

MS LE FEVRE: Oh, gosh, I must have given you the wrong
    reference then. I'm sorry. All right, well, I might
    come back and show you the document.
        What it says and what's recorded is that at that
    time there is no requirement for the Mayday relay
    because Valiant is in the area investigating targets.
    And then the Mayday relay stops from that point forward.
        At 0339 hours, it's right, isn't it, that no small
    boat had been confirmed, rightly or wrongly, as being
    Charlie?

A. I believe so, yes.

Q. What was the usual practice or procedure for ending
    a Mayday relay broadcast?

A. The usual practice or procedure would be where the ——
    the emergency situation ceases to be.
        Now, the rationale for this emergency relay
    broadcast were for vessels to assist, and then we
    obviously had a situation where we had a search and
    rescue asset on scene, able to assist, so therefore
    vessels of opportunity, which is the other vessels using
    the Dover Strait, were less of a —— you know, we hadn't
    had any definitive small —— by "small craft", I mean
    craft that could be used to operate in (a) shallow
    waters, in and around traffic separation schemes. So,

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again, it was deemed that, once the Valiant was there,
    we weren't going to get any other vessels from a Mayday
    broadcast.

Q. Ah, so it was the likelihood of response that factored
    into the decision to stop the broadcast?

A. Yes. So basically it was: is this —— is this generating
    any benefit to the ongoing incident? We're not getting
    any responses, we've got search and rescue units on
    scene, and actually, the part of the broadcast which was
    "any sightings" was still being transmitted via the VTS
    service on the working channels of both Gris—Nez VTS's
    broadcast at 10 past the hour and Dover Coastguard's
    broadcast at 20 to the hour. So that request for, "Any
    sightings, please give us information", was still being
    repeated by other means on the VTS working channels,
    supplementing the SAR effort. So to then broadcast on
    16 repeatedly seemed to be more than was required. We
    had the "any sightings" was being done, and also we had
    SAR assets on scene.

Q. So do you think then it was appropriate to end that
    Mayday relay broadcast before the vessel in distress to
    which it related had in fact been located conclusively?

A. I was content with the assets I had on scene to effect
    any rescues, so therefore the Mayday broadcast wasn't
    required.

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Q. All right. I'm going to move on then and ask you about
    the second call that you had with Mubin. This is a call
    at 0231 hours, so fairly shortly after the broadcast of
    the Mayday relay is started.
        How would you describe Mubin's general state during
    this call?

A. I don't remember the second call, unfortunately, so
    without seeing some transcript ——

Q. All right.

A. —— I'm going to, unfortunately, struggle to comment.

Q. Well, we'll look at the transcript then.
        {INQ007655/1}, please. Thank you.
        That's the covering page.
        If we move on to the first —— to page 2 of
    the document, please {INQ007655/2}, that's you,
    Coastguard:
        " ... good morning.
        "Hussain", which, as you saw on the first page, is
    in fact Mubin ——

A. Yeah.

Q. ——:
        "Coastguard, can you help me please? Can you help
    me, please? I'm finished ... "
        You say:
        "Hello ... can I take your name first of all?"

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        Gives the name:
        " ... have you called before?"
        You say. He says:
        " ... yeah, like ... location. Can you look ... look
    ... Look up, please."
        You say:
        "So you've called before. Have I spoke to you ...
    as well ...
        "Have I spoken to you before? How many people are
    in your boat?
        "40 ... 40 people ... we're dying and two are ——
    children."
        You ask for the telephone number.
        And over the page, please, {INQ007655/3} into page
    ... yes. So confirming the telephone numbers. Again,
    you're asking for how many people there are on the boat.
    You get a number and a little bit of a breakdown, some
    of it's inaudible. You ask where they'd set off from,
    you were told Calais.
        Next page, please, {INQ007655/4}. You ask what
    colour the boat is. He says:
        "Don't ... understand. It's broken, broken ... Can
    you help me, please? And the water has blown my ..."
        You ask again about the colour, and you're told:
        "The boat's finished ... can you help me, please?"

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1　　　　"I can ..."
2　　　　You say:
3　　　　"... but I can only help you if I know where you are
4　　and what colour boat you're in.
5　　　　"...
6　　　　"I ... need to know where you are, to send someone
7　　to help you."
8　　　　And they mention the WhatsApp.
9　　　　Over the page, please {INQ007655/5}. And then
10　　there's a conversation about telephone numbers.
11　　　　Next page {INQ007655/6}, continuing about the
12　　numbers. Part way down the page, you say:
13　　　　"Well I've got a very important question for you~...
14　　　　"...
15　　　　"How many times have you rang to speak to the UK
16　　authorities ... this number is very familiar and I've
17　　spoken to Mumin, effectively already."
18　　　　So that's you triangulating this call, is it, with
19　　the previous call?
20　A. This is me trying to manage what is multiple calls all
21　　from the same vessel. Whenever we receive a call, we'll
22　　create an incident, and as we go through this you'll see
23　　what it's like with ten incidents for the same boat and
24　　actually trying to ascertain all information into one
25　　incident, or is there one boat, or is there ten boats?

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1　　So, yes.
2　Q. And then at the bottom of the page, you say:
3　　　　"I told you ... there's a boat on its way and ...
4　　We've got your position from WhatsApp already."
5　　　　Did you ask him to send a fresh, updated location
6　　via the WhatsApp in the course of this call? We can
7　　look at the whole transcript, if you like, of course.
8　A. I don't think I requested it. Again, possibly I was
9　　thinking he's sending it, so he may send me an update,
10　　and possibly I should have formally asked for that, if
11　　I hadn't asked for it, or maybes made that assumption
12　　that he would send an update, because he's contacted me
13　　and we've done this process before.
14　Q. Thank you. Because I think it's right that your
15　　Standard Operating Procedure of general application for
16　　dealing with multiple calls tells you —— tells all
17　　Coastguard personnel to extract all information you can
18　　from repeat calls, because there may be some new, or
19　　better or update information in —— available from that
20　　later call; is that right?
21　A. That's correct, yes.
22　Q. Do you think you should have asked him expressly to send
23　　a fresh location in the course of this call?
24　A. On reflection, it wouldn't have hurt. So it would have
25　　been good to do it.

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1　Q. Can we move on, please, to page {INQ007655/7}. So
2　　you'll see in the middle of the page, approximately, you
3　　say:
4　　　　"... there is a boat coming. You're just going to
5　　have to ——"
6　　　　Mubin says:
7　　　　"Where is it? We are dying, where is the boat?"
8　　　　You say:
9　　　　"The boat is on its way but it has to get ——"
10　　　　He says:
11　　　　"We all die. We all die."
12　　　　You say:
13　　　　"... you're going to have to be patient ... stay
14　　together ... I can't make the boat come any quicker."
15　　　　On the next page, please, to page {INQ007655/8}:
16　　　　"I can't make the boat go any faster than it's going
17　　currently."
18　　　　And in the middle of the page:
19　　　　"I can't give you a time at the minute but less than
20　　half an hour."
21　　　　Why did you tell Mubin that the boat was going to be
22　　with him in less than half an hour?
23　A. So if I can just maybe clarify ——
24　Q. Of course.
25　A. —— for the Inquiry. I believe the —— in the incident,

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1　　the HMCC Valiant's tasked at approximately 01:42, from
2　　memory of reading that incident, and I think you said
3　　this phone call's about 02:30.
4　Q. Yes.
5　A. So from Dover to the Sandettie Lightvessel is
6　　approximately 12 and a half miles. I can't remember
7　　exactly. But I've done a quick calculation, thinking,
8　　if the boat's underway from Dover at that time,
9　　you know, they make about 15 to 18 knots best speed, so
10　　I've obviously had in my mind that the boat's underway.
11　　It may not have been. And this is what I've said, so
12　　I'm kind of thinking, well, we tasked it at this time,
13　　give it time to get moving, and then I sort of said
14　　30 minutes thinking, again, that passage of time, and
15　　where am I, I've probably assumed it is within about
16　　half an hour from where it is, without actually formally
17　　checking because I'm in this phone call with Mubin.
18　　Rather than distracting myself with looking at
19　　the screens, I want to listen to the information and
20　　gather and assess it, so~...
21　Q. Thank you. So that was a sort of off—the—cuff guess?
22　A. Yeah, basically, you know, it's, time's passed, I've
23　　tasked an asset, you know, experience tells me transit
24　　times, and if I've tasked them at this time and they've
25　　got underway, they should arrive somewhere in

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1   the vicinity of that sort of timescale.

2 Q. As you know/we know, it was about an hour before Valiant

3   in fact reached the Mayday coordinate position from

4   0201, so about twice that time estimate.

5 A. Yes, it was double that time, and that may have been

6   because I wasn't aware of what time it actually got

7   underway.

8 Q. All right. Looking down towards the bottom of the page

9   now, you say to Mubin:

10   "I appreciate everyone's very scared on the boat ...

11   we need ...

12   "... you need to stop making calls you need to stop

13   making calls ...

14   "...

15   "... You need to stop making calls because every

16   time you make a call we think there's another boat

17   out ..."

18   Next page, please {INQ007655/9}:

19   "... there and we don't want to accidentally go

20   chasing for another boat when it's actually your both

21   we're looking for."

22   Take that off the screen, please.

23   Is that an instruction from you to Mubin to stop

24   calling Coastguard?

25 A. From that, what I wanted was, "Listen, you need to

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1   understand, we are working to rescue you and we're

2   getting a lot of calls in with lots of different

3   information", maybes I need —— again, from my mind,

4   I don't know that amplified with: unless somebody

5   drastically alters. You know, generally, we say don't

6   call again unless something changes, you know. So that

7   was me asking him to be patient.

8   As I said earlier, that will —— you know, when do

9   they start exaggerating, well, how long has it been from

10   the first call to when they get rescued, so it was

11   ringing us every ten minutes and then giving a different

12   name, or, again, as you look at that transcript, were

13   saying the name is Hussain, and not Mubin. So there's

14   another incident for that and now I'm going to roll it

15   into Charlie because I've managed to ascertain it, but

16   it's taking my time up of keeping what is a complicated

17   maritime picture in one piece.

18 Q. Thank you.

19   And is that the standard instruction then, not to

20   call again unless something changes? Is that a standard

21   instruction?

22 A. It's not a standard instruction that I'm aware of.

23   However, it's about asset and incident management.

24   You know, it's —— keeping the pertinent amplifying

25   information flowing is great, however, just telling me,

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1   because again, at this point, "We're all going to die"

2   ... if I look back on this and reflect on it, "We're all

3   going to die, we're all going to die", is it

4   exaggeration now, because we keep getting these phone

5   calls without any more information? And I think this is

6   where it starts to generate to me is the level of

7   distress being exaggerated because it is, you know,

8   the boat's not come quick enough. And, yeah, it's —— if

9   you don't understand what's fully going on and you're

10   getting, "We're all going to die", it's quite

11   a distressing situation to find yourself in of sitting

12   at the end of a phone, effectively helpless. You know

13   where they are, you want to get a boat to them and you

14   can't.

15 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Mr Gibson, would you like a break?

16 A. That's all right.

17 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: We'll just pause for a moment.

18   (Pause).

19   I think we might have a break.

20 MS LE FEVRE: Mr Chair, if it helps, I only had one more

21   question to ask about this call and I was going to

22   suggest we broke immediately then and then the topic

23   will be over and Mr Gibson will know he doesn't have to

24   come back.

25 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Yes, okay, well, ask the final question,

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1   yes.

2 A. If we could clear it off in one go, I'd prefer that.

3 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Yes.

4 MS LE FEVRE: Thank you.

5   To the best of your knowledge, did Mubin call again

6   in the course of that shift?

7 A. I'm not sure. Again, there was so many names. So, as

8   —— as the night progressed, it —— as I've said, there

9   was more than one boat. You know, we had so many calls

10   and so many different names and —— we will touch on

11   staffing later and I will explain more about

12   the pitfalls of having plenty of staff and not having

13   enough staff, but, yeah, it's I don't recall if he rang

14   again.

15 MS LE FEVRE: Thank you very much.

16   Chair, if that's ...

17 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Well, thank you very much.

18   So we'll come back about five minutes to 2, if

19   that's all right.

20 A. Yeah.

21 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: So thank you, Mr Gibson.

22 VIDEO HEARINGS MANAGER: I confirm the cameras are now off.

23   (The witness withdrew)

24 (12.55 pm)

25   (The short adjournment)

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1   (1.56 pm)

2   (The witness returned)

3   SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Well, good afternoon, everyone, and

4   welcome back, Mr Gibson.

5   Ms Le Fevre.

6   MS LE FEVRE: Thank you.

7   Mr Gibson, I want to ask you now about a call you

8   had with the French Coastguard at 0242 hours. We have

9   a transcript of that call as well. I'm going to ask for

10   that to come on to our screens. It's {INQ007656/1},

11   please. You can see the date and time and

12   the participants there.

13   If we can move on to {INQ007656/2} of that

14   transcript, we can see the introductions, and you

15   confirm and up the French migrant 7, as they called

16   the boat, with your case, Charlie, at the foot of

17   the page.

18   The French Coastguard, in their third entry on this

19   page, they say:

20   "... they called already, spoke, 'Please call us',

21   because he claim, 'Help me, help me, help me. We are in

22   the water' ..."

23   So they ask you:

24   "... so you have a rescue boat for this case or

25   not?"

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1   And you say:

2   "We have the Valiant proceeding, however the Flamant

3   is closer to their position. The Flamant is currently

4   outlined three nautical miles from where they are."

5   Firstly, the French Coastguard passing this

6   information to you, "We are in the water". Now,

7   the Inquiry hasn't found any Coastguard —— His Majesty's

8   Coastguard log where that information is

9   recorded: persons in water. Is that important, an

10   important piece of information?

11   A. Again, this is another statement of: how accurate is

12   that information, how —— how do I validate that

13   information? So, again, "We are in the water", is this

14   we are in the UK water, because again, this is a lot of

15   that, I guess, language barrier. So, again, it's how

16   that message is received. You know, "We've entered

17   the water" or, "We are in the water", and I guess that

18   is possibly something we've got that, this mindset of

19   mine, where, I mean, this call comes not long after

20   chatting to Mubin, where he's saying, "We are in UK

21   waters", or, "We in UK water, okay", because this is

22   what they're trying to achieve. So possibly this is me

23   looking at, yes, they're in the —— the French are

24   ringing me to tell me something, so, you know, if —— if

25   this was the opposite way round, so I'm ringing

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1   the French Coastguard to say, "Listen, I've just had

2   a phone call from people in the water and they're in

3   your area", I would be expecting a response of some

4   description or actually we should proceed if they're ——

5   whichever.

6   So it's not recorded because, again, it's that

7   passing of information from Gris—Nez, it's a bit of an

8   update. As you can see, again, we've used the limit of

9   my French at the start of this with "Bonjour", so, yeah,

10   it's —— we're still in the early stages of passing

11   information to me in this call of, like, "Right, you're

12   ringing me", "It's our case 7, it's your migrant alpha",

13   "Actually, no, it's not, it's Charlie", so we're trying

14   to ascertain where we are with that. So I've not

15   recorded it because maybes it's not being reinforced to

16   me as saying, "Help me, help me, help me, we are in

17   the water". And, again, I'm not taking that as being

18   they're in the water, because, again, it's referenced

19   the boat.

20   Q. I see. So that's why it's not recorded.

21   Did you tell anyone else about this part of

22   the Coastguard —— the French Coastguard's call to you?

23   A. Possibly not, no. Obviously these are my SMC thoughts

24   about what's going on. We're getting underway to —— at

25   this point, we have the information of: they are here

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1   and they need help. But we don't actually ascertain

2   what is going on with the nature of the boat, so we're

3   still in this information gather/responding phase of not

4   having a full picture.

5   Q. All right.

6   I'll ask you a little about your response then.

7   The Flamant, you say, is closer to their position?

8   A. Yeah.

9   Q. And it would be the quickest response vessel.

10   If we move through to {INQ007656/4} of

11   the transcript —— thank you —— we see you, in terms,

12   saying that, locating the Valiant boat and then saying

13   "the Flamant is obviously closer" to where the Flamant

14   is at the moment and then there's a conversation about

15   the relative speeds of the respective vessels.

16   Over the page again, please, to {INQ007656/5}:

17   "How many minutes?"

18   And you say:

19   "How many minutes? They're doing 15 knots so

20   they've got nine miles ... about 35 to 40 minutes."

21   And the French Coastguard:

22   "40 minutes?"

23   And then an audible gasp.

24   Could you have asked, expressly asked the French

25   Coastguard outright to task the Flamant to attend this

                              124

1   boat?

2 A. I could. It would have still remained with the French

3   Coastguard's decision to accept that request or not.

4   The Mayday relay, as I've said, is about, you know, all

5   vessels that are capable and which —— and can respond to

6   respond. I think, from my perspective, me instructing

7   a foreign military asset to comply with an instruction

8   and proceed from French waters into UK waters, it's

9   probably not something I thought I should tell them to

10   do that, which is why it was a polite request of, "Is it

11   possible if they can". I think, within my remit as an

12   SMC, I could do it, however, engaging an international

13   SAR in this instance, and again, we are —— when we work

14   with our SAR partners it's quite amicable and it's

15   generally for, like, not a political —— you know, this

16   is a political topic for a lot of people. For us, it's

17   just search and rescue, but there is political

18   sensitivities around it.

19 Q. Yes.

20 A. So, I guess, when you start making demands, it's —— it's

21   how we process that, and maybes that's one part, and

22   it's certainly something we've picked up on from this

23   incident as a Coastguard of we need to be better at

24   actually being very clear with what we want.

25 Q. Thank you.

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1   So just so I'm clear, you could ask?

2 A. I've since learned that I could have made it, "Can you

3   formally task the Flamant". And it would be "Could

4   you —— I'm formally requesting you task the Flamant to

5   this incident as the nearest search and rescue vessel or

6   nearest vessel".

7 Q. That's the most you could have done, an express and

8   formal request for the tasking?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. It wouldn't be for His Majesty's Coastguard to directly

11   task the Flamant?

12 A. No, because it is not a —— so HM Coastguard will

13   formally task declared assets and additional assets.

14   However, the Flamant is neither a declared or additional

15   asset, it's a vessel of opportunity.

16 Q. Does it follow from your answers that you had never

17   previously asked the French Coastguard to task one of

18   their assets?

19 A. I'd never had to forcibly request is how I would

20   describe that. You know, we've spoken with the French

21   and liaised with the French and have a good working

22   relationship and it's never been to a point where,

23   actually, I really need it to go.

24 Q. Thank you.

25   Did you consider raising this negative response,

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1   effectively, with the —— with your Maritime

2   Tactical Commander?

3 A. I didn't. Again, it's —— for me, at this point, I've

4   got to work with what I've got, and I didn't have

5   the time to go, "Wouldn't it be great if we got this".

6   So, again, it was another thing of, it could have been

7   raised if I'd had the capacity to do it, but again,

8   I was more concentrating on the rescuing and working

9   with what I've got.

10 Q. Yes, because would he perhaps have had different

11   communication channels with the French Coastguard?

12 A. He would have had no different communication channels

13   with the French Coastguard. It's —— you know,

14   the direct line, as it were, from ringing a foreign RCC,

15   you know, he could have maybes carried bit more clout,

16   or he may have formally requested it. However, like

17   I say, I didn't feel I had the time to ring him when

18   I could —— my time could have been better spent managing

19   all the SAR incidents ongoing.

20 Q. Thank you.

21   Can I just go back two pages in the transcript to

22   {INQ007656/3}, please, and just looking at the express

23   information that you relayed to the French Coastguard in

24   the centre of the page:

25   "... the Flamant ... obviously she's in UK waters

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1   but the Flamant is probably the closer vessel to respond

2   if they are sinking."

3   What was your state of mind in respect of the state

4   of the small boat at that time?

5 A. So, one of our process is what we call the facts,

6   factors, deductions and outputs. So what we know, what

7   we can deduce from that and what we need to do to fix

8   the deduction so —— and that's covered by actions, risks

9   and constraints. So worst case scenario is: they're

10   sinking. You know, they're saying they're finished;

11   they haven't said they're sinking, but one of

12   the deductions I've obviously made in my mind was, worst

13   case scenario is: they could be sinking. So that's ——

14   again, this is why I've said "if they are", not "they

15   are", it's "if they are". So, again, a deduction is if

16   it is as bad as it could be, you know, worst case

17   scenario is that dinghy is going to sink.

18 Q. Thank you.

19   Take that transcript off the screen, please.

20   Can I ask you this then. Would you agree that RNLI

21   lifeboats are better equipped to proceed at speed and

22   perhaps in tough sea conditions to provide assistance,

23   better equipped than Border Force cutters, for example?

24 A. Are they better equipped? RNLI lifeboats are capable

25   craft, however, they are limited by survivor capacity,

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1   and again, they are quicker by definition .   HMCC Valiant
2   is a —— Border Force may correct me on this, but maybe
3   quite an aging vessel and probably due for replacement,
4   and, when new, was probably capable of higher top
5   speeds, but for safety reasons and sustainability , it
6   was slower. So a lifeboat could be used, could be
7   utilised , and again, however, these are volunteers and
8   we're managing finite resources, so ...
9   Q. Thank you.
10   RNLI was a declared and available asset to
11   Coastguard that evening?
12 A. Yes, the lifeboats obviously declared their status of
13   availability , and again, that request would go to their
14   launching authority and they would decide whether they'd
15   accept or decline a tasking.   The lifeboats would not be
16   pre—deployed. That is not within our memorandum of
17   understanding. They are not to just be sent out there
18   to wait for it to happen; they were generally at that
19   time tasked to a specific incident within UK waters and
20   then returned to base.
21 Q. Thank you.
22   So did you consider, to the best of your
23   recollection , tasking RNLI to attend this small boat,
24   Incident Charlie, once you knew the Flamant was not
25   going to attend it ?

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1   A. I considered it . However, obviously, as I've said,
2   the Valiant's underway. To page the lifeboat, there
3   would be that timescale where the Deputy Launch and All
4   Launch and Operations Manager contacts the Coastguard to
5   agree or disagree the tasking. That then follows with
6   a separate page to the crew, they then have to assemble,
7   again, get the boat ready for sea, do their checks. So
8   actually , by the time I'd paged a lifeboat , which, Dover
9   lifeboat would have been the closest, the arrival time
10   on scene would have probably been quite similar. So,
11   again, it wouldn't have expedited the vessel arriving on
12   scene.
13 Q. Thank you.
14 A. Valiant and Dover lifeboat would have arrived on scene
15   at approximately the same sort of time.
16 Q. And is that a thought process you went through on
17   24 November?
18 A. Yes. So as I've said, our resources are finite . So in
19   terms of actual capability across the Kent coast and
20   into Sussex, you have Ramsgate Lifeboat, you have Dover
21   All—Weather Lifeboat and you have Dungeness Lifeboat,
22   three different classes of lifeboat , and obviously
23   the Border Force assets available . As I said earlier in
24   this , it 's saying we'd had two weeks of foul weather and
25   we were expecting a busy night, and a 36—hour period of

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1   extended possible migrant activity , there was
2   a consideration for not exhausting what is a finite
3   amount of resources, so therefore ——
4   Q. In the RNLI?
5   A. In the RNLI. And you know, it's: we're at the start of
6   what is a busy period. You know, we are being told this
7   is just amber; tomorrow's red, the next night's red. So
8   I was very mindful about not exhausting or fatiguing all
9   my resources, because once I've exhausted the RNLI,
10   there is no back up to the RNLI, as it were. So I was
11   mindful of how much resource I used because of what was
12   predicted.
13 Q. So they wouldn't have got there any more quickly and you
14   were mindful of the limited resource?
15 A. Yeah.
16 Q. I want to ask you next about a call you had at 0311 in
17   the morning, with Border Force, with Border Force
18   Maritime Command and with a man called Tom Willows, from
19   whom, again, the Inquiry expects to hear in the next
20   days and weeks.
21   In this call , you discussed with Mr Willows
22   the French intelligence that you had received, the fact
23   that the Valiant was proceeding to the Incident Charlie
24   boat and the fact that there were a number of other
25   small boats in the area, two to three small boats in

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1   addition to Charlie in the vicinity of
2   the Sandettie Lightvessel .
3   Can I have, please, {INQ007602/1} on the screen.
4   It 's the cover page there. If we can turn to
5   {INQ007602/3}, please.
6   So, here you are, explaining to Mr Willows
7   the Valiant is proceeding to Charlie and where it is in
8   relation to the Lightvessel. You're asked whether it is
9   still a Mayday situation at the moment, and you say:
10   "Well, they've told me it's full of water."
11   Who's "they" in those circumstances?
12 A. This, I'm not sure about. This is where I, again,
13   I can't remember everything, however, I may have started
14   coming to these conclusions on my own without
15   the evidence. Again, I have this gut feeling that
16   something isn't quite right and I've obviously
17   considered sinking , taking water. So I don't know
18   whether I've ever had it confirmed, however my thought
19   processes are, if there is something seriously ——
20   you know, no one wants to think worst case scenario, but
21   you've got to consider, you know, the likelihood of it
22   catching fire is very slim because it's a small rubber
23   boat. Yes, there is petrol in it . But actually,
24   the most likely catastrophic would be taking water,
25   sinking, deflating, stuff like that. So I'm maybes

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1   verbalising it, but without having definitive proof to
2   back it up. And this is part of my tasking of —— or
3   getting further information, can someone just tell me
4   what's going on. I've got all these thoughts about what
5   could be going on, and that is the worst scenario you
6   can be in. So it's, I'm sharing ideas with people,
7   possibly to influence a decision or to reinforce my
8   decisions that this is a Mayday situation, it's not
9   quite right, because I can't rationalise that feeling
10   I had from that first phone call.
11 Q. Thank you.
12 A. But I haven't got definitive proof of what the distress
13   of the dinghy was.
14 Q. So you share the information and you fix that
15   information with Mr Willows as well ——
16 A. Yeah.
17 Q. —— your thoughts at the time.
18   You talk about the reason for the Mayday broadcast
19   to get a certain vessel with a French flag on the back
20   of it to attend:
21   "... they've basically completely ignored the Mayday
22   distress call ... it didn't kind of work how I wanted it
23   to, but there was a reason for it."
24   What do you mean by that?
25 A. It was further information. Further information

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1   gathering. You know, anyone who can give us a visual of
2   this vessel or information on it, that's the purpose of
3   the Mayday call. You know, if —— if the Flamant had
4   attended, fantastic, you know. But likewise, that
5   wasn't the only vessel out there.
6 Q. So what you're talking about there is a reason for
7   the Mayday broadcast?
8 A. Yeah.
9 Q. Not a reason for Flamant not attending ——
10 A. Yeah.
11 Q. —— in response?
12 A. Yeah.
13 Q. Understood, thank you.
14   And you say:
15   "Now it looks like they are ... hot—footing it away
16   at 30 knots [so] there is potentially two to three craft
17   ... in the vicinity of the border ..."
18   All right.
19   Then, moving down then, please. So Mr Willows says
20   to you:
21   "... we don't want to call any other assets out just
22   yet ... we'll wait and see what develops."
23   And you say:
24   "That's the dream, isn't it, don't get more than one
25   out."

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1   And Mr Willows says:
2   "Yeah."
3   Did you believe that it was better to have as few
4   assets out as possible?
5 A. This —— this is about managing what limited assets I've
6   got. So that is about, if we can do it with just one
7   asset and keep everything else for what is coming. So,
8   as you said, the Flamant is seen exiting the area to go
9   and do something else, so in my mind's eye, whether
10   the French have told us yet or not, and with
11   the expectation from the intelligence and
12   the forecasting, we are in for a busy day.
13 Q. Yes.
14 A. So it's, if we can do the ones we know about with one
15   vessel and then don't use the next vessel until we know
16   about some more, that's just me trying to be as
17   efficient with my search and rescue assets as possible.
18 Q. Thank you.
19   And you've told us today and you've told us in your
20   witness statement that you knew you had to preserve
21   assets for what was likely to be a busier —— still
22   busier shift the following day. So is it right that you
23   were intentionally minimising the use of assets on
24   24 November?
25 A. I was being as efficient as I possibly could be with my

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1   assets.
2 Q. Thank you.
3   Move on to {INQ007602/4} of this transcript, please.
4   You talk at the top of the page about the helicopter
5   163, and we'll come back to that a little later.
6   Towards the bottom of the page, you do a little
7   rough calculation with the reports that you have and
8   the numbers you've got, 30 and 40, and so your rough
9   calculation is that Valiant would be expected to pick up
10   110 persons from small boats. That would be —— would
11   have been too much for the Valiant; is that right?
12 A. I can't remember the exact capacity count on Valiant,
13   but it was somewhere in the vicinity of 100 to 120
14   persons.
15 Q. So you say it's:
16   "... probably pushing our luck for Valiant."
17 A. Possibly. That is I haven't got definitive numbers. As
18   we've said earlier, I was told 30 people in one phone
19   call, 40 in another. What is the example number? It's
20   do we go 30, 30, 30, that's 90, but it turns out to be
21   50, 50, 50, that is pushing it. So I think it was that
22   mind's eye of until we've got a better understanding of
23   what we've got, we don't know.
24 Q. Would those numbers in that sort of ballpark have been
25   a reason in their own right to task another asset to

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1   this area on that night?
2 A. Not necessarily. It would have been something that was
3   in my forward look, my future planning for it, and
4   again, if another vessel had turned up in roughly
5   the same location with another 40 people, then that
6   would have influenced, yes, it's time for more capacity,
7   more assets.
8 Q. I see. Thank you.
9   We can take that off the screen, please, and I will
10   ask you some questions now about helicopter R163.
11   That's a helicopter, an asset made available by
12   Bristow Helicopters to Coastguard; is that right?
13 A. That's correct, yes.
14 Q. And on this night and on this shift, it was captained by
15   a Christopher Trubshaw. Again, the Inquiry expects to
16   receive evidence from Mr Trubshaw fairly shortly now.
17   In the migrant activity tracker at 0231, David Jones
18   records his plan for the aerial tactical commander to
19   speak to Christopher Trubshaw and to arrange —— this is
20   the plan —— for R163 to be airborne for a period of time
21   between 03:00 and 05:30, and that would give a maritime
22   picture from the air. Were you aware of that plan?
23 A. I am unsure aware of that plan, however I was already
24   considering could we use rotary aircraft to ——
25 Q. I see.

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1 A. —— cover this, what the unfolding picture was, of
2   multiple small craft in quite a close vicinity of each
3   other and the complications of identifying which one's
4   which.
5 Q. The Inquiry understands that R163 was initially tasked
6   by the aerial Tactical Commander, not directly by you;
7   that's right, isn't it?
8 A. I believe so.
9 Q. Thank you.
10   Is it correct, to the best of your recollection,
11   that no one at MRCC informed the aerial Tactical Command
12   about Incident Charlie or the fact that a vessel was
13   thought or might be sinking?
14 A. I can't remember, unfortunately.
15 Q. Presumably then you can't remember either any passing of
16   information that there might be a requirement to search
17   for people in the water?
18 A. I don't remember asking for that requirement, no.
19 Q. Right.
20   You yourself did speak to the captain of R163 at
21   about 0249 hours. We've got a short transcript of that.
22   I don't think we need to look at it, but in that call
23   you set a search area for R163. Do you remember doing
24   that?
25 A. That initial call —— and this is, I'm going to sort of

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1   challenge that comment about search area. It's —— it's
2   a difficult one, because that was actually a patrol
3   area.
4 Q. Yes.
5 A. So I'm not searching for a specific incident per se,
6   what I'm doing is gathering an aerial picture of what's
7   going on. So I set a rectangular box.
8 Q. Yes.
9 A. Which was from, I believe, the Mike Papa Charlie buoy
10   north—eastwards towards the Sandettie Lightvessel,
11   where, from the information I had, most of the small
12   boats were concentrated or they'd been departing from.
13   I think the weather assessment had told us that actually
14   the north—east beaches, so to put that in context,
15   anywhere from the French—Belgian border round to
16   Cap Gris—Nez was going to be favourable first, and then
17   the western beaches, down towards Le Touquet would, as
18   the day progressed, become favourable conditions for
19   launching. So most of the launches were concentrated in
20   the Dunkirk and Calais area to start with.
21 Q. Thank you.
22   So you set your rectangular area ——
23 A. Yeah.
24 Q. —— in that conversation, and you say that was a patrol
25   area?

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1 A. Basically, it was, "Can you go and identify any
2   dinghies, small boats in this area and report back
3   positions, statuses of them".
4 Q. It's probably very obvious to you, Mr Gibson ——
5 A. Yes.
6 Q. —— but what, in these circumstances, is the difference
7   between a patrol area and a search area?
8 A. So a patrol, I have got this from —— this is an area
9   that I need searching, there is no calculated maritime
10   drift, so I'd like you to fly as a patrol. You're not
11   search —— it is a search, but it's not how we ——
12   the parameters are slightly different. So we would do
13   a defined search plan if we knew exactly what we were
14   looking for, where it went in the water, what we
15   estimate its drift to be, size, aspect, things like
16   that. Whereas this is, we're aware of some boats
17   underway and making way. So, as it's known now, we
18   carry out ISR flights, which is intelligence,
19   surveillance and reconnaissance, which is quite an
20   established practice, whether it be civilian or
21   military, and that's effectively what this patrol was
22   going to be. We're aware there is stuff there, we don't
23   know exactly where it is. The search is more around
24   this happened here, two hours have passed, this is where
25   it should end up. So that's what I'm trying to define

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1   by patrol and search.
2   Q. All right.
3   A. So this generally relates to something that is drifting,
4   whereas a lot of these boats are underway and making way
5   and therefore cannot be mathematically modelled to
6   search.
7   Q. Thank you.
8   A. They're powered.
9   Q. So it's slightly more general and it can't be subject to
10   very particular parameters?
11   A. Yes.
12   Q. Yes.
13   A. Generally, when we talk about search in the Coastguard,
14   it is something that has been affected by environmental,
15   meteorological and hydrological conditions, not under
16   its own power.
17   Q. All right. Thank you.
18   Now, the Inquiry is aware that R163 was airborne by
19   0354 hours, and I would like us to look again now at
20   the migrant activity tracker, {INQ000235/7}, please.
21   Thank you.
22   We can see there, against your name and against that
23   timestamping, the fact that R163 is now assigned; is
24   that right?
25   A. Yes, assigned.

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1   Q. Thank you.
2   And that incident reference in lower case, so
3   automatically generated, 41382, that is the incident
4   reference for this migrant activity tracker for
5   the night; is that right?
6   A. Yes, so we would refer to this as a migrant admin log ——
7   Q. Sorry?
8   A. No, no, it's okay, because it is —— no, it is both, but,
9   for us, this is what, like I say, about trackers, we had
10   so many names for trackers that it gets confusing for
11   those looking in from the outside. When you're doing
12   it, day in, day out, it's very easy to use the same name
13   and still know what you're talking about. So, yeah,
14   because I've assigned 163 for this patrol, so it's not
15   to a specific incident, it's doing everything ——
16   Q. Thank you.
17   A. —— that's why it's gone in the admin log.
18   Q. Understood. So you didn't assign or task R163 to
19   Incident Charlie specifically?
20   A. No, because at this point we just wanted to know where
21   everything is and if they could get eyes on and give us
22   updated positions. So obviously, as you've mentioned,
23   getting WhatsApp position is one way. This is our other
24   way. If we can do it from the air, they can give us
25   visual and also course and speed, which then allows us

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1   to plot and predict where boats are going to go.
2   Q. Thank you.
3   Once R163 appears then on this general log, do all
4   entries in relation to R163 remain on this log and this
5   log only?
6   A. Yes.
7   Q. For this tasking?
8   A. Yeah, unless 163 was then assigned to a different
9   incident. So all the time it's assigned to this
10   incident, as you go through, if it's released from this
11   incident, it will show as "released from incident" and
12   a timestamp to that. But any time we update 163's
13   incident card, it's attributed to the admin log.
14   Q. Thank you very much. That's very helpful.
15   Can we take that off the screen, please.
16   Now, at 0352, you spoke again to
17   Christopher Trubshaw. Can we have {INQ008825/1} on
18   the screen, please. Thank you.
19   That's the first page of it. The second page
20   {INQ008825/2}, it's a very short transcript, we can see
21   it there:
22   "... Valiant's on scene of one craft.
23   "She has reported one other craft sighted in
24   the vicinity ... I believe that a search around
25   the Sandettie light vessel as an expanding square, or

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1   a parallel track as you see fit to search for potential
2   other craft in the area."
3   There's —— so now we are in specific search
4   territory; is that right?
5   A. We haven't modelled for a drift, but I've again got this
6   opinion that most of these boats —— so the drift —— if
7   anything had broken down from their initial positions,
8   the drift would be to the north—east, 045 degrees on
9   a compass. So if you've got north, which is 0,
10   everything's going north—east because that's the way
11   the tide's been setting and the wind is blowing them.
12   Q. Thank you.
13   So these references to searching:
14   "... as an expanding square, or a parallel
15   track ..."
16   Is that more detailed information, a more detailed
17   description of a search exercise?
18   A. Yes, so they are internationally recognised IAMSAR
19   search tracks.
20   Q. Search parameters, yes.
21   A. Yes, so basically there's the expanding squares, they
22   start in the centre and work their way out with
23   a gradually lengthening track. The parallel track is
24   where we would fly the long length of the rectangle,
25   turn and then come back down that rectangle. The other

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1   version of that is called a creeping langer head, where
2   they do the short side of the rectangle as it turns.
3   Q. Thank you.
4   And does the IAMSAR manual have something to say
5   about —— or something more precise to say about track
6   spacing and sweep widths depending on what it is that
7   you're looking for?
8   A. Yeah, so every single drifting target has a sweep width,
9   then there is correcting sweep width, which is to do
10   with environmental factors, and, yeah, so there is a ——
11   there is a sweep width and a track —— a track spacing
12   for each conceivable, and I say "conceivable" because,
13   to date, you know, as different maritime equipment
14   changes, you know, we keep pace with the generic and
15   then a specific, and things like that.
16 Q. Yes, of course.
17   And so that's contingent on what it is that's being
18   looked for?
19 A. Very much so, because, again, different things drift at
20   different speeds.
21 Q. Thank you.
22   And so there are different search parameters, for
23   example, relevant when searching for craft, and when
24   searching for people?
25 A. Correct, yes.

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1   Q. Whose decision is it to set search parameters for
2   airborne assets such as R163?
3   A. So that would be with the SMC generally. And, again, in
4   this instance, it's slightly different from what we'd
5   call a traditional maritime search because I'm looking
6   for multiple craft, not just one. Again, I've been told
7   there's two or three craft in the vicinity, so I'm
8   trying to cover all my bases with the one aerial asset
9   I've got. So, again, I'm not telling him to go and look
10   for one specific craft, I'm asking them to conduct
11   a search for all the craft in the area. So if I —— if
12   we took this incident in pure isolation, I know there's
13   a dinghy with 40 people in it that I'm looking for and
14   that's all I have to look for, and that makes it easier,
15   because if I don't find it, I keep looking. The risk
16   with small boats is, if you go searching on a busy
17   night, you will find one, you will find two, and again,
18   then we're into the territory of identifying which one's
19   which.
20   So, at this point, I'm aware of weather —— weather
21   restrictions to the fixed wing aircraft, so, again, it's
22   what can he fly safely for his aircraft to detect. Now,
23   I've said, "This is what we're looking for, we're
24   looking for boats about 8 metres in length, you know
25   what you can detect". And again, weather conditions, he

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1   is —— he's in an aircraft, I'm sat in an Ops room, he
2   needs to tell me his visibility, his flight height,
3   stuff like that. So I'm leaving, "I want you to do
4   a search for boats, can you choose what you think is
5   safest for your aircraft to fly, based on the weather
6   conditions, what you think you can achieve effectively".
7   Q. Thank you.
8   So is this instruction as much detail or as much
9   precision as you felt you could give Mr Trubshaw?
10 A. Yes.
11 Q. Ask you this. The Inquiry hasn't seen any evidence that
12   R163 was told that there were possibly persons in
13   the water by this stage associated with
14   Incident Charlie. To the best of your knowledge, is
15   that right?
16 A. Yeah, that's correct. Again, I'm still unaware of
17   the nature of distress of Incident Charlie. They've
18   told us they're in trouble and need help. I'm still
19   trying to establish is it sinking, is it not. And
20   again, we now are getting multiple other craft in
21   the same vicinity. So we haven't said people in
22   the water, so, yeah, it's not —— that's not cropped up
23   in that decision—making process, because if it's, is it
24   still sinking, it's a rubber dinghy's, a rubber dinghy,
25   and if it's inflated, it's inflated. You know,

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1   a commercial vessel made of steel will sink, so, again,
2   we haven't —— I haven't considered people in the water,
3   it's has the dinghy —— is it just full of water or has
4   it sunk? That's where we're still unsure of the nature
5   of what's going on with this dinghy.
6   Q. And I think you've answered this question already, but
7   if R163 knew that it was looking for people in the water
8   as opposed to a vessel or craft, that would have
9   affected the parameters under which —— pursuant to which
10   they were searching; is that right?
11 A. This is obviously something we discussed with the MAIB.
12   So if we are searching for people in the water,
13   the track spacing is 0.1 of a nautical mile, which is
14   200 yards detection range, basically. But that is for
15   one person in the water. If they're wearing a bright
16   orange life jacket, that dramatically increases as well,
17   you know. So if we're looking for 40 people in
18   the water, that's a much bigger target than just one
19   person in the water. So it would change, however you've
20   got to —— the guidance —— and, again, it's very clear,
21   MAIB said this as well —— a person in the water is 0.1
22   of a —— 0.1 of a nautical mile, one cable, but we're not
23   just looking for one person in the water, there's
24   potentially 40 people. So it's balancing what you know
25   you're looking for with the realistic of there is

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1   multiple people, and we've been told there's
2   life jackets in play as well, which enhances that
3   detection range as well.
4   So it's a very hard thing to subjectively say, "Yeah
5   they should fly that". The downside of flying a very
6   narrow track spacing is you don't cover the area, or as
7   much area as possible. And, again, I know there's other
8   craft that I'd like to have positive positions for who
9   haven't rang us, potentially. Again, we —— we know
10   we've had a lot of phone calls, but we don't know all
11   these craft are actually ringing us; some of them are
12   merrily proceeding along underway, quite content that
13   they will make it safely. So it was that balance of
14   there's multiple incidents and trying to cover all
15   bases.
16 Q. Thank you.
17   All right, can we take that off the screen, please.
18   I'm going to move on to ask you some questions about
19   Valiant and its arrival and its work in relation to
20   three small boats, not Incident Charlie, but three other
21   small boats.
22   The Inquiry knows that the Valiant arrived in
23   the Mayday position, so at the coordinates confirmed at
24   0201 at 0324 that morning. Not finding anything, it
25   then moved in the direction it best estimated the small

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1   boats might have moved in and towards, and we understand
2   that by the time it cleared its mission that
3   evening/that morning, it had embarked three small boats
4   in total by the time it was underway back to the coast.
5   The first then of those small boats was embarked by
6   0434 hours according to the Border Force systems and
7   they gave it their Mike or M number of M957.
8   Can we have, please, on the screen {INQ007578/1}.
9   This is a call record of a conversation between you and
10   the Valiant at 0421 hours. We'll move on to
11   {INQ007578/2}, please. The Valiant calling you,
12   I think; is that right?
13 A. Yes.
14 Q. With a description of the first of the small boats.
15   It's a black rib, black inflatable, and you say:
16   "... I believe this is probably incident Lima ...
17   matches the description [of] a black RIB."
18   And the report you had from the French where there
19   were about 40 people on board.
20   And the Valiant says:
21   "Yeah, that could be the same ... clearly there's
22   a lot of reports, so we'll deal with what we've got."
23   And you say:
24   "We'll work on that potentially being Lima and
25   [we'll] carry ... on [the search] for Charlie ..."

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1   Yes?
2 A. Yes.
3 Q. Take that off the screen, please.
4   Did you in fact identify —— come to identify that
5   first small boat as Incident Lima?
6 A. I can't recall whether I did. However, I've recovered
7   a boat which matches a pretty close description of what
8   I think Lima was identified as in the first place.
9 Q. Thank you.
10 A. So it's —— I can't say for definite without reviewing
11   all my logs, but ——
12 Q. Well, I think, if it helps, we can look at that
13   {INQ00246/1}, please. This is I think the Lima ViSION
14   log. If we look at page {INQ000246/4} of that log, do
15   we see you at 05:27, an entry made by you:
16   "Believe this vessel was picked up by Valiant at
17   0423 ... All migrants recovered and boat marked and
18   abandoned ..."
19   Is that your entry?
20 A. Yes, so I've obviously —— at the time it's recovered,
21   we've recovered a boat and again we're now going to
22   attribute it to information we've previously held. So
23   I think this is —— we've done other stuff since then and
24   I've kind of come to the conclusion that, based on
25   the position that it was reported in, the distance it

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1   had travelled, I've carried out a few things to
2   cross-check the information and confirm to myself I'm
3   content that that would be that boat in question.
4 Q. Thank you.
5   And as we've already seen in your conversation with
6   the Valiant, it wasn't Incident Charlie, as far as you
7   were concerned?
8 A. No, that's correct, yeah.
9 Q. All right. If we take that off the screen, please, and
10   can I have in its place a page from —— and I'm going to
11   call it the tracker, it is the spreadsheet in your
12   language, but I'll call it the tracker —— {INQ006808/1}
13   in its native version, please, and I'm looking for
14   the entry for the 24th. That's right, thank you.
15   So can I see here —— this is the Coastguard tracker;
16   is that right?
17 A. Yes, this is ——
18 Q. Or the Coastguard spreadsheet?
19 A. —— the Excel document that gets referred to as
20   the migrant activity tracker ——
21 Q. Yes.
22 A. —— which is what we use to share the information with
23   other agencies.
24 Q. Thank you.
25   And I think this is it in its form as at 0530 hours

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1   on the morning of 24 November. We can see then ——

2   I think this is the first time that we've looked at

3   this. We can see, in the first column, the alphabetical

4   naming of the migrant vessels. And then, in the second

5   column, the duplicates of those vessels. The third

6   column marked in red or green for resolved or ongoing.

7   The incident report source. The French reference to

8   marry up with the French tracker. The Coastguard's GIN

9   unique identifying number. The Border Force numbers,

10   those Mike numbers. Mobile phones. And then positions.

11   The area for search and rescue, whether in French or UK

12   waters. Some descriptions as to the vehicles and their

13   details. The numbers of persons reported on board.

14   What asset's been tasked. And any further notes. And

15   then a final column for "Outcome".

16   If we look down back to the left—hand columns,

17   please, and we look down for the entry for "Lima", we

18   can see "Juliet" in fact, two lines up from

19   the highlighted, "Juliet" identified as a duplicate of

20   "Lima"; is that right?

21 A. I believe so, from what you've shown me. I can't

22   remember from ...

23 Q. And that's got an "R" marked next to it. Now, is that

24   showing that that incident had been resolved?

25 A. Resolved because we believe it to be a repeat of —— of

1   Lima, basically. That would be why it would be shown as

2   R. As you'll notice, there is zero positional

3   information in there, not really much description. And

4   again, if we went into the ViSION log for —— there's not

5   a GIN for it, which is weird, there should be

6   a Coastguard GIN in there for it —— it would probably

7   give us some information and a rationale for why it was

8   made a repeat of Lima, whether it be the same telephone

9   number or positional information from the —— there would

10   be something to corroborate why we were content it was

11   definitely a duplicate from the outset.

12 Q. I see, because Lima, at this stage, remains marked

13   outstanding in red?

14 A. Yes. I will stipulate that this is not the sole

15   source —— the single source of the truth is ViSION.

16   This was us —— to enable us to share information. So

17   ViSION should have always been updated first and then

18   the tracker second. So that didn't always happen and

19   that is something we've addressed, because ViSION is our

20   legal document for recording information. This is about

21   sharing information with third parties to make everyone

22   else aware who needs to be made aware.

23 Q. Yes, I understand.

24   If we look into the seventh column —— I think my

25   maths is right —— I'm looking for the UK Border Force

1   reference column, and we can see that "M957" has been

2   entered against Incident Charlie in this version of

3   the tracker; do you see that?

4 A. Yes, I do.

5 Q. M957 is the number that should have appeared against

6   Incident Lima; is that right?

7 A. From the ViSION log we've just witnessed, that would be

8   correct, yes.

9 Q. Did you notice, at any time during this shift, that this

10   Mike or M number had been entered against

11   Incident Charlie on this tracker?

12 A. No, I did not.

13 Q. You yourself didn't make that entry?

14 A. I don't believe so. The Mike numbers were generally

15   provided by Border Force MCC or when the staff who were

16   based in the joint control room with Dover came in, they

17   would either pass this information or update it. If

18   you'd like me to give a reason for that, you will see

19   the asset tagged as "VALIANT", because that's what

20   Valiant was going to, we'd actually tagged Valiant to

21   Charlie. So I could understand if someone had seen

22   Valiant was the asset tagged and there was an asset

23   M number provided, that they would go, "Oh, Valiant's

24   with Charlie", and again that would be the conflict of

25   having the Valiant tagged to an incident which it was

1   proceeding to and then coming across a subsequent

2   incident before it got to Charlie.

3 Q. Thank you.

4   Is that effectively your best guess as to how that

5   entry came to be made?

6 A. It is, unfortunately, yeah. The Mike numbers bear ——

7   it's a Border Force reference number. So that is for

8   when they're landed ashore so they can be

9   administratively processed so they know, again, without

10   going too much into the process, they come ashore, their

11   welfare is checked, anything they've got is bagged for

12   evidence, they're interviewed and then they're taken to

13   onward care, and that is just how they identify

14   the different groups of 40 people arriving into

15   the reception centre.

16 Q. Thank you.

17   You've told us this morning that effectively all

18   information regarding Valiant's actions was recorded in

19   the Incident Charlie log because it's to

20   Incident Charlie that Valiant was originally tasked?

21 A. That's correct, yeah.

22 Q. Do you then make a connection between Valiant appearing

23   exclusively on the Charlie log and this error —— entry

24   in error in the tracker?

25 A. Potentially, yes, because whether that information was

1   recorded in Valiant's logs, because it would have been
2   there, and the M number would be Valiant just picked up
3   M957. If someone was updating it, either from afar, or
4   whoever put that information in, could easily look at
5   the log and go, well, that's in Charlie and make that
6   mistake, potentially.
7 Q. Does it follow then that you would agree that there's
8   scope for confusion in that —— arising from that process
9   of recording assets against particular incidents?
10 A. I think it's a limitation of our system and it can cause
11   problems. Again, and this is one of the factors,
12   you know, our system's set up for going to specific
13   incidents, you know, and coming across another incident
14   makes it quite difficult. No different to the police,
15   when they attend a road traffic accident, if they come
16   across another one beforehand, I'm sure it probably
17   causes problems for them in going, "Oh, hang on, that
18   patrol car is now not doing that". So, yes, there is
19   limitations of our system and it would cause confusion.
20 Q. Thank you.
21   If we take that off the screen, please, and I want
22   to ask you about the second small boat that Valiant was
23   dealing with. Can I have {INQ007469/1}, please, on
24   the screen.
25   Now, this is a call or conversation between

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1   Stuart Downs —— not you —— and Valiant. And if we look
2   at {INQ007469/2}, please, we can see that Mr Downs is
3   providing a position, which has been acquired from R163,
4   together with a description of the vessel as being
5   "eight metres long":
6   "... slight ...
7   Perhaps "light":
8   "... grey in colour."
9   And:
10   "Underway heading westerly with 30 [people on
11   board] ..."
12   And R163, we see at the foot of the page, isn't
13   still with the vessel:
14   "They described the vessel as not being in distress
15   ... not being in the immediate need of any assistance.
16   So they're continuing their search to look for other
17   vessels ..."
18   We can take that off the screen now.
19   Valiant was alongside the second small boat then at
20   0520 hours, and they gave that next number, the next
21   Mike number, M958.
22   We've then got a series of very brief communications
23   to look at {INQ001580/1}, please.
24   (Pause).
25   Mr Gibson, I think I can deal with it another way

<div align="center">158</div>

1   without calling documents on the screen.
2   They're communications from the Valiant to
3   Coastguard, a trio of communications relaying
4   information about this second boat that they located.
5   In the first of the calls, 05:58, they say there have
6   been no calls made from the persons on this boat
7   externally to Coastguard.
8   In the second call, at 06:05, they say the people on
9   board this second boat are 31 adult males, so no women
10   and no children.
11   And in the third communication, at 06:07, they say,
12   in fact, perhaps there might have been one call made to
13   Coastguard from this boat.
14   So those are three pieces of information that
15   Valiant has relayed to Coastguard about this second
16   small boat that they've located and they're alongside.
17   At this stage then, thinking about Incident Charlie,
18   this was a boat of whom it was known that the profile of
19   the passengers was a mixed profile; is that right?
20 A. So, sorry, which —— which incident are we ...?
21 Q. Incident Charlie, and we've looked at the Charlie log
22   and we can look at it again, but what had always been
23   consistently reported about Incident Charlie was that
24   there were men and women and children on that boat; is
25   that right?

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1 A. That was the initial report. However, that was never
2   verified, where that report came from, and obviously
3   there is subsequent phone calls with —— with Mubin where
4   he then changes that from being 30 persons on board to
5   40 persons on board, so there is some confusion around
6   the validity of that original evidence, in my mind,
7   because I've had conflicting information and other phone
8   calls where the numbers change.
9 Q. As to numbers, yes, but as to whether the profile was
10   entirely a male population on the boat or whether, as
11   initially reported, it was a profile of men and women
12   and children, there had been no change in that
13   information, had there?
14 A. Not that I'm aware of, from the initial one. However,
15   the —— the phone call which I took from Mubin didn't
16   give a breakdown, it was just a number of persons.
17 Q. And then the boat associated with Incident Charlie was
18   at least believed to be perhaps sinking; is that right?
19 A. It was a consideration, and, again, as we've discussed,
20   that was one of my thoughts. We've also discussed that
21   level of exaggeration, and, again, we haven't come
22   across a boat that's sinking or taking water, we were
23   finding(?) boats that are underway and making way.
24 Q. Had you received —— had Coastguard received any
25   information about Incident Charlie, in fact all evening,

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1   to the effect that the boat was underway, in progress?
2 A. Again, there was nothing to say it wasn't either. There
3   is, I believe, (inaudible) the engine, or they mention
4   the engine in one of the phone calls, but I don't know,
5   I don't think it's audible what they say about
6   the engine and there is a lot of background noise, so to
7   actually hear the engine in the phone call is
8   indistinguishable. So there is nothing that I am
9   presented with which gives me a definitive one way or
10   the other.
11 Q. All right. Well, let's look at it, perhaps, from
12   the other end of the telescope. What is there about
13   the description of this second boat from Valiant that is
14   consistent with the information you'd received about
15   Incident Charlie?
16 A. It's obviously conflicting, and, again, at this point,
17   we have been ongoing with incidents, we are now at 5.20
18   in the morning, did you say?
19 Q. Yes.
20 A. And, again, that information received at 1 o'clock has
21   been superseded by further updates and things like that,
22   so I can't comment on the conflicting information.
23 Q. But it is conflicting information? The information
24   about Valiant small boat 2 and Incident Charlie is
25   conflicting, it's inconsistent; is that right?

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1 A. Yes, it's inconsistent from the initial report to what's
2   been recovered.
3 Q. Right.
4   And then the third and final small boat that Valiant
5   located was identified separately, and correctly, as
6   Incident November; is that right?
7 A. As per my witness —— if that's what's in my witness
8   statement, yes.
9 Q. Thank you.
10   By this time in the morning, you still hadn't had
11   a break; is that right?
12 A. That's correct, yes.
13 Q. Do you remember that you were interviewed internally by
14   the Maritime and Coastguard Agency as part of its
15   internal investigation about this incident?
16 A. Yes, I do.
17 Q. And do you remember saying in the course of that
18   interview that you were, by 4.30 or thereabouts in
19   the morning, getting tired?
20 A. I would say, if anyone who had worked tirelessly, as
21   I had, from my night shift to where I was, physically,
22   as a human being, you are going to become tired.
23 Q. Yes.
24   And do you remember saying in that interview that
25   the initial thought of sinking small boat was gone?

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1 A. I think so, because I hadn't found any evidence of
2   a sinking small boat, and, again, you start to doubt,
3   had you overestimated the level of distress. At this
4   time of small boat crossings, a lot of these boats
5   actually made it all the way to UK beaches and landed on
6   UK beaches. So it's a term we use, in terms of, it's an
7   escaping target. If it is going faster than the search
8   is advancing, these boats could actually make it all
9   the way and get outside of where we're looking for them,
10   as it were, if they were underway and making way.
11 Q. Thank you.
12   And so is it right that by 4.30 or thereabouts you
13   were less concerned than you had been about
14   the potential existence of a sinking small boat?
15 A. Yes.
16 MS LE FEVRE: Thank you.
17   Chair, it's 2.55, but that is a convenient moment to
18   break, if it's convenient for you.
19 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Yes, of course, yes. So we'll have
20   a break.
21 VIDEO HEARINGS MANAGER: I can confirm the cameras are off.
22   (The witness withdrew)
23 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: So we'll come back at 5 past.
24 (2.55 pm)
25   (A short break)

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1 (3.05 pm)
2   (The witness returned)
3 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Yes, well, thank you, Mr Gibson.
4 MS LE FEVRE: Thank you.
5   I want to ask you some questions now arising
6   directly from your witness statement. Can I have on
7   screen, please, {INQ10392/1}, and page 98 {INQ10392/98}.
8   Paragraph 195 then, please. You say —— you've told us:
9   "Regarding which of the three small boats
10   I concluded or believed to be Incident Charlie, I think
11   I must have assumed either consciously or unconsciously
12   that it was the second small boat recovered ... I'm not
13   sure if I could have said [what] I was sure about ... at
14   the time."
15   What do you mean by assuming consciously or
16   unconsciously?
17 A. So I've clearly come to an opinion that this incident
18   has been resolved, and how I've arrived at that opinion,
19   was it a conscious decision of, "Yeah, that's definitely
20   Charlie", or an assumed, "That is probably Charlie", so
21   an unconscious assumption. Consciously, I would say
22   I've got enough variable(?) information; unconsciously,
23   I'm pretty sure. I guess that's what I meant by that.
24 Q. You didn't record that assumption, I think, within
25   the Coastguard logs; is that right?

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1 A. I think, unfortunately, by this point, I had —— again,
2 as we've mentioned, fatigue and tiredness —— omitted.
3 I've had that thought internally and not recorded it as
4 per our Standard Operating Procedures.
5 Q. Can we go to page 96 of the statement and paragraph 191,
6 please {INQ010392/96}. You say —— you tell us in terms
7 here:
8 "I don't think this belief was recorded anywhere in
9 a log ... I had the oral handover ... I probably would
10 have explained the situation [regarding the] ... May Day
11 Relay ... incident CHARLIE and my rationale for thinking
12 that Charlie had been one of the small boats picked up
13 ... but I cannot recall exactly what I said. I do not
14 think I discussed the conclusion with the Maritime
15 Tactical Commander or anyone at JRCC. I do not think
16 I would have thought [that] was necessary."
17 Do you think you told anyone else about that
18 assumption at handover?
19 A. I think, because, obviously, if we look at our incident
20 log for Charlie, I've sort of recorded it as being
21 finished, and I think there is a —— I've said —— and,
22 again, using the Excel document, which is referred to as
23 the migrant activity tracker, we've resolved incidents
24 as we've gone through, and that would have formed part
25 of this one's —— these are —— I would have displayed

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1 the ongoing incidents through to I think it was about
2 Incident Sierra. So the handover would have gone, "I'm
3 content this one's done, content that one's done", and
4 I would have talked at length about what was ongoing and
5 given them a bit of an overview of, "This is what we've
6 recovered so far".
7 Q. Thank you.
8 Can I go back, with apologies, to {INQ010392/98} and
9 to that same paragraph, 195, to the tail end of it,
10 please. You say, picking it up five or six lines from
11 the bottom:
12 "I now know that none of the three boats we
13 recovered were Charlie. However, at the time, I was
14 confident ... we had rescued everyone we had received
15 calls from. If there was even a slight chance that
16 someone hadn't been rescued, I trusted that the ongoing
17 search and rescue operations, which were ... underway
18 when I left at 07:30, would find them."
19 Why were you so confident that that which was
20 ongoing in respect of search and rescue would find
21 Charlie?
22 A. So, obviously, as I've just —— as I've said earlier,
23 that small boats SAR and what we call our "routine
24 general SAR" is different. So when we go out to an
25 incident and we recover it, that's it done. There's no

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1 further cause for us to be out there doing any sort of
2 monitoring. We're in a period of sustained good weather
3 and highly —— well, we've now entered that point which
4 would have been red on the Deveran report, which is
5 "highly likely", so sea states of less than 10 cm, so
6 very slight.
7 We are going to be out there with assets and planes
8 dealing with the day stuff coming through, so this area
9 has now been saturated, or, in my mind, going forwards,
10 this area is going to be saturated by French assets
11 escorting small boats in their Search and Rescue Region,
12 monitoring them, our aviation assets are going to be up
13 during the day. So there is an ongoing SAR element
14 throughout the course of the day, and if there's
15 anything we have missed, it should be picked up through
16 the course of the day, because there is proactive
17 ongoing search and rescue.
18 And as I said earlier, the prime example of that is,
19 we've gone looking for Charlie, but we found
20 Incident Lima, and again, that would be true of anything
21 else. Say a lifeboat goes out from Dover for that
22 requirement and they come across another incident, they
23 can deal with that. So they're going to come across
24 stuff because there is assets going to be going out all
25 day going forwards.

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1 Q. Thank you. So it's the generality, is it right, of
2 ongoing activity, general ongoing search and rescue
3 activity?
4 A. Yeah, it's really weird. So as we've got the migrant
5 admin log, that's the overview of what assets we're
6 assigning to things. We have individual incidents, but
7 the whole day's almost like an incident in itself. We
8 know there's going to be sustained search and rescue
9 activity required for the whole day, so it's —— there's
10 individual incidents, because that's how our system
11 works, and an overall picture of air search and rescue.
12 Q. All right. Thank you.
13 So going back to your assumption, conscious or
14 unconscious, that Charlie was the second boat
15 recovered —— and we can take the statement off
16 the screen now —— the Incident Charlie ViSION log wasn't
17 closed during the night shift, so it wasn't closed by
18 the time you left; is that right?
19 A. That's correct, yes.
20 Q. The Coastguard shared tracker wasn't updated during
21 the night shift to show that the Charlie incident had
22 been resolved. It had had the M957 number entered next
23 to it, but it wasn't showing as resolved. And you've
24 told us, as we've just seen, that the fact that Charlie
25 wasn't closed on ViSION doesn't mean that you were

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1   uncertain about what had happened to it but, is this
2   right, you didn't have sufficient information to close
3   it?
4   A. So what would happen is, we've had multiple phone calls,
5   and the easiest way, once you've identified what their
6   multiples are, is to make it a repeat of that incident
7   so all that information is captured centrally under
8   the one incident. So we are leaving it open because,
9   again, what used to happen was, we'd have loads of open
10   incidents and we then just have to close each one
11   individually, and they did relate to things, so this was
12   an admin perspective of: that could relate to that. So
13   it was, again, about admin and times. You know, at this
14   point in time, we've got ongoing search and rescue, and
15   actually closing an incident which is complete involves
16   a summary to say who did what to when and who, and then
17   obviously all of our post—incident statistics. So,
18   again, it's quite an administrative function, and again,
19   that was left to the end of the day in case there was
20   any other informations or incidents that could be linked
21   and then made it to a tidy reply(?).
22   Q. So what information specific to Incident Charlie were
23   you waiting for to allow you to close the Charlie log
24   before you went off shift?
25   A. I can't comment on that, but basically my point is there

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1   may have been other incidents which were calls from
2   Charlie which we couldn't identify as being Charlie
3   because there was no information the same, but they'd
4   originated the same sort of time, things like that. So
5   when we get calls with —— so there will be 999 calls we
6   get, which is, "Help, I'm in the water, I need
7   the Coastguard", and that's the limit of the information
8   we get, and you've got to —— you can't action —— there's
9   not an actionable position, but we can't just disregard
10   that someone has rang and said, "Can you help me". So
11   there's that investigation piece to go on as well, and,
12   again, there's that, sort of, it happened when we were
13   receiving multiple calls in this area where we know
14   mobile phone coverage is limited.
15   So, again, it's trying to tie up all the ones where
16   we have very limited information for and tie them to
17   incidents, and, again, if there's any correlating
18   numbers and things like that. So Charlie would have
19   been left open so people could easily go in and find
20   that information on ViSION rather than having to search
21   for the incident number and corroborate any numbers.
22   Q. What does closing an incident actually mean, though?
23   What does it signify?
24   A. Closing means we've completed all the actions and done
25   our closing statements, our information, and then it ——

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1   then it disappears from active incidents on ViSION. So
2   ViSION shows all your open incidents on a day—to—day
3   basis, and once they're closed they disappear from that
4   active screen, and then you've got to run a filter to
5   show what you're looking for, so either all incidents
6   open in the last seven days, there's various filters you
7   can run, but it's not front and centre on the screen,
8   you'd actually have to physically go looking for that.
9   Q. And unless and until an incident is actually closed, it
10   remains something requiring the attention of human
11   resource, doesn't it?
12   A. So an incident —— there's a couple of stages of
13   the incident. So there's unserviced, which means it's
14   open with no actions taken. It then goes to an open
15   category, when we're taking positive SAR action. When
16   we release all the assets from an incident, if it's
17   completed, it then goes to finished, and there's —— it
18   goes "U", "O", "F" and "C", in a little box at the top,
19   and that shows you that the incident's finished but just
20   not closed. So it shows that it's finished and it's
21   probably either, like I said earlier, awaiting units
22   returning to base, and their confirmation that them SAR
23   units are safe and well, and then the closure action
24   would be taken.
25   Q. I see.

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1   So I think let's look again at the Charlie log. Can
2   we have on screen, please, {INQ000237/1}, and if we can
3   pick it up, please, at {INQ000237/13}, I think. This is
4   the last page of entries, is this right, before you go
5   off shift? We can see the last entries are all made by
6   Mr Downs, starting at 06:31, running through to 06:46,
7   and that's showing us that the Valiant is cleared from
8   the incident; is that right?
9   A. As of, yeah, 06:46:
10   "Status changed from ... On Scene to ... Called."
11   So that actually means it's been re—tasked somewhere
12   else, potentially, with the "Called".
13   Q. Thank you.
14   And the log continues to run for another page, so we
15   can look at that page and look at {INQ000237/14}, with
16   the incident being closed at 15:21 on that afternoon.
17   Where does the Charlie incident show as finished?
18   A. So if you go back to page 1 {INQ00237/1} —— again,
19   the printed transcript is very different to ——
20   Q. Of course.
21   A. —— how ViSION displays it. So on page 1 ——
22   Q. The very first page of the log.
23   A. Yeah. Well, it would normally —— so it's really hard to
24   explain it. On ViSION, our list comes up, you have
25   the GIN top left, the date, the distress phase,

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1   the incident type, so in this case "VAID", vessel
2   appears in difficulty, and then there's a bit on
3   the right—hand side which has the bit which shows
4   whether it's closed or finished.
5 Q. I see.
6 A. Unfortunately, the way ViSION —— when we print out, it
7   doesn't show it as well as it does in the live version
8   when it's an active incident.
9 Q. Thank you.
10   If we take that off the screen and have back your
11   witness statement at page 96 {INQ010932/97} and at
12   paragraph 193, and almost exactly halfway down that
13   paragraph you tell us, consistent with what you've just
14   told us:
15   "The closure of incidents is an administrative task
16   ... with ongoing SAR operations I deemed it not safety
17   critical to close the incident before I left that
18   morning."
19   What do you mean by "not safety critical"?
20 A. So "safety critical" is anything that would have
21   the chance to endanger life. By not closing that
22   incident, if I dedicated resource to close that incident
23   I could be detracting resource from carrying out SAR
24   operations. So, basically, it being open still isn't
25   going to affect anyone's life, but me committing

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1   resource to closing it could endanger life.
2 Q. Thank you.
3   I want to ask you —— take that off the screen,
4   please. I want to ask you a little about the process
5   for terminating search and rescue. There was a Standard
6   Operating Procedure for that, for terminating migrant
7   SAR. It's contained in the key SOP {INQ000428/1}, so if
8   we could have that up on screen again, please, and if we
9   can move through that to I think {INQ000428/5} —— sorry,
10   page 6, please {INQ000428/6}, "Termination of SAR". So:
11   "In order to determine if the distress incident
12   should be downgraded, the following information should
13   be received."
14   Information about the vessel, yes?
15 A. Yes.
16 Q. Information about persons on board, and for that I think
17   we'll need to go to the next page {INQ000428/7},
18   information about life saving equipment and conditions
19   and so on.
20   And then in the middle of this page, "SAR
21   Termination":
22   "SAR can be terminated where reliable information is
23   received that [an] emergency no longer exists."
24   Firstly, when was SAR formally terminated in respect
25   of Incident Charlie?

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1 A. That I cannot give you a definitive time on.
2 Q. Was it during your shift or after your shift finished?
3 A. If we're going on what classes as a termination,
4   the case being closed would be effectively the cessation
5   of search and rescue.
6 Q. So search and rescue didn't formally close until
7   3 o'clock or so the following day?
8 A. Potentially, yes.
9 Q. Are you able to explain to us whether there was reliable
10   information, before you finished your shift, that
11   the emergency for Incident Charlie no longer existed?
12 A. Was there reliable information, I can only base on what
13   I knew and not assumptions made. So from the initial
14   positions given, the drift modelling that I calculated
15   from what I expected the vessel to drift, vessels were
16   located in very similar positions of where I'd expect to
17   find vessels. The Valiant searched using various
18   different means, radar, visual searches, and rescue 163
19   conducted a thorough expanding square search
20   encompassing the whole area I expected the vessels to be
21   found.
22   On completion of that search, nothing was found, so
23   therefore I made a decision that the —— based on that
24   search, which was —— I can confirm the aircraft ——
25   the quality of the search, that that emergency situation

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1   that I believed to be there no longer existed, because
2   we hadn't located any vessels in distress in the area we
3   expected to find any vessels in distress.
4 Q. So is this right, the reliable information consisted of
5   the nil return from R163?
6 A. Yes, that would be my —— you know, I've gone looking for
7   a vessel in distress and I haven't found a vessel in
8   distress.
9 Q. Do you think your conscious or unconscious assumption
10   that Charlie was the second boat located by Valiant
11   factored into that information?
12 A. Yes, because, again, I believe that second boat was in
13   a position where I'd have expected Charlie to be.
14 Q. So based on position and position only?
15 A. Yeah, so the sort of 2 o'clock position, and if they had
16   stopped moving for whatever reason and were just
17   drifting with the tide and the weather.
18 Q. Do you think it's right, with hindsight, that search and
19   rescue was formally terminated for Incident Charlie?
20 A. With the benefit of hindsight, there's lots of
21   possibilities, and with the benefit of hindsight, no,
22   however, it is very difficult to make a positive
23   identification with the information we're provided.
24 Q. Thank you. We can take that document off the screen,
25   please.

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1   Then to handover. You've told us a little bit about
2   this already. Your shift ended at 07:30. It ended
3   without you having taken a break at any time for
4   the last 12 hours or so. Before your shift ended,
5   Richard Cockerill joined you in the SAR operations room
6   at MRC Dover. What role was he carrying out when he
7   joined you?
8 A. So, yeah, Richard Cockerill is also an SMC and
9   a Team Leader, and he joined the operations rule ——
10   room, and I'm going to put this, as a Coastguard
11   operational officer. He was an asset to my team, he
12   could take direction, or, if required, I could have
13   asked him to take control, as an SMC, of a particular
14   role. Again, you generally have an SMC leading
15   the room, and then obviously other people can be SMC
16   qualified, but you have to have someone doing the shots.
17   And, again, he could have picked up SMC for certain
18   incidents going forwards, however, he came in at
19   5 o'clock and we discussed that I had a good overall
20   picture of what was going on, I briefed him on what was
21   going on, so he was fulfilling a role of call—taking,
22   information—gathering, analysis.
23 Q. Do you know, can you remember, what if anything you
24   briefed him about in respect of Incident Charlie?
25 A. I can't, unfortunately, no.

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1 Q. At this stage, at 05:00, Valiant had located the first
2   small boat but not the second small boat. Do you think
3   the ongoing situation with Incident Charlie was an
4   important matter to brief to a new team member?
5 A. So he would have been briefed on ongoing incidents
6   coming in and what Valiant was doing in its location.
7   So there would have been that overall brief of: we've
8   got ongoing SAR, make yourself aware of the incidents,
9   Charlie, Delta, Echo, things like that. So he would
10   have been briefed that we had ongoing incidents and to
11   make himself aware.
12 Q. Was Incident Charlie, as it had been described to you
13   and taking into account all that you've said about
14   the need to assess and check information, but was
15   Incident Charlie the most serious incident with which
16   you were dealing that evening?
17 A. From, as the night progressed, the lack of credible
18   information about what that gut feeling I had was, it
19   did diminish as we started to deal with more and more
20   boats, and again, that consistency of the boats being
21   underway, making way powered, it unfortunately detracted
22   from whether there was a serious situation or not with
23   Charlie, and it became a part of maybes it was an
24   exaggerated case and it's just come to (inaudible).
25 Q. It's James Crane, I think, who comes in to take over

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1   from you formally, to take over ——
2 A. That's correct, yes.
3 Q. —— the whole shift from you at 7.30 in the morning. Do
4   you think that you gave a detailed oral handover to
5   Mr Crane when he arrived?
6 A. Again, we would have used a PowerPoint document to cover
7   off ongoing planned flights, problems in the Ops room,
8   and then, from what I recollect, I believe I would have
9   given him a handover of all the ongoing SAR, and an
10   overview of the SAR we carried out and completed.
11 Q. Is it right —— you've told the Inquiry this in your
12   witness statement —— that you raised no particular
13   concerns in relation to Incident Charlie because you
14   believed by then it had been recovered; is that right?
15 A. That's correct. I believed it had been recovered, so
16   therefore I had no further concerns.
17 Q. You told him to keep an eye out, though, for
18   Incident Charlie. What did that mean?
19 A. So, basically, we had, as I believe it is in
20   the tracker, the spreadsheet, there is up to about
21   Incident Sierra, and again, we haven't had definite
22   positive confirmation of each boat being the specific
23   boat. We're saying, you know, we're pretty sure we've
24   got it, but obviously it could —— it could have escaped
25   us. So this is the belief that, obviously, some of

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1   these boats are underway and making way, and that was
2   the first one to reach UK waters that we were made aware
3   of by the French, and it could have continued on. That
4   north—easterly drift, whether it's under power or
5   drifting, would alter their course. If they're heading
6   a westerly course and the tide's setting north east,
7   they are actually in fact going to be going north west
8   and carry on.
9   So they could have completely gone, again, depending
10   on the speed. So most small boats achieve a speed of
11   approximately 4 to 5 knots, about 6 miles an hour for
12   those in a non—nautical sense, so in an hour they will
13   travel up to five miles across the sea. If they've
14   travelled in a north—westerly direction where we're not
15   expecting them, they could have quite conceivably
16   transited through the area we were sending Valiant, and
17   without that aerial picture, it's hard to maintain.
18 Q. What did you expect James Crane to do with your
19   instruction request to him to keep an eye out for
20   Charlie?
21 A. Again, it would be just to be aware, you know, if you
22   get an outlying, shall we say, report of a small vessel,
23   so from where the Sandettie Lightvessel is, in a sort of
24   westerly —— north—westerly direction is
25   the Goodwin Sands, so that's an area of water that dries

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1   out, and again it is getting further and further away
2   from the historically known places where migrants
3   transited. So if he'd had a report of a small vessel
4   north of the east Goodwin Lightvessel, it would have
5   been, "Don't discount that as being a false report, that
6   could be a vessel, if we've had one escape through where
7   we think they should be". So, again, it was giving him
8   just a forward look and just to consider the unexpected
9   almost.
10 Q. Do you think your handover to Mr Crane in relation to
11   Incident Charlie was sufficient?
12 A. Yes, so, because I believed it had been recovered.
13 Q. And in relation to your assessment throughout the night
14   of information received in calls from small boats, is it
15   right that you received no specific training or guidance
16   about the possibility of exaggeration in those calls?
17 A. I don't recall any specific training about exaggeration.
18   However, it is something we were known and there was, as
19   I say, websites which the migrants were using, which we
20   were aware of, which said say this, say that, because it
21   will expedite the rescue.
22 Q. Did you in fact receive instruction/guidance that
23   calls/information should be taken at face value?
24 A. Again, part of Coastguard training is gathering
25   the information, assessing the information. So, again,

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1   can they —— you know, if you ask the same question
2   twice, do you get the same answer? If that information
3   changes, you've got to make a decision on what that
4   information is. As per, if you want to take Charlie,
5   for instance, "we're finished, we're finished", we don't
6   know what that actually meant at the time. You know, we
7   are —— they're using words, but with no real basis.
8   We're all going to die is, unfortunately, not very
9   specific in what's actually going on in a situation. So
10   it is very hard, knowing there is a language barrier and
11   trying to ascertain what is factual and what is not
12   factual.
13 MS LE FEVRE: Thank you.
14   Chair, I've come to the end of the questions on my
15   questions for Mr Gibson. Thank you.
16 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Thank you very much.
17   Mr Gibson, thank you very much indeed. Thank you
18   for your witness statement, thank you for all your
19   evidence today. It's been extremely helpful to
20   the Inquiry. I know it's been difficult for you, but
21   I very much appreciate it. So thank you very much.
22 MS LE FEVRE: Thank you.
23 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: So we shall now end the proceedings and
24   resume tomorrow.
25 VIDEO HEARINGS MANAGER: I can confirm the cameras are now

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1   off.
2   (The witness withdrew)
3 (3.34 pm)
4   (The hearing adjourned until 10.00 am on Thursday,
5   6 March 2025)

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