

Small boats

Key points for the Minister to make.

- We are appreciative of the good working relationship between HM Coastguard and the French Coast Guard. The teams are working in the Channel in extremely challenging circumstances, and we know that all of them are doing everything they can to save lives. It is vital that we protect that good operational cooperation from any of the politics and media pressures.
- We are both facing the aftermath of the tragic deaths in the Channel last year. Both the UK and French have duties under Article 2 of ECHR, and it is important that we cooperate. There is already an agreement for information exchange between our police agencies in support of the French criminal investigation, but we are also seeking sharing of information in return for our safety investigation by the UK Marine Accident Investigation Branch. Offer to write with more details.
- Welcome the new agreement reached between UK and France to strengthen security at ports to help clamp down on illegal entry and detect and prevent small boat crossings.

Background briefing:

- In 2021, there were over 51,000 Channel crossing attempts by migrants using small boats, of which over 23,000 were prevented. This was treble the number compared to 2020, which saw over 15,500 attempts made and over 7,000 crossings prevented.
 - So far in 2022, over 29,500 crossings have already been prevented, nearly 65% more than to this point in 2021.
 - UK-French Coastguard cooperation arrangements are set out in the Mancheplan agreement which is due to be refreshed over coming months.
 - MAIB have made repeated attempts to gather information from the French authorities to support their investigation in the 24 November channel deaths, to no avail, despite significant information from the French police having been leaked to the French media. The French magistrate is so far refusing to release information. **Public Interest/Operational Sensitivity**
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- The new French deal is worth more than 7.2million euros and will see the numbers of officers in northern France increase by 40% over the coming months. Specialist UK officers will also be embedded with their French counterparts, which will help to disrupt crossings and clamp down on people smugglers.
 - The new agreement lays the foundations for deeper UK-French co-operation to tackle illegal migration and marks the next step for our close operational partnership.

