

Migrant Incident Activity – Wednesday 4th July 2021

Background, Observations, Risks and Recommendations

Name MLPI, Clandestine Operations Liaison Officer (COLO)

Background:

1. On Friday 30th July a 'Gold Call (Expanded)' was convened by Dan O'Mahoney 'Owing to the high likelihood that from Sunday onwards there will be a high number of arrivals after a period of no arrivals.'

The lack of migrant activity had been due to poor weather in the Channel over the previous day which prevented the Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) successfully launching migrant vessels from the beaches along the French coastline.

Previous periods of inactivity had always been followed by a higher level of crossings as the OCGs attempted to clear their backlog.

Although Monday 2nd August saw minimal activity within the Channel, the latest Met Office forecast and observation of Windy App (the preferred tool available to the OCGs) indicated that there would be a definite increase on Tuesday 3rd August with an expected peak on Wednesday 4th August, before a slightly lower crossing rate on Thursday 5th August. After an initial assessment (Monday) by the Met Office of 'Likely Crossings' (Amber) for both Tuesday and Wednesday, a later forecast (Tuesday) amended Wednesday's assessment to 'Highly Likely' (Red).

Therefore, all indications were that there was sufficient credible intelligence and information (from Monday morning) to support the prediction that from Tuesday to Thursday MRCC Dover, the Joint Control Room and the Tug Haven were going to experience an increased workload over a protracted period.

This prediction was proven with Tuesday witnessing 17+ incidents, Wednesday 41+ incidents and Thursday 22+ incidents.

Observations:

Before listing my observations in relation to our response to incidents on Wednesday 4th July 2021, I'd like to give my overall impression of how migrant incidents generally develop as a pattern of activity over 5 phases:

Phase 1 - Initial information Gathering; Normally via Op EOS flights and access to the French Migrant Tracker.

Phase 2 - Migrant Vessel Tracking; Generally achieved through use of positions established from the French Migrant Tracker, observation on C-Scope of French

OFFICIAL - SENSITIVE

Warships or CG vessels, C-Scope radar targets, Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) sorties and reports from commercial and private vessels transiting the Dover Straits.

Phase 3 - Interdiction, Search & Rescue/Recovery; Achieved via the tasking and coordination of both Border Force Units (BFU) and SAR declared & additional facilities to vessels identified in Phase 2.

Phase 4 – 999 Calls and Beach Landings; Normally occurs once migrant vessels know they are in UK waters and then use prepared 'scripts' to contact multiple emergency services (often from the same vessel), to request immediate assistance due to 'vessel sinking,' 'critically ill individuals,' 'loss of engine in the TSS,' etc.

This 999 activity can occur alongside the 'uncontrolled' beach landing of any migrant vessel that has gone undetected up to now.

Phase 5 – Review and Completion; Achieved by review and comparison of all (French, HMCG, Border Force and Immigration Enforcement Migrant Trackers) alongside VISION logs and discussion with all those actively involved in tasking, coordination and information gathering/processing.

Delays or ineffective actions in the earlier phases will lead to greater negative impacts in the later stages.

Specific Observations from Wednesday 4th August 2021

1. Despite repeated requests from MRCC Dover, once the French Migrant Tracker was finally shared (at approx. 06.30 DST), it already contained 23+ incidents entered within it.
2. The MRCC Day watch for SAR was made up of 1 x qualified Maritime Operations Officer (MOO) and 2 x MOOs that were under training (this was the same watch that had handled migrant incidents on the previous day 3rd August).
3. The SMC for the day was remotely located at MRCC Humber (this was the same SMC that coordinated the response to the migrant incidents on the previous day 3rd August).
4. As the 'apparent' number of migrant vessels in distress within the UK SRR increased (particularly during the 999 phase), there was an obvious (and understandable) loss of effective communication with the remote SMC which had consequences to shared situational awareness and joint understanding of risk.

OFFICIAL – SENSITIVE

(v1.0 20210806)

INQ007279/2
INQ007279_0002

OFFICIAL - SENSITIVE

Evidence:

Whilst attending a 10-minute Aerial Tasking meeting I witnessed another four Distress Phase Incidents being created based upon 999 calls (many on review, from the same vessel).

The tasking and arrival of a SAR(H) asset resulted in a UAS having to leave its task of shadowing an unaccompanied migrant vessel due to de-confliction, with this migrant vessel then making an uncontrolled landing at Dungeness Power Station.

A migrant vessel (with 40+ occupants) was left for over two for hours with only a single Border Force jet-ski in company after a request for support from Ramsgate ALB was declined by the SMC as it would leave no ALB available for response along the North side of the coastline.*

**This decision was quite understandable given the migrant vessel was in a reasonably stable state and a BFU was present. However, at this time (and for the foreseeable future) all other RNLI and BFU vessels were committed to rescue/recoveries and any deterioration in the migrant vessel's status could have resulted in persons in the water with no asset available on-scene for rescue.*

Once the Ramsgate ALB was finally tasked, it suffered engine failure and was taken of service.

5. It was clear that available resources were becoming stretched with several conducting secondary (before returning to shore) or multiple taskings (after their initial deployment). Often there were no available assets to cover the number of 'apparent' distress incidents that were being logged.
6. Due to the loss of situational awareness and effective communications identified in item 4 above, the remote SMC elected to stand down* and a support cell with a new SMC was stood-up at the JRCC.

**Again, this decision was quite understandable and undoubtedly the right thing to do and avoided further mixed messages to the team of MOOs at MRCC Dover. After a briefing from the MRCC and JCR, the new SMC at the JRCC focussed their efforts on reviewing the open incident narratives, the HMCG Incident Migrant Tracker and analysing where there were overlaps and/or duplication.*

There were a number of conversations between the SMC and COLO after their appointment which assisted in an increase of shared situational awareness, appreciation of risk and ability to reduce incident alerts levels and numbers.

OFFICIAL – SENSITIVE

(v1.0 20210806)

OFFICIAL - SENSITIVE

7. The MOOs involved in the SAR response at MRCC Dover were witnessed to be struggling* with the amount of information coming in, the logging of the information, the analysis of this data and communication with the remote SMC.

**There was genuine concern for the welfare of those officers involved in the SAR response, with no adequate time available for rest, comfort or meal breaks.*

These are not new observations (some being raised by Border Force colleagues), where previous 'red days' have seen staff at MRCC Dover displaying signs of tiredness bordering on exhaustion with a consequent drop in performance. This is particularly apparent when there have been multiple 'red and/or amber days' with the same team (often with MOOs under training) having to manage the SAR response.

Risks:

From the observations above, I would expect most risks to be apparent. However, I have listed (what I believe to be) the critical ones below:

1. Loss of organisational reputation.
2. Staff retention, welfare and morale.
3. Loss of life at sea from ineffective/inadequate preparation and/or response.
4. Failure to recognise/or declare a Major Incident when the criteria have been met*.

**The definition of Major Incident is: An event or situation with a range of serious consequences which require special arrangements to be implemented by one or more responder agency.*

5. Inability to adequately defend the organisation at any subsequent investigation, inquest or enquiry which focuses on post-incident reviews and/or lessons learnt.

OFFICIAL – SENSITIVE

(v1.0 20210806)

Recommendations based on the above:

Again, the following list is non-exhaustive, but these are those (that I believe) should be seriously considered as a priority:

1. The presence of an SMC physically based at MRCC Dover for all 'amber and red days.'
2. Sufficient trained personnel at MRCC Dover for all 'amber and red days' to support the SMC.
3. Conducting adequate preparation and resourcing when there is credible intelligence and/or information to indicate that a 'amber and/or red day' is likely.
4. The implementation of SOPs and Protocols that are tested, trained, exercised and regularly reviewed.
5. The implementation of migrant specific post-incident reviews both internally (and with partner agencies) to ensure that lessons are learnt and new strategy and/or tactics can be developed.
6. Welfare support for staff that are exhibiting any signs of stress, tiredness and/or a drop in performance due to repetitive exposure to 'amber and red days.'
7. The proportionate and careful use of 'broadcast action' when dealing with multiple migrant incidents in distress and 'broadcast actions' which can be focussed on specific vessels by using C-Scope/AIS.
8. Early access to the French Migrant Tracker can ensure that the Ops Room aren't overwhelmed with information immediately and have sufficient time to assess the data. This was apparent when Thursday's (5th August) day started with 7 incidents on the French tracker as opposed to 23 incidents on Wednesday.
9. The creation of one UK Migrant Incident Tracker which all parties (HMCG and BF) can access and input into.