

Witness Name: Richard Cockerill  
Statement No.: 1  
Exhibits: [RC/01 – RC/30]  
Dated: [31/10/2024]

## THE CRANSTON INQUIRY

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### WITNESS STATEMENT OF RICHARD COCKERILL

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I, Richard Cockerill, Team Leader (Delta Watch), Search and Rescue ("SAR"), HM Coastguard Operations, at the HM Coastguard, Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC) UK, Unit 12, Kites Croft Business Park, Fareham, Hampshire, PO14 4LW, will say as follows:-

#### Introduction

1. I make this statement on behalf of His Majesty's Coastguard ("HM Coastguard" or "HMCG") in response to a witness evidence request dated 30 July 2024.
2. The matters contained in this statement are either known to me, or are ones which I believe to be true, (in which case I have specifically said so), or which are derived from records retained by HMCG. Any records to which I have referred, I have had access to and believe them to be true.
3. I attach to my Witness Statement an index of the Exhibits to which I refer in my statement.

4. I understand that this statement will be evidence before the Inquiry and may be published on the Inquiry's website, disclosed to full participants to the Inquiry, and other witnesses as the Inquiry deems necessary.

### **Role and responsibilities**

5. I joined HMCG in April 2012 when I was appointed as a Coastguard Watch Assistant ("CWA"). In comparison to the structure today, this was a grade lower than a Maritime Operations Officer ("MOO"), but the role and duties were very similar. At that time, the Maritime Search and Rescue ("MSAR") qualification was available as a National Vocational Qualification ("NVQ"), and a mandatory qualification for this role. I attained the MSAR (Foundation) whilst I was a CWA and the MSAR (Intermediate) when I was a Watch Officer. The qualifications tested my knowledge and application of a number of essential skills, including navigation, map and chart work, communications (including the operation of radios), understanding weather forecasts and the influence it could have on SAR missions on land and at sea, including surface synoptic observations ("SYNOP") charts, the effect of high and low pressures and the passage of North Atlantic fronts.
6. The role of CWA included taking emergency '999' calls, recording weather reports, updating situational awareness reports to allow colleagues to make command decisions and task assets, and acting under the direction of the Watch Officer (equivalent of the current rank of Senior Maritime Operations

Officer ("SMOO")). Any person employed as a CWA was not authorised to make decisions.

7. As a CWA I was trained and assessed as competent in search and rescue ("SAR") principles which included navigation, communications and effective questioning of callers in order to gather as much relevant information as possible, in order to assist in any incident we would respond to. Information gathering was one of the fundamental SAR skills taught to CWAs and was based on what was called the 'six W's'. These were all designed to assist in ensuring the effective coordination of any SAR mission and ensuring the right assets were tasked, based on the information we were provided with.

8. I have set out the 'six W's' below in the order of priority which I personally apply them when dealing with calls received in the Ops room. Whilst I have set these out in a priority order, this is not a prescribed format and we will record and react to the information as it is received. Most of the relevant information is recorded within the first few minute of any call, with further questions and details being captured where those reporting the incident are not familiar with their surroundings.

a. Where – what is the location of the incident?

This is critical information as without a location, we cannot begin to coordinate a response.

Determination of a location can be derived from a variety of sources depending on whether we are speaking with partner agencies or members of the public. Some phones will automatically send a location

to emergency services if the phone is registered in the UK and has the Emergency Location Service ("ELS") turned on.

Whilst not an exhaustive list, we would typically receive the following location indicators: a 'lat & long' (latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates), a grid reference, descriptions of landmarks, vessels, oil rigs or other fixed objects e.g. buoys whilst at sea which could be used to identify a search area, the use of flares or other distress signals and WhatThreeWords. Where these are not possible, effective questioning is deployed, e.g. a caller might tell you they are on a beach, but not know which one. Questions such as 'what town are you in', 'which car park did you park in/ where did the bus / taxi drop you off', 'which café did you visit before going to the beach' can be used together with local knowledge or internet searches to identify a likely location.

Understanding the location may also allow other assets to be considered in the immediate response; the English Channel is one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world where HMCG is able to send Mayday relays requiring ships and vessels in the vicinity to render assistance.

b. Who – how many persons are involved?

It is important to understand the scale of the incident in order to effectively coordinate any rescue attempt in order to ensure that both suitability and capacity is assessed and deployed.

c. What – what is the situation and how is it developing?

Having established the location and size of the incident, the next important factor is to understand what it is so that we may proactively respond to it. Many of the 'W's' overlap in relation to their significance to



our response. A short description summarising the incident allows anyone accessing the incident to immediately understand the scene and monitor the response, updating the SAR plan and required assets as the incident may develop, including escalation and de-escalation.

d. When – when did the incident start or when was it reported?

This relates both to time and timescales.

The time an incident is occurring is an important factor as it can influence the SAR response. Examples include seasonal influences where HMCG experiences a higher demand in SAR responses during the summer months, as more people enjoy the coastal resorts and recreational activities. The coordination of responses can be limited by which assets and resources are available at the time depending on weather conditions and other taskings. In contrast the darker and quieter months in winter and often adverse weather conditions often produce a lower demand, but the weather and restricted light present different challenges.

The time of day may affect SAR missions due to the available light or whether there are other assets or vessels in the area which might be able to assist, including civilian vessels.

Timescales are also important as the passage of time between the initial observation and the report being received can affect a SAR mission. It has been my experience that some witnesses are either not able to report a matter, or choose not to report something until sometime later for example their mobile phone battery or signal was insufficient, the weather required them to take shelter etc. Understanding any delay in the report being received can allow us to calculate where any search

area may have moved to in relation to tidal flows etc, if the incident is at sea. Timescales can also assist us in understanding how long a person has been exposed to the situation.

Within the context of small boat crossings ("SBC"), the French equivalent of the JRCC, Centre régional opérationnel de surveillance et de sauvetage ("CROSS") Gris Nez, may not update us in relation to a SBC for a number of hours, particularly during busy periods. Knowing where the boat has been seen to leave from and our knowledge and experience of average speeds and crossing times, it is possible to identify a suspected search area and task assets to confirm.

e. Weather

Adverse weather can have a huge impact on aerial and sea going assets being used in the course of a SAR mission. Understanding current and prevailing conditions allow us to plan an operation taking this in to consideration.

f. Watch – what is being observed?

Observations of what witnesses can see is often helpful as they often see different things from different perspective, which we can knit together to form a bigger picture and cross reference with other information.

9. I still use this technique in relation to what information I request from callers. As part of my mentoring other team members as a Team Leader, I advise them to prioritise the "where" and "who" questions. Understanding the location of an incident is critical in relation to understanding the situation and tasking any

asset to assist. The number of persons can also influence what asset is deployed. The 'what' is usually given in the initial call in any event as part of the initial report, particularly where the call has been triaged by the emergency '999' or '112' switchboards who determine that the emergency response requires the Coastguard. If calls are received via other means, including the radio, I follow the same priority.

10. In February 2016 I was successful in my application to be promoted to the role of SMOO. This role required me to obtain the Search Mission Coordination ("SMC") qualification, which I attained shortly after my promotion.
11. It is my understanding that under International Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue Manual ("IAMSAR"), once the SMC qualification is attained, it has no expiry date. IAMSAR is a manual for organisations who conduct or are responsible for maritime and aviation SAR operations. Irrespective of this belief, it is HMCG's policy that this qualification is validated every five years to demonstrate on-going competency and to ensure that practitioners are re-assessed as being current and competent, with any revisions to the syllabus which may have been introduced. I do not recall any fundamental changes between my initial course following my promotion to SMOO, or my subsequent validation.
12. On 23 and 24 November 2021 my initial SMC qualification was valid and 'in date', and I have subsequently renewed it as required.

13. In June 2021 I was promoted to my current role as Team Leader. I attach a copy of the role profile (Exhibit RC/01 [INQ002709]) which sets out my role and responsibilities.
14. As Team Leader I am responsible for leading, managing and directing my team / those operating within the Ops room at JRCC, Fareham. The JRCC is home to both aeronautical and maritime responses, hence the "Joint" Rescue Coordination Centre. Although I refer to operating at the JRCC, this is a physical location and my role is better described as being a Team Leader within MRCC, Solent. I have no responsibility in relation to the national network other than when giving remote assistance, as directed by the Network Commander ("NetCom"). References to a NetCom or JRCC Commander ("JRCC Cmdr") is a reference to the same role; the titles have changed since 2021 and I use both role names.
15. Outside of the mandatory courses required for each role, most of the training I have received has been 'on the job'. Whilst there are similarities in relation to some SAR operations, each incident is unique and requires its own consideration based on the information gathered and assets available.
16. Prior to November 2021, I cannot recall receiving any small boat specific SAR training, other than to read and acknowledge the Standard Operating Procedures ("SOPs") and guidance published in relation to them, including :
- a. Incidents involving migrants V.12 dated 6 October 2021 (Exhibit RC/02 [INQ000428]);

b. Guidance document SAR incidents involving migrants v.2 dated 9 September 2021 (Exhibit RC/03 [INQ000449]).

17. In terms of wider training, SBC SAR incidents are dealt with in accordance with the criteria applicable to any SAR incident, with the same principles and considerations being applied. Based on my experience and training throughout my career with HMCG, I believe I have the requisite knowledge and skills to respond to SBC incidents, as required. Whilst it is accurate to say that Dover almost exclusively deals with SBC incidents, the JRCC Cmdr based at that JRCC has overall command of the national network and responsibility for coordinating remote support.

18. The role of HMCG is to provide a 24 hour emergency response service and to coordinate all maritime SAR operations. The UK SAR region covers approximately 2 million square miles, which is divided into SAR zones which are then assigned to one of the ten Marine Rescue Coordination Centres ("MRCC"). All MRCCs are coordinated by the Network Cmdr ("NetCom") who is based at the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre ("JRCC"), Fareham, which is responsible for coordinating the national network in addition to being the single point of contact ("SPOC") for all international requests.

19. The JRCC is the primary fall back station to any MRCC which requires remote assistance. Any MRCC which requires assistance would make a request through its duty SMC, who in turn would make a request to the NetCom at the JRCC. The NetCom would assess the demand across the network and

coordinate what assistance could be offered and by who, and communicate this to each MRCC as required. In theory, MRCC Shetland could offer assistance to MRCC Dover if they had the capacity to do so.

20. Remote support works well in my experience as the work we do is conducted from a distance and is reliant upon written incident reports, visual data which is transmitted via links from aerial assets, or from emergency calls, radio calls or information from partner agencies, which all MRCCs are familiar with and have access to. The geographical location of the MRCC responding to any SAR, including SBC incident, does not in my opinion adversely affect the mission.

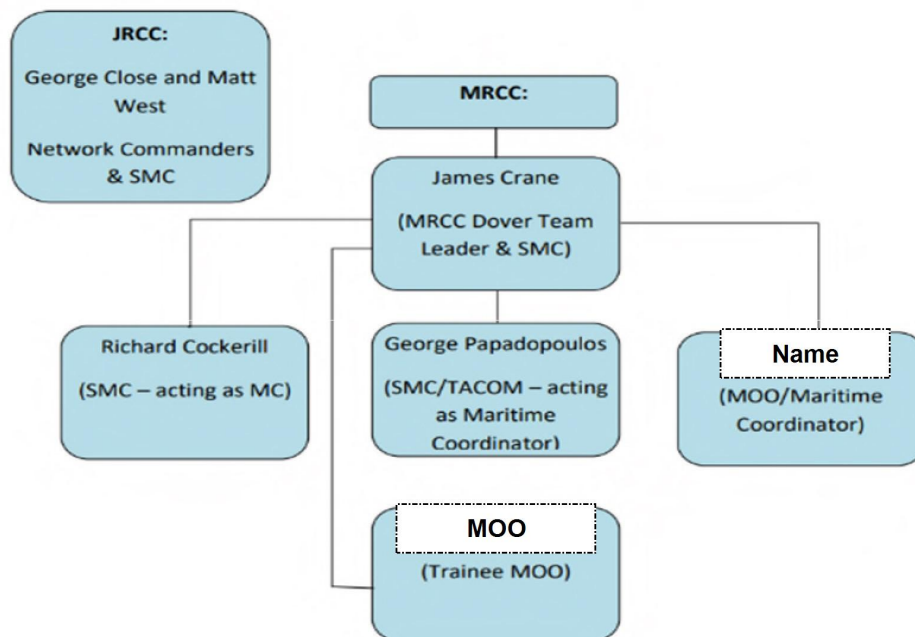
21. On occasions I would be required to work remotely as an SMC in relation to incidents at MRCC Dover (both SBC and non-SBC), in addition to any other station which required support across the network. All MRCC Ops rooms have identical work station set ups, the idea being that any operative can work from any station and be familiar with the equipment. On a national level, all MRCC are linked by the same systems, policies and procedures. This national network allows the JRCC to coordinate any MRCC to provide remote assistance to any other station during busy periods or when there are low staffing levels, including covering periods of annual leave. This can be in relation to specific incidents, to cover staff breaks, for a few hours or an entire shift, as the demand requires. It is completely flexible and works well in my experience. I do offer remote assistance to those MRCCs who require it, as and when required.



22. Recommended staffing levels are considered and approved by HMCG senior leadership, and planned for by MRCC Cmdrs and Teams Leaders. This would include consideration of physical staff on station and their respective qualifications. I am responsible at a local level within MRCC Solent, to plan and manage my team in accordance with the specified recommended staffing levels, and mitigating any shortfalls from absences, by requesting assistance.

### Role on 23 and 24 November 2021

23. During my watches on 23 and 24 November, the following staff structures applied :



24. I recall more people being in the Ops room and have checked the watchbill (Exhibit RC/04 [INQ000409]. I can see that three other colleagues were on duty as 'VTS' operators. 'VTS' stands for vessel traffic service and the VTS operators

staff the dedicated 24 hour radio and radar service which monitors the movement of commercial vessels within the Dover Straits. I am not aware from the SBC incidents I was involved with, if any of the VTS operators assisted in any other SBC incidents during that watch.

25. Between Monday 22 November and Thursday 25 November 2021 I was working at MRCC Dover. The purpose of my assignment to Dover was to provide me with on station experience and to gain first-hand knowledge in relation to SBC activity. This enhanced my situational awareness as to the volume and frequency of SBC activities, and how the MRCC Dover Ops room responded to the same. This is the only period I have physically worked at MRCC Dover.

26. On busy days MRCC Dover is likely to request support from the national network, either in relation to SBC incidents, or to request assistance with all other incidents to allow them to focus on the SBC activity. As explained above, remote support would be coordinated via the NetCom. As a SMC, I have provided remote cover to MRCC Dover as required.

27. I have set out previously that whilst SBC activity is concentrated almost exclusively within the Dover Straits, and responded to by MRCC Dover, SBC is a defined category of standard SAR operations. The SMC qualification and my general experience whilst working within HMCG means that I was and remain more than competent to deal with these incidents remotely.

28. My attendance at MRCC Dover in November 2021 was in a supporting/ observation role where I operated as a Maritime Coordinator ("MC"), which essentially undertakes the same role as a MOO, operating under the direction of the MRCC Dover (SMC). The dates I attended were busy so I was of more assistance to the watch by answering calls and undertaking the role of a MC.
29. It is my recollection that neither Neil Gibson (from my time joining the night watch at 05:00 on 24 November), nor James Crane for the duration of the day watch on 24 November 2021 took a break so I was not required to provide cover. It is common practice for SMCs not to take a break on busy watches, as a break causes a loss in the momentum of the situational awareness. Most SMCs in my experience prefer to remain immersed in the watch and will eat in the Ops room, only taking short comfort breaks, as required.
30. On 23 November I was on duty on the day watch between 07:00 – 19:00. I recall it was a busy shift but cannot recall the specifics of the incidents I dealt with.
31. I was not on duty for the night watch on 23 / 24 November 2021 when the incident Charlie was initially reported to MRCC Dover. I recall there had been a request put out to see if anyone was available to work overtime in relation to the night watch. Having worked during the day on 23 November and being on the watchbill for the day watch on 24 November, I was not in position to volunteer to work the night of 23 November; this would have meant I worked for 36 consecutive hours, which was not possible. In order to assist, I volunteered

to start my day watch early on 24 November, commencing at 05:00 and working until 17:00, which was approved.

32. On 24 November I attended MRCC Dover in time to log on for the start of my shift at 05:00. I remember that the Ops room was calm and relaxed. I distinctly recall this atmosphere as a colleague of mine coming on watch c.07:00 had brought me breakfast and I remember being able to eat it whilst at my desk, which does not happen during busy periods.

33. As a result of my staggered watch start time, I did not receive a specific handover or briefing as I did not take over from an off-going MOO. The additional capacity my early attendance provided allowed the off-going watch and on-coming watch to deal with their watch handovers as usual. This is usually a PowerPoint presentation given by the watch SMC which would include any on-going incidents, with focus given to those in the distress or alert phases. This is a dynamic template which is edited on each watch, for the handover to the on-coming watch. It is designed to give a brief situational awareness as to what is happening. It includes weather state, which zones are being covered, any network support and a brief outline of any on-going incidents.

34. I do not recall any on-going high priority incidents that were in a distress phase, or being made aware of any Mayday relays. I was aware of an UKBF vessel being underway and dealing with an on-going incident, which was in its final stages.

35. As stated above I am a qualified SMC and Team Leader. Notwithstanding this I essentially operated as a MC on the day shift of 24 November. At no point did I take the lead or 'supervise' my colleagues from a SMC perspective, and I do not recall providing SMC cover to James Crane who was the SMC of that watch.
36. James Crane was the MRCC Team Leader and SMC at Dover on 24 November 2021 for the day watch. He made an entry in the network log at 08:11:55 which recorded me as 'Op Deveran support, SMC and working between 07:30 – 19:30 (Exhibit RC/05 [INQ000233]. Op Deveran was the operational name given to all things SBC related. I actually worked from 05:00-17:00 as agreed the day before – I can only assume this reference was to the usual day shift at Dover. In relation to the reference to 'SMC' the logs record the highest qualification held by that individual as opposed to their specific role on any watch. At no point on 24 November 2021 did I assume the role of SMC.
37. 'Supervision' with HMCG can include situational awareness, which those in the Ops room can receive from hearing calls coming in and the various verbal updates to the SMC who has overall responsibility for SAR operations. Having been in the Ops room since 05:00, I believe I had a good understanding of the situation when the day watch started at c.07:30.
38. I was not ordinarily stationed at MRCC Dover so do not feel able to comment on the number of migrant crossings experienced in 2021. This would have been discussions led by Commanders (the next level up from my role) and other senior managers, which I was not involved in. Much of my awareness came

from general conversations with colleagues and from open source material such as graphs which would feature as part of new reports etc.

39. In order to assist the Inquiry in relation to the events of the 23 – 24 November 2021, including incident Charlie, I have refreshed my memory by reference to the incident logs which were contemporaneous to that period. I have tried where possible to set out my actions either in themes or chronological order.
40. There is an SOP in relation to opening an SBC incident which directs that all matters are opened in the distress phase, "*until credible evidence suggests a distress response is not needed*" (Exhibit RC/02 [INQ000428]). The SOP goes on to detail further actions to consider, which are standard in any distress phase or SAR mission we conduct.
41. Incidents are opened contemporaneously whilst taking the relevant call, so that information is available as soon as possible. This is done by pressing the 'new incident key' within ViSION, which is the software system we use. The incident is not created until the information has been recorded in the system and the 'create incident' button is pressed. This is why there are a number of system entries in relation to what boxes are populated, with details of calls and radio messages being saved to the log once the incident is created. This is why there is time difference between the opening and creation of the incident. These times will vary depending on how long the MC takes to gather the relevant information from callers etc.



42. I opened all migrant incidents in accordance with SOP Incidents involving migrants V.12 dated 6 October 2021 (Exhibit RC/02 [INQ000428]), including my verbal updates to the SMC so that they had the best situational awareness they could have.
43. The tasking of aerial assets should have been undertaken via the ARCC – small boat response form (Exhibit RC/06 [INQ001456]). This is an aide memoire to ensure that the relevant information is available when requesting aerial assistance – it is not a prescribed form which needs to be completed.
44. Having reviewed the incident log for 'Charlie' I can see that I did not have any direct involvement with the matter, as recorded in Exhibit RC/07 [INQ000237]).
45. Admin log (Exhibit RC/08 [INQ000235])
- a. This administration incident log (or 'admin log') is an incident log which is created daily in ViSION (from midnight to midnight each day) and is specific to MRCC Dover and SBC activity. This allows a record to be created which notes any activity in relation to SBC which cannot be attributed to a specific incident. This admin log is created by MRCC Dover for each day, and can be viewed by any member of staff if they choose to log in to it. It provides a 'catch all' area to ensure that all records and actions are captured.
  - b. There is no formal reconciliation process, other than the manual end of watch review. Where there is time, MC's may review all open incidents

and cross reference any telephone numbers and names. If a 'match' is made, the MC can add a comment to the incident log and link it any other matching incidents as a repeat incident. When an incident is linked, the system will close the incident log identified as the repeat, but it remains accessible to be read. Where there is no time at the end of a watch, the on-coming watch will usually conduct this review as part of their role, as time allows. Any team member can update the log whilst it is live in order to link an entry within this log to another incident.

- c. The ViSION system will recognise UK numbers and, if there has been a previous call, tag any further call as 'call 2', 'call 3' etc, alerting the MC to previous calls and the likelihood of this call being linked to an on-going incident. This functionality does not work on non-UK registered or roamer phones, therefore has limited value where these phones are used, including but not limited to SBC.
- d. I have reviewed this document and am able to say that the references to 'Charlie' within this log do not relate to any migrant incident. Zone 14, which is the SAR area of responsibility which includes the Dover Straits, is sub-divided in to keypad areas, and call-signs are assigned as a quick reference to that area. 'Charlie' within this log refers to the keypad area within zone 14.
- e. This is demonstrated throughout the log where 'Charlie' is referred to as a patrol area (09:27:00), a patrol box (09:52:15), 'OPS' (11:23:44), a box

(12:18:23) and an intelligence area (15:28:26). A further example is recorded at 09:52:15 which includes reference to patrol box Delta. In November 2021, the keypads in zone 14 were assigned and referred to by their phonetic call-signs.

- f. The admin log is not a log that I would typically access as a SMC, and would only review it if directed to an entry by a member of the team. Most SMCs will have a good situational awareness from the verbal updates given within the Ops room, without the need to review individual incident logs. If the SMC has taken a break, or been out of the Ops room for any reason, it may be that an incident log would be reviewed at that point. Other than logging calls as recorded within the log, I did not review the admin log on 24 November 2021.
- g. I have noted the following entries which I generated which indicate the work I undertook during that watch:
  - i. At 05:18:00 I logged a phone message received from Gris Nez. The report indicated that there was a small boat, believed to have 40 persons on board including one child, in the vicinity of Valiant [a UK Border Force ("UKBF") SAR vessel] the occupants of which had indicated they could see the helicopter. Looking at the admin log, this appears to have been R163 [HMCG SAR helicopter] in the entry made by Neil Gibson at 05:11:57. The vessel was noted to be green in colour and all POB appeared to be wearing life jackets. Two mobile

numbers were given, with one being attributed to having WhatsApp capability. Coordinates were given as to the location.

- ii. At 05:28:09 I logged a radio message received from R163 which stated that, whilst tasked to another incident, they had noted a further vessel, approximately 8m in length, heading westerly under power with approximately 30 persons on board. No signs of distress were noted. I advised R163 that Elizabeth was heading to intercept the track of the vessel.
- iii. R163 provided a further update at 05:43:05 which I noted in the admin log. The vessel was reported as making a safe westerly course. A short discussion took place in which it was established there was no danger to the vessel or its occupants, and noted that Valiant was within the area. Based on this information, I was content for R163 to continue with its original search mission. At 06:14:25 R163 radioed to say it has spotted the last vessel and gave coordinates. R163 was returning to base, with a drone due to take over serial observations at c.06:30:00.
- iv. At 06:20:59 I received a further phone call from Gris Nez reporting that some migrants may need assistance, and coordinates were given. It was unclear as to whether there was an engine on the vessel and the number of persons on board was not known, although it was suspected there was a pregnant woman. In the same call I was

advised that the Flamant (a French Navy ship) was escorting a dark grey dinghy with approximately 40 people on board and it would be about 20 minutes until they crossed in to UK waters.

- v. At 09:15:33 I tagged catalogue message MSG ::000071-24112021 – point migrants GN 09h00 UTC to the admin log. Catalogue messages are references to emails received to the MRCC email address, where the inbox sits within ViSION. MSG ::000071-24112021 was an email sent by Gris Nez, which contained a copy of their migrant tracker, completed as at the time they sent it (c.09:06 when it was received), in addition to a chain setting out previous iterations of the tracker, with various time stamps. I exhibit a copy of this at Exhibit RC/09 [INQ001243].

The Gris Nez migrant tracker was only received by MRCC Dover.

Upon receipt of the tracker, I reviewed it to see if there were any matters the watch were not aware of. I cannot remember if there were, but having reviewed my actions on the day in relation to opening new incidents, I do not believe that there were. I received the migrant tracker and actioned it by 09:15; the next incident I opened was not until Whiskey 1 at 10:28. Any new incidents would have been opened whilst reviewing the tracker with verbal updates to the Ops room.

The colour key to the tracker is explained at the bottom of the email chain exhibited, which I have set out below, and my understanding of the same:

- vert: affaire close du point de vue SAR en SRR française.

Green: Gris Nez had closed the incident

- orange: embarcation en cours de sécurisation.

Orange: I cannot recall what this meant

- blanc: ni clos, ni sécurisé

White: the incident was open for Gris Nez

- vi. At 09:31:07 I made a note in the log at the direction of James Crane (SMC) which stated that due to the number of vessels in the South he was going to task the Hastings all-weather lifeboat to proceed to the vicinity of patrol area Charlie (as noted in the log at 09:27:00) as Valiant could not leave Dover for another 35 minutes and no other SAR units were available to proceed. James remarked that the weather was not favourable, with choppy seas. All-weather lifeboats are capable of high speeds and can be operated safely in adverse weather due to the self-righting design of the vessel. Lifeboats are operated by the Royal National Lifeboat Institution ("RNLI") which is wholly separate from the MCA and HMCG. The RNLI is predominantly staffed by volunteer crews.
- vii. At 09:52:15 I had a conversation with George Close (NetCom) when it was confirmed the network support would be given to MRCC Dover from MRCC Solent. A routine desk (MC) and Channel 16 operator



(who would staff the dedicated Mayday relay channel) were provided with a note that no further support was required at that time. Reference to 'RCOCKERILL (SMC)' was not in relation to me acting in the role of SMC at that time – this remained with James Crane throughout the shift. When documenting personnel, HMCG use the highest qualification they hold, and not the role they occupy at that point in time.

- viii. At 11:02:30 I logged a radio call from ZP80 [which I believe may be a UKBF asset] stating that there had been four migrant landings so far at Dungeness, which they were dealing with. As the migrants had made shore, this was a UKBF and /or police matter. No further details were given in relation to any small boats attributed to these landings, or number of person detected or detained. The admin log shows a high level of SBC activity and landings during this watch but I cannot recall if I was aware of this at that time.
- ix. At 11:35:10 I received a call from a migrant. Despite asking if they were on a boat and seeking to gather other information, the caller just kept repeating "please please please no UK France" before hanging up.
- x. 11:47:41 – I assigned catalogue message "MSG::000122-24112021, Subject: point of migrants gris nez" to the admin log. This was a

further update of the French migrant tracker received at 11:24. I attach a copy of the email as Exhibit RC/10 [INQ001256]

- xi. I received a phone call from Kent police at 12:56:39 who reported they had taken a call about a minute earlier from a migrant vessel believed to be about 4km from land. Persons on board said they could see Romney power station and something orange. The mobile used was a non-UK phone (described as a roamer), therefore there were no contact details we could try in order to gather further information. There were 14 people on board including 7 children. Hastings could see another vessel which looked empty 1 mile off starboard beam.
- xii. At 14:50:54 I noted a radio call from AC08 [Area Commander of Coastal Operations] who reported a number of beach landings around Dungeness. He indicated that HMCG would provide assistance to overseeing the disembarkation of migrants, as the UKBF and police currently undertaking that role were needed for other tasks.
- xiii. At 15:34:32 I logged a radio message from ARCC indicating they were not aware that R163 was needed. They were happy to search Charlie but might be delayed as they had not been told they were needed and had started the engineering process.

xiv. At 15:52:37 there was an incoming phone call from ARCC in relation to aerial taskings. ARCC had spoken to Gris Nez direct who stated there were 6 people outstanding. The discussion was about whether R175 should be tasked or wait for CG26 to search keypad area Charlie. Having discussed this with James Crane, ARCC were advised that R175 was not required as CG26 would be on scene at the same ETA. CG26 is a HMCG fixed wing aircraft which is used to provide visual situational awareness in any SAR operation as opposed to R175 which is dedicated SAR helicopter.

46. I was not aware of the 'controller message' entered by David Jones on 24 November 2021 at 00:41:35 which stated *"JRCC CDRS MAR & AIR HAVE DISCUSSED [sic] AT 0030Z. CONCERN IS THAT WITH POOR VIZ AND OUR SURVEILLANCE AIRCRAFT BEING LIMITED TO CONDUCT MISSION WE AER EFFECTIVELY BLIND. BOTH CDRS AGREE THAT CAUTION OF ALLOWING OURSELVES BE DRAWN INTO RELAXONG [sic] AND EXPECTING A NORMAL (?) MIGRANT COROSSING [sic] NIGHT WHEREAS THIS HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE VERY DANGEROUS"*.

47. I was not on duty at the time this message was posted and it was not brought to my specific attention when I logged on at 05:00. I was aware that aerial assets had been delayed due to the poor weather, which from my own experience meant that we would not have access to visual links to the incidents we were dealing with until they were airborne.

48. During the watch I opened seven incidents as follows:

a. Incident Quebec (Exhibit RC/11 [INQ000255]);

At 06:17:27 I opened an incident following a call from Gris Nez that the French Navy ship, the Flamont, was escorting a migrant boat, dark grey with approximately 40 persons on board. No lifejackets were observed and they estimated they would reach UK waters in approximately 20 minutes. The incident was categorized as being in the monitoring phase as the boat was not yet in UK waters and being escorted by a French ship. Neil Gibson tasked CPV Hunter [UKBF patrol vessel] at 06:43:14 to meet the Flamant.

At 07:20:07 I recorded a resource message that the migrant vessel had broken down but the occupants did not wish to board the French ship. This is common as migrants wish to travel to the UK.

I had no further dealings with this incident.

b. Incident Whiskey 1 (Exhibit RC/12 [INQ000294]);

I opened this incident at 10:28:20 in response to a call from FV Louise Jane, a UK civilian vessel. The expression 'dead in the water' refers to a small boat which has either lost or has no engine capability. This incident related to a green dinghy with 25 people on board, including a child. I requested RNLi assistance at 10:39:16, as the FV Louise Jane was unable to assist.

I recorded the casualties as being recovered at 11:53:19, and other than a few updates re assets etc, I had no further involvement in the incident.

c. Incident Hotel 2 (Exhibit RC/13 [INQ000303]);

This incident was opened by me at 11:15:33 and related to a call received from a migrant boat which we were able to locate through WhatsApp as being within UK waters. There were 30 persons believed to be on board. Having opened the incident I took no further part in this incident as I continued to take new calls.

d. Incident Juliet 2 (Exhibit RC/14 [INQ000306]);

At 11:25:52 I opened a new incident following a call from Kent police reporting a call from a migrant boat. The caller reported it had 44 persons on board, including women and children. No name was given but a mobile number was available. The caller indicated that they were in the water approximately 4km from a lighthouse.

At 11:29:05 I noted the SMC's comment that it was likely that they were located between the two most common lighthouses until better information was received or we were able to match it to another existing incident.

I had no further involvement in this incident.

e. Incident Oscar 2 (Exhibit RC/15 [INQ000311]);

At 11:53:07 I opened this incident upon receipt of a phone call from Gris Nez who reported migrants within UK waters, from coordinates they had received from WhatsApp, and provided a number. They did not know how many persons were on board.

I had no further involvement in this incident.

- f. Incident Sierra 2 (Exhibit RC/16 [INQ000316]); and

I opened this incident at 12:11:30 following an emergency call from a migrant boat. The number was a roamer and therefore untraceable. The caller reported they had departed from Paris and were on a white boat with ten persons on board, not believed to include children. The occupants could not see land but could see two very large blue ships, one of which was called 'Mo'.

I requested the launch of DR3 [Dover all-weather lifeboat] to assist at 12:27:11 which was accepted and assigned to the incident by 12:28:09. At 13:29:29 I updated the system following a message from DR3 confirming that they had offloaded 33 persons and were heading back to berth in order to refuel. I further tasked DR3 at 13:40:02, after which I took no further part in this incident.

- g. Incident Zulu 2 (Exhibit RC/17 [INQ000322]).

At 13:05:16 I opened this incident having received a call from a member of the public who was fishing on Dungeness beach. The report was that they could see a migrant boat just off the point, with the occupants all wearing orange. The call then dropped, the number was recorded but when called connected straight to voicemail.

At 13:12:23 I called ARTEMIS and determined that a migrant boat was about to make landfall and all occupants were wearing orange.

I took no further part in this incident.



49. My involvement in the following matters was limited to tasking, communicating with resources, updating the log in accordance with the position of the resource and clearing resources from incidents:

- a. Incident Delta Exhibit RC/18 [INQ000238]);
- b. Incident November Exhibit RC/19 [INQ000252]);
- c. Incident Tango (Exhibit RC/20 [INQ000258]);
- d. Incident Yankee (Exhibit RC/21 [INQ000264]);
- e. Incident Oscar 1 (Exhibit RC/22 [INQ000286]);
- f. Incident Delta 2 Exhibit RC/23 [INQ000299]);
- g. Incident Bravo 3 Exhibit RC/24 [INQ000325]);
- h. Incident Delta 3 Exhibit RC/25 [INQ000326]);
- i. Incident Echo 3 Exhibit RC/26 [INQ000327]);
- j. Incident Kilo 3 Exhibit RC/27 [INQ000333]);
- k. Incident Lima 3 Exhibit RC/28 [INQ000334]).

50. In relation to being able to reconcile incidents, at 09:28:23, I was able to identify incident 041433-24112024 (Exhibit RC/29 [INQ000273]) as a repeat of incident Alpha 1 (Exhibit RC/30 [INQ000268]), based on the fact it had the same telephone number. Subsequently, I closed incident 041433-24112024 and reported the repeat on the log of Alpha 1. I believe that this is the only incident I closed on that day.

51. The closure of an incident requires authority from a SMC. As explained earlier in my statement, the ViSION system will close an incident which is marked as a repeat. This is still notified to the SMC, usually verbally within the Ops room

to ensure their situational awareness is accurate. I cannot recall if I had a conversation with James Crane or if I used my own authority as a SMC to close this incident. If I authorised myself, I am confident that I would have made James (as SMC) and others in the Ops room aware of the repeat incident, as is standard practice for the reason explained above.

52. Reconciliations are difficult as it is common knowledge within HMCG that when migrants are rescued, they rarely have mobile phones in their possession. It is widely believed that the phones are ditched in to the water to prevent UK authorities using them in any criminal or immigration investigation. If phones were recovered, calls could be made to MRCC Dover and incidents or messages reconciled.

### **Communications gap**

53. In simple terms, under various Conventions and Regulations, the maritime industry uses a global communication network which primarily operates over very high frequency ("VHF") radio waves. The range of these frequencies allows a range of communications over distances of up to 50 nautical miles between ship to shore, ship to ship and ship to aircraft where required. The range is dependent on the type of aerial being used; aerials on tall ships or cliffs on shorelines allow a range closer to 50 nautical miles, with aerials mounted on small vessels at sea level offering ranges closer to the bottom end of that scale.

54. This network has designated channels for use in connection with commercial shipping, for example channel 16 is the designated distress, urgency and safety channel where any Mayday relays are broadcast to alert ships in the vicinity. There are international laws which require assistance be provided to those in peril at sea.
55. I am not aware of any communication gaps in the VHF coverage in regards the Dover Straits, although from my own experience I am aware that adverse weather conditions can reduce the operational range on occasion. If there were any known gaps, I would expect them to be recorded in the SAR zone profile. A zone profile is a document which would capture any relevant information in relation to the SAR area, including known 'black spots' or mobile phone network coverage.
56. Cellular or mobile phone coverage operates similarly to VHF radio. Mobile coverage is more susceptible to adverse weather conditions which result in reduced coverage. It operates on a lower power resulting in shorter range, and it relies upon the phone being detected by a mobile operator mast. If the mobile is not operating on a data signal, this also affects some of the functions, specifically being able to trace a location of the phone and by extension, its operator.
57. The UK mobile phone network only recognises phones registered in the UK; non-UK registered phones display as '777' numbers and are essentially

untraceable. This prevents us from being able to call those who contact us from such numbers.

58. The type of handset can also affect whether a location can be sent; the settings in iPhone can be set to give the user the latitude and longitudinal position.

59. The migrants use WhatsApp as this allows them to send a location which has obvious benefits to any SAR mission. This app requires the user to be on a data signal. Whilst vessels in the English Channel can access the UK network, it depends on their position, which may cause their signal to bounce off the French network. The same can be true for those who are around the median line in the English Channel. The median line is an imaginary line which divides UK and French waters and therefore areas of responsibility.

60. One of the biggest challenges HMCG face in relation to communications regarding SBC can be language barriers. Many migrants are instructed to give stock phrases in relation to requesting rescue, but are not able to respond to requests for information regarding locations etc.

61. CROSS Gris Nez is the French equivalent of HMCG JRCC. It is the single point of contact ("SPOC") for international maritime requests and enquiries, and due to its position overlooking the Dover Straits, has what I believe to be daily contact with MRCC Dover.

62. I occasionally have cause to contact Gris Nez in relation to my role as a SAR operator in relation to a number of issues, including mutual requests for assistance or as the French SPOC for any international enquiries.

### **Other matters**

63. At the time of 23/24 November 2021, I had no appreciation of the significance of the day. It was a busy day at MRCC Dover and I believed that I had acted in accordance with my role and assisted in a number of SBC SAR incidents. I did not seek any support in the aftermath, either shortly after or since.

64. In relation to the general arrangements for support through HMCG, I have no experience of any barriers or issues in accessing the Employment Assistance Programme ("EAP"). I have been until recently a Trauma Risk Management ("TRiM") practitioner. TRiM is a proactive tool used by HMCG to support colleagues who have been exposed to traumatic events, and begins 72 hours after the relevant traumatic event. It is peer-to peer support which is designed to identify colleagues who might need professional assistance and discuss potential referrals, aimed at reducing the longer term impact and effects of the trauma. I regularly discuss issues with my team and ensure that anyone who needs further support and assistance is identified and referred.

### **Statement of Truth**

I believe the content of this statement to be true.

Personal Data

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Dated: 31<sup>st</sup> Oct 2024