

Witness Name: Neal Gibson

Statement No.: 1

Exhibits: NG/01 - NG/71

Dated: 9 January 2025

THE CRANSTON INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF NEAL GIBSON

I, Neal Gibson, Rescue Coordination Centre Manager at the HM Coastguard, Dover, will say as follows:-

Introduction

1. I make this statement in my capacity as Rescue Coordination Centre Manager at the HM Coastguard, part of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in response to a witness evidence request dated 30 July 2024.
2. The matters contained in this statement are either known to me or ones which I believe (in which case I have specifically said so) or are derived from records

including computer records maintained by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, and to which I have access and which I believe to be accurate.

3. I am willing for this statement to form part of the evidence before the Inquiry and to be published on the Inquiry's website.
4. All timings in this statement, unless otherwise stated, are UTC.
5. I offer my sincerest condolences to the bereaved from the events of the 23-24 November 2021.

My Background and Role as Team Leader and SMC at MRCC Dover on 23-24 November 2021

6. HM Coastguard ("HMCG") is an on-call emergency organisation responsible for the initiation and co-ordination of all civilian maritime and aviation search and rescue missions. This includes the mobilisation, organisation and tasking of adequate resources to respond to persons either in distress at sea, or to persons at risk of injury or death on the cliffs or shoreline of the United Kingdom.
7. The Joint Rescue Coordination Centre ("JRCC") at Fareham and the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres ("MRCC") around the UK coastline (of which Dover MRCC is one) form a network of command and control centres for responding to reports of maritime and coastal distress and other emergency

situations. Maritime Operations staff provide a 24-hour service to mariners and coast users in receiving incoming distress calls, alerting the appropriate rescue assets, and co-ordinating the rescue effort.

8. I have been employed by HM Coastguard for over 10 years. I started as a Maritime Operations Officer and was subsequently promoted to Senior Maritime Operations Officer ("SMOO") in January 2019. I qualified as a Search and Rescue Mission Coordinator ("SMC") in February 2020. In June 2020 I was promoted to Team Leader and in April 2022 I took on the role of MRCC Commander of Dover MRCC. This role has since changed its name to Rescue Coordination Centre Manager ("RCCM").
9. Reference to the duties of an SMC can be found in the International Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue ("IAMSAR") manual. The SMC is the person in charge of a Search and Rescue ("SAR") Operation until a rescue has been effected or until it has become apparent that further efforts would be of no avail (IAMSAR Vol II 1.2.3(a)). For each incident, an SMC is assigned and an emergency phase declared. An SMC is knowledgeable in tactical planning, an experienced supervisor, and competent at all aspects of a SAR mission. The emergency phase (e.g., uncertainty, alert, and distress) is classified by the SMC based on the level of concern for the safety of persons or craft which may be in danger. The SMC may reclassify an emergency phase as the situation evolves. The emergency phase communicates to the involved parties the current level of concern and helps determine response actions to be taken for each incident.

10. The SMC's primary responsibilities were to: gather information about distress situations, develop accurate and workable SAR action plans and dispatch and coordinate the resources to carry out SAR missions.

11. In order to qualify as an SMC, I was required to undertake a three-week training course, which included a mixture of theory, written examinations and role play assessments (**NG/01 [INQ000359]**). The content included IAMSAR, coastguard procedures, search planning, search instructions and communications, mission conduct, human factors, and error analysis. The training provided an SMC with the skills to manage SAR missions – this would include SAR missions involving small boats. There was no specific small boat training during the SMC course at the time I was working towards SMC qualification in early 2020.

12. SMC qualification is required before one can be promoted from Senior Maritime Operations Officer to Team Leader. My functions as Team Leader are set out in the MCA Role Profile (**NG/02 [INQ000393]**) and include:

- a. Responsibility for leading and managing their operational teams and integrating delivery within the national network utilising planning skills at the operational level to achieve tactical/strategic benefit.
- b. Responsibility for delivering sound leadership and management for their operational team and division including medium- and longer-term operational planning.

- c. Accountable to the Controller for the operational delivery of six Coastguard functions.
- d. Providing operational responses for SAR, Counter Pollution and emergency and disaster management operations. Acting as the operational decision maker and, when delegated, also at the tactical level.
- e. Responsibility for the management for Senior Maritime Operations Officers and Maritime Operations Officers within their operational teams, ensuring competence and training is maintained, liaising with the Training and Standards Officer to ensure suitable interventions as required.

13. On the night of 23-24 November 2021, I was Team Leader for Team 3 and SMC between 1930 and 0730. My role as SMC was in play on the night as opposed to that of Team Leader. The roles go hand in hand but are distinct roles.

MRCC Dover as at 23-24 November 2021 including available resources

14. The Coastguard functions being undertaken at MRCC Dover as at 23-24 November 2021 were SAR, Pollution Response, Vessel Traffic Services ("VTS"), Maritime Safety, Accident and Disaster Response and Maritime Security. These six functions are those required to be fulfilled by HMCG by the International Maritime Organisation. The other three functions are covered by other agencies – Customs / Border Control by UK Border Force,

Fisheries Control by the Environment Agency and Law Enforcement by local police forces.

15. Within the MRCC building at Dover, SAR and VTS functions were both located at the time in the Operations room. There were eight SAR desks within the Operations room, with some VTS desks at the back of the same room. Not all of the SAR and VTS desks would be occupied by staff at each shift. Within the room on the night of 23-24 November 2021, for example, just my team was present, which consisted of five staff for most of the night – three staff, including myself, at the SAR desks, and two staff at the VTS desks.

16. UK Border Force (“UKBF”) personnel were located downstairs at MRCC Dover at the time. They would stand at an appropriate level of personnel based on the Operation Deveran RAG rating for the day. From MRCC Dover they would manage the landing of persons picked up from small boats by UKBF at Dover port. On the night of 23-24 November, there were no UKBF personnel in the building until 0500. Any contact I had with UKBF before 0500 was done remotely from Portsmouth. The main contact I had with UKBF when dealing with SAR response was the Border Force Maritime Cutter Command (“MCC”), who was the MRCC liaison officer. Communications we had during the course of SAR operations would have taken place over the telephone whether I was talking to UKBF officers remotely or in the same building, so when UKBF staff did arrive at 0500, we still would have spoken to them via telephone, as we were not located in the same room.

17. The capabilities available to officers at MRCC Dover as at 23-24 November 2021 included:

- a. Software – ViSION logging software, the Coastguard Information Portal (CIP)
- b. Communications systems – Airwave systems; Marine Very High Frequency (“VHF”) radio; Medium Frequency radio; a standalone HMCG mobile telephone for use with WhatsApp; Satellite phone
- c. Email capabilities - all members of my team had access to emails sent from the MRCC Dover generic email address.

18. When HM Coastguard receive calls for assistance from conventional routes (999 calls, marine VHF radio), these are processed using internationally agreed principles laid down in International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, 1974 (“SOLAS”) and the Maritime SAR Convention.

19. Regarding policies or procedures given regarding the use of communications technology in responding to small boats attempting to cross the Dover Strait prior to 23-24 November 2021, we had Standard Operating Procedures (“SOPs”) on topics such as Emergency Telephone Call Handling (**NG/03 [INQ005186]**), Phone – Emergency Calls and SMS Text Messages (**NG/04 [INQ005192]**), ViSION - Multiple Call, Scenario and Incident Functions (**NG/05 [INQ000435]**).

20. Policies and procedures specifically relating to use of communications technology in responding to small boats attempting to cross the Dover Strait prior to 23-24 November included Incidents Involving Migrants SOP (**NG/06 [INQ000428]**) and SAR Incidents Involving Migrants SOP (**NG/07 [INQ000449]**). These were published not long before the incident on 23-24 November.

21. The starting point for response to small boats incidents is to use the internationally agreed principles laid down in SOLAS and the Maritime SAR Convention, as we would for any SAR response. Existing SAR principles were modified to meet the unique challenges small boat crossings brought. We had to adapt to try to be able to assist as best we could. Procedures that might not necessarily be in the form of published SOPs eventually developed into specific SOPs as the frequency and area of small boat crossings increased. I contributed to the development of these SOPs.

22. Having worked at MRCC Dover as an SAR officer since 2014, I have seen the rapid and significant increase in small boats incidents. This has had an impact in nearly every aspect of my role and at MRCC Dover in general.

23. When reports or calls are received by HM Coastguard alerting them to crossings of small boats in the English Channel, they commence the SAR operation, alerting appropriate resources to respond, as we would with any SAR response. However the main point of difference between more conventional SAR and small boats SAR is the much more difficult process of

receiving information from those who need to be located. HMCG officers attempt to get as much information as possible about the small boat, its location and those onboard, but there are many complex issues which mean that this is difficult to achieve.

24. HM Coastguard procedure for responding to any SAR incident is to create an incident for every call received on ViSION. This procedure is the same for responding to small boats incidents. Each small boat incident will be assigned a Global Incident Number ("GIN"). This is a unique identifier in the incident management system ViSION. The incident log can then be updated to contain information which is relevant to that small boat incident and can include records of calls, action taken and SAR resource messages. A new small boat incident is not created if it is obvious that the caller has called before, and their existing small boat incident can be updated. To differentiate between each call received, a reference is given to each small boat incident. In the UK alpha numeric references are given to GIN incidents, so a small boat incident will be ALPHA, BRAVO1, FOXTROT2, etc. Both phonetic letters and numbers are used as the number of calls received by HM Coastguard often exceed the number of letters in the alphabet.

25. At MRCC Dover, we had to adapt our capabilities to the evolving small boats crisis. For example, it was decided that a HMCG standalone iPhone would be used to enable communication with persons on small boats via WhatsApp, which has the ability to 'drop' or share location.

26. There are gaps in communications coverage in the Dover Strait for airwave systems, which run through mobile networks. These black spots in coverage exist because the usual range of an airwave mast is 17 nautical miles and the complete area of the Dover Strait is not covered by all the masts. Marine VHF radio has full coverage across the Dover Strait with no known faults. We can however only communicate via VHF with vessels in the Dover Strait that also have VHF capabilities. Small boats rarely, if ever, have VHF capabilities. Any vessel over 300 Gross Tonnes in the Dover Strait has Automatic Identification System ("AIS") transceivers which means they can be tracked via AIS Software. Dover Coastguard has marine radar integrated with AIS software which allows HMCG to track the position, course and speed of a vessel. Prior to small boats incidents, 'conventional' SAR operations from vessels at sea would usually be assisted by AIS. Small boats were never fitted with AIS transceivers.

27. Mobile telephone coverage in the Dover Strait is likely to be unreliable, dependent on certain conditions such as high/low pressure, sun flare activity, as well as location of Network Provider masts. Most of the time, the only means of communication with persons on small boats is via mobile telephone. This brings with it a number of difficulties – weak signal, phones getting wet, batteries dying. Nonetheless, we needed to find a way to get the location of small boats, so we procured a standalone mobile phone, intended to be used only to send and receive WhatsApp messages which could contain coordinates.

28. Staffing levels at MRCC Dover had been low for some time, exacerbated by the increase in small boat incidents which impacted morale and stress levels, staff leaving to work at other agencies and then latterly the Covid-19 pandemic. I was usually supposed to work a 'two-day, two-night, four-off' shift pattern, but in the weeks before 23-24 November 2021, I had worked 'six-on, two-off' frequently due to lack of staff (**Exhibit NG/08 [INQ000409]**). Funding had been granted to increase headcount at MRCC Dover but by November 2021, HMCG had not been able to recruit as many staff as had been funded.

The JRCC and the national network's involvement in small boat activity on 23-24 November 2021

29. HM Coastguard operates a network of one Joint Rescue Coordination Centre ("JRCC"), nine Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres ("MRCC") and one Maritime Rescue Sub Centre ("MRSC") throughout the UK. All of these centres are connected through data centres which create a national network of 36 operational zones. This results in all routine and emergency telephone lines and the 166 radio communications sites located throughout the UK being available to all MRCCs/MRSC and the JRCC. This provides resilience within the national network to enable the distribution of workload to whichever operational zone requires resource to respond to an emergency, i.e. any operator on duty can be allocated to any operational zone, regardless of their geographic location in the UK. An example of how this worked in practice is when an SAR SMC at an MRCC needs to have a break, or to cover VTS. There must be at least one SAR SMC at all times at each MRCC, but because

of the network capabilities, an SMC from JRCC or another MRCC can step in and take over as SMC remotely. This happened frequently. On the 23-24 November, I was covered by remote SMCs during my 3-hour VTS cover.

30. Communications with the JRCC and other MRCCs, either through Network calls at the beginning of shifts, phone calls or via the ViSION Network Management Log, established who was covering who and when. This system worked well. This also meant that staff from across the network gained experience in SAR response to small boats incidents, which mainly only take place at Dover and the surrounding areas. Communications between JRCC and MRCC Dover generally took place over VHF.

31. The Network briefing call at the beginning of every shift was an opportunity for JRCC to alert the network of anything significant. The Tactical Commander would usually update on weather conditions and the Operation Deveran RAG rating. The Operation Deveran document is a report to assist with the prediction of likely crossings, which is prepared and shared by the Home Office. The report looks at the forecasted weather and sea state in the area and then assesses the likelihood of crossings, giving a Green (crossings highly unlikely), Amber (crossings likely) or Red (crossing highly likely) rating. Whilst we were informed of the Operation Deveran rating at this meeting, we were also told the rating on a rolling basis a week in advance. This helped us plan resources, both human and physical, according to the likelihood and intensity of crossings anticipated. There was also a section in the report which assessed any likely impact to UK asset availability and capability for aerial

assets and UK Border Force surface assets. The Operation Deveran report valid Monday 22 November 1200 to 2 December 0600 recorded from 2200 on Tuesday 23 November to 0600 Wednesday 24 November as an amber day with crossings likely. It also recorded the impact to UK assets, and for the same time period the AR3 Drone from Dover was assessed as may have some impact due to fog (NG/09 [INQ000146]).

32. My understanding of the roles of Maritime Tactical Commander, Aviation Tactical Commander and Small Boats Tactical Commander in relation to small boats is as follows:

- a. The Maritime Tactical Commander oversaw the entire network. Their responsibilities included assessing risks across the network, coordinating support, and reallocating resources as needed to ensure seamless delivery of coastguard functions. During SAR operations, they provided tactical oversight and support to SMCs, ensuring each incident received an appropriate response with the necessary assets. Maritime tactical commanders also monitored staffing levels and competencies across the network on a shift-by-shift basis. If an MRCC faced a staffing shortfall, the maritime tactical commander could reassign resources remotely or adjust maritime zones to transfer responsibility to another MRCC. They could also deploy remote SMCs as needed to maintain SAR readiness across all maritime zones. Staffing arrangements were reviewed during a network-wide meeting at the beginning of each watch.

- b. The Aviation Tactical Commander supervised a team of operators at Aeronautical Rescue Coordination Centre ("ARCC"), now called JRCC (Air). The Air Tactical Commander ensured the effective and efficient coordination of the response to Aeronautical SAR incidents and those incidents requiring SAR aviation assets.

- c. Small Boat Tactical Commander ("SBTC") – This role was created in August 2021 to support MRCC Dover as the intensity of small boats activity grew. The SBTC role was introduced to support MRCC Dover in managing the migrant crisis by providing on-site tactical oversight. This role aimed to minimise the risk of JRCC tactical commanders losing situational awareness across the network during periods of high migrant activity. On days when Op Deveran amber or red alerts were issued, the SBTC adjusted their hours to be present during peak periods of migrant activity. Additionally, they were available on an on-call basis during significant migrant crossing events outside their regular working hours. The SBTC was also responsible for planning surveillance flights using fixed-wing aircraft. They reviewed the Op Deveran weather assessments and coordinated with Border Force to agree on flight timings. Once finalised, they submitted an aviation request to JRCC (Air), which then assigned the task to 2Excel.

Working relationship with other stakeholders involved in responding to small boats attempting to cross the Dover Strait

33. I have explained the extent of my working relationship with UK Border Force on a practical level relating to how we communicated above. UK Border Force's main role to assist HMCG in SAR was in relation to deployment of surface vessels to respond to SAR incidents, as tasked by HMCG. Once persons are recovered from small boat incidents on to UKBF surface vessels, HMCG no longer have involvement with those persons, as our SAR function has then been completed.

34. We do not have particularly regular contact with the National Crime Agency. They may provide intelligence on crossings sometimes.

35. We receive calls which have been received by police forces either via 999 or calling police stations directly.

36. 2Excel Aviation is contracted to the MCA to provide fixed wing aircraft to HMCG. We would work with them regarding aerial assets which HMCG task for SAR response.

37. Bristow Group is contracted to the MCA to provide helicopters which HMCG task for SAR response.

38. RVL Group / RVL aviation are contracted to the Home Office to provide fixed wing aircraft. HMCG are able to task RVL aircraft for SAR response.

39. RNLI lifeboats are Declared Facilities of HMCG. Standard Operating Procedure Declared and Additional Resources (**Exhibit NG/10 [INQ003768]**) defines Declared Facilities as facilities that have been designated as being available for civil maritime SAR according to a specific standard or set criteria. Each authority declaring facilities is responsible for:

- a. Declaring the standard of capability and availability for each facility;
- b. Maintaining each facility to the declared standard;
- c. Informing HM Coastguard when there is any change in the declared standard of each facility;
- d. Informing HM Coastguard of any reason for not making available any facility which has been requested by HM Coastguard.

40. RNLI all weather and inshore lifeboats, hovercraft and Beach Rescue Units are available to HMCG as surface assets to assist with SAR response. The availability of RNLI boats to assist during periods of increased demand is at the discretion of the RNLI launch operator or deputy launch operator. When we decide whether to task RNLI boats we decide which would be the most appropriate asset to deal with the incident based on demand and number of persons on small boats. At each shift, I am aware which boats are available from the handover documents or oral briefings on available assets. MRCC Dover tasks RNLI assets according to their suitability for the particular SAR response and their availability.

French Authorities

41. The main reason for contact between MRCC Dover and MRCC Gris-Nez is to share information about small boats incidents, which depart the French coast and travel through French waters in the Dover Strait before they reach English waters, which is when HMCG become responsible for the incidents. All contact with Gris-Nez is logged either on ViSION or on the NICE communications system, and is made via VHF. Direct communication is utilised when required for coordination and sharing of information which is time critical. MRCC Dover contact Gris-Nez or vice versa whenever required to either ask for information or share information. We are sent the French Tracker which sets out any small boats incidents they are aware of. As at 23/24 November 2021, this was not a live document, so iterations of the tracker would be sent multiple times over the course of a shift. Often, MRCC Dover would need to proactively request the tracker to be sent via email from MRCC Gris-Nez. As discussed below, MRCC Dover did not receive the tracker until 0057 on 24 November, by which time the French authorities had had notice of small boat activity for many hours. The earlier information is shared about small boat activity, the more chance HMCG has to prepare for when the incidents reach English waters. This may impact how staff resources are arranged over the course of the shift, or may trigger contact with UKBF informing them of approximate timings when small boats are expected to reach English waters.

Operational systems in place as at 23-24 November 2021 to respond to small boats attempting to cross the Dover Strait

Resources

42. Standard Operating Procedures on Aircraft Tasking Policy for Migrant Surveillance Patrols (NG/11 [INQ000461]) and ARCC Small Boat Response (NG/12 [INQ001456]) had been published shortly before November 2021 regarding the tasking of aerial assets in response to small boats incidents.

Systems in place for determining location of small boats

43. When HM Coastguard receive calls for assistance from conventional routes (999 calls, marine VHF radio), these are processed using internationally agreed principles laid down in SOLAS and the Maritime SAR Convention. These processes are also applied to how HM Coastguard responds to small boat incidents. The IAMSAR manual defines three emergency phases to classify incidents and assist in determining the actions to be taken for each incident. These are:

- a. Uncertainty phase – A situation wherein doubt exists as to the safety of a marine vessel, and or the persons on board.
- b. Alert phase – A situation wherein apprehension exists as to the safety of a marine vessel and of the persons on board.
- c. Distress phase – A situation where there is reasonable certainty that a vessel or other craft, including an aircraft or a person, is threatened by grave and imminent danger and requires immediate assistance.

44. HM Coastguard considered all migrant boats entering UK waters to be in grave and imminent danger requiring immediate assistance until information gathered from credible sources provides sufficient evidence for the SMC to determine that a distress response is unnecessary. The effect of this was that all incidents involving migrant boats in the UK Search and Rescue Region ("SRR") were initially placed in the "Distress" phase.

45. The key aim is to gain as much information as possible about the small boat, its location and those onboard. However, there are many impediments to achieving this goal. Lack of mobile phone signal or data; difficult weather conditions; phones losing battery or getting wet; the language barrier; panic or shouting during calls, are just some of the challenges faced when trying to get information from persons on a small boat. Often, they are reticent to tell the truth, either about their location, who they are or the state of the boat they are in. Experience has shown that sometimes persons in small boats exaggerate their status, give false names or refuse to give any names, and do not tell the truth about previous calls to HMCG or other agencies. It is common for multiple people on small boats to make calls to the French Coast Guard or HMCG. When people make calls, it is often the case that different information is provided, and this makes it difficult for the emergency services to know if different calls are from the same small boat.

46. Each member of the team tasked with call collection took responsibility for gaining as much information as we could from small boats incidents. Steps we took to identify the location of small boats included first trying to ascertain

location using WhatsApp or other geo-location technology. This was the most reliable information. Otherwise, trying to get information from the French authorities or other stakeholders, for instance EISEC information from 999 calls. Sometimes we had to rely on asking persons in the boats to identify any vessels or objects around them. We did not rely on social media to monitor the arrival of boats. Without accurate position data, often the only way to assume if a boat was in UK waters was to listen to the dial tone when we called, however this was also not always entirely accurate as it depended on mobile phone networks and which mast they connected to.

47. There were no specific SOPs regarding determining the location of small boats. We learnt from experience what kind of questions to ask to gain any information we could.

48. No specific policies were provided regarding communication with persons who do not have English as a first language. However, there was a "Language Line" SOP dated 02/07/2021, which stated "Language Line Solutions may be used for operational purposes whenever language is causing a problem" (**NG/13 [INQ006203]**). MRCC Dover had access to Language Line services to facilitate communication with persons on small boats but in reality, it was not used much. Often, calls would be very short or would cut off due to bad signal before we had time to connect to Language Line. Through experience and common sense, officers learned how to communicate with those who did not speak English well, but it was a major barrier to receiving the information that we needed to locate small boats that often could not be overcome.

Systems in place for distinguishing small boats

49. We asked as many specific questions as we could to distinguish between small boats – phone numbers attached to persons on boats, colour and markings on the boat, description of how many on board, how many women and children, details of how many were wearing lifejackets etc. It was key that everything was logged in as much detail as possible, but also as rapidly as possible. The process was incredibly difficult when we had multiple small boats incidents at the same time, and when we often had multiple reports from the same small boat.

50. HMCG held responsibility for distinguishing between boats, but we took as much information from stakeholders such as UKBF or Gris-Nez as we could. Information from stakeholders was put into logs on VISION so that we could make our own determinations on which incidents may be repeats. Over the course of a shift, we would constantly question the information we had, and try to make matches or links.

51. Information gathering is a substantial aspect of standard HMCG SAR initial training. The basic elements of this are no different for small boats, but experience and training on the job teaches the right questions to ask to achieve the best results. There were no specific policies or procedures provided regarding distinguishing between small boats. However, the Incidents Involving Migrants SOP (**NG/06**) Information Gathering section on pages 2-3 included examples of the kind of questions to be asked about vessels and persons on board, which could then be used for comparison /

reconciliation purposes, and states that information gathering was to continue throughout the incident. The SOP included instructions to 'Log multiple reports as separate incidents. Merge once details across multiple incidents match.'

Triage

52. The SMC was responsible for triaging of incidents. All small boats incidents, as explained above, were designated into the 'distress' phase but it was important to triage the level of distress the small boat may be under. This may lead to escalating the SAR response – by expediting tasking of surface or aerial assets or by broadcasting a May Day Relay for immediate assistance from passing vessels. The criteria used included: past experiences, identifying whether information was valid, whether the message was matching the tone of the voice, etc. A large amount of judgment was involved. There were no specific policies or procedures provided regarding triage of small boats.

Systems in place for closure of small boat incidents

53. HM Coastguard's standard operating procedures included direction on the protocol for Search Suspension and Termination (**NG/14 [INQ000450]**). Termination of a search is defined as "The halting of searches that are concluded, whether successful or not". The protocol allowed for SAR efforts to be terminated based on receipt of credible information that the emergency situation had ceased and that SAR assistance was no longer required. Suspension of a search is where the search effort is paused due to various factors but can be restarted. HM Coastguard's suspension and termination

policy refers to IAMSAR Chapter 9 which states that operations enter the conclusion stage when:

- a. Information is received that the ship, aircraft, other craft, or persons who are the subject of the SAR incident are no longer in distress;
- b. the ship, aircraft, other craft, or persons for whom SAR facilities are searching have been located and the survivors rescued; or
- c. during the distress phase, the SMC or other proper authority determines that further search would be to no avail because additional effort cannot appreciably increase the probability of successfully finding any remaining survivors or because there is no longer any reasonable probability that the distressed persons have survived.

54. The key SOP we used however for small boat incidents was the Incidents Involving Migrants SOP, v12, dated 6 October 2021 (**NG/06**). It contains a section on SAR Termination, which states: "SAR can be terminated where reliable information is received that the emergency no longer exists." Closure relates to the closing of an incident on Vision once all actions according to Mission Conduct have been followed. Searches may be terminated even if the incident remains open, as per **NG/14**. The procedures in force at the time of the accident did not contain particular actions to be taken when closing migrant incidents.

SAR response to incident CHARLIE on the Night of 23-24 November 2021

19:00 23 November 2021 to 01:00 24 November 2021

55. I commenced my 12-hour shift at 1930 on 23 November 2021, as SMC for zones 13 and 14 and Team Leader of Watch 3. My SAR team that night consisted of Stuart Downs, a MOO-T ("Maritime Operational Officer-Trainee") and **TRAINEE MOO** who was also a MOO-T but was not yet qualified. One MOO was on annual leave, and another MOO was off sick (**NG/08**). At the time, Stuart was partially qualified, holding a Communications ticket, which met the minimum requirement for staff counting. However, he had not yet completed his Incident Response qualification, the final step to becoming fully certified. **TRAINEE MOO** as a full trainee, was only able to make non-emergency telephone calls, administration tasks relating to assigning assets to incidents and recording of maritime safety information.

56. **Name** and **Name** were scheduled to VTS duty. As these were the only two officers trained as VTS officers on shift that night, it was going to be necessary for me to provide 3 hours of VTS break cover, plus my own break as I was the only other staff member VTS, Channel Navigation Information Service ("CNIS") and SUNK trained on duty. SUNK is a Vessel Traffic Services area managed by Dover Coastguard. It is north of the north foreland and manages the inbound and outbound traffic of vessels to the ports of London and Felixstowe and associated ports within the Thames estuary. It also contains the pilot boarding area for these ports. VTS operations must always have two VTS-trained staff cover at all times. Within Dover MRCC at the time, the VTS desk was physically removed from SAR operation, at the

back of the room. It is not possible at all to cover both SAR and VTS at the same time. Whilst I covered VTS, the plan was that I would receive SAR SMC cover from another SMC remotely in the network for 4.5 hours.

57. Each MRCC SMC entered a Start of Watch Status ("SOWS") update on the Maritime National Network Management Log (**NG/15 [INQ000231]**) at the beginning of each shift. The entry I made at 1944 on 23 November 2021 is as follows:

1944

NGIBSON

SMC Comment

MRCC DOVER SOWS NIGHTS SHIFT 23/11/2021

ON-DUTY:

TL // N GIBSON // SMC // VTSO // 1930-0730

(VTS COVER 4.5 HRS)

MOO // S DOWNS // COMMS // 1930-0730

MOO(t) //

TRAINEE MOO

 // NON OPS // 1930-0730

RADAR

MOO //

Name

 // MC // VTSO // 1930-0730

VTS TL //

Name

 // MC // VTSO(c) // 1930-

0730

SICK: 1

ISOLATION: 0

ON-LEAVE: 1

SHIFT SWAP: 0

VACANCIES :1

FUNCTIONS: VTS CNIS AND SUNK

VTM ZONE: D

...

SMC SUPPORT REQUIRED FOR 4.5 HOURS

58. Regarding call collection, Downs and I were tasked with taking calls regarding all SAR matters, which included small boats incident reports. [REDACTED] was only able to deal with certain calls as a trainee. I provided supervision of Downs and [REDACTED] to the extent that I was sat near them and could monitor what they were doing and saying. I did not provide any specific supervision or guidance to my team on the night 23-24 November. The standalone Coastguard mobile phone for use with WhatsApp was not allocated to a particular member of the team. It was located on our SAR desk to be used when necessary, when asking for positions from callers on small boats for whom we had been given

mobile phone numbers. It was not intended to be used as an additional communications device.

59. At the beginning of my shift, I received a handover from the SMC / Team leader of the previous shift. Such a handover would normally consist of an oral handover, and a Sharepoint handover document created at the end of each shift for the incoming SMC and team. The oral handover would go into detail about each ongoing incident and give an update on the status of all SAR Assets, with the Sharepoint document acting as an aide memoire/ reference point. I cannot now remember exactly what was said at the handover on the night of 23rd November.

60. The 2100 Network Briefing update in the Maritime Network Management Log (NG/15) showed the staffing levels across the Network that evening:

Controller Message

23rd November 2021 2100 - NETWORK

BRIEFING

ON CALL STRATEGIC COMMANDER: Duncan Ley

DUTY MAR & AIR TACTICAL COMMANDERS:

MarOps: Dai Jones / ARCC: Dom Golden @ JRCC

ON CALL:

Name

 (Falmouth)

1: Staffing levels as per incident: 41309

SITE No s SMC / TL

SHET 2 / 0 / M:

ABDN 3 / 1 / S:

HMBR 3 / 1 / TL:

LNDN 1 / 0 / 0:

DVER 2 / 1 / TL: Nieal G [sic]

SLNT 9 / 2 / TL: Tom B

FMTH 2 / 0 / M:

MFHN 3 / 1 / S:

HYHD 3 / 1 / S:

BFST 3 / 1 / S:

STWY 3 / 2 / S:

MCC 1 / 0 / :

JMSC

CAPITA

MCA ICT

DCPSO –

61. I understand that the level of staff across the network that night was sufficient according to recommended staffing levels for the network set by HMCG.

62. The Tactical Commander, David Jones, also made the following comment in the log:

Guidance from Tactical Commander where

there are teams of 2 or 3 please consider getting

through breaks to ensure maximum numbers in

ops rooms when we face maximum demand. If

you are getting at all overwhelmed alert me by

whatever means available that you need support,

it is better to go big early and retract, than try to

bring support in late.

63. I have been asked whether I was aware of a "controller message" recorded on the ViSION Admin log 041382 (NG/16 [INQ000235]) at 0041 by David Jones which stated as follows:

ABOVE E-MAIL ATTACHMENT IS A SCREEN

SHOT OF WEATHER (VISIBILITY) @ 0100Z

FROM HELIBRIEF. OF NOTE IS THE

SIGNIFICANTLY POOR WX /VIS NOW ON BOTH
SIDE OF THE DOVER STRAITS. *AKREADY
2EXCEL HAVE POSTPONED THEU CG25B
SORTIE DUE TO THEIR CONCERNS FOR
SUITABLE WX DIVERSIONS FOR AIRCRAFT.

JRCC CDRS MAR & AIR HAVE DISCUSSED 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 AND EXPECTING A
NORMAL (?) MIGRANT COROSSING NIGHT
WHEREAS THIS HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE
VERY DANGEROUS

64. I do not recall being aware of this controller message on the Admin log, but I
may have read it at the time. I was not on the call between the Maritime and

Air Commanders at 0030. At that time, I was covering VTS. However, I was aware from experience that it would likely be an active night as it had been given the Op Deveran rating of amber: crossings were probably going to be happening that night and bad weather and poor visibility was likely to be an issue. I was also two members of staff down. I had prepared accordingly for this – namely by covering for my two VTS colleagues' breaks at the beginning of the shift, as stated above, so that I would be on SAR SMC duty when it was likely to be busier with small boat activity later on in the night. If I was aware of the message, it would not have changed anything about my approach or actions for the rest of the shift. The following day was given a red Op Deveran rating, so I knew that I had to preserve assets for what was likely to be a busier shift of crossing events the next day. I was not expecting a 'relaxing' night by any means.

65. Often on a night shift, MRCC Dover would check in with MRCC Gris Nez between roughly 2100 and 0000 to see if they had any information about small boat activity so we could prepare ourselves for when boats were likely to reach English waters in the early hours of the morning. Often they would have called us, or vice versa, to inform us of any activity, or they may have sent their tracker to us via email, either by request from us or of their own volition. It was not unusual, however, for MRCC Gris-Nez not to inform us of small boat activity until the early morning, or otherwise we became aware of it by other means, for example by 999 calls from a small boat, or through HMCG aviation surveillance. On the night of 23rd November, I cannot recall whether anyone requested information from MRCC Gris-Nez before 0034.

However, if MRCC Gris-Nez did not contact us first, it would usually be the SMC who would check in with MRCC Gris-Nez. I was occupied on VTS at that time on 23rd November.

66. On this night, there was a delay between the French becoming aware of small boat activity in the Dover Strait, seemingly from around 2100 when the first boats on the French tracker were known to have departed the French coast, and when MRCC Dover was sent the tracker for the first time at 0057. If we had been informed earlier we could potentially have acted sooner in preparation for the arrival of a number of small boats known to be in the Dover Strait. This theoretically could have involved sending out surface assets pre-emptively. However, I do not think it would have had a significant impact on my actions for the rest of the shift, as I do not think UKBF would have sent surface assets until it was known for certain what boats were soon to be in English waters and where they were. Regarding human resources being prepared, the staffing resources within MRCC Dover could not be changed at that stage, and we had support from JRCC and the network if necessary. We may have passed the information to UKBF to give them forewarning of small boat activity. However, as I have said, it would be unlikely that they would proactively launch a vessel just on being made aware that small boats activity had been noted by the French Coastguard. Similarly, we would not have put RNLI lifeboats on standby just on becoming aware of small boat activity, as they are an immediate resource to be stood up when necessary in response to specific incidents.

01:00 to 02:00 24 November 2021

67. At around 0125, I returned to my desk on SAR, having been covering VTS. I can see now from the logs that the first small boat incident MRCC Dover became aware of that night came via a call from the Port of Dover, and was logged with the reference ALPHA at 0029 in a newly created ALPHA incident log (NG/17 [INQ000234]). It is highly likely that as soon as I returned to the SAR desk I would have read the following messages on the logs. If I did not read all the messages, Downs would have given me a briefing orally on what they contained.

68. Downs had made the following entry at 0030 on the newly created ALPHA log (NG/17):

Details changed from OPS CENTRE DOVER PORT

PD 523

LOTS OF VOICES IN TEH BACKGROIUND.

WIND NOISE

BELIEVCE MAIGRANT to OPS CENTRE DOVER PORT

PD 523

LOTS OF VOICES IN TEH BACKGROUND.

WIND NOISE IN BACKGROUND

BELIEVE MAIGRANT

CAN YOU HELP ME - THEN LINE CUT OUT

69. Then at 0032, Downs stated in the ALPHA log (**NG/17**):

CALLED MOBILE BUT RING TONE WAS FRENCH

AND THEN LINE CUTS OUT.A

70. At 0034 he entered into the ALPHA log (**NG/17**):

INCIDENT IS POSITIONED ON MRCC DOVER AS NO

POSITION KNOWN. MONITORING PHASE AS

BELIVED TO BE IN FRENCH WATERS.

71. At 0100, Downs entered into the ADMIN log (**NG/17**) an email received from MRCC Gris-Nez, which contained their tracker (**NG/18** INQ007691 From this log, I would have been able to access this email. I cannot recall whether I did open the email to view the spreadsheet (referred to as a tracker) when I returned to the SAR desk, or if Downs orally updated me on the contents of the tracker. By 0100, MRCC Dover was now aware that there were potentially four small boats that the French were aware of in the Dover Strait (with two other small boats also listed in the tracker as 'at earth – no crossing'). The tracker showed that the French Warship Flamant was either with or had been with small boat incidents 1, 2 and 3. UKBF were copied into this email, as is usual.

72. Downs created another incident log for a new small boat incident, referred to as BRAVO, at 0101 (NG/19 [INQ000236]). At 0108, the following entries were entered into the BRAVO log (for the avoidance of doubt, the reference to SMC in the following entries does not refer to me, but to the SMC at MRCC Solent - C Barnett - who was covering for me whilst I was on VTS duty):

4/11/21 01:08:14 SDOWNS Call Collection

FRENCH MIGRANT 1

DETECETD 21:02 AT CANAL DES DUNES

SEMI RIGID BOAT

40 POB

FRENCH VESSEL FLAMANT

COURSE 284 AT 6 KNOTS

POSN 5107.40N 001 42.67E

24/11/21 01:08:54 CBARNETT SMC Comment

AS PER DISCUSSION WITH BF, CAN WE

PLEASE CONFIRM WITH GRIS NEZ THAT THE
POSITION IS CORRECT AND THAT THE TIME

IS CORRECT, AS THIS WOULD PUT THE

VESSEL APPROX 1NM AWAY FROM UKSRR 3
HOURS AGO.

73. The following entries were also made in the BRAVO log (**NG/19**):

24/11/21 01:10:17 SDOWNS Routine

DOVER IS SPEAKING TO MRCC GRIS NEZ TO
CONFIRM POSITION

24/11/21 01:11:57 SDOWNS Coordinate changed from

1.71116662025452,51.1233329772949 to

1.9706666469574,51.0756683349609

24/11/21 01:13:17 SDOWNS Incident Grade changed from D to M

24/11/21 01:15:26 CBARNETT Routine

LKP GIVEN FROM GRIS NEZ PUTS THIS IN A
DIFFERENT POSITION TO THAT OF THE
EMAIL. THIS POSITION IS IN THE FRENCH
AOR, SO DOWNGRADED TO MONITORING.

24/11/21 01:15:50 CBARNETT SMC Comment

ABOVE SMC COMMENT

24/11/21 01:25:59 SDOWNS Routine

Routine

UKBF ADVISED OF UPDATED POSITION 51

04.54N 001 58.24E

24/11/21 01:26:06 SDOWNS Resource Status

Inform UKBF (V) of 041383-24112021

24/11/21 01:26:06 SDOWNS UKBF - Informed of incident 041383 -
24112021

74. In addition to incidents ALPHA and BRAVO, at 0115 Downs created a new incident log for small boat incident CHARLIE (NG/20 [INQ000237]). At 0119, the log entry states:

24/11/21 01:19:41 SDOWNS Call Collection

FRENCH MIGRANT 7 IS UK MIGRANT CHARLIE

30 POB

13 WOMEN

8 CHILDREN

14 OF POB HAVE LIFEJACKETS

DINGHY APPEARS IN GOOD CONDITION

TEWL NUMBERS

Personal Data 095

Personal Data 166

75. The following entries were then also made by Downs on the CHARLIE log
(NG/20):

24/11/21 01:22:06 SDOWNS Call Collection

51 06.51N 001 46.21E

24/11/21 01:24:05 SDOWNS Routine

UKBF MCC ADVISED OF THIS MIGRANT - HMC

VALIANT WILL PROBABLY BE DEPLOYED WILL

ADVISE WHEN DECISION MADE BY UKBF

24/11/21 01:24:16 SDOWNS Resource Status

Inform UKBF (V) of 041384-24112021

24/11/21 01:24:16 SDOWNS UKBF - Informed of incident 041384-24112021

76. Downs spoke to MRCC Gris-Nez and UKBF about Migrant 7/ CHARLIE. I cannot now recall whether Downs verbally told me anything else not written in the logs about the small boat incidents. Once I was at my desk, I would have been in close proximity to my colleagues on SAR, and therefore would have been able to hear half of conversations had with MRCC Gris-Nez, JRCC or UKBF if I was not also on another phone call, so I would have had a reasonable awareness of what was happening beyond what was written in the logs. We would also share amongst us what had happened in between calls.

77. Very shortly after returning to the SAR desk, and now being aware of small boat incidents ALPHA, BRAVO and CHARLIE, as well as the information in the French tracker stating that they were aware of four small boats incidents in the Dover Strait, I requested an VTS broadcast announcement on VHF Channel 11 at 0126 stating *"All ships in Dover Straits. Search and Rescue Operations. Following confirmed reports of small boat crossings this evening, vessels are requested to post extra lookout while transitting the South West*

lane between the Interbank Buoy and the South Varne Buoy and report any sightings of small craft to Dover Coastguard on VHF Channel 16" (NG/21

INQ007650

78. At 0130, [Name] who was located at JRCC, updated the CHARLIE incident log to state that Valiant had been tasked from Dover to the small boat incident CHARLIE. I have been asked why the Valiant's actions in respect of the three boats located and embarked later on in the night are recorded on the ViSION incident log for incident CHARLIE rather than on the general ADMIN log for small boat activity. As Valiant was tasked to the incident CHARLIE in ViSION, from then on, any communication from Valiant's call sign was automatically recorded both in the Valiant asset tab on ViSION, and in the CHARLIE incident log. The following log entries in the CHARLIE incident log (NG/20) shows Valiant being assigned to Incident 041384-24112021 (CHARLIE):

24/11/21 01:30:20 [Name] Resource Status

Required response met

24/11/21 01:30:20 [Name] Resource Status

Required response met

24/11/21 01:30:20 [Name] VALIANT

-

Assigned to Incident 041384-24112021

24/11/21 01:30:20 Name VALIANT

-

Status Update

Status changed from 20 - A - At Base to 01 -

Called

24/11/21 01:30:20 Name Status changed from U - Unserviced to

O -

Open

24/11/21 01:30:20 Name Resource Status Turnout Methods

Offered

VALIANT : [V]

79. At 0131, after speaking with MRCC Gris-Nez at 0128, Downs entered into the
CHARLIE log (**NG/20**):

Call Collection

ARE NOW IN POSITION

51 07.25N 001 45.22E

HOW KNOW IN POSITION - FROM WHATTS

APP PD 879

33 PERSONS 13 WOMEN AND 8 CHILDREN 14

80. I have been asked by the Inquiry about the procedure for use of WhatsApp when a number is obtained by HM Coastguard by the French. There was a document entitled "CGOC Dover WhatsApp Usage" dated 20/20/20 (NG/22 [INQ006747]). However, this was more of a guide how to use WhatsApp rather than procedure for use of WhatsApp when a number is obtained by HMCG by the French. As far as I am aware, the practice was to send a message to the number via WhatsApp to ask for a position, stating that the number belonged to the UK Coastguard, and if necessary, also send a link to download the WhatsApp application. At 0142 and 0144, messages were sent to the numbers associated with Migrant 7/ CHARLIE by the standalone mobile WhatsApp number (NG/23 [INQ001414] - [Redacted] 095) and (NG/24 [INQ001415] - [Redacted] 166). I do not recall sending these messages. Downs most likely sent these as he had taken the call at 0128 with Gris-Nez.

81. At 0136, another incident log was created for small boat incident FOXTROT by [Redacted] (NG/25 [INQ000239]), after a call was received by [Redacted] from the Port of Dover. He made the following entries about the call:

24/11/21 01:48:40 [Redacted] Name Officer Message

CALL TRANSFERRED FROM PORT OF DOVER -

UNABLE TO GET CALLERS NUMBER

LOTS OF SHOUTING, TRIED TO PASS WHATSAPP

NUMBER TWICE AS IT WAS REQUESTED BUT

THEN CALLER SAID HAD NO INTERNET,
ASKED THEM TO CALL 999 IN ORDER FOR US TO
GET THEIR POSITION
CALLED PORT OF DOVER BACK FOR NUMBER:
PD 523, THEY HAVE NOW HAD 3 CALLS
FROM THE NUMBER

24/11/21 01:54:38 Name Priority Message

INCIDENT POSITIONED IN VICINITY OF
EXISTING MIGRANT JOBS PURELY FOR INCIDENT
CREATION, NO POSITIONAL INFORMATION GATHERED

82. At 0140, Barnett created an incident log for small boat incident DELTA (NG/26
[INQ000238]), with an entry at 0144 stating:

01:44 C Priority

A

VESSEL - VAID - Appears in

Difficulties CBARNETT

DELTA // 30 POB// 30 POB , DELTA

FRENCH MIGRANT 3

INFO FROM GRIS NEZ

51 04.70N 002 24.50E

23 2224 UTC

30 POB

83. At 0143, I made my first entry into the CHARLIE incident log (**NG/20**), stating as follows:

24/11/21 01:43:50 NGIBSON SMC Comment

UPGRADED TO DISTRESS AS LOCATION

UPDATE PLACES VESSEL IN UK SRR

UNKNOWN CONDITION OF CRAFT AND

PERSONS ON BOARD NO FRENCH ASSETS ON

SCENE WITH VESSEL

84. At 0145, Barnett created an incident log for small boat incident ECHO (**NG/27** [**INQ000240**]). The entry is as follows:

01:45 C Priority

M

VESSEL - VAID - Appears in

Difficulties CBARNETT

ECHO // 30 POB// 30 POB , ECHO

REPORT FROM GRIS NEZ

FRENCH REF 6

24 4.58N 002 25.06E

24 0013

30 POB

85. At 0148, the French Coastguard passed a phone call from Migrant 7 to MRCC Dover. I answered the call. This call lasted for 21 minutes and 14 seconds (NG/28 INQ007630) On the phone was what sounded like a young man on a small boat. I asked him to calm down as he sounded panicked. I asked for his name. When he responded, I heard "Moomin." I later found out this was not "Moomin", but Mubin. I will refer to "Moomin" throughout this statement as this is the name that is used in the incident logs, but no disrespect is intended in the use of the incorrect name. From the outset I had difficulty hearing due to other people shouting, language difficulties and a bad line. I asked him to ask the others to be quiet. I tried asking for the colour of the boat but he did not understand me and could not give me an answer. He asked for my help, saying that he was in the sea and the boat was broken. He asked for a

WhatsApp number so he could send his location. I gave him the number of the HMCG standalone WhatsApp mobile telephone - [PD] 940. He confirmed this number back to me. Whilst he was giving me his number, it was very difficult to understand him, due to others speaking and shouting. Again, I asked for one person to speak and for the others to be quiet.

86. Before giving me a phone number, he asked me if I was from the UK and I confirmed that I was UK Coastguard. He gave me the phone number [PD] 879. I asked how many people were on the boat, and he told me about 40 people. I called back the number he had given to me and said I would send a message. He then gave me another number for WhatsApp - [PD] 057. Again, I confirmed this number with him, and said I would send a 'normal' SMS text message and a WhatsApp message to this number. He said he did not have internet. I said I would send both messages. After some panicked sounds around him, he asked if I would send a boat. I said we would, but we needed to know his position, and that a boat would take time to get to them. He then said he had internet.

87. During the call, at 0149, two WhatsApp messages were sent to the first number, [PD] 879, stating firstly 'This is the UK Coastguard' and secondly, 'Please send us your position' (NG/29 [INQ001419]).

02:00 to 03:00 24 November 2021

88. I sent another WhatsApp message to [PD] 057 at around 0200, stating 'Please send us your location.' Before the caller sent his location, he said he

could see a light. I received a message back with a location at 0201: 51.146557,1.748657. I sent another message back via WhatsApp, asking him to resend his location at 0207 (**NG/30 [INQ001421]**). I also sent an SMS message at 0209 to the same number, asking 'Can you share your Google maps location' (**NG/31 [INQ001416]**). As far as I am aware, I was following HMCG practice relating to WhatsApp messages. "Moomin" then asked if he was in UK waters. I confirmed he was. He repeated that he saw a light. Another person took over the call and said 'look on the left'. He said 'we are finished, look on the left please.' I asked if there was a boat to his left. He repeated to look to his left many times, and that they could see a light. There was shouting that the boat was broken and people were screaming. I asked Moomin to come back to the phone. I tried to clarify a number of times that I was not on the boat, so could not see the light. I asked him how far away the boat was a number of times. Throughout this part of the call, it was incredibly difficult to hear as the line was distorted. At times, I could barely hear anything.

89. Whilst I was still on the call, at 0206, either I or my colleagues used the coordinates I had been given via WhatsApp to locate a vessel, Gaschem Schinano, that was close by on the AIS, which could have been the light that the people on the small boat were referring to. The small boat was positioned near the Sandettie Light Vessel, which was in the North East lane of the Traffic Separation Scheme ("TSS"). This was a high density area with lots of commercial traffic. Dover Channel Navigation Information Service ("CNIS") hailed vessel Gaschem Schinano which was located close to the position of

the small boat and told them that there were reports of a small boat in their vicinity. They responded that they could not see any small boat. She told them to keep a sharp lookout and to navigate with caution.

90. The call dropped off after 21 minutes and 14 seconds, at approximately 0209.

I had a gut feeling that this was not a routine call, and that this did not feel like an exaggerated case. The elevated level of shouting and panic in people's voices gave me cause for concern.

91. At 0204, whilst I was on the call, the HMCG mobile phone received a Missed Call from PD 095. There was another missed call from the same number at 0210 (**NG/32 [INQ001417]**).

92. At 0211, I added an entry into the CHARLIE log (**NG/20**) briefly recording the call:

24/11/21 02:11:13 NGIBSON Casualty Details

MOOMIN

40 POB

PD 057

WHATS APP MESSAGE SENT LOTS OF

SHOUTING UNREADABLE MOST COMMS DUE

TO SHOUTING

93. I added further entries regarding coordinates from the WhatsApp message received during the call at 0201 (**NG/20**):

24/11/21 02:13:56 NGIBSON Casualty Details

DECIMALISED LAT AND LONG

51.146557 1.748657

51 08.476N 001 44.552E

94. I received another WhatsApp message after the call finished (**NG/30**) and updated the log (**NG/20**) with new coordinates:

24/11/21 02:14:24 NGIBSON Coordinate changed from

1.753666639328,51.1208343505859 to

1.74865698814392,51.146556854248

95. During the 21-minute call, small boat incidents HOTEL, INDIA, JULIET and KILO with corresponding incident logs were created by colleagues. I was probably not aware of these new incidents until after I had finished the call and entered log updates. However, this demonstrates how busy the shift was, with incidents being reported consistently throughout the early hours of the morning.

96. Whilst I was on the call, MRCC Dover received an updated French Tracker at 0148 (**NG/33** INQ007692) and logged in the ADMIN log by Downs

(NG/16) at 0152. No telephone numbers were recorded on the French Tracker. The Tracker recorded that Migrant 1 and Migrant 9 could be linked to Migrant 7 incident (CHARLIE). It stated that the small boat had 40 people on board. Migrant 9 was recorded as having 33 persons onboard, including 3 children and 6 females. I cannot recall if I saw the updated Tracker at this time or shortly after my call, or whether Downs or other colleagues informed me verbally that Migrant 1 and Migrant 9 could be linked to Migrant 7 (CHARLIE) but it is possible that I was aware that a number of small boat incidents at this point in the morning could be duplicates, with roughly the same amount of people onboard.

97. At 0217, a call was received to the standalone WhatsApp mobile phone from PD 057, one of the numbers the caller had given me. It was three minutes in length (NG/34 [INQ001418]). I do not recall this phone call, and cannot be sure whether I answered it or somebody else did. As it is a WhatsApp call, it was not automatically recorded in the NICE system. It is not recorded in any incident log. The standalone Coastguard phone is not intended to be used for communication beyond to provide positional information. Nonetheless, if I did take this call, I should have logged it on ViSION and I cannot give an explanation for why it is not logged. However, my focus as soon as the long call from the small boat was over was to log the positions received via WhatsApp during the call and then commence the May Day Relay process as soon as possible.

98. At 0220 and 0221, WhatsApp messages were received from PD 879 and PD 057, both the numbers received from the caller on the small boat, including coordinates: 51.149422,1.754940 and 51.1507571,1.759471 respectively (**NG/29**) and (**NG/35 [INQ001424]**). I do not recall seeing these WhatsApp messages at this time. The position on the CHARLIE log at 0224 below relates to the WhatsApp position sent before the new positions received at 0220/0221. I understand that the WhatsApp position received at 0221 (**NG/35**) was not actioned until 0328. I cannot give an explanation for why this message was missed at the time, other than to say that I was setting up the May Day Relay when it was received.

99. Between 0224 and 0228, I made the following log entries into the CHARLIE log (**NG/20**):

24/11/21 02:24:40 NGIBSON Details changed from to SMALL CRAFT
WITH 40

ON BOARD IN POSITION 51 08.5N

001 44.5E THIS BEARS 244 DEGRESS 1.8NM

FROM SANDIETTE LIGHT VESSEL TAKING

WATER AND REQUIRING IMMEDIATE

ASSITANCE ANY VESSEL THAN CAN ASSIST TO

CONTACT DOVER CG

24/11/21 02:24:40 NGIBSON Co-ordinating changed from to DOVER
CG

24/11/21 02:24:40 NGIBSON Custom Form

Custom Form Attached

Type: BCast MAYDAY FREE FORMAT

Comments: None

...

24/11/21 02:28:36 NGIBSON Resource ONE Task changed from to
BX

ACTION BY DOVER CG TO ALL VESSELS FOR
ASSISTANCE

24/11/21 02:28:36 NGIBSON SITUATION changed from to REPORT
OF SMALL

CRAFT IN VICINITY OF SANDIETTE LV WITH 40
POB

24/11/21 02:28:36 NGIBSON MISSION changed from to DISTRESS
PHASE

INCIDENT TO LOCATE AND EXTRICATE

PERSONS TO PLACE OF SAFETY

24/11/21 02:28:36 NGIBSON EXECUTION changed from to DOVER
CG TO BX

ACTION TO REQUEST VESSELS TO ASSIST

BORDER FORCE VALIANT TASKED TO ASSIST

...

24/11/21 02:28:36 NGIBSON CONFIRMATION/QUESTIONS
changed from to

CLOSEST VESSEL FLAMANT ON C-SCOPE

...

24/11/21 02:28:36 NGIBSON Resource TWO Task changed from to
GET UNDER WAY TO VESSEL IF NO OTHER VESSELS

100. These entries related to the May Day Relay that I created which was broadcast at 0227. I decided to broadcast a May Day Relay based on the level of distress I heard on the call, and the lack of information I had been able to get from the small boat itself. I did this with the purpose of alerting

vessels in the area who may have been able to assist the small boat or provide more information on its location or status. The May Day Relay was repeated four times every twenty minutes from 0227.

101. May Day Relays are only used in severe distress situations, where there is a grave risk to the life of the people in distress. May Day Relays are used as often as required – this could be once a month or less. They are not uncommon, however they are the highest level of alert, so are not used without good reason.

102. According to SOLAS convention requirements, vessels in the area are required to respond to a May Day Relay, whether they are able to provide assistance to the boat in distress or not. Some large vessels would not be able to manoeuvre to assist a small boat. Not all vessels are going to be able to assist, so May Day Relays are also to ensure that vessels are on the look out as well. Some vessels on 23/24 November did respond. They were told to keep a sharp lookout. However, vessels do not always respond. I do not know why some vessels did not respond to the May Day Relay on that night. I am not aware of enforcement action taken in relation to the failure of some nearby vessels to respond on 23/24 November. At the time of a May Day Relay, we are preoccupied with lifesaving actions rather than considering actions against those vessels that have not responded.

103. I could see on C-Scope that the French vessel Flamant was the closest vessel to the last known position we had for the small boat, as identified via AIS. This was logged on the CHARLIE log at 0228, as shown above. Whilst I believe I still would have sent a May Day Relay in the circumstances if

Flamant was not nearby, there was an aspect of my decision to create a May Day Relay that related to the position of the Flamant.

104. I contacted MRCC Solent to draft and record the May Day Relay. The wording of the May Day Relay was as follows: *'Small Craft with 40 persons on board in position 51o 08.5N 001o 44.5E this bears 244o 1.8nm from Sandettie Light Vessel, taking water and requiring immediate assistance any vessel that can assist to contact Dover Coastguard'*.

105. When a May Day Relay is broadcast, it is preceded by a Digital Selective Call ("DSC") alert. A May Day Relay should use the DSC classification alert of "Distress" instead of "Urgency" which is what I am now aware happened for the first three May Day Relays. An "Urgency" DSC alert is used for a Pan Pan broadcast, where there is risk of danger, but not danger of loss of life. A "Distress" DSC alert is used for a May Day Relay when there is danger of loss of life. I do not think I specifically asked for a "Distress" DSC alert to be sent before the May Day Relay when I requested it. My understanding was that it was standard procedure that a "Distress" DSC alert would be used. The May Day Relay was drafted and recorded remotely at MRCC Solent, and so I was not aware at the time that it was sent under the incorrect DSC classification. I believe this was just operator error. In any event, the alert did still go to all vessels, so whilst it was incorrect procedure, the impact of the error should not have been particularly significant in my opinion.

106. There was a 999 call received from a small boat which was connected to MRCC Dover at 0224. I was dealing with the May Day Relay so was not

on this call. It was logged as a new incident on a log called Name NG/36
[INQ000245]) by Downs. The log entry is as follows:

02:34 C Priority

M

VESSEL - VAID - Appears in

Difficulties SDOWNNS

MIGRANT VESSEL ENGINE STOPPED

WE ARE SINKING

NAME Name

IN THE MIDDLE OF SEA, LOST OUR ENGINE.

THE ENGINE HAS STOPPED.

HOW A FAR FROM UK ARE YOU? WE ARE MOST IN BETWEEN
FRANCE AND UK.

WHERE DID LEAVE? DUNKIRK WHAT TIME? 21:00

HAVE YOU PHONED ANYONE ELSE? NO WE JUST....

CAN SHIPS OR VESSEL. - NAME OF BIG SHIP - NO I CANT SEE
ABOUT 3KM AWAY

CAN YOU SEE ANY COLOURED LIGHTS? DONT KNOW.

HOW MANY PEOPLE ON YOUR BOAT?

999 CALL DROPPED OUT

VODAFONE ZONE CODE0165

107. At 0231, I made an entry onto the KILO incident log (NG/37 [INQ000244]) as follows:

24/11/21 02:31:08 NGIBSON SMC Comment

CURRENT INFORMATION IS SCANT AND

POSSIBLE IN FRENCH WATERS

MULTIPLE ATTEMPTS CURRENTLY ONGOING

WITH MULTIPLE 999 CALLS BEING RECEIVED

AT THIS TIME A MONITORING INCIDENT TILL FURTHER
INFORMATION CAN BE GATHERED

108. At 0232, I took a 999 phone call (NG/38 [INQ007655]). The caller asked for help and stated, 'I am finished' and that there were ladies on the boat. I asked if he had called before. He replied he had. There were 40 persons onboard. I asked for his telephone number. He did not respond to this, but asked for a helicopter. I asked where the boat set off from that evening. He responded Calais. I asked what colour the small boat was but was unable to get an answer as the caller did not understand the question. He replied saying they were outside of the boat. The caller then tried to provide a telephone number

for a WhatsApp message to be sent. Another person started giving a number, [PD] 394. This was not a complete number, but I recognised the telephone number as being the first part of the number given to me by 'Moomin' on the earlier phone call ([PD] 879). I mentioned the name 'Moomin', who then came on the call. Because of this, I was able to link this call conclusively to small boat incident CHARLIE and the 21-minute call I had earlier with "Moomin." I explained to the caller that a boat had been tasked but they would have to wait for it to arrive. I asked them to stop calling unless their situation changed, as each time they called, I thought it was a different small boat incident. I tried to stress that it was really important not to keep calling. The caller stated that it was cold, and he was in the water. I said that I understood, and a rescue boat had been sent. The caller asked for it to arrive quickly. The call then ended after 6 minutes and 58 seconds.

109. I created a new incident GIN 041395-24112021 and incident log, named '40 pob' (NG/39 [INQ000247]) at 0232. The entry, made at 0240, is as follows:

02:40 C Priority

VESSEL - VAID - Appears in

Difficulties NGIBSON

No Incident Address

[PD] 187

40 POB IN BOAT

LEFT FROM CALAIS

BOAT COLOUR

PD 394

110. At 0235, Valiant is recorded as tasked to small boat incident CHARLIE in the CHARLIE incident log (NG/20).

111. At 0234, an update to the French Tracker was sent by email (NG/40

INQ009684

The tracker linked small boat incidents French Migrant 1, 7 and 9 as possible duplicate incidents. There were telephone numbers listed for French incident Migrant 7 as Personal Data 523 (the same number which called the Ferry Port of Dover and is recorded for small boat incident ALPHA and FOXTROT) and Personal Data 296.

112. At 0237, small boat incident LIMA was created in a new LIMA incident log, by Name (NG/41 [INQ000246]). This is recorded as a black migrant vessel, with 40 persons on board, reported by Flamant in Position 51 08N 001 51E course 300 Speed 6Kts.

113. At 0240, I closed the incident GIN 041395-24112021 on incident log '40 pob' as a repeat of CHARLIE (NG/39). I did not include any reasoning on the log for doing so, which I should have done. However, I was satisfied that the call I received was from the same small boat and involved the same person I had spoken to for 21 minutes at 0148.

114. At 0241, I updated the KILO incident log (NG/37) as follows:

24/11/21 02:41:17 NGIBSON SMC Comment

POTENTIAL THIS IS CHARLIE AS THEY ARE

MAKING MULTIPLE CALLS

115. At 0242, Dover Port called MRCC Dover, which was answered by Downs.

Dover Port reported they had received a further call from a migrant vessel – it was the same number as before PD 523 (this number was associated to ALPHA small boat incident). The call had cut out prior to it being connected to HM Coastguard. This was put into the ECHO (**NG/27**) and ALPHA (**NG/17**) logs.

116. At 0242, MRCC Gris-Nez called MRCC Dover. I answered the call (**NG/42**

INQ007656

. Gris-Nez informed me that they were receiving calls regarding the French Migrant 7 incident which was UK small boat incident ALPHA. They enquired if we had a rescue boat responding. I said that Valiant was on its way, however Flamant was closer to the small boat position. I said that Flamant was 3nm from the small boat. MRCC Gris-Nez replied that it was not the same small boat incident. I asked which small boat incident it was. Gris-Nes stated it was French Migrant 7. I told her that French Migrant 7 was UK small boat incident CHARLIE which was to the south-west. MRCC Gris-Nez stated that the telephone number which called them was the UK small boat incident ALPHA. I said that ALPHA and CHARLIE could be the same incident. MRCC Gris-Nez stated it was as they had the same telephone number. I said that there had been lots of calls from the small boat and I had broadcast a May Day Relay, hoping for a response. Valiant was 9.5nm away but Flamant

was the closer vessel to respond if the small boat was sinking. MRCC Gris-Nez stated that Flamant was with French Migrant 10. I asked about the status of that small boat (Migrant 10). I emphasised that if CHARLIE was sinking, Flamant was the closest vessel. MRCC Gris-Nez confirmed again that, for the moment, it was with Migrant 10. I said again that I had broadcast a May Day Relay for vessels to respond to CHARLIE's position. MRCC Gris-Nez asked if the rescue boat was near the scene. I responded that they were not on scene, and they were making best speed. Gris-Nez stated that her colleagues were on the phone with the migrants. During the call, I could hear a man in the background telling someone in English to dial 999. I said that Valiant were proceeding, but Flamant was closest and the other small boat with Flamant was getting closer to the UK waters also. MRCC Gris-Nez asked for a time on scene for rescue and I said that Valiant was going as fast as they can. MRCC Gris-Nez asked approximately how many minutes until Valiant would be on scene. I said 35-40 minutes and that they were going as fast as they could. I repeated that Flamant was much closer, but Valiant was making best speed. The operator thanked me and the call then ended.

117. I have been asked whether there was an understanding at MRCC Dover following this call that incident CHARLIE was sinking and that there were people in the water. I had considered since the call with "Moomin" on incident CHARLIE at 0148 that the passengers on the boat were panicked and fearful and may be in a dangerous situation which was why I broadcast the May Day Relay. This information from Gris-Nez that the boat was sinking and there were people in the water was third party information, but we also had the

phone calls at 0225 and 0232 which we either suspected (0225 call) or were fairly certain (0232) to be from incident CHARLIE. On these calls we had been told the boats were sinking or that they were 'finished.' The details of these calls were on ViSION logs for the JRCC and the Maritime Tactical Commander to see. At 0249, Dover MRCC informed R163 that distress calls had been received (see below). From my perspective, a rescue vessel, Valiant, was making way to the last known position, and a helicopter, R163, would be airborne as soon as possible.

118. I have been asked why I, as SMC, did not directly request MRCC Gris-Nez to task Flamant to attend incident CHARLIE, either on this call or in any follow up communications. I accept I did not directly request Gris-Nez to task Flamant to CHARLIE, and in hindsight, I could have been more persistent or forceful. However, I did try, repeatedly, on the call to press the urgency of the situation and make it clear that Flamant was the closest vessel. I believe the request was heavily implied. I thought the French officer had grasped the seriousness of the situation when she seemed shocked when I told her that Valiant was 40 minutes away. However, after this call, Flamant was not tasked by the French Coastguard to assist with incident CHARLIE or to respond to the May Day Relay, and I did not ask the French Coastguard again.

119. At 0247, Barnett updated the ADMIN log (**NG/16**) to state that helicopter R163 had been tasked and would be airborne for 90 minutes from 0330.

120. At 0248, I closed the incident GIN 041393-24112021 on the [Name] incident log as a repeat of CHARLIE (NG/36). I did not include any reasoning on the log for doing so, which I should have done. The update is mirrored in the CHARLIE log. I was not on the call with [Name] at 0234, so I must have discussed this with Downs before closing the incident. From the French Tracker, we could see that Migrant 7 / CHARLIE left Dunkirk at 9pm, which is the time that [Name] said their boat left Dunkirk. The background noise heard on the call with the small boat associated with the CHARLIE incident sounded very similar to me to the background noise heard on the call with the [Name] small boat incident. They both said the boats were sinking. I must have felt at the time that I had enough information to close the incident as a repeat of CHARLIE.

24/11/21 02:48:55 NGIBSON Closed as a repeat of 041384-24112021 (NG/36)

24/11/21 02:48:55 NGIBSON 041393-24112021 identified as a repeat of this incident (NG/20)

121. At 0249, R163 called HM Coastguard to inform us that they should be airborne at 0330 patrolling for small boats. They enquired if any distress calls were being received from small boats. The coastguard operator confirmed they had received distress calls and R163 requested coordination from the start, as they may struggle with the weather. R163 stated they required HM Coastguard to tell them exactly what they were required to do. (NG/43

INQ007601

122. The Operator transferred the call to me at 0250. R163 told me that he requested clear instructions and asked if it was possible to provide something over the phone which they could start with and amend once they were proceeding. I said we'd had numerous reports from small boats, however I thought some were repeat calls. I provided a provisional search area from MPC Buoy up towards the Sandettie Light Vessel and back towards the edge of the South-West lane. I provided the latitude and longitude for Sandettie and a course and distance from Lydd. I said that the tide would be in a north-east direction so the rectangle would be to the north-east to East Goodwin Light Vessel and for R163 to concentrate in that area. I told him Valiant was proceeding to one vessel and another two small boats were reported to be in that area also. R163 stated that the weather at Lydd was not too bad, but there was a risk at 0500 of shallow fog, and they would monitor conditions. I said the mission was to search, not rescue, as it would not be safe to winch from a small boat. R163 said they would take a life raft onboard. I told him that visibility was good at Dover with a cloud height of around 750 feet approximately (NG/44

INQ008823

123. I have been asked why a call to the Coastguard standalone mobile phone was not answered at 0257. I cannot give an explanation, though the call I was on with R163 started at 02:50:31 and was 5 minutes and 41 seconds long so I would have just finished this call when the call to the Coastguard mobile phone went unanswered (NG/35). As mentioned above, the Coastguard standalone mobile phone was not intended to be used as a communication device. It was an interim solution to a fairly recent problem of not being able

to locate SAR subjects via the usual means such as GPS or AIS. WhatsApp was the easiest way at that time we could request coordinates. At the time, this could only be done via the WhatsApp app on a mobile phone. Neither the phone itself, nor WhatsApp as an application, were intended to replace our NICE communication system, which recorded and logged calls. However, it is inevitable that those on small boats would have used WhatsApp to communicate with the Coastguard once they had the phone number, and it is regrettable that no one on the team kept a closer eye on the standalone phone and WhatsApp messages or calls being received on it, even if we were particularly busy dealing with incidents via the normal communication lines.

03:00 to 04:00 24 November 2021

124. At 0301, in the BRAVO log (**NG/19**), I closed BRAVO incident as a repeat of CHARLIE. I did not include any reasoning on the log for doing so, which I should have done. The update is mirrored in the CHARLIE log at 0301, stating that incident 041383-24112021 had been identified as a repeat of CHARLIE. My rationale for closing BRAVO was that the French tracker documents received at 0152 and 0237 via email both recorded that Migrant 1 (BRAVO) was possibly the same as Migrant 7 (CHARLIE) and Migrant 9 (INDIA). There was a repeat of the May Day Relay broadcast by JRCC on behalf of MRCC Dover also at 0301.

125. There was a repeat of the May Day Relay broadcast by JRCC on behalf of MRCC Dover also at 0301.

126. At 0302, in the ALPHA log (**NG/17**) Downs closed the ALPHA incident as a repeat of FOXTROT. This was mirrored in the FOXTROT log (**NG/25**), where it was stated that ALPHA was a repeat of FOXTROT. There is no reasoning as to why ALPHA was closed as a repeat of FOXTROT in the log.

127. At 0306, I updated the FOXTROT log (**NG/25**):

24/11/21 03:06:22 NGIBSON SMC Comment

POSIBILITY THAT THESE CALLS ARE ALSO

COMING FROM INCIDENT CHARLIE AS VERY

SIMILAR STORY AND BACKGROUND NOISE TO CALLS FOR
CHARLIE

128. I cannot say why FOXTROT, or indeed ALPHA, were not closed as duplicates of incident CHARLIE at any time on the 23-24 November. It might have been simply the case that whilst we were able to close incidents as duplicates / repeats over the course of the evening, we did not manage to consider all incidents that may have been able to be closed as duplicates. When we were as stretched as we were that night, it might have been felt that leaving a comment on the log raising possible duplicates would be sufficient until such time as more information came to light to fully close incidents. As it was, many incidents were not closed on ViSION until well into 24 November, after my shift had ended.

129. At 0306, Downs received a call connected through 999. He created a new incident GIN 041396-24112021 on incident log named Failed Engine (NG/45 [INQ000248]). At 0311, he entered the following on the log:

03:11 C Priority M VESSEL - VAID - Appears in

Difficulties SDOWNNS

UNKNOWN MIGRANT VESSEL // FAILED ENGINE

CALLER WANTED A RESCUE BOAT DID NOT ASK DIRECTLY
FOR COASTGUARD

WE ARE COMING TO ENGLAND WE ARE BETWEEN ENGLAND
AND FRANCE

BOAT WE LOOSE ARE ENGINE WE HAVE PEOPLE IN THE SEA
WE HVE PREGNANT

WOMEN AND CHILDREN

35 POB

LINE CUT OUT.

NO DETAILS FROM OPERATOR OR POSITION.

IN BACKGROUND SHOUTING,

130. At 0309, I logged on the KILO incident log (NG/37) that incident JULIET was identified as a repeat of KILO. I closed the JULIET incident at the same

time. I did log a reason for this closure. The JULIET log states as follows
(NG46/ [INQ000243]):

24/11/21 03:09:43 NGIBSON SMC Comment

MADE REPEAT OF KILO AS FLAMANT REPORTED

ON SCENE WITH VESSEL

24/11/21 03:09:57 NGIBSON Closed as a repeat of 041392-
24112021 incident

131. I took a call with UKBF at 0311 (NG/47 INQ007602) The UKBF operator asked if small boat incidents BRAVO and INDIA had been rescued by the French. I stated that I believed BRAVO was a repeat of CHARLIE, and that small boat incident INDIA was also a repeat of CHARLIE as the telephone numbers matched and the story matched. I confirmed that no small boats had been rescued by the French and that HMC Valiant was proceeding to small boat incident CHARLIE which was southwest of the Sandettie Light Vessel. I confirmed the small boat was still under a May Day Relay as we had been informed the small boat was full of water. I explained that the reason I sent the May Day Relay was to get a vessel in the area to respond to the broadcast. I described one vessel in particular - a grey boat with a French flag on the back – by which I was referring to the Flamant. I stated that the Flamant had ignored the SOLAS distress call, and that my plan had not worked in the way I had wanted. Flamant now appeared to be on a heading away from the median line, that is, away from the last known position of CHARLIE.

132. Whilst in this call I do state that my reason for creating the May Day Relay was so that Flamant would respond, it was not the sole reason for doing so. The key reason was the level of panic and fear I heard on the call, and consequently the necessity for assistance for the boat and/or more information about its location which could be received from other vessels. I was aware that the Flamant was very close by, and it seemed logical to try to get the Flamant to assist with the small boat as the closest vessel to it.

133. I continued to tell the UKBF operator that there was the potential for a further two or three small boats in the vicinity of the border south of the Sandettie Light Vessel for Valiant to pick up once it had assisted CHARLIE. UKBF said they would wait to see how many people Valiant might be needing to assist before calling out any other assets, as they did not want to call out other assets at that time. I responded *'that's the dream isn't it, to get them all in one go.'* I have been asked about this comment specifically. There was only a finite amount of surface assets to rescue people from small boats available in the area. Whilst multiple vessels were able to be out on SAR at any one time, and other vessels than the Valiant were available had we needed them, it was always better to have as few vessels out as possible, due to the amount of time it took vessels to get to and from their rescue locations. It could take a number of hours to move a vessel from one location to another. I knew that the rest of the morning and into the next day was likely to be even busier than the evening, due to the Red Operation Deveran rating, and so if we were able to rescue everyone using one vessel at that time, it meant that more vessels

would be available to deal with the expected rescues that would be necessary later on in the morning.

134. I have been asked, how, if at all, the realisation that there were four boats in broadly the same area impacted on my search planning, including (but not limited to) why the Valiant was considered to be sufficient in terms of SAR assets tasked. At that time, the assets in use were Valiant and an SAR helicopter. That was, according to my experience of 'Amber' rated nights, normally a sufficient amount of resource. Until a more complete picture was obtained with regard to the scale of the situation, it was in my opinion not sensible to act further and assign more resources or further assets, especially as those resources may be needed later on, and crews needed time off to rest in between taskings. It was important to continually reassess the situation and consider the available assets and whether they would be sufficient for the amount of people to be rescued, which is what we continued to do for the rest of the morning as we received more information from Valiant and R163. At that time, I was content with the survivor capacity on Valiant. It is for these reasons I did not task RNLI at any point that evening, or push for further UKBF surface assets. UKBF had cause to send out further vessels throughout the day on 24 November. In not sending those out during the night, it meant they were available for SAR from the morning onwards, whilst Valiant was returning to Dover with the recovered persons from three small boats.

135. Continuing the 0311 call, I told UKBF that we had received a lot of calls from the same boat, and we had a WhatsApp location for small boat

CHARLIE. I confirmed that the small boats had also called the Port of Dover which had caused confusion. UKBF stated that Valiant would be on scene soon. I said that the small boats Flamant was alongside had 30 and 40 people onboard so there was the potential need to rescue 110 persons, which pushed the limit of people onboard for HMC Valiant.

136. The coastguard operator stated that small boats 10 and 11 were in UK waters according to the French Coast Guard and Flamant had departed the area. I said I was unsure how many people were on small boat 11 or what their position was. The French Coast Guard also reported that French Migrant 3 was in UK waters and that would be to the south of HMC Valiant, in the same place as small boat CHARLIE. I said there was another small boat to the north of Sandettie Light Vessel and another near Sandettie Light Vessel.

137. I told the UKBF operator that R163 would lift in 30 minutes and would be on scene 15 minutes after that. I said that all the small boats were in the same area. UKBF asked if the fixed wing aircraft was not able to fly due to the fog. This was confirmed. I said I would call Valiant via Airwave and inform them of the other small boats in the area. The call then ended at around 0317.

138. I have been asked why a WhatsApp call to the Coastguard standalone mobile phone was not answered at 0312 (**NG/48 [INQ001425]**) and (**NG/35**). I was on the call with UKBF from 0311 which lasted 6 minutes and 32 seconds (**NG/47**).

139. At 0320, I made the following update in the CHARLIE log (**NG/20**):

24/11/21 03:20:18 NGIBSON SMC Comment

VALIANT INFORMED POTENTIAL OF MULTIPLE

BOATS WITHIN THE AREA OF CHARLIE AND

RESCUE 163 LIFDING AT 0330 UTC AND

PROCEEDING TO SCENE

140. There was a repeat of the May Day Relay broadcast by JRCC on behalf of MRCC Dover also at 0320.

141. At 0315, a further update to the French Tracker was received from MRCC Gris-Nez (**NG/49** INQ009684)

142. At 0325, Barnett entered into the CHARLIE log (**NG/20**):

4/11/21 03:25:11 CBARNETT VALIANT

-

Status Update

Status changed from 03 - Proceeding to 04 - On

Scene

...

24/11/21 03:25:34 CBARNETT Routine

VICINITY OF LKP FOR CHARLIE. INTENTION,

TO PROCEED UPTO SANDETTIE. IF THEY HAD
STOPPED THEY MAY WELL DRIFT THAT DIRECTION

143. At 0327, Downs entered into the CHARLIE log (**NG/20**):

24/11/21 03:27:25 SDOWNS VALIANT Resource Message
- NOTHING SEEN PROCEEDING TO SANDETTIE
LIGHT AS POSSIBLE POSITION OF DRIFT

144. At 0328, the WhatsApp message containing a position received on the Coastguard standalone mobile phone at 0221 was looked at for the first time, and the position was updated on the CHARLIE incident log by me (**NG/35**). I cannot give an explanation why the message was not picked up before 0328, other than the sheer volume of work being done between 0221 and 0328 by a small team, and the fact that we had not been trained to monitor communication via a standalone mobile phone over WhatsApp, so it was not at the forefront of our mind to check, unlike our primary tasks of call collection and monitoring / updating of ViSION.

145. The log entries are as follows (**NG/20**):

24/11/21 03:28:52 NGIBSON Casualty Details

UPDATED POSITION FROM WHATSAPP

51 09.027N 001 45.341E

24/11/21 03:32:38 NGIBSON SMC Comment

ABOVE POSITON TIMED 0221UTC

24/11/21 03:32:59 NGIBSON Environment Info

TIDAL SET 1.6 KTS 037 DEGREEES

146. A WhatsApp message was sent to PD 057 (number associated to CHARLIE small boat incident) from the stand-alone mobile phone stating "re send your position please" at 0333. No response was received (**NG/35**) I cannot recall whether I sent this message or if it was another colleague, but it appears that seeing the location sent via WhatsApp at 0328 triggered a further message from one of us to try ascertain CHARLIE's current position.

147. Between 0335 and 0339, a number of updates on Valiant were logged on the CHARLIE log (**NG/20**):

24/11/21 03:35:19 CBARNETT Routine

DE VALIANT - 2 POTENTIAL TARGETS// RANGE,

7 CABLES. 51 09.6N 001 47.5E

24/11/21 03:39:02 CBARNETT Officer Message

DISCUSSION WITH SMC.

NO REQUIREMENT FOR MAYDAY RELAY AS

VALIANT IN THE AREA INVESTIGATING

TARGETS.

24/11/21 03:39:34 Name Further action

Taken for 24/11/2021 03:35:00

BX DDD RELAY LAN AE

Comments:

AS PER SMC COMMENT, NO DDD REQUIRED

148. As Valiant had reported two potential targets, I stopped further May Day Relay broadcasts, as they were no longer necessary now Valiant was in the vicinity of what we assumed were incident CHARLIE and one of the other boats that had been reported to be in the area.

149. At 0348, MRCC Gris-Nez informed me that the small boat assigned to small boat incident LIMA was in the UK search and rescue region. I made the following update to the LIMA log (**NG/41**):

24/11/21 03:48:01 NGIBSON SMC Comment

REPORT FROM FRENCH THAT VESSEL NOW IN

UK SRR

ASSET IN VICINTY IS VALIANT SEARCHING FOR

CHARLIE AND HAS SPOTTED MULTIPLE TARGETS

AND IS INVESTIGATING

150. At 0348, Valiant reported to me that they were on scene and engaged with an unlit small boat which had stopped in position 51o 10.4N 001o 47.8E. (NG/50 [INQ007390] The small boat had approximately 40 persons onboard. I said that this was likely to be small boat CHARLIE and provided the name of the caller believed to be onboard ("Moomin") and his telephone number ending 057. Valiant confirmed they would ask the question when they engaged (NG/51 [INQ007624] Valiant reported at least one other small boat in the area (NG/52 [INQ007391] I confirmed that there could be an extra one or two targets in the vicinity, however some could be repeats from multiple calls and reports from the French (NG/53 [INQ007625] Valiant confirmed they had seen at least one other small boat. I said we would get more information from R163 when it was airborne (NG/54 [INQ007392]

151. The information was recorded in the CHARLIE log (NG/20) at 0350 as follows:

24/11/21 03:50:58 NGIBSON Resource Message

VALIANT ON SCENE WITH UNLIT MIGRANT

VESSEL 40 POB

STOPPED IN THE WATER

152. Also at 0350, ARCC reported that R163 was airborne and proceeding. I have been asked whether I was involved in the change to R163's tasking at or around 0350. As set out above, at 0249, I had requested R163 search from MPC Buoy up to Sandettie Light Vessel. I provided the latitude and longitude for Sandettie and a course and distance from Lydd. I said that the tide would be in a north-east direction so the rectangle would be to the north-east to East Goodwin Light Vessel and for R163 to concentrate in that area.

153. On a call at 0352, I asked R163 to search around the Sandettie Lightvessel, recommending 'either an expanding square search or a parallel track as you see fit' (NG/55 INQ008825). Previously, at 0249, I recommended a parallel track search pattern to cover a rectangular search area ("rectangle would be to the north-east to East Goodwin Light Vessel"). I believed that this would cover the likely passage small boats would take when making their way to the UK. By 0354, I had the updated WhatsApp position for CHARLIE, (as at 0221), and so I tried to estimate, taking into account drift, a new position over which R163 could carry out their search. I amended the search pattern and track spacing in my head, using my knowledge and experience rather than a search planning tool. I did not draw up a formal search area. I do not believe I tasked R163 to specifically search for people in the water at any point on 23/24 November.

154. At 0354, I made entries on the ADMIN log (**NG/16**) about R163's tasking:

24/11/21 03:54:32 NGIBSON Resource Status

Required response met

24/11/21 03:54:32 NGIBSON Resource Status NGIBSON

Turnout R163 (V) to 041382-24112021

24/11/21 03:54:32 NGIBSON Resource Status

Required response met

24/11/21 03:54:32 NGIBSON R163 - Assigned to Incident 041382-

24112021

24/11/21 03:54:32 NGIBSON R163 - Status Update

Status changed from 20 - A - At Base to 01 -

Called

24/11/21 03:54:32 NGIBSON Status changed from U - Unserviced to

O -Open

24/11/21 03:54:32 NGIBSON Resource Status Turnout Methods

Offered

R163 : [V]

24/11/21 03:54:32 SYS Talkgroup set to None

24/11/21 03:54:32 SYS R163 - Talkgroup changed from None to 0

24/11/21 03:54:36 NGIBSON R163 - Status Update

Status changed from 01 - Called to 02 – Tasked

24/11/21 03:54:48 NGIBSON R163 - Resource Message

ON TASKED LIFTED FROM LYDD

2 HOURS 40 ENDURANCE

VALIANT ON SCENE WITH CRAFT IN POSITON

51 10.60N 001 47.5E

INFORMATION 1 OTHER CRAFT SIGHTED BUT

POTENTIALLY MORE RECOMMENDED

EXPANDING SQUARE AROUND SANDIETTE AS

CRAFT POSITIONS REPORTED IN THE VICINTY

24/11/21 03:55:07 NGIBSON R163 - Status Update

Status changed from 02 - Tasked to 03 -Proceeding

155. I have been asked my view as to why R163 did not find incident CHARLIE on 23/24 November. R163 overflew an area which was planned to cover the last known positions of the boat and to take into account either the direction it would make way if it was still moving, or drift if it was not. Particular conditions on the night meant it would have been very hard for R163 to spot

incident CHARLIE: There was low light and poor visibility which meant that searching for unlit small boats or people in the water would be difficult. Thermal imaging likely would not have worked on subjects who may already have been in the water with low body temperatures, or, even if still in the boat, who had been exposed to the elements since approximately 9pm the previous evening and likely to be very cold and wet.

156. At 0358, I closed incident INDIA as a repeat of CHARLIE (**NG/56 [INQ000242]**). This is mirrored in the CHARLIE log (**NG/20**) with the following entry:

4/11/21 03:58:04 NGIBSON 041389-24112021 identified as a repeat
of this

Incident

24/11/21 03:58:04 NGIBSON Call Collection

Repeat 041389-24112021: FRENCH 9

REPORTED 0111 UTC

33 POB

3 INFANTS

6 FEMALES

157. I did not give any rationale for closing INDIA as a repeat of CHARLIE on either log, which I should have done. However, the French tracker had linked

small boat incidents Migrant 1 (ALPHA), 7 (CHARLIE) and 9 (INDIA). As with all closure decisions, I used my experience and information gained across all the incidents to make the best decisions I could to try to effectively manage the situation.

04:00 to 05:00 24 November 2021

158. At 0403, I updated the ADMIN log (**NG/16**) to state that R163 was On Scene. This meant it had arrived to the search area I had specified and had commenced its search.

159. At 0416, I spoke with Valiant (**NG/57** INQ007573) who said those rescued claimed not to have called the coastguard. Valiant stated that was what they were told, but they did not know if it was true or not. This information was from one person who spoke reasonably good English. They did not confirm to me whether there was anyone onboard called "Moomin". I asked Valiant to standby whilst I tried to call the telephone number I had spoken to "Moomin" on earlier.

160. At 0416 a call was made via WhatsApp to PD 057, the number provided by "Moomin" on the call at 0148 (**NG/58 [INQ001426]**). The call failed. I also made the following entry on the CHARLIE incident log (**NG/20**):

24/11/21 04:16:42 NGIBSON VALIANT

-Resource Message

PERSONS ON BOARD VESSEL STATE HAVENT SPOKEN TO
UKCG THIS EVENING

161. At 0418, R163 informed Valiant of the position of a second small boat.
Valiant said they would go to that small boat once everyone had been
recovered from the first small boat. Downs made the following entry on the
ADMIN log (**NG/16**):

24/11/21 04:18:49 SDOWNS R163 - Resource Message

LOCATED TARGET 51 09.06N 001 43.97E

VESSEL IS 8M LONG BELIVED LIUGHT GRTEY

IN COLOUR 30 POB UNDER POWER HEADING

WESTERLY. NO IMMINNET TYHREAT TO

PERIONS ON BOARD AND NO DANGER TO LIFE // CONTINUING
SEARCH

24/11/21 04:21:42 SDOWNS R163 - Resource Message

UKBF HMC VALIANT WILL ATTEND THIS

VESSEL WHEN COMPLETE WITH CURRENT

VESSEL.

162. At 0421, I spoke with Valiant again, who gave me a description of the small boat that they had made rescues from. They stated it was a black RHIB (NG/59 INQ007578). I then stated that I believed this was probably incident LIMA because 'it would match the description being a black RHIB. Also, from the French it was reported approximately 40 people on board' as per the LIMA incident log (NG/41).

163. At 0423, I made the following entry in the CHARLIE log (NG/20):

24/11/21 04:23:37 NGIBSON VALIANT Casualty Details

- DESCRIPTION IS BLACK RHIB

164. At 0436, we were informed that Valiant had picked up all the migrants from the first small boat. I updated the CHARLIE log (NG/20) to state:

24/11/21 04:36:10 NGIBSON VALIANT

-

Resource Message

ALL MIGRANTS DISEMBARKED BOAT HAS BEEN

MARKED AND STROBE INPUT// AWAITING

FINAL TOTAL OF PERSONS RECOVERED

165. At 0443, 0445 and 0452, we were informed that Valiant was moving to a second boat whose position was identified by R163. They had recovered 35 persons from the first small boat. Downs updated the CHARLIE log (**NG/20**) as follows:

24/11/21 04:43:37 SDOWNS VALIANT

-

Resource Message

35 POB 20 MALES 2 FEMALES 13 MINORS.

PROCEEDING TO NEW POSITION?

AVAILABLE .

24/11/21 04:45:57 SDOWNS VALIANT

-

Resource Message

VALIANT PROCEEDING TO POSITION FROM

R163 AT 04:18

24/11/21 04:52:27 SDOWNS VALIANT

-

Resource Message

POSITION UPDATE AT 04:32 FROM R163 51 08.0N 001 41.8E

COPIED BY VALIANT AND

PROCEEDING

166. At 0456, Border Force Maritime Command Centre: Operation DEVERAN

Live Update 0450 was emailed to nearly 100 recipients (**NG/60 [INQ001215]**).

I have been asked whether I saw this tracker on the morning of 24 November and if so, was I aware of the discrepancy on the face of the documents in that Border Force had recorded "Charlie" as the first boat embarked by the Valiant, whereas I recorded this first boat as being "Lima" in the ViSION log system at 0527. Firstly, I would not say that this document was a tracker. Rather, this document is a Situation Report. I may have seen this document at 0456 on the morning of the 24 November, but I cannot recall whether I did or not, and if I did, I cannot recall whether I was aware of the discrepancy. I cannot comment why UKBF have recorded CHARLIE has having been found and embarked by the Valiant. Information was shared as much as possible with UKBF via telephone calls on the night, but information was patchy, and it may be possible that information was passed incorrectly or misinterpreted.

167. I have also been asked about Border Force Live Updates at 0700 (**NG/61 [INQ001231]**) which identified coastguard incidents "C"; "E"; and "N" as

located and embarked by the Valiant (by reference to the "M" numbers "M957", "M958", and "M959") and 0900 (**NG/62 [INQ001246]**) which identified coastguard incidents "C"; "L"; and "N" as located and embarked by the Valiant (by reference to the "M" numbers "M957", "M958", and "M959"). I cannot comment on why UKBF have identified the incidents as such.

05:00 to 06:00 24 November 2021

168. From 0500, Richard Cockerill, another Team Leader who was SMC-qualified, started his day shift early. I cannot recall details of any oral handover or briefing I would have given Cockerill when he arrived, but I would likely have given him brief details of the current incidents to bring him up to speed. I do not recall having any concerns regarding briefing Cockerill, and he quickly became of great assistance to me as a very much needed extra pair of hands dealing with small boats incidents.

169. At 0505 and 0510, new incidents and incident logs were created for reported small boat incidents OSCAR and NOVEMBER (**NG/63 [INQ000251]**) and (**NG/64 [INQ000252]**) by Downs and Barnett.

170. At 0511, I entered the following message into the Admin log (**NG/16**):

24/11/21 05:11:57 NGIBSON R163 - Resource Message

AT THE END OF THE ENDURANCE FOR R163

INTENTION IS TO RTB AND NOT RETURN //

2ND TARGET UPDATED POSIITON AS OF

00509UTC 51 08.0N 001 41.8E USING IR

CAMERA NO DESCRIPTION OF COLOUR

171. At 0518, a call was received from MRCC Gris-Nez to HM Coastguard. They had taken a call from a small boat who was thought to be in the vicinity of Valiant. Cockerill made the following entry in the ADMIN log (**NG/16**):

24/11/21 05:18:00 RCOCKERILL Radio Log Message

Radio Log Mesage From griz nes To dvr cg at

24/11/2021 05:18:00 on Phone:

vacinity of valiant 51 08.01n 001 41.38e can

see the helicopter have 40 people colour green

1 child on board all wearing lj have 2 phone

numbers tel PD 263 WhatsApp -

PD 290.no other info

172. At 0524, incident OSCAR was closed as a repeat of incident NOVEMBER by Downs. No reason was given for this on either OSCAR or NOVEMBER log (**NG/63** and **NG/64**).

173. At 0527, in the LIMA incident log (**NG/41**) I made the following entry:

24/11/21 05:27:14 NGIBSON SMC Comment

BELIEVE THIS VESSEL WAS PICKED UP BY

VALIANT AT 0423UTC AND ALL MIGRANTS

RECOVERED AT 0436UTC AND BOAT MARKED

AND ABANDONED WITH STROBE

174. I have been asked, with reference to this entry on the LIMA incident log which shows that I considered the first boat picked up by Valiant to be incident LIMA, why I believed this and whether I informed UKBF or the JRCC of this belief or discussed it with anyone at MRCC Dover, including Richard Cockerill when he arrived at 0500. I believed this boat to be LIMA because the French Coastguard had reported that small boat incident LIMA was a black boat with 40 persons onboard. At 0423, I had updated the CHARLIE log to state that the small boat that had been picked up by Valiant was a black rhib (**NG/20**) as told to me by Valiant on the call at 0421 (**NG/59**). The same colour of boat and roughly similar number of persons (40 persons reported on LIMA, 35 persons rescued by Valiant by 0436) on board, as well as knowledge of the position of where it was picked up in relation to where I expected LIMA would have crossed into English waters, led me to believe that the first boat picked up was LIMA. I do not recall informing anyone at JRCC beyond updating the log which they would have had access to. I may have mentioned it to Cockerill as part of the general briefing I would have

given to him on all of the incidents when he arrived at 0500 but cannot recall specifically.

175. I have also been asked why on the document entitled "Migrant tracker – MRCC Dover" sent at 0754 on 24 November 2021 to MRCC Gris Nez (**NG/65 [INQ001234]**) no outcome is recorded for incident "Charlie" but incident Lima is recorded as "recovered by Valiant 0436UT..." I was no longer on shift when this document was sent. However, I would say that I was perhaps more confident that LIMA had been the first boat recovered by Valiant at 0436 than I was sure that one of the other boats picked up by Valiant was CHARLIE, because we had more information to be able to match LIMA and the first boat recovered by Valiant, such as the colour, amount of people onboard and recovery location. As the night went on, they did their best to attribute the recovered vessels to live incidents. Whilst I was fairly certain CHARLIE had been picked up, largely due to the fact that three boats had been picked up from the general location of CHARLIE's last known position, and that once Valiant picked up the boats, we no longer received calls from CHARLIE and a call to a known phone number on CHARLIE failed, we did not have conclusive information to say CHARLIE had been picked up as one of those boats.

176. At 0536, small boat incident PAPA was created in VISION (**NG/66 [INQ000254]**) by Downs. At 0541, small boat incident PAPA was identified as a repeat of NOVEMBER (same telephone numbers). OSCAR was also linked to these small boat incidents.

177. At 0542, R163 informed me that they had seen the NOVEMBER small boat.

I gave the following updates in the NOVEMBER log (**NG/64**):

24/11/21 05:42:57 NGIBSON SMC Comment

999 CALL RECEIVED VESSEL HAS BEEN

OBSERVED BY R163 BASED ON LAST

KNOWN POSITION OF DELTA THIS

INCIDENT COULD BE A REPEAT OF DELTA

24/11/21 05:43:41 NGIBSON SMC Comment

RESCUE 163 DECLARES N O VISIBLE

SIGNS OF DANGER TO CRAFT AND

UNDERWAY WESTERLY COURSE APPRO 4

KNOTS

DOWNGRADED TO ALERT

178. At 0555 Valiant informed HM Coastguard that all persons had been rescued from the small boat. Downs asked if anyone from the small boat had called the emergency services. Valiant confirmed they would get back to us with information. The CHARLIE log (**NG/20**) states:

24/11/21 05:55:42 SDOWNS VALIANT

-

Resource Message

ALL MIGRANTS OFF EVENT DINGHY

ABANDONED AND MARKED, PLUS STROBE 51

08.06N 001 41.13E WHAT COLOUR LIGHT

GREY // ANY PERSONS MADE CALLS TO

EMERGENCY SERVICES?? // DO NOT KNOW

WILL ASK AND GET BACK TO YOU ALSO WITH NUMBERS.

179. At 0558 Downs updated the CHARLIE log (**NG/20**) to state:

24/11/21 05:58:20 SDOWNS VALIANT

-

Resource Message

FROM DECK TEAM TWO SPEAK ENGLISH AND

DO NOT CLAIM TO HAVE CALLED UK

AUTHORITIES // ANY NAMES FOR PERSONS

THAT SPEAK ENGLISH? // WAIT -

06:00 to 07:00 24 November 2021

180. At 0605 Valiant reported to HM Coastguard that the second small boat rescued had 31 males. Valiant replied that they could not obtain any names, but one person claimed he had seen someone make a call. Obtaining names of anyone who spoke English may have helped me identify whether "Moomin" had been picked up, thereby confirming that CHARLIE had been recovered by Valiant but it was not, and I do not recall asking Valiant again to provide the information. Downs made an entry in the CHARLIE log (NG/20) at 0605 which stated:

24/11/21 06:05:12 SDOWNS

VALIANT

-

Resource Message

SECOND EVENT 31 MALES. ONE DOES CLAIM

NOW THAT THEY DID SEE SOMEONE MAKE A

CALL

181. At 0607 HM Coastguard tasked Valiant to a third small boat in the vicinity of the Southwest Goodwin Buoy. This was the target sighted by R163 (NG/20).

182. At 0609 R163 helicopter confirmed that they were returning to base, as they had completed their search. I released them from the small boat incident (NG/16).

183. At 0629, Valiant reported they had located the third small boat, by this point believed to be NOVEMBER, in position 51o 08.9N 001o 31.5E. At 0631, Valiant reported that the third boat was stopped in the water, and multiple casualties were waving (NG/20).

07:00 to end of shift 24 November 2021

184. At 0703, Valiant reported they were returning to Dover Port, once they had rescued all persons from the third small boat. At 0722, Valiant informed HM Coastguard that they had rescued all persons from the third small boat. They were waiting for the deck crew to confirm the headcount. They were at capacity with persons rescued so would return back to Dover port. At 0727, Valiant reported that for their third small boat rescue the headcount was 32 persons rescued with 21 males, 4 females and 7 minors. These were all logged in the NOVEMBER log (NG/64).

185. In the same way as each MRCC SMC entered a Start of Watch Status on the network-wide Network Management log at the start of every shift, SMCs also entered an End of Watch Status ("EOWS") update on the log at the end of every shift. My EOWS that morning at 0723, just before leaving MRCC Dover at the end of my shift, was as follows (NG/67 [INQ000233]):

24/11/21 07:23:06 NGIBSON SMC Comment

MRCC DOVER EOWS NIGHTS SHIFT 23/11/2021

ON-DUTY:

TL // N GIBSON // SMC // VTSO // 1930-0730

(VTS COVER 4.5 HRS)

MOO // S DOWNS // COMMS // 1930-0730

MOO(t) //

TRAINEE MOO

 // NON OPS // 1930-0730

RADAR

MOO //

Name

 //MC // VTSO // 1930-0730

VTS TL //

Name

 // MC // VTSO(c) // 1930-

0730

MISSED BREAK N GIBSON

186. It was an exhausting night with a large number of incidents. I had covered 3 hours for VTS colleagues at the beginning of my shift, and then had remained on SAR duty, on what turned out to be an incredibly busy evening, without a break from around 0125 until 0730, albeit with additional assistance from Cockerill from around 0500.

187. I gave a normal handover to the SMC / Team Leader when he arrived on the morning of 24 November. This consisted of an oral handover briefing, and the handover document on Sharepoint, which acted as an aide memoire to the oral handover. I would most likely have highlighted the May Day Relay action, but as I believed that the small boat involved in the May Day Relay was likely recovered by Valiant, and was satisfied that I had done all I needed to do to assist in the SAR of that and other boats, I do not think any particular concerns would have been raised by me on the handover.

188. The duty Strategic Commander was not called during the night shift because it was not felt necessary.

Small Boat Incident Charlie

189. It should be reiterated that whilst bodies were recovered at 1pm on 24 November, these were found in French waters and it took a long time to link the bodies found that day with any incidents that MRCC Dover had dealt with overnight on 23-24 November. I did not leave my shift that morning thinking we had any incidents that had not been attended to, or that would be attended to by SAR after I left. By the end of my shift on 23-24 November, I believed that the small boat which had been designated as CHARLIE had been recovered by Valiant. Two dinghies had been recovered in the approximate area to the probable position of CHARLIE, according to the WhatsApp positioning, (and a further dinghy recovered in a different location), and there was an indication that people in at least one of the dinghies picked up by Valiant had contacted the Coastguard.

190. I still believe that this was a fair assumption to have made at the time, based on my experience of working on small boats incidents since they commenced on the Dover Strait, and from the information we had obtained on the night.

191. I don't think this belief was recorded anywhere in a log. When I had the oral handover with the day shift SMC around 0705, I probably would have explained the situation, that there had been a May Day Relay in relation to incident CHARLIE and my rationale for thinking that Charlie had been one of the small boats picked up by Valiant but I cannot recall exactly what I said. I do not think I discussed the conclusion with the Maritime Tactical Commander or anyone at JRCC. I do not think I would have thought it was necessary. I probably discussed it with Downs TRAINE
E MOO and Cockerill but I cannot recall any specifics. There was no review of any conclusion I arrived at in relation to CHARLIE by the Maritime Tactical Commander or by anyone else at JRCC as far as I am aware.

192. As I understood it, the search for CHARLIE could be deemed a successful search, because R163 successfully located three small boats in the vicinity of where CHARLIE was last reported, and the persons on those three boats were rescued. Therefore, the tasking had been completed. The SAR could be terminated because we had reliable information that the emergency no longer existed. Had we not located any boats, then search efforts would have increased with further surface or air asset taskings.

193. The fact that incident CHARLIE had not been closed on ViSION does not indicate to me that I was uncertain about what had happened to it, but it does indicate that we did not have enough information yet to fully close the case. It was normal for cases not to be closed for many hours whilst a full picture of all the incidents emerged. The incident would have shown as finished in ViSION as a status. Closure of an incident is because we have deemed that the emergency situation no longer exists and the full mission conduct process has been followed and persons accounted for. The closure of incidents is an administrative task and with ongoing SAR operations I deemed it not safety critical to close the incident before I left that morning. I received an email from James Crane at 19:21 on 24 November 2021 with the subject: 'GENERIC CLOSING STATEMENT AND SOR ENTRY.' This stated: *"In discussion with TACOM G.Papadopolous: After the cessation of multiple migrant incidents during today. No further calls have been received for this incident or further confirmed sightings. Areas of interest have been searched with nothing untoward found. With this in mind, it is being closed pending further information. 241044UTC to 241840UTC DOVR 041464 MIGRANT. Report of a migrant vessel crossing the Dover Strait TSS. Multiple crossings during the day and vessel not identified. Incident closed pending further information"* (NG/68 [INQ010357]).

194. I did not consider that there was a realistic possibility that incident CHARLIE had not been rescued. I am fairly certain that I had formed the conclusive view that incident CHARLIE had been located and embarked by

the Valiant, but if there was any doubt that incident CHARLIE was not one of the boats picked up by Valiant, perhaps subconsciously, I would have been reassured by the fact that there were ongoing SAR operations that morning, and had CHARLIE not been picked up, the likelihood was that it would be recovered by ongoing efforts after I had finished my shift.

195. Regarding which of the three small boats I concluded or believed to be incident CHARLIE, I think I must have assumed either consciously or unconsciously that it was the second small boat recovered. However, I'm not sure if I could have said I was sure about that at the time. Whilst I felt I had a good overall picture of what had happened to each incident, there were still a large number of incidents with varying levels of information that we had been able to gather about each one, with which we tried to make reasonable assumptions on duplicates and incident closures. I think by the end of the shift, I was fairly certain that the first boat was LIMA, and again fairly certain that the third boat was NOVEMBER. I now know that none of the three boats we recovered were CHARLIE. However, at the time, I was confident that we had rescued everyone we had received calls from. If there was even a slight chance that someone hadn't been rescued, I trusted that the ongoing search and rescue operations, which were still underway when I left at 07:30, would find them.

196. On 29 November 2021, I sent an email to [Name] and George Papadopoulos, copying in [Name] with the subject: 'Official Sensitive – GIN 41384 + GIN 041497' (NG/69 [INQ010358]). In this email I stated:

"I've had some concerns around the incident 041497 and the tragic loss of persons, a few niggles have been in my mind regarding this and incident charlie GIN 041384, the number of persons involved and the location of the incident.

Incident charlie we believed was recovered by valiant along with 2 other boats and that deck crew confirmed that one of the migrants had been seen on the phone.

The location of Charlie had initially been passed by the french from a WhatsApp location. we then received a updated whatsapp at 0220UTC on the migrant phone. But no messages accompanying it stating any issues with the craft.

Based on the nature of the call from charlie from a person called Moomin was difficult to hear we carried out a Mayday Broadcast Valiant was underway. But i felt Mayday BX action was appropriate as there were french assets in the area that could have proceeded as they were closer.

No responses were received, I called Griz Nez direct to ask if the Flamant could proceed to which they said it was with another boat.

I have read today the news article with the interview stating they called french and UK emergency services but nobody came the survivor states a male

called Mubin called the emergency services which could possibly be the moomin I spoke to.

I have run a Saris Model saved under GIN 041384 and the found position of GIN 041497 falls within the search area.

3 Vessels were recovered from the area unfortunately we had no descriptions from the calls which made it difficult, however Valiant had proceeded to the area and identified 2 targets in similar locations to the Whatsapp location and the Potential drift locations. Rescue 163 also was on scene and conducted a search of the area for small craft.

At the time of the Mayday BX Valiant where some 10 miles from scene and the Flamant 2.5nm from last known position. I know it doesnt change the Outcome but felt I needed to raise it with someone."

197. On 30 November 2021, I put together a timeline of incident GIN 041384 (NG/70 [INQ010341]) and emailed it to Mike Bill and Name (NG/71 [INQ010359]).

Support

198. I have been asked whether, and how, my team was provided with support in the aftermath of the incident on 23-24 November. After my involvement in the tragedy became clearer, which took some time, I consulted

with an HM Coastguard Trauma Risk Management (“TRiM”) practitioner. The HMCG TRiM process was available to me to make use of as much or as little as I wanted. I believe the level of accessibility and the adequacy of the support systems were good. The only barriers I felt to obtaining support were personal, not organisational – support was there through the TRiM process when I was ready and willing to seek it.

Statement of Truth

I believe the content of this statement to be true.

Signed:

<p>Personal Data</p>

Dated: 09 January 2025