

# OPUS2

The Cranston Inquiry

Day 3

March 5, 2025

Opus 2 - Official Court Reporters

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

1

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

2

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

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

4

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

20

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1       however my role was not to manage the SAR at that time,  
 2       it was to deliver the VTS function.  
 3       Q. Thank you.  
 4       The trainee, she was non—operational; that's right?  
 5       A. She'd been with us 30 days at that point, so she was new  
 6       to the Coastguard, she'd done her initial training and  
 7       she was learning a lot of the — you know, a lot of  
 8       the learning we can do in the Ops room and actually  
 9       being exposed to seeing what's going on and learning it  
 10       is a good part of learning the job before going on the  
 11       formal training.  
 12       Q. Yes.  
 13       But she was 30 days into a nine—month training  
 14       regime; is that right?  
 15       A. That's correct, yeah.  
 16       Q. Thank you.  
 17       And what did non—operational mean for you as  
 18       Team Leader in practical terms? What could she actually  
 19       do?  
 20       A. So administrative tasks. We could direct her to update  
 21       bits of information which were non—critical. Again, we  
 22       have SAR partners ring in, and the way our system works  
 23       is it identifies who our SAR partners are. So they  
 24       would take a function of various calls from SAR partners  
 25       who would be delivering routine information, so not

1       search and rescue information, but routine information.  
 2       The maritime safety information broadcast is part of  
 3       the work we do, which is about maritime safety. She was  
 4       able to record that information and update it  
 5       appropriately, and it's — it's a pre—recorded  
 6       broadcast, so therefore it can be — it can be reviewed  
 7       and checked before it goes out. Updating trackers as  
 8       directed. Again, updating documents. By trackers,  
 9       I will — I need to emphasise, I mean the spreadsheet,  
 10       not a geolocation method —  
 11       Q. Yes.  
 12       A. — it is a spreadsheet in overview —  
 13       Q. The Coastguard shared tracker. Is that what you're  
 14       referring to?  
 15       A. I — it referred to anything really, it's just referred  
 16       to as a "tracker" in this Inquiry, because it is  
 17       genuinely a spreadsheet with an overview of  
 18       the information.  
 19       Q. Thank you.  
 20       A. The synonym "tracker" maybes construes that people  
 21       believe that these boats are tracked in some form of  
 22       method.  
 23       Q. Oh, I see, so that's the distinction in your mind?  
 24       A. In my mind the word "tracker" is possibly the wrong use  
 25       of the word. "Document". It is a spreadsheet, but it

1       was called a tracker because actually it was for sharing  
 2       information so people could keep a track of what was  
 3       going on.  
 4       Q. Thank you.  
 5       A. It's a conflict of the English language where one word  
 6       means six different things.  
 7       Q. Yes, of course. Well, thank you for that.  
 8       Just going back to your trainee on the evening. She  
 9       was to carry out administrative tasks?  
 10       A. Yes.  
 11       Q. And learn by observation?  
 12       A. And learn by observation, and again, getting her to do  
 13       entries in ViSION is a good skill set.  
 14       Q. (Overspeaking — inaudible).  
 15       A. You've seen the type of entries we use for brevity, so  
 16       the message is in there, but quickly and efficiently.  
 17       Q. And that and you was the whole of the SAR team in  
 18       the operations room on that shift?  
 19       A. That was the complement of people based in MRCC Dover.  
 20       Q. Thank you.  
 21       Are you aware that the trainee was involved in  
 22       a call directly with the French Coastguard in the course  
 23       of that shift?  
 24       A. I became aware of it. I was on the VTS at the time.  
 25       Again, it rang as a routine line, and, again, we would

1       generally — the trainees could answer the routine phone  
 2       calls, because a lot of them would be maybes enquiries  
 3       from the public. The French Coastguard do have  
 4       a dedicated line to ring which informs us that it is  
 5       the French Coastguard calling us, however they obviously  
 6       rang on the routine line for, whatever reason, I do not  
 7       know.  
 8       Q. In normal expectation then, a trainee wouldn't be  
 9       speaking directly to the French Coastguard; is that  
 10       right?  
 11       A. No, not without some form of communications ticket.  
 12       Q. And why not? What are the risks associated with that  
 13       sort of communication?  
 14       A. If, for whatever reason, it turned out to be an  
 15       emergency situation, they wanted to pass information on,  
 16       it's again managing risks and expectations, and again,  
 17       if it did happen, they were coached to pass it over to  
 18       an experienced operator.  
 19       Q. And do you know whether in fact that was passed over to  
 20       an experienced operator?  
 21       A. I do not know, unfortunately, because I was engaged with  
 22       the VTS operations.  
 23       Q. The Inquiry's been separately told that the trainee was  
 24       in charge of the standalone mobile phone in the course  
 25       of that shift. Do you agree with that, or — is that

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

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

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

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

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1 of the overall SAR picture for the areas I'm responsible  
 2 for, if there was any Mayday broadcast from commercial  
 3 shipping or other SAR related matters, that would have  
 4 been — had to be relayed to me either via a flash  
 5 message or a phone call or a VHF talk box, which we've  
 6 got so ... —

7 Q. What about the verbal updates between calls and  
 8 the improved situational awareness amongst the team —

9 A. So —

10 Q. — was that affected?

11 A. It is affected, because obviously in our standard  
 12 situation, we'd say, "Can I just get everyone's  
 13 attention" and brief everyone. You end up with a double  
 14 brief basically. You brief your team in the room and  
 15 then you're having a brief with someone either on  
 16 the phone. So updates via the phone on — it's a phone  
 17 call, it ties an operator up, as simple as that.  
 18 You know, it's an interruption. If someone takes  
 19 a phone call in this room now, they're not paying  
 20 attention to what's going on, because that is just how  
 21 it works. So there is limitations. It's good because  
 22 we don't have to have that physical presence. There are  
 23 a lot of benefits.

24 Again, during this period, let's not forget, we were  
 25 still in the height of COVID, with social distancing and

1 things like that, the isolation policy was five days  
 2 from a positive test, so if you took out an entire Ops  
 3 room in HM Coastguard, we could still function and  
 4 deliver our services from somewhere else where we had  
 5 the capability of staff who weren't off sick. So there  
 6 was a lot benefits, and COVID was quite a significant  
 7 challenge for a lot of the emergency services and  
 8 HM Coastguard involved.

9 Q. What about supervising staff? You've told us about  
 10 Stuart Downs almost through his training and your  
 11 trainee, both of whom required supervision. How easy  
 12 is it to supervise as SMC remotely or from a remote  
 13 location?

14 A. So in terms of supervision, it's not they have to have  
 15 their hand held through the whole incident, they just  
 16 have to have their work approved. So, "I'm going to  
 17 task an asset", "Yeah, that's fine"; you know, it's just  
 18 seeking that confirmation. So it can be done. They can  
 19 use the VHF talk box to say, "SMC, I need to make you  
 20 aware of incident — Global Incident Number X, Y, Z, and  
 21 my intentions are a lifeboat, Coastguard rescue team,  
 22 aircraft", and then the SMC can come back and say,  
 23 "Concur with your decisions", or, "Actually,  
 24 additionally, can you do this".

25 So the supervision is — is achieved, and again it's

1 not a, "I need to check everything you've done",  
 2 everything goes in ViSION, their thoughts, their  
 3 requests, and then it can be approved, signed off,  
 4 enhanced.

5 Q. All right.

6 I'm going to ask you now some questions about the  
 7 information that was available to you at the start of  
 8 that shift. You've explained to the Inquiry through  
 9 your statement that you received an oral handover from  
 10 the outgoing SMC; is that right?

11 A. Yeah, that would be correct.

12 Q. That you think there might have been a written record,  
 13 but you've been unable to find it?

14 A. So the handover, the general practice for the handover  
 15 is we have a PowerPoint document which lists any — I'm  
 16 going to use the term "generic" ongoing matters, be  
 17 that: search and rescue assets which may have a limited  
 18 capability or are off service, mention it now; a list of  
 19 the known hoax callers we have and their general  
 20 telephone numbers and what they'll ring up saying;  
 21 vessels of interest, so, again, part of the coastal  
 22 monitoring is done by His Majesty's Coastguard, so any  
 23 vessels of interest would be in that handover; and then  
 24 there would be a list of all the ongoing SAR incidents.  
 25 So the general document gives you an overview of

1 what's going on with the building, silly things, even  
 2 including like does the hot water work, you know,  
 3 the coffee, you know, it's broken, some domestic things,  
 4 and then also very specific SAR —

5 Q. Specific SAR, and that would include of course any  
 6 ongoing small boat SAR as well?

7 A. Yes. And again, that would be briefed from ViSION.  
 8 You'd note them in the document just for noting them,  
 9 because, again, you use that document to jog your memory  
 10 on: this is done, this is done. So a SAR incident that  
 11 may be complete, or it's the casualties have been  
 12 rescued safely and maybe the SAR assets are en route  
 13 back to base. So the SAR action is complete, however  
 14 our duty of care still extends to the search and rescue  
 15 units still at sea or transiting back to base.

16 Q. Thank you. Or, for example, this is an ongoing incident  
 17 and you need to be particularly aware of?

18 A. Very much so, and you would brief the SMC of where you  
 19 were up to through the ViSION log. You'd run through  
 20 the ViSION log with the start and the middle, and over  
 21 to you for the end, as it were.

22 Q. Thank you. All right.

23 But you've been unable to find, or nobody has shown  
 24 you a copy of the written PowerPoint that you think you  
 25 would have received?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 I want to ask you now about a call that Christopher  
 2 or Tom Barnett made to you at 19:39, so shortly after  
 3 you'd started your shift. And I think Mr Barnett is  
 4 the remotely based SMC who provides that additional  
 5 layer of cover whilst you're taken away to VTS duties;  
 6 is that right?  
 7 A. That's correct, he is a Team Leader on SMC based at  
 8 the JRCC.  
 9 Q. With equivalent rank at the time and qualification to  
 10 you?  
 11 A. Yes.  
 12 Q. Thank you.  
 13 Can I have then on the screens please {INQ01028/1}.  
 14 This is -- we can see that's the first page of it. This  
 15 is the transcript of the call made between the two of  
 16 you, Tom Barnett, Christopher Barnett formally, and  
 17 yourself at that date and on that time.  
 18 Can we move over to {INQ010128/2} of the transcript.  
 19 We can see you introducing yourselves and you are  
 20 asked how you're doing, and you say I'm:  
 21 "Running around like a headless chicken. But apart  
 22 from that, okay."  
 23 "... I'm trying to work out a plan for this  
 24 evening", says Mr Barnett, and you talk about the fact  
 25 you would like all this staff in a freight car to you.

1 It's a jovial remark, but is that a reference to  
 2 a preference for staff in person rather than remote  
 3 staff?  
 4 A. Yeah, I mean, we -- I've arrived at work this evening,  
 5 so I'd actually been on leave two days previously, so  
 6 again, as we discussed, I was doing extra shifts. I did  
 7 actually have the opportunity to take some leave on  
 8 the two day shifts, so I'd actually come into this night  
 9 shift quite fresh from when I was on leave. However,  
 10 what we had, which the Inquiry may or may not be aware  
 11 of, is a period of unsettled weather, so wave heights in  
 12 excess of 1 metres in the English channel, for about  
 13 the preceding two weeks, and this is now rated as amber  
 14 for the first night, followed by a couple of red days.  
 15 Q. Thank you.  
 16 A. So ... --  
 17 Q. And those are the ratings given by Operation Deveran?  
 18 A. That's correct, yeah.  
 19 Q. The likelihood, partly and significantly based on  
 20 the weather forecast, of crossings or attempt crossings  
 21 in that upcoming --  
 22 A. That's correct. The Met Office provided that product to  
 23 the best of its ability, because again, all weather is  
 24 a mathematical model, so don't always blame them when  
 25 the weather's wrong. But they were there to provide us

1 with an overview of what would be a potentially,  
 2 you know, achievable crossing for the small boats  
 3 involved or totally unachievable because of  
 4 the conditions' expected.  
 5 Q. Thank you.  
 6 When you tell us about the previous two-week period  
 7 of wave heights, were you expecting that that night was  
 8 going to be a particularly dense one in terms of attempt  
 9 crossings simply because it had been impossible for  
 10 a period of time?  
 11 A. From experience, over the year previously and leading up  
 12 to that point, if there was ever a significant period  
 13 whereby crossings couldn't take place because of  
 14 the weather, the demand is there. You know, it is very  
 15 much, keeping to the theory of supply and demand, if  
 16 there is demand, they will supply it. So I was under no  
 17 illusion that, although this night is only rated as  
 18 Amber, there is a big urgency and drive to go.  
 19 Q. Thank you.  
 20 And so Mr Barnett asks you, in the middle of that  
 21 page:  
 22 "Are we expecting lots this evening?"  
 23 And you say:  
 24 "It's amber, and who knows?"  
 25 Is that what you're referring to?

1 A. Yes. I mean, I don't have a crystal ball, but,  
 2 you know, if I had to put a bet on it, I was expecting  
 3 to be busy for the potentially 36 hours from  
 4 midnight--ish, possibly earlier. Again, it's hard to  
 5 predict when they will leave and when they'll not leave.  
 6 However, experience has told us previously when to start  
 7 expecting.  
 8 Q. It's your expectation based on experience?  
 9 A. Yes.  
 10 Q. Thank you.  
 11 You go on to say:  
 12 "Border Force have stood up all their assets to call  
 13 us if you need us, rather than we'll go out and have  
 14 a look."  
 15 What are you referring to there?  
 16 A. So they, all their assets have readiness capabilities,  
 17 and I believe the main HMCC cutter Valiant was ready to  
 18 go in Dover as required. So sometimes on a -- on an  
 19 amber forecast, they would be at maybes 30 minutes'  
 20 notice to move 90 minutes' notice to move. Again, it's  
 21 a 42-metre Damen class cutter, you don't just turn  
 22 the key and go, you know, the engines have to be  
 23 pre-warmed and checks carried out --  
 24 Q. I see.  
 25 A. -- as per any maritime code so ... But they were aware

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

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

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

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

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1 Gris—Nez, so it would be — but, again, I can understand  
2 why on a transcript it would sound like "grenade bomb"  
3 but it would be "a Gris—Nez bomb".

4 Q. Thank you very much.

5 You make reference here to the tracker. You've  
6 explained your hesitance in using the word "tracker",  
7 but it is a word that was used and is used for  
8 spreadsheets or tables exchanging information about  
9 migrant crossings?

10 A. Yes, that's correct, basically.

11 Q. Thank you.

12 And the Inquiry's aware of course, as you tell us  
13 about in this transcript, that the French Coastguard  
14 operates its own tracker for migrant boats and that  
15 delay in the Coastguard providing their tracker was  
16 a long—standing, a regular problem for His Majesty's  
17 Coastguard?

18 A. Yes. And on that, the context of it is, we use  
19 the term "tracker", it's a spreadsheet. So, call  
20 collection, if you take it from a single vessel  
21 casualty, is one call, one incident, so the reason it's  
22 done as a tracker or a spreadsheet is because they want  
23 to tell us about multiple incidents at the same time,  
24 rather than ringing us and saying, "I'd like to make you  
25 informed of this, this and this". So they basically

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1 have, for want of a better explanation, provided us with  
2 multiple call collections of information they hold via  
3 a spreadsheet.

4 Q. Yes, thank you.

5 And on this particular night, the first version of  
6 the French tracker received by His Majesty's Coastguard  
7 was sent at 0057 hours on 24 November of 2021, so early  
8 hours of the second day of the shift?

9 A. First night shift.

10 Q. First night shift?

11 A. Yeah. Sorry, yeah.

12 Q. Yes.

13 And that included, is this right, information about  
14 small boats in motion, active, from about 9 o'clock on  
15 23 November?

16 A. From what I remember from the evidence, I believe, yes,  
17 it had a number of boats and the times they departed.

18 Q. Thank you.

19 You've just told us, you told us in your witness  
20 statement, that really the earlier information is  
21 provided about small boat activity, the more chance His  
22 Majesty's Coastguard has to prepare for when  
23 the incidents actually reach English waters, English SAR  
24 area; that's right, isn't it?

25 A. That's correct, yes.

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1 Q. And that includes — that preparation might include  
2 alerting UK Border Force as to approximate timings, it  
3 might include allocation or reallocation of staff, if  
4 necessary?

5 A. Yes, correct. It's all about preparing a plan.  
6 You know, the SMC's job is to prepare a plan, and  
7 the more time — time is also our greatest enemy,  
8 because we're usually working against a timescale which  
9 is ticking away from us. So the small boat search and  
10 rescue is quite different to some of the SAR we do,  
11 because actually, a lot of the time, we can prepare,  
12 providing we're given accurate, timeously, information  
13 to assist.

14 Q. And on this shift, by 1 o'clock in the morning, in fact  
15 the boat with which this Inquiry is primarily concerned,  
16 Charlie, was very close to the median line, very close  
17 to crossing into UK waters; is that right?

18 A. The Incident Charlie, which relates to a boat. I'm very  
19 specific that it's not boat Charlie, it is  
20 Incident Charlie, which relates to the boat this Inquiry  
21 is interested in, was at or around close the median  
22 line —

23 Q. Thank you.

24 A. — when that information was received.

25 Q. Did you consider yourself, in the early part of your

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1 shift, before you went to VTS, directly chasing, making  
2 contact with Gris—Nez, with the French Coastguard, for  
3 information about small boat activity on that evening?

4 A. I don't recall, is the answer.

5 Q. In your witness statement you tell us that that's  
6 something that you regularly did; is that right?

7 A. It's something that we would do regularly. For whatever  
8 reason, I may have directed it or not directed it.  
9 I think possibly, if I have to speculate, possibly some  
10 — you know, I was dealing with a member of staff being  
11 sick, so there was that welfare perspective of,  
12 you know, doing that paperwork. So that planning for  
13 coming in and then finding I'm a member of staff less  
14 than I'd hoped to be, maybe distracted my mind from what  
15 I would call a practice that we did sometimes.

16 Q. Thank you.

17 So you can't remember whether you yourself directly  
18 did it and you can't remember whether you instructed  
19 anybody else to do it?

20 A. No, I can't.

21 Q. All right.

22 If you had received information about  
23 Incident Charlie, in particular, earlier, could you,  
24 Coastguard, have tasked Border Force to send an asset  
25 earlier?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 A. So that is just to make sure that when we look at our  
 2 ViSION list, anything that shows as a green incident  
 3 type, you know, it's not a distress phase incident. So  
 4 my eyes, when I came back, were drawn to multiple  
 5 distress phase incidents, and I probably asked the team  
 6 at the time, "Is there anything else I need to be aware  
 7 of from the admin log", and I think the answer was, "No,  
 8 not really, the flights are probably not going to get  
 9 off the ground because of the fog".

10 Q. Is it unusual for an updating message such as this to  
 11 refer to the potential for danger?

12 A. The — from my perspective, I was not expecting  
 13 a normal, relaxed night at all. I can tell you, I was  
 14 very aware of what I was expecting and the response that  
 15 would be required. And with the talk of fog, again,  
 16 that was already going, this is going to be more of  
 17 a challenge than usual without aerial support to give us  
 18 that positional information. So they've discussed it  
 19 and obviously they've voiced their concerns with each  
 20 other. These were concerns which were already massively  
 21 within my head, looking at: it's going to be busy  
 22 because of the timescale of the weather beforehand and  
 23 it's going to be further — harder to coordinate an  
 24 effective overall SAR picture without that aerial asset  
 25 involved.

1 Q. Was a briefing recorded in this way or a message  
 2 recorded in this way, was that the normal way of  
 3 bringing such a situation to your, the SMC's, attention?

4 A. In terms of pre-planned stuff, possibly. Again,  
 5 the ViSION system is there to record our thoughts and  
 6 feelings. Is this — this, I would say, is them  
 7 recording their thoughts in their contemporaneous notes,  
 8 and this is them going, you know, we need to keep  
 9 ourselves on guard. And this is them recording then  
 10 their feelings in a — in a logical incident, and again,  
 11 it's quite difficult to find the right incident  
 12 sometimes. So if it's a generic statement like this is,  
 13 it's not particular — to one particular SAR incident,  
 14 it's where do you put that? Should it have gone in  
 15 the Network Management Log? Possibly. But, again, this  
 16 is specific to the Zone 14 area that Dover coordinated,  
 17 so, again, I guess it's: where do you put that  
 18 information? We want to record it and note it.

19 Q. Would you have been more likely to see it if it had been  
 20 recorded in the Network Management Log?

21 A. Yes, probably, because, generally, what we used to do as  
 22 a practice was you would record when SMCs were on and  
 23 off break in the Network Management Log, which gives  
 24 the maritime commanders overview of where people were,  
 25 or their capabilities.

1 Q. Can I ask you very specifically, to the best of your  
 2 knowledge and recollection, how common was it, back at  
 3 the tail end of 2021, for scheduled surveillance flights  
 4 to be cancelled/put off?

5 A. Again, aviation is very weather dependent. It's — and  
 6 in some respects, it's a lot more critical than  
 7 maritime. So, you know, when a ship runs out of fuel,  
 8 it's fine, it just bobs around there. If an aircraft  
 9 runs out of fuel, it's a little bit more intense for  
 10 them on board. So, again, the whole margin for error  
 11 with aeronautical stuff is critical compared to that.  
 12 So if there was any risk, then that is deferred to my  
 13 aviation colleagues.

14 Q. Thank you. All right, that can come off the screen,  
 15 please.

16 I'd like to ask you very briefly and in just very  
 17 general terms about RVL, or Reveal. Were you aware that  
 18 there was an asset operated by a company called  
 19 RVL flying that night between about 10 o'clock in  
 20 the evening and about 4.30 in the morning?

21 A. I wasn't aware. So RVL was another one of  
 22 the aeronautical contractors. So Bristow Helicopters  
 23 supply all the search and rescue rotary aircraft, and  
 24 2Excel were the other part of our flight programme.  
 25 RVL were tasked mainly, from my understanding, with

1 counter-pollution work, so I wasn't aware of that  
 2 aircraft. And if it was up I would have assumed it was  
 3 doing counter-pollution work because that was what they  
 4 were contracted for. That's my understanding.

5 Q. And so if I were to ask you why that asset wasn't tasked  
 6 to assist with Incident Charlie, that would be your  
 7 answer, that would have been your understanding of what  
 8 it was doing and what it could do?

9 A. That — that's correct. And also I wouldn't have tasked  
 10 an asset like that, because that would have been  
 11 a request to the aeronautical rescue for air support.

12 Q. I see. Thank you.

13 All right, we've talked about the French tracker,  
 14 which arrived in its first iteration of the shift at  
 15 0057 hours. The Inquiry knows that a call from  
 16 the French Coastguard was taken by Mr Downs at 1.06, and  
 17 we'll ask him about that when he comes to give his  
 18 evidence. And then he had opened a specific log on  
 19 ViSION for Incident Charlie and I'd like to look with  
 20 you at that now. That's {INQ000237/1}, please. And we  
 21 can see, at the header of that page, the unique GIN  
 22 number; is that right?

23 A. That's correct, yes.

24 Q. Top left-hand corner.

25 We can see that the incident has been

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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1 of aerial picture?  
 2 A. It could have been. However, again, it wasn't -- again,  
 3 I was carrying out my actions as I saw fit, and he would  
 4 review that incident at some point.  
 5 Q. I see.  
 6 Let's look at the Mayday relay itself then  
 7 {INQ007660/1}. That's the first page of it. We can see  
 8 it's timed at 2.27.  
 9 On to the next page, please {INQ007660/2}:  
 10 "Mayday relay, Mayday relay, Mayday relay, all  
 11 stations, all stations, all stations ... Dover  
 12 Coastguard. Dover Coastguard, Dover Coastguard.  
 13 "Mayday information number one. Small craft with 40  
 14 persons onboard in position ...  
 15 With the decimalised coordinates and a description  
 16 of location in relation to the Sandettie Lightvessel:  
 17 "Taking water and requiring immediate assistance.  
 18 "Any vessel that can assist to contact Dover  
 19 Coastguard."  
 20 That's the message that is the Mayday relay?  
 21 A. Yeah.  
 22 Q. Does it follow that it was your belief, at least a real  
 23 possibility, that this boat was taking water at this  
 24 stage?  
 25 A. So without viewing the VISION log, whether I requested

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1 the Mayday broadcast to be compiled or whether  
 2 I compiled it myself, I can't confirm.  
 3 Q. I see.  
 4 A. So because 16 -- the Channel 16 function has been  
 5 performed by Solent, I may have made that request to  
 6 Solent to compile it, and whether I would have reviewed  
 7 it before it was broadcast I can't comment without  
 8 checking the incident. So they may have put in "taking  
 9 water", I don't know. But, again, looking at this,  
 10 the "taking water", I don't know. I don't think I had  
 11 that information at that point. However, it could have  
 12 been one of the facts and deductions I made from what  
 13 could be causing them to panic so much.  
 14 Q. Thank you.  
 15 Would you take that off the screen please.  
 16 I think it's right that you were aware at the time  
 17 you caused the relay to be broadcast that the closest  
 18 vessel to this small boat was a French vessel,  
 19 the Flamant?  
 20 A. Yes, so obviously when we were analysing and assessed  
 21 the information, we can see a light, the Gaschem Shinano  
 22 was in there, but also the -- the French vessel Flamant  
 23 was also displaying its AIS, so I was aware of its  
 24 position in relation to the position of this incident.  
 25 Q. Thank you.

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1 Did you have any sense then of how far away, in  
 2 time, the Flamant was at the time that the relay was  
 3 broadcast from this -- from this small boat?  
 4 A. So, from memory -- and I think this is also noted in my  
 5 witness statement -- I think I estimated the distance  
 6 was about 2.5 nautical miles. Again, time --  
 7 distance/speed/time calculation, if you want me to do  
 8 one off the top of my head, probably quite close, in  
 9 terms of giving me an instant picture. So I'd say  
 10 probably 15 minutes, if that, if they were making best  
 11 speed. Again, their best speed probably somewhere in  
 12 the region of 15 to 20 knots.  
 13 Q. That's really helpful. Thank you very much.  
 14 Did you hope that the Flamant would respond to this  
 15 relay?  
 16 A. Yes, so the Mayday relay is -- you know, is, by law, all  
 17 vessels who can respond should respond to a Mayday  
 18 relay. That is a law of the sea.  
 19 Q. So you expected it to respond?  
 20 A. Yes.  
 21 Q. Did it respond?  
 22 A. No.  
 23 Q. Other vessels did respond?  
 24 A. Yes.  
 25 Q. Were any of those able to assist?

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1 A. There was a couple of vessels transiting the south--west  
 2 lane that responded. They -- they, because of their  
 3 nature of their course, couldn't assist, so they were  
 4 thanked for responding. The reason they couldn't  
 5 respond was, for them to go where this position was, it  
 6 would have put them going in the -- well, they would  
 7 have contravened Rule 10(b)2 of the collision  
 8 regulations, which would be proceeding in the wrong  
 9 traffic lane against the flow of traffic, so --  
 10 Q. And would have been dangerous in its own right?  
 11 A. Pretty dangerous, yes.  
 12 Q. Thank you. All right.  
 13 The relay then was repeated every 20 minutes; is  
 14 that right? Is that normal?  
 15 A. Again, that's in my witness statement.  
 16 Q. All right.  
 17 A. Generally, with distress, we'd be somewhere between  
 18 15 minutes and 30 minutes depending on where it was and  
 19 what it was.  
 20 Q. Thank you.  
 21 And it comes to an end, I think, at about  
 22 0339 hours. I'm going to ask to have up on the screen,  
 23 please, {INQ000238/11}. That will be the vision log for  
 24 Charlie.  
 25 (Pause)

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1 THE EPE OPERATOR: It's only five pages.  
 2 MS LE FEVRE: Oh, gosh, I must have given you the wrong  
 3 reference then. I'm sorry. All right, well, I might  
 4 come back and show you the document.  
 5 What it says and what's recorded is that at that  
 6 time there is no requirement for the Mayday relay  
 7 because Valiant is in the area investigating targets.  
 8 And then the Mayday relay stops from that point forward.  
 9 At 0339 hours, it's right, isn't it, that no small  
 10 boat had been confirmed, rightly or wrongly, as being  
 11 Charlie?  
 12 A. I believe so, yes.  
 13 Q. What was the usual practice or procedure for ending  
 14 a Mayday relay broadcast?  
 15 A. The usual practice or procedure would be where the ---  
 16 the emergency situation ceases to be.  
 17 Now, the rationale for this emergency relay  
 18 broadcast were for vessels to assist, and then we  
 19 obviously had a situation where we had a search and  
 20 rescue asset on scene, able to assist, so therefore  
 21 vessels of opportunity, which is the other vessels using  
 22 the Dover Strait, were less of a --- you know, we hadn't  
 23 had any definitive small --- by "small craft", I mean  
 24 craft that could be used to operate in (a) shallow  
 25 waters, in and around traffic separation schemes. So,

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1 again, it was deemed that, once the Valiant was there,  
 2 we weren't going to get any other vessels from a Mayday  
 3 broadcast.  
 4 Q. Ah, so it was the likelihood of response that factored  
 5 into the decision to stop the broadcast?  
 6 A. Yes. So basically it was: is this --- is this generating  
 7 any benefit to the ongoing incident? We're not getting  
 8 any responses, we've got search and rescue units on  
 9 scene, and actually, the part of the broadcast which was  
 10 "any sightings" was still being transmitted via the VTS  
 11 service on the working channels of both Gris-Nez VTS's  
 12 broadcast at 10 past the hour and Dover Coastguard's  
 13 broadcast at 20 to the hour. So that request for, "Any  
 14 sightings, please give us information", was still being  
 15 repeated by other means on the VTS working channels,  
 16 supplementing the SAR effort. So to then broadcast on  
 17 16 repeatedly seemed to be more than was required. We  
 18 had the "any sightings" was being done, and also we had  
 19 SAR assets on scene.  
 20 Q. So do you think then it was appropriate to end that  
 21 Mayday relay broadcast before the vessel in distress to  
 22 which it related had in fact been located conclusively?  
 23 A. I was content with the assets I had on scene to effect  
 24 any rescues, so therefore the Mayday broadcast wasn't  
 25 required.

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1 Q. All right. I'm going to move on then and ask you about  
 2 the second call that you had with Mubin. This is a call  
 3 at 0231 hours, so fairly shortly after the broadcast of  
 4 the Mayday relay is started.  
 5 How would you describe Mubin's general state during  
 6 this call?  
 7 A. I don't remember the second call, unfortunately, so  
 8 without seeing some transcript ---  
 9 Q. All right.  
 10 A. --- I'm going to, unfortunately, struggle to comment.  
 11 Q. Well, we'll look at the transcript then.  
 12 {INQ007655/1}, please. Thank you.  
 13 That's the covering page.  
 14 If we move on to the first --- to page 2 of  
 15 the document, please {INQ007655/2}, that's you,  
 16 Coastguard:  
 17 " ... good morning.  
 18 "Hussain", which, as you saw on the first page, is  
 19 in fact Mubin ---  
 20 A. Yeah.  
 21 Q. ---:  
 22 "Coastguard, can you help me please? Can you help  
 23 me, please? I'm finished ... "  
 24 You say:  
 25 "Hello ... can I take your name first of all?"

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1 Gives the name:  
 2 "... have you called before?"  
 3 You say. He says:  
 4 "... yeah, like ... location. Can you look ... look  
 5 ... Look up, please."  
 6 You say:  
 7 "So you've called before. Have I spoke to you ...  
 8 as well ...  
 9 "Have I spoken to you before? How many people are  
 10 in your boat?  
 11 "40 ... 40 people ... we're dying and two are ---  
 12 children."  
 13 You ask for the telephone number.  
 14 And over the page, please, {INQ007655/3} into page  
 15 ... yes. So confirming the telephone numbers. Again,  
 16 you're asking for how many people there are on the boat.  
 17 You get a number and a little bit of a breakdown, some  
 18 of it's inaudible. You ask where they'd set off from,  
 19 you were told Calais.  
 20 Next page, please, {INQ007655/4}. You ask what  
 21 colour the boat is. He says:  
 22 "Don't ... understand. It's broken, broken ... Can  
 23 you help me, please? And the water has blown my ..."  
 24 You ask again about the colour, and you're told:  
 25 "The boat's finished ... can you help me, please?"

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

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

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

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

1 the vicinity of that sort of timescale.  
 2 Q. As you know/we know, it was about an hour before Valiant  
 3 in fact reached the Mayday coordinate position from  
 4 0201, so about twice that time estimate.  
 5 A. Yes, it was double that time, and that may have been  
 6 because I wasn't aware of what time it actually got  
 7 underway.  
 8 Q. All right. Looking down towards the bottom of the page  
 9 now, you say to Mubin:  
 10 "I appreciate everyone's very scared on the boat ...  
 11 we need ...  
 12 "... you need to stop making calls you need to stop  
 13 making calls ...  
 14 "...  
 15 "... You need to stop making calls because every  
 16 time you make a call we think there's another boat  
 17 out ..."  
 18 Next page, please {INQ007655/9}:  
 19 "... there and we don't want to accidentally go  
 20 chasing for another boat when it's actually your both  
 21 we're looking for."  
 22 Take that off the screen, please.  
 23 Is that an instruction from you to Mubin to stop  
 24 calling Coastguard?  
 25 A. From that, what I wanted was, "Listen, you need to

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1 understand, we are working to rescue you and we're  
 2 getting a lot of calls in with lots of different  
 3 information", maybe I need -- again, from my mind,  
 4 I don't know that amplified with: unless somebody  
 5 drastically alters. You know, generally, we say don't  
 6 call again unless something changes, you know. So that  
 7 was me asking him to be patient.  
 8 As I said earlier, that will -- you know, when do  
 9 they start exaggerating, well, how long has it been from  
 10 the first call to when they get rescued, so it was  
 11 ringing us every ten minutes and then giving a different  
 12 name, or, again, as you look at that transcript, were  
 13 saying the name is Hussain, and not Mubin. So there's  
 14 another incident for that and now I'm going to roll it  
 15 into Charlie because I've managed to ascertain it, but  
 16 it's taking my time up of keeping what is a complicated  
 17 maritime picture in one piece.  
 18 Q. Thank you.  
 19 And is that the standard instruction then, not to  
 20 call again unless something changes? Is that a standard  
 21 instruction?  
 22 A. It's not a standard instruction that I'm aware of.  
 23 However, it's about asset and incident management.  
 24 You know, it's -- keeping the pertinent amplifying  
 25 information flowing is great, however, just telling me,

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1 because again, at this point, "We're all going to die"  
 2 ... if I look back on this and reflect on it, "We're all  
 3 going to die, we're all going to die", is it  
 4 exaggeration now, because we keep getting these phone  
 5 calls without any more information? And I think this is  
 6 where it starts to generate to me is the level of  
 7 distress being exaggerated because it is, you know,  
 8 the boat's not come quick enough. And, yeah, it's -- if  
 9 you don't understand what's fully going on and you're  
 10 getting, "We're all going to die", it's quite  
 11 a distressing situation to find yourself in of sitting  
 12 at the end of a phone, effectively helpless. You know  
 13 where they are, you want to get a boat to them and you  
 14 can't.  
 15 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Mr Gibson, would you like a break?  
 16 A. That's all right.  
 17 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: We'll just pause for a moment.  
 18 (Pause).  
 19 I think we might have a break.  
 20 MS LE FEVRE: Mr Chair, if it helps, I only had one more  
 21 question to ask about this call and I was going to  
 22 suggest we broke immediately then and then the topic  
 23 will be over and Mr Gibson will know he doesn't have to  
 24 come back.  
 25 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Yes, okay, well, ask the final question,

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1 yes.  
 2 A. If we could clear it off in one go, I'd prefer that.  
 3 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Yes.  
 4 MS LE FEVRE: Thank you.  
 5 To the best of your knowledge, did Mubin call again  
 6 in the course of that shift?  
 7 A. I'm not sure. Again, there was so many names. So, as  
 8 -- as the night progressed, it -- as I've said, there  
 9 was more than one boat. You know, we had so many calls  
 10 and so many different names and -- we will touch on  
 11 staffing later and I will explain more about  
 12 the pitfalls of having plenty of staff and not having  
 13 enough staff, but, yeah, it's I don't recall if he rang  
 14 again.  
 15 MS LE FEVRE: Thank you very much.  
 16 Chair, if that's ...  
 17 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Well, thank you very much.  
 18 So we'll come back about five minutes to 2, if  
 19 that's all right.  
 20 A. Yeah.  
 21 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: So thank you, Mr Gibson.  
 22 VIDEO HEARINGS MANAGER: I confirm the cameras are now off.  
 23 (The witness withdrew)  
 24 (12.55 pm)  
 25 (The short adjournment)

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1 (1.56 pm)  
 2 (The witness returned)  
 3 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Well, good afternoon, everyone, and  
 4 welcome back, Mr Gibson.  
 5 Ms Le Fevre.  
 6 MS LE FEVRE: Thank you.  
 7 Mr Gibson, I want to ask you now about a call you  
 8 had with the French Coastguard at 0242 hours. We have  
 9 a transcript of that call as well. I'm going to ask for  
 10 that to come on to our screens. It's {INQ007656/1},  
 11 please. You can see the date and time and  
 12 the participants there.  
 13 If we can move on to {INQ007656/2} of that  
 14 transcript, we can see the introductions, and you  
 15 confirm and up the French migrant 7, as they called  
 16 the boat, with your case, Charlie, at the foot of  
 17 the page.  
 18 The French Coastguard, in their third entry on this  
 19 page, they say:  
 20 "... they called already, spoke, 'Please call us',  
 21 because he claim, 'Help me, help me, help me. We are in  
 22 the water' ... "  
 23 So they ask you:  
 24 "... so you have a rescue boat for this case or  
 25 not?"

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1 And you say:  
 2 "We have the Valiant proceeding, however the Flamant  
 3 is closer to their position. The Flamant is currently  
 4 outlined three nautical miles from where they are."  
 5 Firstly, the French Coastguard passing this  
 6 information to you, "We are in the water". Now,  
 7 the Inquiry hasn't found any Coastguard -- His Majesty's  
 8 Coastguard log where that information is  
 9 recorded: persons in water. Is that important, an  
 10 important piece of information?  
 11 A. Again, this is another statement of: how accurate is  
 12 that information, how -- how do I validate that  
 13 information? So, again, "We are in the water", is this  
 14 we are in the UK water, because again, this is a lot of  
 15 that, I guess, language barrier. So, again, it's how  
 16 that message is received. You know, "We've entered  
 17 the water" or, "We are in the water", and I guess that  
 18 is possibly something we've got that, this mindset of  
 19 mine, where, I mean, this call comes not long after  
 20 chatting to Mubin, where he's saying, "We are in UK  
 21 waters", or, "We in UK water, okay", because this is  
 22 what they're trying to achieve. So possibly this is me  
 23 looking at, yes, they're in the -- the French are  
 24 ringing me to tell me something, so, you know, if -- if  
 25 this was the opposite way round, so I'm ringing

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1 the French Coastguard to say, "Listen, I've just had  
 2 a phone call from people in the water and they're in  
 3 your area", I would be expecting a response of some  
 4 description or actually we should proceed if they're --  
 5 whichever.  
 6 So it's not recorded because, again, it's that  
 7 passing of information from Gris-Nez, it's a bit of an  
 8 update. As you can see, again, we've used the limit of  
 9 my French at the start of this with "Bonjour", so, yeah,  
 10 it's -- we're still in the early stages of passing  
 11 information to me in this call of, like, "Right, you're  
 12 ringing me", "It's our case 7, it's your migrant alpha",  
 13 "Actually, no, it's not, it's Charlie", so we're trying  
 14 to ascertain where we are with that. So I've not  
 15 recorded it because maybe it's not being reinforced to  
 16 me as saying, "Help me, help me, help me, we are in  
 17 the water". And, again, I'm not taking that as being  
 18 they're in the water, because, again, it's referenced  
 19 the boat.  
 20 Q. I see. So that's why it's not recorded.  
 21 Did you tell anyone else about this part of  
 22 the Coastguard -- the French Coastguard's call to you?  
 23 A. Possibly not, no. Obviously these are my SMC thoughts  
 24 about what's going on. We're getting underway to -- at  
 25 this point, we have the information of: they are here

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1 and they need help. But we don't actually ascertain  
 2 what is going on with the nature of the boat, so we're  
 3 still in this information gather/responding phase of not  
 4 having a full picture.  
 5 Q. All right.  
 6 I'll ask you a little about your response then.  
 7 The Flamant, you say, is closer to their position?  
 8 A. Yeah.  
 9 Q. And it would be the quickest response vessel.  
 10 If we move through to {INQ007656/4} of  
 11 the transcript -- thank you -- we see you, in terms,  
 12 saying that, locating the Valiant boat and then saying  
 13 "the Flamant is obviously closer" to where the Flamant  
 14 is at the moment and then there's a conversation about  
 15 the relative speeds of the respective vessels.  
 16 Over the page again, please, to {INQ007656/5}:  
 17 "How many minutes?"  
 18 And you say:  
 19 "How many minutes? They're doing 15 knots so  
 20 they've got nine miles ... about 35 to 40 minutes."  
 21 And the French Coastguard:  
 22 "40 minutes?"  
 23 And then an audible gasp.  
 24 Could you have asked, expressly asked the French  
 25 Coastguard outright to task the Flamant to attend this

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1 boat?  
 2 A. I could. It would have still remained with the French  
 3 Coastguard's decision to accept that request or not.  
 4 The Mayday relay, as I've said, is about, you know, all  
 5 vessels that are capable and which -- and can respond to  
 6 respond. I think, from my perspective, me instructing  
 7 a foreign military asset to comply with an instruction  
 8 and proceed from French waters into UK waters, it's  
 9 probably not something I thought I should tell them to  
 10 do that, which is why it was a polite request of, "Is it  
 11 possible if they can". I think, within my remit as an  
 12 SMC, I could do it, however, engaging an international  
 13 SAR in this instance, and again, we are -- when we work  
 14 with our SAR partners it's quite amicable and it's  
 15 generally for, like, not a political -- you know, this  
 16 is a political topic for a lot of people. For us, it's  
 17 just search and rescue, but there is political  
 18 sensitivities around it.  
 19 Q. Yes.  
 20 A. So, I guess, when you start making demands, it's -- it's  
 21 how we process that, and maybes that's one part, and  
 22 it's certainly something we've picked up on from this  
 23 incident as a Coastguard of we need to be better at  
 24 actually being very clear with what we want.  
 25 Q. Thank you.

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1 So just so I'm clear, you could ask?  
 2 A. I've since learned that I could have made it, "Can you  
 3 formally task the Flamant". And it would be "Could  
 4 you -- I'm formally requesting you task the Flamant to  
 5 this incident as the nearest search and rescue vessel or  
 6 nearest vessel".  
 7 Q. That's the most you could have done, an express and  
 8 formal request for the tasking?  
 9 A. Yes.  
 10 Q. It wouldn't be for His Majesty's Coastguard to directly  
 11 task the Flamant?  
 12 A. No, because it is not a -- so HM Coastguard will  
 13 formally task declared assets and additional assets.  
 14 However, the Flamant is neither a declared or additional  
 15 asset, it's a vessel of opportunity.  
 16 Q. Does it follow from your answers that you had never  
 17 previously asked the French Coastguard to task one of  
 18 their assets?  
 19 A. I'd never had to forcibly request is how I would  
 20 describe that. You know, we've spoken with the French  
 21 and liaised with the French and have a good working  
 22 relationship and it's never been to a point where,  
 23 actually, I really need it to go.  
 24 Q. Thank you.  
 25 Did you consider raising this negative response,

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1 effectively, with the -- with your Maritime  
 2 Tactical Commander?  
 3 A. I didn't. Again, it's -- for me, at this point, I've  
 4 got to work with what I've got, and I didn't have  
 5 the time to go, "Wouldn't it be great if we got this".  
 6 So, again, it was another thing of, it could have been  
 7 raised if I'd had the capacity to do it, but again,  
 8 I was more concentrating on the rescuing and working  
 9 with what I've got.  
 10 Q. Yes, because would he perhaps have had different  
 11 communication channels with the French Coastguard?  
 12 A. He would have had no different communication channels  
 13 with the French Coastguard. It's -- you know,  
 14 the direct line, as it were, from ringing a foreign RCC,  
 15 you know, he could have maybes carried bit more clout,  
 16 or he may have formally requested it. However, like  
 17 I say, I didn't feel I had the time to ring him when  
 18 I could -- my time could have been better spent managing  
 19 all the SAR incidents ongoing.  
 20 Q. Thank you.  
 21 Can I just go back two pages in the transcript to  
 22 {INQ007656/3}, please, and just looking at the express  
 23 information that you relayed to the French Coastguard in  
 24 the centre of the page:  
 25 "... the Flamant ... obviously she's in UK waters

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1 but the Flamant is probably the closer vessel to respond  
 2 if they are sinking."  
 3 What was your state of mind in respect of the state  
 4 of the small boat at that time?  
 5 A. So, one of our process is what we call the facts,  
 6 factors, deductions and outputs. So what we know, what  
 7 we can deduce from that and what we need to do to fix  
 8 the deduction so -- and that's covered by actions, risks  
 9 and constraints. So worst case scenario is: they're  
 10 sinking. You know, they're saying they're finished;  
 11 they haven't said they're sinking, but one of  
 12 the deductions I've obviously made in my mind was, worst  
 13 case scenario is: they could be sinking. So that's --  
 14 again, this is why I've said "if they are", not "they  
 15 are", it's "if they are". So, again, a deduction is if  
 16 it is as bad as it could be, you know, worst case  
 17 scenario is that dinghy is going to sink.  
 18 Q. Thank you.  
 19 Take that transcript off the screen, please.  
 20 Can I ask you this then. Would you agree that RNLI  
 21 lifeboats are better equipped to proceed at speed and  
 22 perhaps in tough sea conditions to provide assistance,  
 23 better equipped than Border Force cutters, for example?  
 24 A. Are they better equipped? RNLI lifeboats are capable  
 25 craft, however, they are limited by survivor capacity,

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1 and again, they are quicker by definition . HMCC Valiant  
 2 is a — Border Force may correct me on this, but maybe  
 3 quite an aging vessel and probably due for replacement,  
 4 and, when new, was probably capable of higher top  
 5 speeds, but for safety reasons and sustainability , it  
 6 was slower. So a lifeboat could be used, could be  
 7 utilised , and again, however, these are volunteers and  
 8 we're managing finite resources, so ...

9 Q. Thank you.

10 RNLi was a declared and available asset to  
 11 Coastguard that evening?

12 A. Yes, the lifeboats obviously declared their status of  
 13 availability , and again, that request would go to their  
 14 launching authority and they would decide whether they'd  
 15 accept or decline a tasking. The lifeboats would not be  
 16 pre-deployed. That is not within our memorandum of  
 17 understanding. They are not to just be sent out there  
 18 to wait for it to happen; they were generally at that  
 19 time tasked to a specific incident within UK waters and  
 20 then returned to base.

21 Q. Thank you.

22 So did you consider, to the best of your  
 23 recollection , tasking RNLi to attend this small boat,  
 24 Incident Charlie, once you knew the Flamant was not  
 25 going to attend it?

1 A. I considered it . However, obviously, as I've said ,  
 2 the Valiant's underway. To page the lifeboat, there  
 3 would be that timescale where the Deputy Launch and All  
 4 Launch and Operations Manager contacts the Coastguard to  
 5 agree or disagree the tasking. That then follows with  
 6 a separate page to the crew, they then have to assemble,  
 7 again, get the boat ready for sea, do their checks. So  
 8 actually, by the time I'd paged a lifeboat, which, Dover  
 9 lifeboat would have been the closest, the arrival time  
 10 on scene would have probably been quite similar. So,  
 11 again, it wouldn't have expedited the vessel arriving on  
 12 scene.

13 Q. Thank you.

14 A. Valiant and Dover lifeboat would have arrived on scene  
 15 at approximately the same sort of time.

16 Q. And is that a thought process you went through on  
 17 24 November?

18 A. Yes. So as I've said , our resources are finite . So in  
 19 terms of actual capability across the Kent coast and  
 20 into Sussex, you have Ramsgate Lifeboat, you have Dover  
 21 All-Weather Lifeboat and you have Dungeness Lifeboat,  
 22 three different classes of lifeboat , and obviously  
 23 the Border Force assets available . As I said earlier in  
 24 this , it 's saying we'd had two weeks of foul weather and  
 25 we were expecting a busy night, and a 36-hour period of

1 extended possible migrant activity , there was  
 2 a consideration for not exhausting what is a finite  
 3 amount of resources, so therefore —

4 Q. In the RNLi?

5 A. In the RNLi. And you know, it's: we're at the start of  
 6 what is a busy period. You know, we are being told this  
 7 is just amber; tomorrow's red, the next night's red. So  
 8 I was very mindful about not exhausting or fatiguing all  
 9 my resources, because once I've exhausted the RNLi,  
 10 there is no back up to the RNLi, as it were. So I was  
 11 mindful of how much resource I used because of what was  
 12 predicted.

13 Q. So they wouldn't have got there any more quickly and you  
 14 were mindful of the limited resource?

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. I want to ask you next about a call you had at 0311 in  
 17 the morning, with Border Force, with Border Force  
 18 Maritime Command and with a man called Tom Willows, from  
 19 whom, again, the Inquiry expects to hear in the next  
 20 days and weeks.

21 In this call , you discussed with Mr Willows  
 22 the French intelligence that you had received, the fact  
 23 that the Valiant was proceeding to the Incident Charlie  
 24 boat and the fact that there were a number of other  
 25 small boats in the area, two to three small boats in

1 addition to Charlie in the vicinity of  
 2 the Sandettie Lightvessel.

3 Can I have, please, {INQ007602/1} on the screen.  
 4 It 's the cover page there. If we can turn to  
 5 {INQ007602/3}, please.

6 So, here you are, explaining to Mr Willows  
 7 the Valiant is proceeding to Charlie and where it is in  
 8 relation to the Lightvessel. You're asked whether it is  
 9 still a Mayday situation at the moment, and you say:

10 "Well, they've told me it's full of water."

11 Who's "they" in those circumstances?

12 A. This, I'm not sure about. This is where I, again,  
 13 I can't remember everything, however, I may have started  
 14 coming to these conclusions on my own without  
 15 the evidence. Again, I have this gut feeling that  
 16 something isn't quite right and I've obviously  
 17 considered sinking, taking water. So I don't know  
 18 whether I've ever had it confirmed, however my thought  
 19 processes are, if there is something seriously —  
 20 you know, no one wants to think worst case scenario, but  
 21 you've got to consider, you know, the likelihood of it  
 22 catching fire is very slim because it's a small rubber  
 23 boat. Yes, there is petrol in it. But actually,  
 24 the most likely catastrophic would be taking water,  
 25 sinking, deflating, stuff like that. So I'm maybe

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 on the morning of 24 November. We can see then ---  
 2 I think this is the first time that we've looked at  
 3 this. We can see, in the first column, the alphabetical  
 4 naming of the migrant vessels. And then, in the second  
 5 column, the duplicates of those vessels. The third  
 6 column marked in red or green for resolved or ongoing.  
 7 The incident report source. The French reference to  
 8 marry up with the French tracker. The Coastguard's GIN  
 9 unique identifying number. The Border Force numbers,  
 10 those Mike numbers. Mobile phones. And then positions.  
 11 The area for search and rescue, whether in French or UK  
 12 waters. Some descriptions as to the vehicles and their  
 13 details. The numbers of persons reported on board.  
 14 What asset's been tasked. And any further notes. And  
 15 then a final column for "Outcome".  
 16 If we look down back to the left-hand columns,  
 17 please, and we look down for the entry for "Lima", we  
 18 can see "Juliet" in fact, two lines up from  
 19 the highlighted, "Juliet" identified as a duplicate of  
 20 "Lima"; is that right?  
 21 A. I believe so, from what you've shown me. I can't  
 22 remember from ...  
 23 Q. And that's got an "R" marked next to it. Now, is that  
 24 showing that that incident had been resolved?  
 25 A. Resolved because we believe it to be a repeat of --- of

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1 Lima, basically. That would be why it would be shown as  
 2 R. As you'll notice, there is zero positional  
 3 information in there, not really much description. And  
 4 again, if we went into the ViSION log for --- there's not  
 5 a GIN for it, which is weird, there should be  
 6 a Coastguard GIN in there for it --- it would probably  
 7 give us some information and a rationale for why it was  
 8 made a repeat of Lima, whether it be the same telephone  
 9 number or positional information from the --- there would  
 10 be something to corroborate why we were content it was  
 11 definitely a duplicate from the outset.  
 12 Q. I see, because Lima, at this stage, remains marked  
 13 outstanding in red?  
 14 A. Yes. I will stipulate that this is not the sole  
 15 source --- the single source of the truth is ViSION.  
 16 This was us --- to enable us to share information. So  
 17 ViSION should have always been updated first and then  
 18 the tracker second. So that didn't always happen and  
 19 that is something we've addressed, because ViSION is our  
 20 legal document for recording information. This is about  
 21 sharing information with third parties to make everyone  
 22 else aware who needs to be made aware.  
 23 Q. Yes, I understand.  
 24 If we look into the seventh column --- I think my  
 25 maths is right --- I'm looking for the UK Border Force

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1 reference column, and we can see that "M957" has been  
 2 entered against Incident Charlie in this version of  
 3 the tracker; do you see that?  
 4 A. Yes, I do.  
 5 Q. M957 is the number that should have appeared against  
 6 Incident Lima; is that right?  
 7 A. From the ViSION log we've just witnessed, that would be  
 8 correct, yes.  
 9 Q. Did you notice, at any time during this shift, that this  
 10 Mike or M number had been entered against  
 11 Incident Charlie on this tracker?  
 12 A. No, I did not.  
 13 Q. You yourself didn't make that entry?  
 14 A. I don't believe so. The Mike numbers were generally  
 15 provided by Border Force MCC or when the staff who were  
 16 based in the joint control room with Dover came in, they  
 17 would either pass this information or update it. If  
 18 you'd like me to give a reason for that, you will see  
 19 the asset tagged as "VALIANT", because that's what  
 20 Valiant was going to, we'd actually tagged Valiant to  
 21 Charlie. So I could understand if someone had seen  
 22 Valiant was the asset tagged and there was an asset  
 23 M number provided, that they would go, "Oh, Valiant's  
 24 with Charlie", and again that would be the conflict of  
 25 having the Valiant tagged to an incident which it was

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1 proceeding to and then coming across a subsequent  
 2 incident before it got to Charlie.  
 3 Q. Thank you.  
 4 Is that effectively your best guess as to how that  
 5 entry came to be made?  
 6 A. It is, unfortunately, yeah. The Mike numbers bear ---  
 7 it's a Border Force reference number. So that is for  
 8 when they're landed ashore so they can be  
 9 administratively processed so they know, again, without  
 10 going too much into the process, they come ashore, their  
 11 welfare is checked, anything they've got is bagged for  
 12 evidence, they're interviewed and then they're taken to  
 13 onward care, and that is just how they identify  
 14 the different groups of 40 people arriving into  
 15 the reception centre.  
 16 Q. Thank you.  
 17 You've told us this morning that effectively all  
 18 information regarding Valiant's actions was recorded in  
 19 the Incident Charlie log because it's to  
 20 Incident Charlie that Valiant was originally tasked?  
 21 A. That's correct, yeah.  
 22 Q. Do you then make a connection between Valiant appearing  
 23 exclusively on the Charlie log and this error --- entry  
 24 in error in the tracker?  
 25 A. Potentially, yes, because whether that information was

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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