

OPUS2

The Cranston Inquiry

Day 8

March 13, 2025

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(10.00 am)

SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Yes. Well, good morning, everyone, and good morning, Mr Willows. Could you just read the affirmation, please.

MR THOMAS GREGORY WILLOWS (affirmed)

SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Yes. Well, thanks very much. So Ms Woods has some questions for you.

Questions by MS WOODS

MS WOODS: Good morning, Mr Willows.

A. Morning.

Q. Is it right you have provided a witness statement for this Inquiry dated 3 December 2024?

A. That's correct.

Q. And I think that statement consists of about six pages; is that right?

A. That's correct, yes.

Q. Thank you very much. I want to start, if I can, by asking you about your role and in particular about your role in November 2021. Is it right, based on your statement, that you were working as an immigration officer?

A. That's correct. I was based in the Maritime Command Centre, yes.

Q. On Tuesday, we heard your colleague Karen Whitehouse

1

refer to you as something called an EO, I think an executive officer. Can you tell us what that is?

A. Yes. Well, within the Civil Service grading, it's officer grade. Karen is my line manager, HO, higher officer. Yes, that's my grade.

Q. So executive officer is your grade within the Civil Service, whereas immigration officer is the title of your role within BFMCC; is that right?

A. That's correct.

Q. Thank you very much.

Could we turn to your statement at {INQ10214/5}, paragraph 13, please, page 5. We can see in the second half of that paragraph:

"Since the creation of the Small Boats Operation Command ... in December 2022, responsibility for assisting [HM Coastguard] with migrant rescue operations has transferred from BFMCC and my work therefore is no longer related to migrant rescues, where the capacity of the BFMC vessels was a relevant factor of which both I, and ... colleagues, were aware."

Mr Willows, are you still working as an immigration officer?

A. I am still working within the Maritime Command Centre, yes.

Q. But is it right, based on this, that you are no longer

2

working in relation to rescue of small boats in the Channel?

A. That's correct.

Q. Thank you very much.

And it's fair to say if the Small Boats Operation Command was created in December 2022, it's been somewhere in the order of two to three years since you were working in that role; is that right?

A. That's correct.

Q. Thank you very much.

Prior to your work for Border Force, is it right — or for BFMCC, is it right that you worked as a maritime enforcement officer?

A. That's right, yes.

Q. I want to ask you a little bit about that, if I can. Is it right that that involves working on a cutter for Border Force?

A. That's correct. I spent about 15 years working on the cutters.

Q. And we heard a little bit from Commander Toy on Monday about the kinds of work that a cutter might undertake; combating smuggling of goods, combating illegal immigration. Was that the kind of work which you took part in in that role?

A. Primarily smuggling operations.

3

Q. Smuggling operations.

A. The migrant activity hadn't commenced whilst I was on the boats. I came off the boats in 2014 and migrant activity started in about 2018.

Q. So if we go to paragraph 2, page 1 of your statement — it is the same document {INQ010214/1} — we can see, paragraph 2:

"During my time working on the cutters, I was never directly involved in migrant rescues operations ..."

And as you have just told us, that's because that didn't really start to become a part of your work until 2018; is that right?

A. It's correct.

Q. We can take that down. Thank you.

When you were working on cutters as a maritime enforcement officer, were you a member of the crew or were you undertaking sort of separate law enforcement role? You weren't a CFI or anything like that, were you?

A. I was a member of the crew, so I was a member of the cutter crew and the boarding crew, so ...

Q. And were you a qualified mariner?

A. Everybody working on a boat takes marine qualifications, depending what level they are, so I had certifications appropriate to my level on board the boat.

4

1 Q. Thank you very much.
 2 Turning back then to the role of immigration
 3 officer , can you tell us a little bit about the function
 4 of an immigration officer , please? What were your
 5 responsibilities ?
 6 A. Within the Maritime Command Centre?
 7 Q. Yes.
 8 A. Specifically to Operation Deveran or ...
 9 Q. I want to understand the role in general first , if
 10 I can.
 11 A. Okay.
 12 Q. Is it right that an immigration officer might have
 13 a range of different roles?
 14 A. Our primary role in the Maritime Command Centre was
 15 looking after the fleet of Border Force assets, tasking
 16 and deploying them on a day-to-day basis, having to look
 17 after the welfare of the crew, and we're the single
 18 point of contact for other Government agencies who might
 19 need assistance from --- from Border Force.
 20 Q. We heard from Karen Whitehouse on Tuesday that her role
 21 was national, not just focused on the Channel, but
 22 dealing with the Border Force fleet as a whole. Is that
 23 also true of your role?
 24 A. Yes, that's correct. The fleet work round the whole of
 25 the UK, so yes, it was a national role.

5

1 Q. And how much of your time was focused on the Channel as
 2 opposed to that national picture?
 3 A. The proportion of the time increased over the years from
 4 when it first started. Events were few and far between
 5 and then, yes, it got to the stage where the majority of
 6 our time would have been taken up by Operation Deveran
 7 work.
 8 Q. Was that true in November 2021?
 9 A. Yes, certainly the majority of our work would have been
 10 on Op Deveran.
 11 Q. You talk about "our work". Are you talking about
 12 immigration officers or are you talking about yourself
 13 and the higher officer you worked with on that tasking?
 14 A. My role specifically in the MCC.
 15 Q. Thank you.
 16 In terms of the structure of your role, who did you
 17 answer to? Who was your line manager?
 18 A. Karen Whitehouse is my HO at the time.
 19 Q. Was it always Karen who was your line manager working on
 20 a shift or did you work with different higher officers ?
 21 A. I would have worked with different HOs at different
 22 times if Karen was on leave. Someone might have swapped
 23 shifts. So yes, but ...
 24 Q. Did you also have a more senior officer available to you
 25 during your shifts?

6

1 A. Yes, there was always an on-call SO who was available if
 2 things needed escalating.
 3 Q. And if you needed to speak to them or contact them, was
 4 it Karen Whitehouse who would do that or were you able
 5 to contact them yourself?
 6 A. Either one of us, as --- as appropriate at the time.
 7 Q. And how would you contact them, if you needed to?
 8 A. By telephone. They weren't on duty in the office, so we
 9 would phone them.
 10 Q. What sort of circumstances might lead you to contact
 11 a more senior officer for assistance or support?
 12 A. Specifically to Op Deveran?
 13 Q. Yes. So November 2021, in the role you are undertaking
 14 ordinarily with Karen Whitehouse, in what circumstances
 15 might you call the senior officer who was potentially
 16 on-call for assistance or support?
 17 A. If an incident needed escalating, if there was --- either
 18 if one --- if there had been a request for a Border Force
 19 asset to go into French territorial waters for any
 20 reason to assist in a rescue, then that would have to be
 21 certainly flagged to the SO, or if there had been
 22 a serious incident resulting in injuries or fatalities ,
 23 then that would need to be escalated to the SO.
 24 Q. If you needed advice or support on a decision whether to
 25 task an asset, for example, is that something that would

7

1 go to the higher officer or would you contact the senior
 2 officer ?
 3 A. We would take that decision in the office between us.
 4 Q. Yes. I want to understand how your role interacted with
 5 that of a higher officer. So you have told us, I think,
 6 that the higher officer was essentially your line
 7 manager, your direct report; is that right?
 8 A. That's right.
 9 Q. In evidence on Tuesday, Karen Whitehouse told us that
 10 there was very little difference between your role and
 11 that of the higher officer. Is that something you would
 12 agree with?
 13 A. Primarily, yes. We both carried out the same functions.
 14 Karen or whoever the HO would be would ultimately have
 15 the line management responsibility, but essentially,
 16 day-to-day roles for the work that we were doing,
 17 especially for Op Deveran, our roles were pretty ---
 18 pretty much the same.
 19 Q. Understood.
 20 Can we go to your statement at paragraph 11, please,
 21 page 4 {INQ010214/4}. So halfway through that
 22 paragraph, you are talking about decisions to task
 23 an asset and right in the middle, it starts:
 24 "As it was, Karen was leading on managing the
 25 surface assets during that shift, I simply rang

8

1 [Her Majesty's Coastguard] to query the latest updates
 2 on the tracker."
 3 Is that a fair description or were you working
 4 collaboratively, making decisions together in concert?
 5 A. Yes, so generally, the way we worked as a pair, we would
 6 discuss and decide at the start of each shift how we
 7 were going to run the shift. One of us -- on this
 8 particular shift, Karen would look after the case filing
 9 and electronic recording side of things, doing the live
 10 updates, and I was looking after the telephones and the
 11 radios.
 12 So we would decide that at the start of the shift,
 13 who was -- who was going to do what for the duration of
 14 the shift, but we would -- it was a small office. There
 15 is only two of us in there. Three desks, but there was
 16 only two ever -- generally, there is only ever
 17 two people on duty. We are a small team. So we knew
 18 exactly what was going on between us the whole time.
 19 Any telephone call or radio transmission would be heard
 20 by both of us in the office. So yes, that is the way
 21 we -- we ran it.
 22 Q. Can you help me to understand those logistics? You are
 23 in a small room just yourself and Karen Whitehouse, is
 24 that right, or usually Karen Whitehouse, on a shift?
 25 A. That's right.

1 Q. Are you sharing a desk? Are you sitting close to each
 2 other? What is the arrangement?
 3 A. Our desks are next to each other.
 4 Q. Okay. And if there was a call or contact via the radio,
 5 could you hear the other person on a call? Could you
 6 hear the radio?
 7 A. Certainly the radio. Of course, it is a -- yes, it's
 8 a handset, so the radio would be heard by both parties,
 9 and telephone call, yes, generally you could either hear
 10 it or the other person would just say what had been said
 11 when you came off the phone.
 12 Q. Okay. Between yourself and the higher officer, who had
 13 final decision-making authority? Who was the one who
 14 actually made a decision about tasking an asset?
 15 A. The HO.
 16 Q. If you were taking a call as you have described and
 17 there was a request to task an asset, could you take
 18 that decision yourself without consulting the higher
 19 officer?
 20 A. I would always consult the HO to make that. If the HO
 21 was there on duty, we would discuss it together and,
 22 yes, ultimately the HO would make the decision.
 23 Q. Okay. You have talked a little bit about speaking on
 24 the phone, speaking on the radio. I want to understand
 25 how the different communications were happening in the

1 office. So you have said you were talking to the higher
 2 officer physically in person when you were both in the
 3 office; is that right?
 4 A. Yes.
 5 Q. When you were speaking to HM Coastguard, was that done
 6 by phone, by radio? How were you communicating with
 7 them?
 8 A. Generally via telephone.
 9 Q. Generally by telephone?
 10 A. (Nods).
 11 Q. And what about an asset? So before it was deployed, if
 12 you needed to call a cutter commander, for example, how
 13 was that done?
 14 A. That was done by telephone to tell them that they were
 15 being tasked. That would be a telephone call.
 16 Q. Once an asset had been deployed, so the cutter is out in
 17 the Channel, it's left the port of Dover, was that the
 18 same? Were you still talking to them by phone or how
 19 did you communicate with an asset?
 20 A. Both means -- both means available, either telephone or
 21 airwaves radio. Obviously they had VHF on board, but we
 22 don't have that in the office because you haven't got
 23 the range. So the coastguard could talk to them on VHF
 24 radio, but we could talk to the vessels either by
 25 telephone or by airwaves radio.

1 Q. You have mentioned VHF radio. Did you say you haven't
 2 got sufficient range to listen to VHF radio in the
 3 office; is that right?
 4 A. That's correct. VHF has a range of approximately
 5 30/40 miles line of sight, so yes, we wouldn't be able
 6 to speak to vessels that far away, no.
 7 Q. It's right you were based at Portsmouth, weren't you?
 8 A. That's correct.
 9 Q. Okay. In what sort of circumstances might you speak to
 10 an asset once it had been deployed? So after the
 11 initial tasking, as I say, en route in the Channel, in
 12 what circumstances might you be contacting, say, the
 13 Valiant?
 14 A. Sometimes it would be a welfare check, depending how
 15 long they had been at sea; if we needed to -- if we
 16 needed an update from them for any reason. But most of
 17 the communication, once the asset was at sea, would be
 18 through the coastguard, the coastguard talking to the
 19 cutter.
 20 We would speak to them -- once they had intercepted
 21 a migrant event, we would pass the -- our reference
 22 number, the M number, Mike number. We would pass that
 23 to the cutter, so we would contact them to pass that
 24 number. But most communication with the asset, once it
 25 was tasked, was by the coastguard.

1 Q. What about the number of people embarked on the cutter?
 2 Was that something you would communicate directly with
 3 the cutter about?
 4 A. Yes, the cutter would — ultimately, they would notify
 5 both us and the coastguard of the numbers that they had
 6 picked up, but yes, we would speak to them once the —
 7 once the event was concluded. Obviously it was a very
 8 busy time on board the vessels when they were involved
 9 in embarking the migrants, but yes, once they had
 10 concluded the events, we would speak to them and obtain
 11 the numbers from them.
 12 Q. You have told us a little bit about the different
 13 communications you would be having in the course of your
 14 shift. How were you recording or writing down or using
 15 the information you were obtaining on those calls?
 16 A. As I said earlier, the way Karen and I worked was we
 17 would decide at the start of each shift who was — well,
 18 we would have one person looking after the recording on
 19 the case register and the live event updates. One of us
 20 would be doing that for the shift and the other person
 21 would be looking after the radio and the telephone
 22 calls.
 23 A lot of the details which we were recording on our
 24 live events updates, our hourly reports, a lot of the
 25 details on that were taken direct from the coastguard

1 tracker. So it was a case of trying to confirm details
 2 from — from the coastguard tracker to our hourly
 3 report. Any additional details which might be obtained
 4 on a telephone call or radio transmission would have
 5 been recorded directly into the electronic reports.
 6 Q. Understood.
 7 So an important part of your role, depending on the
 8 division of work between the two of you, was inputting
 9 that information into logs and trackers and making
 10 records of what you had been told on calls; is that
 11 right?
 12 A. That's correct.
 13 Q. Can I ask you a little bit about your training for this
 14 role? I'm afraid there is not much in your statement
 15 about that, so I want to ask you first quite a general
 16 question. What are the qualifications that are required
 17 to work as an immigration officer?
 18 A. Specifically within the MCC?
 19 Q. In general, to start with. We will get more specific in
 20 a minute, but if you can just tell me, to become
 21 an immigration officer, to take on the role that you had
 22 at that time, what qualifications do you need? What
 23 training?
 24 A. Well, I mean, immigration officers — you know, you have
 25 got frontline immigration officers who are dealing —

1 who are working at ports and airports, or you have got
 2 ourselves who are — who are not frontline-based. We
 3 are in the Maritime Command Centre, which is
 4 a support — support role. So it's a — so it's in the
 5 roles and different training ultimately.
 6 My — personally, my background was I was a trained
 7 Customs Officer who had worked on the fleet and then
 8 came off and worked within the Maritime Command Centre
 9 subsequently.
 10 Q. Is there any basic training which all immigration
 11 officers receive or is it all specialised to the
 12 particular tasking you have within that role?
 13 A. Yes, it's specialised to the role you are doing.
 14 Frontline officers would be trained to a different
 15 capacity to support officers.
 16 Q. Understood.
 17 Moving then to your specific role working on
 18 Operation Deveran and responding to boats within the
 19 Channel, what training were you given to undertake that
 20 role?
 21 A. It was — it was a work area that developed, you know,
 22 from when migrant events started. So I wouldn't say
 23 there was any specific training for Op Deveran itself.
 24 We all had general maritime background experience, but
 25 the running of events, the recording of information was

1 something which was just on the job training, I guess.
 2 Once — once the events started, yes, we just — we
 3 learnt as we went along.
 4 Q. And in relation to small boats in the Channel, were you
 5 given any training about particular facets or challenges
 6 or aspects of that response work which were different to
 7 other general maritime work? So, for example, we know
 8 there are particular challenges associated with small
 9 boats to do with the nature of the boat, the difficulty
 10 locating or identifying the boats, the ways in which
 11 they move or travel. Had you had any training on that
 12 sort of content for this role?
 13 A. We all received briefings. There was weekly briefing
 14 reports from — from CTC and whoever were running
 15 Op Deveran from Dover. So there were weekly briefing
 16 reports which highlighted the current trends and
 17 associated risks with ongoing events, so we updated
 18 ourselves through those briefings from our own managers.
 19 So yes, that's how we basically kept up to date with
 20 regards ongoing threats.
 21 Q. Did you have any specific training in incident response
 22 or risk assessment to help respond to small boats in
 23 distress?
 24 A. If there was — if small boats were in distress, that
 25 was something which would be — well, it would be down

1 to the coastguard who would be dealing with the incident
 2 at the time, you know, realtime. That would be a — be
 3 within the coastguard remit to deal with any ongoing
 4 distress scenarios.
 5 Q. You were being asked to make decisions about the tasking
 6 of assets in response to small boats which were quite
 7 often in distress. I think we have heard evidence that
 8 all small boats were treated as being in distress. Is
 9 that something you agree with?
 10 A. Yes, the grading of each — every small boat event as it
 11 was reported and, you know, when it was entered into the
 12 coastguard tracker, the status would change when it was
 13 in French waters. As soon as they all entered
 14 UK waters, they were then classified as distressed
 15 because of the nature of the boats and the situation.
 16 Yes, they weren't necessarily in distress, but they were
 17 classified as — as distress.
 18 Q. Can you help me to understand that distinction? They
 19 were classified as distress, but not necessarily in
 20 distress. What do you mean by that?
 21 A. Well, it was the view that was taken that because of the
 22 type of boats, the quality of the boats, they weren't
 23 obviously trained mariners on board, they were poorly
 24 equipped boats. Obviously, Operation Deveran as
 25 a whole, the primary role was SOLAS. It was all about

17

1 safety of life. So hence, yes, all the vessels were
 2 classified from the UK side as distress once they
 3 entered UK waters.
 4 Q. You have told us they often weren't genuinely in
 5 distress. Does that mean even where they were
 6 classified formally as being in distress, you weren't
 7 always treating them as though they were in a state of
 8 distress or emergency?
 9 A. Yes — yes, it's difficult to answer that. Obviously
 10 some of them would — yes, there was — generally they
 11 would still be underway. They would still be making way
 12 through the water, but the reason they were classified
 13 as distress on the coastguard tracker and on ours was
 14 because of the nature of the boats and that they were
 15 totally unsuitable boats and the, yes, primary
 16 requirement was to locate and pick up the boats.
 17 Q. So coming back to my original question then, did you
 18 have training for risk assessment or incident response
 19 for boats that were categorised as being in
 20 distress, as you put it?
 21 A. Not specifically, not to my knowledge.
 22 Q. Did you take part in any drills or practical exercises
 23 with the cutters or with other assets?
 24 A. Table top-type exercises, you mean?
 25 Q. For example, yes.

18

1 A. Not personally, no.
 2 Q. Did you ever do training with other stakeholders or
 3 agencies who had involvement in Op Deveran? So, for
 4 example, HM Coastguard, perhaps the RNLI as a voluntary
 5 organisation assisting.
 6 A. Not personally, no.
 7 Q. No, okay.
 8 I want to ask you now a little bit about the working
 9 arrangements for the night of the 23rd into the
 10 24 November 2021, if I can.
 11 A. Yes.
 12 Q. Before I do that, I just want to clarify what it is that
 13 you remember about that night. So can we turn to your
 14 statement, paragraph 5, page 2, please {INQ010214/2}.
 15 So you say in your statement:
 16 "I cannot recall the night of 23 November into
 17 24 November 2021 because it was a 'business as usual'
 18 night. Whilst I now know of the tragic events which
 19 unfolded whilst I was on shift, I did not know at the
 20 time. I cannot recall exactly what work I did that
 21 evening and I have not located any notes or emails from
 22 that shift."
 23 Can I ask you now, Mr Willows: do you have
 24 an independent recollection now of that night?
 25 A. Having heard and seen the various transcripts of

19

1 telephone calls and radio transmissions that were made
 2 that evening, I obviously know that I was on duty and
 3 I was in the — in the MCC that night, but it's three
 4 and a half years ago, so I don't have any specific
 5 recollection of the specific shift itself.
 6 Q. Is it fair to say then that you are reliant on the
 7 documentary material to tell us about what happened on
 8 that night?
 9 A. That's correct.
 10 Q. You don't have any sort of independent memory of that
 11 specific night beyond what the documents and the
 12 transcripts tell you?
 13 A. That's correct.
 14 Q. Thank you.
 15 Is it right that you were never interviewed by the
 16 MAIB as part of their investigation in this incident?
 17 A. That's correct.
 18 Q. So is it right that the first time essentially you have
 19 been asked about what happened that night is as part of
 20 this Inquiry?
 21 A. That's right.
 22 Q. Thank you.
 23 Turning then, as best you can, given that, to the
 24 working arrangements which were in place that night. So
 25 if we turn to paragraph 3 of your statement, which is on

20

1 page 1 {INQ010214/1}, you say right at the bottom of the
 2 page:
 3 "I cannot remember whether I was working remotely or
 4 working in the BFMCC but I know that my colleague
 5 Karen Whitehouse, a BF higher officer, was working in
 6 the BFMCC that night."
 7 Is that still your evidence now? You can't remember
 8 yourself whether you were there in person or whether you
 9 were working remotely?
 10 A. If it wasn't for the transcripts, etc, I wouldn't
 11 have --- I wouldn't be able to recall where I was three
 12 and a half years ago. Having looked at the rosters from
 13 that time period, for example, the night before, which
 14 had been assessed as a green night, I was working from
 15 home. We just had the one in the office, but for that
 16 night, because it's an amber assessed night, the two of
 17 us were in the office .
 18 Q. Is that something you remember or is that something you
 19 have logically deduced must have been the case from the
 20 RAG rating for that night, the red--amber--green rating?
 21 A. A combination. That and one of the transcripts, which
 22 shows that the night before, we had a telephone
 23 conversation when I was working from home and Karen was
 24 in the office .
 25 Q. Okay. Can I take you to the second statement of

21

1 Karen Whitehouse, {INQ10698/2}, paragraph 4, page 2,
 2 please. She says at the very bottom of that paragraph:
 3 "The expectation of Border Force Maritime Command
 4 ... was that BFMCC personnel would be physically based
 5 at the BFMCC on 'red days' or 'amber days', however, we
 6 were able to work some shifts remotely on 'green days',
 7 when the demands of Op Deveran would allow us to do so."
 8 Do you agree that that was the working arrangement
 9 for remote work at the time?
 10 A. That's correct, yes.
 11 Q. Now, we have heard evidence that the evening of the 23rd
 12 was amber and overnight in the 24th, it became a red
 13 day. Is that the basis on which you say you were likely
 14 to have been in person at the office that day?
 15 A. Based on the RAG system, did you say?
 16 Q. Yes, in that the rule seems to have been you should be
 17 physically based at BFMCC on red days or amber days, as
 18 it says at paragraph 4 there.
 19 A. Yes. Yes, that's correct. We were both in the office
 20 on the 23rd because it was amber. I think if I --- the
 21 following day, the 24th, Karen was on leave, so it was
 22 just me on the red night working on my own, so --- but
 23 that was the agreement. If it was red or amber and
 24 there was two of us on duty, we would both be in the
 25 office .

22

1 Q. I think, in fact, it became a red night during your
 2 shift that evening overnight. Is that something you
 3 remember?
 4 A. I don't recall, only from the --- from that day's
 5 planning document which reflected that.
 6 Q. Understood.
 7 I think you mentioned earlier when you were talking
 8 about your understanding of whether you were in the
 9 office or out that you had seen rosters for the day; is
 10 that right?
 11 A. Yes, yes, yes. We have --- we obviously have a team
 12 roster .
 13 Q. I don't think that's something the Inquiry has had
 14 disclosed to it. Is that a document you looked at in
 15 preparation for today's evidence?
 16 A. Only when I was trying to clarify whether I was on duty
 17 or not, so ---
 18 Q. Understood.
 19 A. --- yes, I saw it then.
 20 Q. Can I take you to the first statement of
 21 Karen Whitehouse, which talks a little bit about
 22 communications that night. Paragraph 43, page 19,
 23 please, {INQ010135/19}. So Ms Whitehouse says:
 24 "If I needed to communicate with Mr Willows then
 25 I would have done so by mobile telephone."

23

1 I think that might be higher up in paragraph 43.
 2 I think, in fact, paragraph 43 begins on the previous
 3 page, if we go right to the bottom of the previous page.
 4 Thank you very much {INQ010135/18}:
 5 "If I needed to communicate with Mr Willows ...
 6 I would have done so by mobile telephone."
 7 Going across on to the next page.
 8 Now, at that stage, I believe when she wrote that,
 9 looking at the rest of that paragraph, she was under the
 10 impression that you were working remotely that night.
 11 If you were in the office together, is it right you
 12 would have been speaking to one another rather than
 13 speaking by phone?
 14 A. Yes, that's correct, yes. We sat next to each other, so
 15 yes.
 16 Q. She goes on to say {INQ010135/19}:
 17 "I cannot recall contacting him that night and have
 18 not located any emails between us. Given that we would
 19 have agreed who was doing which tasks, there would not
 20 have been a need to speak unless either of us had
 21 a query."
 22 Was that the normal arrangement when you were
 23 working remotely; that you wouldn't expect to speak to
 24 one another in the course of the night?
 25 A. If it was a green night --- so I think there was some

24

1 initial confusion when Karen made her first statement as
 2 to whether we were both in the office or not, so I think
 3 she subsequently updated that.
 4 So if it was a green night and one of us was working
 5 at home, then we would have a conversation at the start
 6 of the shift, see what was going on, decide who was
 7 going to — what the person working at home was going to
 8 be doing. But yes, if we needed to speak, then
 9 obviously it would be done by telephone.
 10 Q. But is it right that when you were working remotely on
 11 a green night, you wouldn't normally expect to speak to
 12 one another unless there was a query? It wouldn't be
 13 unusual not to speak to one another in the shift.
 14 A. Yes, that's correct, yes.
 15 Q. Can I ask you about the division of responsibilities
 16 between the two of you. So I think you mentioned
 17 earlier that you might choose to divide the work between
 18 one person doing essentially the calls and the other
 19 doing the recording and the information management. Is
 20 that a fair description?
 21 A. Yes.
 22 Q. Was that a standard arrangement or was it something that
 23 was different night by night or morning by morning,
 24 depending which shift you were assigned to?
 25 A. Certainly for us, the way we worked, we always had

1 a conversation at the start of the shift, so we would
 2 probably alternate it. So, you know, the first shift,
 3 Karen was looking after the recording, case register,
 4 etc. Then the next time we were on shift together, we
 5 would probably swap round. So yes, that was the
 6 standard arrangement.
 7 Q. Can we turn to paragraph 35 of this statement, please,
 8 same document, page 15 {INQ010135/15}. She says right
 9 at the very bottom:
 10 "Although I cannot recall ... "
 11 Then going over on to the next page {INQ010135/16}:
 12 "... I would expect that my colleague working
 13 remotely and I agreed at the beginning of the shift that
 14 he would do the 'business as usual' work including
 15 emails, reports etc. and I would focus on Op Deveran and
 16 looking after the assets."
 17 Does that sound right to you in terms of the
 18 allocation of work on the night of the 23rd to the 24th?
 19 A. I think that's — well, no, because that refers to
 20 working remotely. We were both in the office, so
 21 that's — no, that's not correct, no.
 22 Q. I think in her evidence on Tuesday, the position was
 23 a little bit different. Rather than you doing business
 24 as usual, emails and reports and her looking after
 25 Op Deveran and the assets, I understood her evidence to

1 be that you were taking responsibility for the calls
 2 while she was taking responsibility for the information
 3 management side, inputting into the trackers.
 4 A. Yes, that's correct. We were both focused on Op Deveran
 5 on that night. It was an amber night. We knew it would
 6 be busy night. So yes, that's the way it was split.
 7 Q. Is that something you actually remember now or is that
 8 something you are basing on her evidence?
 9 A. I certainly don't recall the conversation at the start
 10 of the shift, but that's based on the transcripts, and
 11 it's clear from that how we were running the shift.
 12 Q. Understood. So it's based on having seen the
 13 transcripts and you taking a number of calls on the
 14 night; is that right?
 15 A. Correct.
 16 Q. How long were your shifts in November 2021?
 17 A. Generally nine/nine and a half hour shifts with
 18 a handover factored in.
 19 Q. Okay. Can I take you to paragraph 44 of this same
 20 document, page 19, I believe {INQ010135/19}. It says:
 21 "The shift involved working through without
 22 an official break — the break is taken at the end of the
 23 shift because of the nature of the work. Comfort breaks
 24 are possible by diverting the phones to the mobile and
 25 taking the airwave handset too. There are opportunities

1 to have a snack without leaving any comms unattended."
 2 Now, I think her position in oral evidence on
 3 Tuesday was a little different to that again, but I want
 4 to understand what your experience was. Do you remember
 5 working through without official breaks?
 6 A. Generally that's what we — that's what we did. We
 7 would eat our meals at the desk. The bit about
 8 diverting phones, etc, to the official mobile, that
 9 would be if you were solo working. If there was just
 10 one person in the office, if you obviously needed to go
 11 to the toilet, take a five/ten-minute break, comfort
 12 break, then you had the option of diverting the phones,
 13 etc, and taking a radio. Obviously when there was two
 14 of you in the office, then there was no requirement to
 15 do that. But yes, certainly we generally worked through
 16 our shift.
 17 Q. Did you often find yourself working solo in that period?
 18 A. Fairly frequently. We were — there was only — the MCC
 19 is a small team. We were basically five teams of
 20 two people. So you only need one person to be on leave
 21 or on a training course and you are solo working, so it
 22 wasn't uncommon.
 23 Q. And it may seem obvious, but if you were solo working on
 24 a given night, were you then responsible for both calls
 25 and communicating with stakeholders and assets and the

1 information management responsibilities, the live
 2 updates and the trackers?
 3 A. Yes, that would be the case.
 4 Q. Whereas normally that would be a two-person task.
 5 A. Correct.
 6 Q. I want to turn now and ask a little bit about that
 7 information sharing role, if I can; how information was
 8 recorded within your office and how it was shared with
 9 others.
 10 Within the Home Office, we know that you had
 11 a Border Force tracker which had a title called "live
 12 updates", and we have spoken a little bit about that
 13 already.
 14 A. Mm.
 15 Q. There was also something called an Op Deveran case
 16 register.
 17 A. (Nods).
 18 Q. I don't think we need to go to that document itself.
 19 It's quite a large spreadsheet.
 20 A. Uh—huh.
 21 Q. We have heard from Karen Whitehouse on Tuesday that it
 22 was different to the Border Force tracker because it was
 23 only filled in once an M number or a Mike number was
 24 assigned to an incident. Could you talk us through
 25 that? At what stage was the case register coming in?

29

1 How was it different to the Border Force tracker?
 2 A. So the tracker or the live events update was basically
 3 a mirror of the coastguard tracker, so it would reflect
 4 every single event that was open, but because, yes, on
 5 some days, they would go round the alphabet two or
 6 three times, we would only actually put an event on to
 7 our official case register once a migrant vessel had
 8 been picked up, and at that point was when the Mike
 9 number was issued, so only then, from our point of view,
 10 did it become an official record, so to speak. So
 11 that's when we created — obviously it was given the
 12 Mike number and that's when we entered it on to our case
 13 register.
 14 Q. So at the start, you were looking at HM Coastguard's
 15 tracker to obtain information; is that right?
 16 A. That's correct.
 17 Q. Was that information then used to inform the
 18 Border Force tracker, the live updates; is that right?
 19 A. That's correct.
 20 Q. And then where was the information for the case register
 21 taken from?
 22 A. Essentially from the tracker, whether it was the
 23 coastguard tracker or from our live events update. It
 24 would be a combination of the two reports which then fed
 25 into our case register.

30

1 Q. So were you taking information from both the
 2 Border Force tracker and HM Coastguard's tracker to feed
 3 into the case register once an incident had an M or Mike
 4 number assigned?
 5 A. That's correct.
 6 Q. I want to ask you a little bit about HM Coastguard's
 7 tracker, if I can. You have already told us it was the
 8 first point of information on anything. It's where you
 9 would first see information about incidents; is that
 10 right?
 11 A. Yes, the — well, either the coastguard tracker or the
 12 French Gris—Nez tracker. We received copies of that as
 13 well, so sometimes we would get indication on there that
 14 there was activity in French waters before it was, yes,
 15 on the coastguard tracker. So yes, that's the first we
 16 got the heads-up, so to speak, from either Gris—Nez or
 17 from the coastguard tracker.
 18 Q. And were you getting the Gris—Nez tracker from the
 19 coastguard or from a different source?
 20 A. We received it direct from Gris—Nez.
 21 Q. Direct from Gris—Nez. Did you then share it with
 22 HM Coastguard or were they also receiving it directly
 23 from Gris—Nez?
 24 A. They received it themselves direct from Gris—Nez.
 25 Q. I want to ask you a little bit about how you interacted

31

1 with the tracker of HM Coastguard. Could we turn to
 2 {INQ010631/1}, please. This is an email from the
 3 20 November 2021. We can see text pasted into the
 4 bottom of the email from both yourself and
 5 Karen Whitehouse and a person whose name has been
 6 redacted. You say at 6.02:
 7 "Morning ... Me and Karen on earlies here."
 8 Is it right that that was an instance where you were
 9 working a morning shift as opposed to an overnight
 10 shift?
 11 A. Yes, 06.12, that would be an early shift, yes.
 12 Q. If we look further down towards the bottom, we can see
 13 you making a number of requests for the tracker. So you
 14 say.
 15 "Can we have another [HM Coastguard] tracker
 16 please ..."
 17 Moving down:
 18 "Thanks."
 19 "Is there another tracker please ..."
 20 And again:
 21 "Thanks for tracker."
 22 Why were you asking for the tracker at that stage?
 23 Did you have access to it yourself on the 20th?
 24 A. Not on the 20th — well, obviously not if I was asking
 25 for it. I believe we only literally were given access

32

1 to it the day or two before the night of the incident.
 2 So at that stage on the 20th, we would not have had
 3 access to the coastguard tracker, no.
 4 Q. And at that stage, how did you obtain the tracker? We
 5 can see requests being made to someone within
 6 Border Force. Did they have access to the coastguard
 7 tracker?
 8 A. I think that would be --- that email is going to ---
 9 sorry, who's that conversation with again? It's ---
 10 Q. So it's a person within the Border Force ---
 11 A. Sorry, yes, sorry. So that was with the CGLO. That was
 12 our --- that was the Border Force liaison officer based
 13 at, you know, the JCR in Dover. So --- so they had
 14 access to the coastguard tracker, but we didn't in the
 15 MCC.
 16 Q. And they were not based in your office. They were based
 17 in a separate office in Dover.
 18 A. They were in the JCR at Dover.
 19 Q. They were in the JCR.
 20 A. Yes, yes.
 21 Q. So any time you needed to see a tracker at this stage ---
 22 A. Yes.
 23 Q. --- you had to make a request for an updated version; is
 24 that right?
 25 A. That's correct.

1 Q. Can I ask that we turn to {INQ010633/1}, please. We
 2 have a similar email, but this time from 22 November in
 3 the evening, 11.24 pm. Once again, we have got yourself
 4 and Karen Whitehouse speaking there. It looks like this
 5 is the shift the night before 23 to 24 November; is that
 6 right?
 7 A. Yes, that's correct. So that evening, I believe I was
 8 working from home.
 9 Q. So if you go about halfway down the page, we can see
 10 Karen Whitehouse says:
 11 "Debriefs-- just read the last comments from
 12 [redacted name] about MCC/CGLO confusion. Wonder what
 13 he's referring to?"
 14 Do you have any recollection what this is about at
 15 all?
 16 A. No, no idea.
 17 Q. Is it fair to say CGLO is HM Coastguard's liaison
 18 officer that we were just speaking about?
 19 A. Well, the Border Force liaison officer working with the
 20 coastguard.
 21 Q. Understood.
 22 You say:
 23 "Not really sure i do wonder if there are too
 24 many people involved sometimes though."
 25 Do you know what you meant by that? Are you able to

1 tell us now?
 2 A. No, no recollection what that conversation was --- was
 3 based on, no.
 4 Q. Carrying down a few entries, Karen Whitehouse says,
 5 23.19:
 6 "I wonder if now we have access to the [coastguard]
 7 tracker if we need a CGLO?"
 8 So by this stage, we can see you do have access to
 9 the coastguard tracker; is that right?
 10 A. Yes, that's correct.
 11 Q. So certainly by the 22nd, the shift before, you had
 12 access to the tracker. It seems likely you gained
 13 access sometimes --- sometime between the morning of the
 14 20th and the evening then of the 22nd.
 15 A. Yes.
 16 Q. Can we turn to another document, please, {INQ010640/1},
 17 starting at page 3, if we can, please {INQ010640/3}.
 18 This is an email chain within Border Force Maritime
 19 Command and we can see there an email on 19 November at
 20 1.57. It starts:
 21 "Dear all,
 22 "In the light of the last few manic Deveran
 23 shifts Just wanted to make a suggestion on the new
 24 live updates and the case register in general, as there
 25 are some variances in how we are operating as teams.

1 I think it's important that we produce consistent
 2 output, so we probably need a bit of a tune up in some
 3 areas."
 4 Can I ask: the live update system that you have been
 5 telling us about, was it new at that stage?
 6 A. I don't recall when it came into --- into use.
 7 Q. Okay. Could we go then to page 1, please of this
 8 document, {INQ010640/1}. We can see at the top this is
 9 a chain forwarded to you by Karen Whitehouse on
 10 21 November, 6.06 in the morning:
 11 "Tom
 12 "FYI."
 13 And below we can see an email from Border Force
 14 Command on 20 November. It says, several lines down:
 15 "Hopefully by close of play tomorrow all MCC staff
 16 will be granted permission to the MCGA share point which
 17 will allow live continuous access to the [coastguard]
 18 Tracker.
 19 "This will prevent chasing and allow us to update as
 20 we go rather than being bombarded with multiple events
 21 sporadically.
 22 "This should ease pressure on our hourly update, but
 23 again we can only report what we know or are told."
 24 And it says this is being done as a trial:
 25 "We should trial run this and if there are still

1 concerns we can revisit this."

2 Looking at that, having seen these documents that

3 give some context, are you able to tell us now: do you

4 have any recollection yourself of when you got access to

5 the coastguard tracker?

6 A. Yes, as we established, it looks like it was some time

7 between the 20th and the 23rd. So whether it's the 21st

8 or the 22nd, I don't know for definite which day it was,

9 but yes, one of those two days, a day or so before the

10 night — the night in question.

11 Q. So it was a new system, effectively, on 23/24 November?

12 A. Yes, for us to have direct access to it, yes.

13 Q. And do you remember now, so using your recollection,

14 whether you were given full access to the coastguard

15 tracker or read-only access? So what I am asking is: do

16 you remember whether you had the ability to make any

17 changes to that document?

18 A. My recollection is initially, we only had read-only

19 access. I don't know when we were given full — full

20 access, but certainly initially, with it being a new

21 system, it was read-only.

22 Q. Can I take you to a document {INQ007058/1}, please. We

23 need to wait a second to bring it up on the computer.

24 There we are.

25 This is a register of changes made to

1 HM Coastguard's tracker on the night of 23 to

2 24 November 2021. We can see the different columns. We

3 can see "Change Date" and "Change Author". And there is

4 just one entry from you that night, which is line 17,

5 item number 17. In fact, I think, yes, it's row 18, and

6 we can see on the 24th at 2.23 in the morning,

7 thomas.willows@homeoffice.

8 Looking at this, do you accept that you had change

9 access on the night, the ability to amend the tracker

10 itself?

11 A. As I said, my — my recollection is we had read-only

12 access initially. Whether that's when we would have

13 logged on to the tracker — I don't know if that's the

14 only entry from me, because by that time at night, we

15 certainly weren't issuing any M numbers. So there's no

16 reason that I would have been editing that document,

17 so — so I can't answer, but I thought we had read-only

18 access, so ...

19 Q. Are you saying that from 2.23 in the morning onwards,

20 you weren't issuing any further M numbers, for instance?

21 A. No, no, I am saying stage, there hadn't been any

22 M numbers issued —

23 Q. Understood.

24 A. — because Valiant hadn't picked up any events by that

25 stage, I believe.

1 Q. Is it right that your shift would have started around

2 7.30/8 o'clock that night?

3 A. About 8.30/8.45, yes.

4 Q. Can it be right that for the first six hours of your

5 shift, a little more, you hadn't logged on to look at

6 the coastguard tracker?

7 A. If there had been no activity — Karen had — Karen had

8 logged on earlier in the shift, and we generally only

9 accessed it once we needed to, once there was ongoing

10 events. Obviously, Valiant was tasked, was it, 1.30 in

11 the morning, I believe, so it was only round about then

12 when we became involved in events. So it was round

13 about then when we really required access to the

14 tracker. I wouldn't necessarily have accessed it if

15 there wasn't any events going on.

16 Q. How would you know whether there are events going on if

17 you weren't logged in to check the tracker before that

18 stage?

19 A. Well, the coastguard would contact us as and when they

20 needed an asset for tasking, and also we would have seen

21 any emails from Gris-Nez once they started coming in.

22 We would have started getting indication that there was

23 activity going on.

24 Q. So you weren't checking the tracker from HM Coastguard

25 until you had a notification from them, like a phone

1 call, or something on the Gris-Nez tracker to indicate

2 that you should then go and check?

3 A. Possibly. As I say, this was a brand new document —

4 a brand new system that we had access to. So yes, I am

5 not — I can't say how we were accessing it and how we

6 were running the coastguard tracker that early on,

7 whether we would have — as it went on, as time went on,

8 I am sure we would have started logging in straight

9 away, but if there was no activity going on, there would

10 have been no — no necessity for us to have been logged

11 into it at that stage.

12 Q. Do you now remember whether or when you logged in that

13 night —

14 A. No, I do not.

15 Q. — or whether or when you might have checked the tracker

16 that night?

17 A. No, I don't know.

18 Q. You have told us about a range of different trackers.

19 We have talked about Border Force tracker, the case

20 register, the HM Coastguard tracker, the Gris-Nez

21 tracker. I think there is also a thing called a VISION

22 log which the HM Coastguard were using to record

23 information. Was that something you were aware of?

24 A. We didn't have access to that, no.

25 Q. Were you aware that it was being used? Did you know

1 about it?
 2 A. I have heard of it, but it's a coastguard system which
 3 we wouldn't have access to, so no.
 4 Q. Did you find that working across multiple different
 5 trackers, copy/pasting information between them, that
 6 that could create confusion or inconsistencies?
 7 A. I don't believe that was the case. I think we -- we
 8 knew the importance of our reporting, obviously how
 9 accurate it had to be. So certainly from our -- from
 10 our point of view, yes, we all took the reporting
 11 seriously and it was a -- it was a primary part of our
 12 role.
 13 MS WOODS: Understood.
 14 Sir, would that be a convenient moment to break?
 15 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Yes.
 16 MS WOODS: Thank you very much.
 17 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: So 10 minutes.
 18 (10.54 am)
 19 (A short break)
 20 (11.05 am)
 21 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Yes, Ms Woods.
 22 MS WOODS: Thank you very much, chair.
 23 Mr Willows, before the break, we were discussing the
 24 different methods of recording information as part of
 25 your role. Another method of recording information was

41

1 the daybook.
 2 Can we turn please to your statement, {INQ010214/2}
 3 at paragraph 4. That's page 2, I believe. Thank you
 4 very much.
 5 We received as part of the Inquiry daybooks from
 6 Karen Whitehouse, which we have gone to in evidence, and
 7 from Commander Toy, but we don't have a daybook from
 8 you. Looking at this paragraph, you say:
 9 "It is an individual officer's decision as to what
 10 information they record in their daybook. I have
 11 checked my daybook and I have not made any notes during
 12 my shift on 23/24 November 2021. This is not unusual
 13 for me; I tend to record information directly onto Home
 14 Office systems, if relevant. Using my daybook is rare,
 15 given the ever-increasing move to electronic records.
 16 Where I did use my daybook, it was typically to record
 17 specific incidents which were relevant for law
 18 enforcement purposes, rather than 'business as usual'
 19 matters such as migrant crossings."
 20 Looking at this, does that mean that you didn't use
 21 your daybook at all on the shift from 23 to
 22 24 November 2021?
 23 A. That's correct.
 24 Q. And, in fact, if we go further down the paragraph, you
 25 say that you didn't use your daybook at all between,

42

1 I think, 1 August 2021 and 28 April 2022; is that right?
 2 A. That's correct.
 3 Q. I think you say in the middle of the paragraph there it
 4 was typically used for law enforcement purposes rather
 5 than small boats; is that right?
 6 A. That's right.
 7 Q. Was that your understanding at the time?
 8 A. Yes.
 9 Q. And you understood that it was a matter for your
 10 discretion whether or not you used the daybook at all?
 11 A. Yes, that's correct.
 12 Q. Could we turn, please, to {INQ010666/1}, please. This
 13 is the Operation Deveran standard operating procedures
 14 which were in place at the relevant time.
 15 Mr Willows, is this a document you were familiar
 16 with in your role?
 17 A. Yes.
 18 Q. Is this essentially the role which governs the way you
 19 do your job for Operation Deveran matters?
 20 A. That's correct.
 21 Q. Thank you very much.
 22 Could we turn to page 6 {INQ010666/6}, please. We
 23 can see a section in the middle of the page titled
 24 "Recording of decisions" and it says:
 25 "Decisions made in relation to this operation must

43

1 be recorded in appropriate documents as soon as is
 2 reasonably practicable (Day book, Ships log and/or
 3 pocketbook). This should include the supporting
 4 rationale for the decision made."
 5 It's fair to say you weren't on a cutter, so you
 6 weren't filling in a ships log; is that right?
 7 A. Correct.
 8 Q. And did you have a pocket book?
 9 A. No, just a daybook.
 10 Q. Just a daybook, okay.
 11 Could we go to page 7, please {INQ010666/7}. We can
 12 see at the top there:
 13 "MCC officers ..."
 14 Were you an MCC officer at the time?
 15 A. Yes.
 16 Q. "MCC officers must record their decisions and actions
 17 taken in day books."
 18 And it goes on:
 19 "MCC officers are responsible for providing timely,
 20 accurate and updates to partner agencies and
 21 departments, and compile case files and a register."
 22 Could we turn one more to page 14, please
 23 {INQ010666/14}. There is a heading titled "Day book
 24 entries". It says:
 25 "SOLAS 1974 ..."

44

1 I think that's safety of life at sea; is that right?
 2 A. Yes.
 3 Q. "... and Criminal Procedures and Investigations Act 1996
 4 (Record/Retain/Reveal) require all actions and decision
 5 making to be recorded. Day book entries must be in
 6 chronological order, factual, and accurate, with
 7 awareness that these may be used in evidence."
 8 So this is referring not only to CPIA, to the law
 9 enforcement element, but also to SOLAS, to search and
 10 rescue, safety of life at sea; is that right?
 11 A. Yes, correct.
 12 Q. You accept you weren't compliant with this requirement
 13 to be recording your decisions and your rationale in the
 14 daybook at the relevant time?
 15 A. The way we — the way things were run in the office, all
 16 entries were put directly on to the electronic updates
 17 and case register. So I personally didn't run
 18 a daybook, but all information or details that I took
 19 were put directly on to the electronic records that were
 20 kept. So they were all, yes, completed timely and
 21 accurately, but the electronic version as opposed to
 22 into a daybook.
 23 Q. You didn't have an electronic daybook. You are talking
 24 about the trackers, aren't you?
 25 A. Yes, the live update tracker and the case register.

1 Q. But you have told us that this is the document which
 2 governed the way you did your job at the time and you
 3 have told us this is a document you were familiar with.
 4 This document says you must be recording in your
 5 daybook, doesn't it?
 6 A. The work around Op Deveran was evolving the whole time.
 7 When it started, incidents were few and far between,
 8 back in — back in 2018 when it all started, but by this
 9 stage, 2021, as you are aware, there were multiple
 10 events, crossings per shift and the amount of reporting
 11 and recording became quite substantial. So it just —
 12 our work evolved in the office and certainly me
 13 personally — I think most people within the team, we
 14 were recording directly on to the electronic records to
 15 save duplicating all the information.
 16 Q. We can see that this document requires you to record
 17 your decision—making and your rationale for that
 18 decision—making in the daybook. Are you telling us that
 19 you were recording your decision—making and your
 20 rationale for your decision—making in the Border Force
 21 tracker, the live update spreadsheet?
 22 A. Well, if there was an HO on duty, then it was the HO
 23 that was taking the decisions, making the decisions.
 24 Q. You have already told us a lot of decisions were
 25 collaborative. You were discussing, you were working

1 together and taking decisions about asset allocation.
 2 Where were you recording your decision—making and the
 3 rationale for that?
 4 A. I was recording the pertinent facts directly on to the
 5 electronic live updates case register.
 6 Q. Just to be clear, I am not asking about the facts. Just
 7 for the moment, I am asking about your decisions and the
 8 reasons for making the decisions you made. Where was
 9 that?
 10 A. Well, I didn't have anything in the daybook.
 11 Q. Okay. We can take this down.
 12 I want to ask you now a little bit about the actual
 13 night of the 23rd to 24th, and I appreciate you have
 14 told us you are reliant on the written records and you
 15 don't have an independent recollection, but I want to
 16 take you to some of those records, if I can, to see what
 17 you do remember and what you can assist us with.
 18 A. Yes.
 19 Q. Could we start by looking at the statement of
 20 Karen Whitehouse, the second one, 10698, at paragraph 6.
 21 It is page 3, I believe {INQ010698/3}. At the very
 22 bottom of that paragraph, Ms Whitehouse says:
 23 "I now believe that all telephone calls made by
 24 BFMCC to HMCG, or received by BFMCC from HMCG, on the
 25 night of 23/24 November 2021 were made or received by

1 Mr Willows."
 2 Do you agree with that? Were all phone calls made
 3 or received by you?
 4 A. Yes, to the best of my knowledge, yes.
 5 Q. Okay. Again, is that based on what you have seen of
 6 some of the transcripts or is that your memory that you
 7 were receiving all the calls?
 8 A. I can't specifically recall the night itself, so it's
 9 going — going from transcripts.
 10 Q. If we could turn to paragraph 12, page 4, please
 11 {INQ010698/4}. In this paragraph, Ms Whitehouse is
 12 talking about calls made to or received from
 13 Commander Toy, so communications with the Valiant. She
 14 says:
 15 "Given that I believe that Mr Willows was working
 16 alongside me at the BFMCC, I consider that it is
 17 currently impossible for me to confirm whether
 18 Mr Willows or I made those calls."
 19 Are you able to say now which of the two of you it
 20 was who communicated with the Valiant on the night?
 21 A. Not for definite. There's transcripts which clearly
 22 have me involved in communications. Maybe Karen did
 23 make a phone call, but I believe I made the majority of
 24 any calls during that shift, but we might well have
 25 overlapped or Karen might well have made some herself.

1 Q. Understood.
 2 Could we turn to Ms Whitehouse's first statement,
 3 10135, paragraph 49, please {INQ010135/21}. It starts:
 4 "The first entry in my daybook for [that date] is
 5 timed at 01:12."
 6 So 1.12 in the morning:
 7 "It is a set of coordinates which I believe came
 8 from [HM Coastguard] by telephone. I was given the
 9 coordinates [and then sets out the coordinates]. Next
 10 to that entry I wrote 23:52Z which I think meant that
 11 the coordinates given for the migrant boat were received
 12 by [HM Coastguard] at 23:52."
 13 Do you now have any memory of participating in any
 14 call before 1.12 or at 1.12?
 15 A. No, I don't.
 16 Q. Okay.
 17 Turning then to the next call, it's at 7648, please,
 18 {INQ007648/1}. We can see that this is a call which
 19 took place around 1.20 on the morning of
 20 24 November 2021. You can see there that there are
 21 two speakers there. They have been identified in the
 22 transcript as yourself and Stuart Downs.
 23 Can I ask: do you remember making this call?
 24 A. No, I don't.
 25 Q. Are you able to confirm whether the speaker on this call

1 was yourself, was you?
 2 A. I have heard one audio recording of it. I don't know if
 3 it's this call. I have heard an audio recording from
 4 a telephone call which was myself. I don't know if it
 5 is this call or not.
 6 Q. Perhaps it would assist if we go to the next page,
 7 please {INQ007648/2}. Are you able to say whether the
 8 entries marked as "Tom Willows" here are in fact you on
 9 that call?
 10 A. Yes, I presume so, yes.
 11 Q. Thank you very much.
 12 Looking at the transcript, it begins with some
 13 information about the boat called Migrant 1 before
 14 turning to the subject of Charlie. So we can see about
 15 two-thirds of the way down the page, we turn to Charlie.
 16 Stuart Downs says:
 17 "Not on the list and more of an issue is migrant 7
 18 which I can give you a position for that."
 19 And you say:
 20 "Okay."
 21 We understand that Migrant 7 is the boat we have
 22 been calling Charlie. Is that also your understanding?
 23 A. Yes, I believe so.
 24 Q. And HM Coastguard gives a position for Charlie, which he
 25 says is from about 10 minutes earlier, as best I can

1 tell. And if we go over the page, {INQ007648/3}, we can
 2 see:
 3 "That's now, or about 10 minutes ago. And that's
 4 supposedly from the — according to the French at that,
 5 when they told us about it, was ... 6 nautical miles
 6 from UK waters. I would imagine it's in UK waters by
 7 now."
 8 And he confirms that there is no French asset with
 9 that boat.
 10 We can see he gives some information about Migrant 7
 11 or Charlie. You say:
 12 "... any further details?"
 13 So you are asking for more information about this
 14 boat, and he says:
 15 "There's 30 people on board, 14 have got life
 16 jackets and supposedly there are 13 women, 8 children."
 17 And he offers to give you a phone number. You say:
 18 "Probably don't need it but go on."
 19 Why was it your view that you didn't need phone
 20 numbers for people on a boat?
 21 A. Because we didn't get involved in that side of things.
 22 So the coastguard — when they were receiving phone
 23 calls from the migrant vessels, it was the coastguard
 24 that was receiving the phone calls, so they're obviously
 25 logging the numbers. And then part of the process was

1 when the migrant vessels were picked up, part of the
 2 process was they would request the Border Force crew to
 3 check with the migrants if any of them had made a phone
 4 call and then they would, you know, cross-reference any
 5 phone numbers. So that's — but that was done through
 6 the coastguard. The coastguard would speak to Valiant
 7 or whichever boat it was direct and request that
 8 information.
 9 Q. Were there ever any circumstances in which Border Force
 10 would call a boat directly?
 11 A. Not in relation to phone numbers. Not that I was aware
 12 of.
 13 Q. Have you ever yourself made a call directly to a small
 14 boat to obtain more information?
 15 A. To a small boat, no. Never, no.
 16 Q. I think these are the numbers for the people on the boat
 17 is my understanding.
 18 A. Yes, yes, that's —
 19 Q. Would you ever call a boat yourself? No.
 20 A. Yes — no, no, we wouldn't do that. That would be
 21 a coastguard job.
 22 Q. Would you ever call a coastguard to request more
 23 information proactively about an ongoing incident?
 24 A. Yes, we would request updates, or if we saw something on
 25 their tracker which we wanted, you know, further

1 information on, then we would contact the coastguard.
 2 Q. Thank you.
 3 Looking down at the bottom of the page, we can see
 4 Mr Downs saying:
 5 "It's a dinghy and they think it's in good
 6 condition."
 7 And then if we turn over the page {INQ007648/4}, we
 8 can see you seeking some more information and then
 9 five entries down, you say:
 10 "Okay, we'll plot it up and look at getting an asset
 11 tasked to it then if it's in UK waters."
 12 And you go on to say it's probably going to be the
 13 Valiant because they are the primary responder.
 14 A. Mm.
 15 Q. Who actually made the decision which asset to task
 16 within Border Force or whether to task an asset in
 17 response within Border Force?
 18 A. So for that particular shift, that would have been
 19 a discussion between me and Karen, once the coastguard
 20 had requested an asset was tasked. From the day's
 21 planning report, we obviously knew which was the primary
 22 asset on standby. There was always two vessels on
 23 standby, but we knew which was the primary boat. So
 24 once the decision was made that tasking the boat was
 25 appropriate, once that decision was made, then we would

1 do so.
 2 Q. Is that something you remember doing or would that just
 3 be your normal practice in response to an incident like
 4 this?
 5 A. That was our standard practice.
 6 Q. Standard.
 7 Do you remember now what information you told
 8 Karen Whitehouse in order to assist with making that
 9 decision? What information from this call did you share
 10 with her?
 11 A. We would have reviewed the whole — the conversation.
 12 Q. Are you confident now that you told her everything that
 13 you had been told on that call?
 14 A. Yes. Yes, I would have told Karen anything and
 15 everything that was relevant to our — to the request
 16 and any decisions that were required.
 17 Q. You say "would have". Again, are you saying that's your
 18 standard practice or you actually remember doing that on
 19 the night?
 20 A. I can't remember the night specifically, but I would be
 21 confident from the way we worked what information would
 22 have been discussed.
 23 Q. Could we turn back to her statement, her first
 24 statement, 10135, please, at paragraph 16, which I think
 25 is page 6 {INQ010135/6}.

1 In paragraph 16 — and you can have some time to
 2 read this if you like — Ms Whitehouse is talking about
 3 the different types of information that would be
 4 relevant to share, what information is relevant for
 5 making tasking decisions. So she talks about the
 6 co—ordinates; the number of persons on board, which she
 7 says is relevant to determining the appropriate asset;
 8 the time of the sighting; the course; the direction; the
 9 speed; mitigating factors like children being on board.
 10 She mentions the type of boat and says:
 11 "... anything else which would assist BFMCC in terms
 12 of allocating an asset and would assist the BFM crew in
 13 locating and identifying the boat."
 14 And then she says:
 15 "Essentially we took as much information as we could
 16 from [HM Coastguard] because when we contacted our
 17 vessels we knew they would ask for the information."
 18 Is that something you agree with in terms of what
 19 the relevant information was to obtain?
 20 A. Yes.
 21 Q. And is that the information you should have been asking
 22 coastguard for as standard in responding to these
 23 incidents?
 24 A. Yes, that's correct.
 25 Q. She goes on to say at the top of the next page

1 {INQ010135/7};
 2 "In November 2021 some of this information would
 3 initially be entered manually into the officer's
 4 daybook. Relevant information would be transferred onto
 5 the BFMCC spreadsheet log."
 6 We know you weren't using your daybook at that time,
 7 so I think we need to look at the log, if we can, which
 8 is 471 {INQ000471/1}. So this is the covering email for
 9 that document sent by Karen Whitehouse at 1.51 on the
 10 morning of 24 November. You can see it is circulating
 11 Operation Deveran live updates.
 12 The spreadsheet itself is at 472 and if we could
 13 turn to that, please {INQ000472/1}. Thank you very
 14 much. We can see the time of that spreadsheet at the
 15 top in blue:
 16 "[TIME] 01:50."
 17 So this is the first Border Force tracker circulated
 18 following that call with HM Coastguard timed at 1.50.
 19 We can see that the coordinates from the call have been
 20 entered here and the description states for Incident C
 21 for Charlie:
 22 "No asset with event. Believed to already be in
 23 UK waters. Valiant called."
 24 Do you remember now who made that entry?
 25 A. I don't remember specifically, no.

1 Q. Okay.
 2 We have some information from that call with
 3 HM Coastguard here. We have the co-ordinates, for
 4 example. We have the fact that Valiant was being
 5 called, believed to already be in UK waters. But
 6 there's important information from that call missing
 7 from this spreadsheet, isn't there?
 8 A. This spreadsheet, there is a --- as the column says
 9 there, there is a brief description, an outline of --- of
 10 the event. So not all the details would have
 11 necessarily been put in at that stage. Some of it would
 12 have been added either later, but, yes, I --- I can't
 13 recall otherwise.
 14 Q. I want to ask you about some specific pieces of
 15 information. So this document doesn't record, for
 16 example, that there were 13 women on board,
 17 eight children, 14 people with life jackets, that it was
 18 a dinghy which was underway, in good condition, any of
 19 the other identifying information obtained by you on
 20 that call, does it, Mr Willows?
 21 A. It doesn't, no.
 22 Q. You have told us you weren't using your daybook to
 23 record relevant facts. You were putting those relevant
 24 facts in the Border Force tracker. Where are they?
 25 A. So most of the details that would have been passed by

1 the coastguard on the telephone were on their tracker,
 2 so if further details were required, they could have
 3 been taken from the coastguard tracker, and this --- this
 4 live update spreadsheet was just a snapshot of the
 5 activity that was going on. This wasn't being used by
 6 the commanders of the vessels. They were receiving all
 7 their live updates from the coastguard direct once they
 8 were tasked to an event.
 9 So this actual report was just an overview which was
 10 being sent to our seniors and the RCCU who were
 11 responsible for deploying the shore-side response. So
 12 all the details may not have been recorded on here as it
 13 was just an overview at the time.
 14 Q. But, Mr Willows, you have told us this is what you were
 15 using to record your relevant facts, your
 16 decision-making, instead of your daybook, but the
 17 information you should have been putting in your
 18 daybook, it's not here, is it?
 19 A. It's not. It's not on that spreadsheet at that stage,
 20 no.
 21 Q. Are you suggesting it was input at a later stage?
 22 A. No, I don't know.
 23 Q. Did you consider that information --- so, for example,
 24 the composition of the boat, how many people were
 25 wearing life jackets, whether the boat was underway ---

1 to be important information that needed to be recorded?
 2 A. All that information would have been passed directly to
 3 the Border Force vessel that was tasked to the incident.
 4 It would have been provided to them by the coastguard
 5 direct, you know, on the radio. So it wasn't --- it
 6 wasn't essential for the purpose of this live update.
 7 The essential information was being passed direct to the
 8 assets that were tasked.
 9 Q. But, Mr Willows, it was yourself and Ms Whitehouse who
 10 tasked the Valiant to respond to this incident, wasn't
 11 it?
 12 A. We gave them the initial tasking, but the coastguard
 13 would then give them the specific information relating
 14 to the incident that they were tasked to.
 15 Q. We have just been through paragraph 16 of
 16 Ms Whitehouse's statement, which lists the relevant
 17 information to share with the Valiant at tasking, and
 18 you have told me you agreed that that was important
 19 information to share, but that wasn't information which
 20 you and Ms Whitehouse shared with the Valiant?
 21 A. I don't recall what was specifically told on the --- when
 22 they were phoned and tasked. I can't comment on that.
 23 Q. Do you remember whether it was yourself or Ms Whitehouse
 24 who actually tasked the Valiant that night?
 25 A. I can't --- I can't recall without seeing the

1 transcripts.
 2 Q. Okay.
 3 On that call at around 1.20 with HM Coastguard, it
 4 doesn't seem like you are working through a sort of
 5 structure or a list or a checklist of questions and
 6 information to be obtained. Did you have any guidelines
 7 for what information you should be seeking to obtain and
 8 record?
 9 A. Again, from the SOP, there would have been guidelines on
 10 what information to ascertain.
 11 Q. Within the SOP that we looked at ---
 12 A. I believe so.
 13 Q. --- previously?
 14 Can we turn to {INQ000507/1}, please. This is the
 15 next --- the covering email for the next Border Force
 16 tracker live update being circulated and this one is
 17 timed at 2.43, so we are about an hour and 20 minutes on
 18 from that initial phone call we were just looking at.
 19 If we turn to 508 {INQ000508/1}, please, we should
 20 see the spreadsheet itself and at the top, timed at
 21 2.50. We know it was actually sent before 2.50, but it
 22 is sent hourly, I understand, so this is the 2.50, if
 23 I can put it that way.
 24 A. Mm.
 25 Q. And the entry for Charlie now says:

1 "Valiant attending. ETA 1 hr to location. Now
 2 a Mayday."
 3 Do you remember now who wrote that entry, whether it
 4 was yourself or Ms Whitehouse?
 5 A. I don't recall, no.
 6 Q. The entry mentions that Charlie was now a Mayday. Did
 7 you hear the Mayday yourself?
 8 A. No, because that would have been broadcast on VHF, which
 9 we didn't have access to.
 10 Q. Do you remember now how you learnt that Charlie was
 11 a Mayday?
 12 A. From seeing the transcript of the phone call, I believe
 13 I had seen reference to it on the coastguard tracker, so
 14 I phoned the coastguard for an update and part of that
 15 conversation was around the Mayday issue.
 16 Q. Could we turn, please, to the text of the Mayday itself,
 17 which is at {INQ007660/1}. Very efficient indeed.
 18 Timed at 2.27, so before the spreadsheet we have just
 19 looked at.
 20 If we turn to the next page {INQ007660/2}, we can
 21 see the text of the Mayday Relay that was broadcast. In
 22 the second paragraph, we can see that it says Charlie
 23 is:
 24 "Taking water and requiring immediate assistance."
 25 Can you remember if that was something you were

61

1 aware of at the time?
 2 A. So we wouldn't have heard this broadcast. This was
 3 obviously on VHF, so we wouldn't hear those broadcasts
 4 made by the coastguard and we weren't — to my
 5 recollection, we weren't aware of the immediate
 6 assistance that was required at that stage. That was
 7 the coastguard carrying out their SOLAS responsibility,
 8 making that broadcast.
 9 Q. I think we can take this down now. Thank you.
 10 You have got an asset which, according to the
 11 tracker we have just looked at, is estimating about
 12 an hour to get to the location. We know, in fact, the
 13 Valiant did take almost exactly one hour then to get to
 14 the Sandettie region. This broadcast says immediate
 15 assistance is required.
 16 If you had heard that Mayday, if you had known that
 17 Charlie required immediate assistance at 2.27, do you
 18 think you might have reassessed whether your asset
 19 provision, the decisions you had made about the assets
 20 to send, were sufficient?
 21 A. So that — ultimately, that is a coastguard decision to
 22 make. They were obviously aware of what assets we had
 23 available. They had asked for Valiant to be tasked. We
 24 had phone calls with them since the initial tasking. If
 25 they felt it was necessary for additional assets to be

62

1 tasked, that would have been down to them to make that
 2 request either for us to deploy another Border Force
 3 asset or an RNLI asset.
 4 Also, that — them broadcasting that Mayday Relay,
 5 that goes to all ships in the Dover Straits. They all
 6 have a legal responsibility to respond to that
 7 broadcast. So if there were — if there were any
 8 commercial ships in that vicinity, they would have been
 9 legally obliged to respond as well and report to the
 10 coastguard.
 11 But as far as assets and taskings were concerned, if
 12 they felt it necessary that another asset was required,
 13 they would have made their request to us. They — it's
 14 happened previously when we have got one boat out, but
 15 then they become aware there is multiple events and they
 16 require additional resourcing, then they would make that
 17 request, but the request wasn't made that night.
 18 Q. Mr Willows, you were a trained mariner. I appreciate
 19 some time before this, but you had the training. You
 20 knew about SOLAS obligations.
 21 A. (Nods).
 22 Q. And in this situation, you have a boat requiring
 23 immediate assistance and an asset that isn't going to be
 24 there for another hour.
 25 A. Mm—hm.

63

1 Q. My question to you was: if you had known that, would you
 2 have reassessed the situation and the need to provide
 3 further assets? I am asking about you and what you
 4 would have done.
 5 A. No, not necessarily. Valiant was en route, yes, from
 6 a Border Force perspective and it was going to take her
 7 an hour. To deploy another asset, it would probably
 8 take them two hours to get there. So a Border Force
 9 asset, another — an additional Border Force asset
 10 wouldn't have got there any quicker than Valiant was
 11 going to get there.
 12 That's why they — that's why I am saying that's why
 13 I assumed they made the Mayday Relay broadcast because
 14 they were trying to see if there were any other assets
 15 closer to the scene than Valiant was, with the
 16 expectation that they would have responded themselves.
 17 Q. Okay. Let's turn to the next call, please. About
 18 20 minutes after the tracker we were just looking at was
 19 circulated, you took part in a call with HM Coastguard.
 20 Can I take you to {INQ007602/1}, please. This is the
 21 transcript of a call between yourself and someone called
 22 Neal Gibson at 3.11 on 24 November 2021. If we turn to
 23 the second page, please {INQ007602/2}.
 24 Mr Willows, looking at this now, are you able to say
 25 whether in fact this was you on the call?

64

1 A. Yes, I believe I have heard this recording, so yes, that
 2 was me.
 3 Q. It looks like here you are making the call to
 4 HM Coastguard. They say:
 5 "... good evening ..."
 6 You say:
 7 "[Yes] ... it's ... Border Force Maritime Command
 8 here."
 9 They say:
 10 "... how can I help?"
 11 So you have made this call. What made you pick up
 12 the phone and call coastguard?
 13 A. So I believe this is the phone call which refers to the
 14 Mayday broadcast and I was enquiring as to what the
 15 situation was.
 16 Q. So if we look at the transcript, I think originally, you
 17 were asking about two incidents called Bravo and India
 18 and you say:
 19 "... just looking at your tracker, which we can
 20 view ..."
 21 So confirmation you can see the tracker:
 22 "... incidents Bravo and India, can you confirm if
 23 they've both been picked up by the French and being
 24 returned to France or what's the score with ..."
 25 And Mr Gibson confirms that they are likely to be

1 repeats of Incident Charlie. He says:
 2 "... the numbers match up ... the story matches as
 3 well."
 4 And he tells you that you have had the same boat
 5 calling regularly. Was that something that was unusual,
 6 to have one boat calling multiple times and have to work
 7 out whether calls related to a single boat?
 8 A. No. My understanding is that would happen on a regular
 9 basis. You would get multiple people from the same
 10 vessel making multiple phone calls, which made the
 11 coastguard's role, I think it's got to be said,
 12 incredibly difficult, so for them to try and
 13 differentiate between all events that were being
 14 reported. But yes, no, it wasn't -- it wasn't unusual.
 15 That's what -- that's what happened on a regular basis.
 16 Q. And it wasn't part of your role to try and distinguish
 17 which calls related to which incident?
 18 A. Correct, no.
 19 Q. Understood.
 20 If we can turn to the next page {INQ007602/3}, we
 21 can see Mr Gibson says:
 22 "At this point in time, Valiant is proceeding to
 23 Charlie, which is southwest of the Sandettie Lightvessel
 24 at the minute."
 25 And you say:

1 "Is that still a Mayday situation at the moment or
 2 not ..."
 3 So at that stage, as you have indicated, you knew
 4 that Charlie was a Mayday situation.
 5 A. (Nods).
 6 Q. And he says:
 7 "... they've told me it's full of water."
 8 Pausing there, was that new information to you at
 9 that time? Can you remember?
 10 A. I can't recall specifically. I don't know. I can't
 11 remember.
 12 Q. In the Mayday broadcast, the Mayday Relay, there is
 13 a reference to Charlie taking on water, but here, "full
 14 of water" means something different, doesn't it?
 15 A. If that was the -- if that was the case, then yes.
 16 Q. Did you understand that to be different, taking on
 17 water? The Inquiry has heard some evidence that it's
 18 relatively common that boats take on some water. Here
 19 you are being told Charlie is full of water.
 20 A. Yes. Well, obviously we -- we couldn't, you know, say
 21 one way or another if that was the -- if that was the
 22 case. Yes, as you said, the boats, generally speaking,
 23 yes, were very poor quality and, yes, they would
 24 normally ship a lot of water. But yes, we couldn't
 25 comment on this specific situation there.

1 Q. What do you mean when you say, "We couldn't tell one way
 2 or the other if that was the case"? Here you are being
 3 given information by HM Coastguard about the state of
 4 the boat, aren't you?
 5 A. I believe they are reporting -- well, they are advising
 6 us to what they have been told by one of the people on
 7 the boat.
 8 Q. Is that something you accept and used to inform your
 9 response or is it something you are sceptical of? You
 10 are questioning: is that really true?
 11 A. Well, primarily, it's down to the coastguard, yes, as
 12 part of their overall assessment of the incident and the
 13 situation. Obviously, if they felt that it was in real
 14 distress, then that's when and why they would broadcast
 15 a Mayday and ask for assistance from any other vessels,
 16 you know, close by.
 17 Q. Setting aside the coastguard for a minute, I want to
 18 understand what you thought when you got this
 19 information, and I appreciate if you cannot remember,
 20 please do say. There is no criticism for being unable
 21 to remember. I want to understand what you can recall.
 22 A. Right.
 23 Q. When you found out that Charlie was full of water, did
 24 that change your assessment of the urgency of the
 25 situation, of this incident?

1 A. Well, from our point of view, Valiant was tasked and
 2 Valiant was en route. There was nothing else, you know,
 3 that we could have done at that stage. Like I say, it
 4 was the — the situation was overall managed by the
 5 coastguard. So we had tasked and deployed our asset and
 6 she was on the way to the scene, so there wasn't — you
 7 know, there wasn't anything else that we could have done
 8 at that stage.
 9 Q. Once again, I am not asking what you wanted to do or
 10 what you thought you should do. I am asking about your
 11 assessment of the urgency in the situation. You find
 12 out that we have got a boat now which is full of water.
 13 Does that change your understanding of how urgent this
 14 is; whether it is an emergency, whether there is people
 15 in distress? I am talking about you and not the
 16 coastguard. I know you can't speak for another
 17 organisation. What did you think?
 18 A. Well, I can't recall the night in question, so
 19 I don't — I don't recall, you know, the conversation
 20 specifically, but, as I say, the Valiant was en route.
 21 There was nothing else that we could have done at that
 22 stage. We tasked our asset and they were on their way
 23 to the scene.
 24 Q. Looking back at the transcript, Mr Gibson says:
 25 "... they've told me it's full of water. The reason

1 I did the full Mayday broadcast was to get a certain
 2 vessel which is painted grey and there was a French flag
 3 at the back of it to attend ... However, they've
 4 basically completely ignored a SOLAS Mayday distress
 5 call ... "
 6 Again, you have just told us you knew there was
 7 a Mayday Relay and, therefore, that other vessels were
 8 going to attend. Here, you are finding out that, in
 9 fact, that Mayday broadcast has been ignored. Did that
 10 change your assessment of the situation?
 11 A. Well, again, there's nothing we could do in response to
 12 that. Issuing Mayday broadcasts like that was part of
 13 the coastguard remit and it's not something that we —
 14 we got involved in. So no, there was nothing else we
 15 could have done at that stage.
 16 Q. Mr Willows, my question isn't what did you do or what
 17 could you have done. My question is about your
 18 assessment of the situation. What did you think about
 19 the risk, the urgency of it, about Charlie and what
 20 dangers Charlie might have been in? I want to
 21 understand what was in your mind when you learnt that
 22 the boat was full of water, you knew that the Valiant
 23 was a considerable distance away and you knew now that
 24 the Mayday Relay had been ignored. What did that make
 25 you think about this incident?

1 A. Well, again, Valiant couldn't have gone any faster, so
 2 there's nothing we could have done that would have got
 3 our asset there any quicker. Like I say, that would
 4 have been down to the coastguard to consider deploying
 5 a lifeboat if they could have got there quicker, but
 6 that's not a decision for us to take. We had Valiant
 7 tasked and that was our — our remit.
 8 Q. Mr Gibson goes on to say at the bottom of that
 9 paragraph:
 10 "... once the Valiant has dealt with Charlie, there
 11 could well be some other vessels ... in that area."
 12 You say:
 13 "Same area, yeah, okay, that's fine. Well, we'll
 14 wait and see what the sort of numbers are and whether
 15 Valiant can deal with that."
 16 Then you say:
 17 "... we don't want to call any other assets out just
 18 yet, but we'll wait and see what develops."
 19 And then Mr Gibson says:
 20 "That's the dream, isn't it, don't get more than one
 21 out."
 22 And if we turn to the next page {INQ007602/4}, right
 23 at the top — forgive me, I think there is more up at
 24 the top, is there? Thank you. If we turn to the next
 25 page, you are then being told about helicopter rescue.

1 You have heard Mr Gibson say the dream is to get
 2 one asset out. Was that your understanding at the time;
 3 that there was — the ideal was to only ever have
 4 one asset responding?
 5 A. So that statement is basically referring to resource
 6 management. We obviously had limited assets working on
 7 Op Deveran at that time and, obviously, they only had —
 8 they were restricted with how many hours they could
 9 work, etc, how long they could go to sea for. So we
 10 wouldn't want to send more than one asset to sea unless
 11 we had to. Otherwise, you are wasting hours that
 12 a vessel could be at sea when they weren't required. So
 13 it was all about resource management at the end of the
 14 day.
 15 Q. Can we turn to your statement please, which is
 16 {INQ010214/4} at paragraph 11, page 4. You are
 17 explaining there your response in this call and you say:
 18 "[HM Coastguard] did not ask me to task an asset
 19 during the call; if they had done so then I could have
 20 considered the request together with Karen as the higher
 21 officer."
 22 But that's not quite what we have seen in this call,
 23 is it? When Mr Gibson raised the fact that there were
 24 other boats in the area, you say, "We don't want to call
 25 any other assets out just yet". So you are making

1 a decision about whether or not you want to call assets
 2 out in response to additional boats in the area in the
 3 course of that call .
 4 A. No, I think if you read — if you listen to that
 5 conversation and read that conversation, that was
 6 a two-way conversation. He said there were potentially
 7 other boats in the area; again, potentially, because
 8 they had already identified duplicates during that night
 9 already, so they didn't know for definite if or how many
 10 other boats there were out there. So it's in that
 11 situation where you wouldn't want to task vessels
 12 without knowing that there were definite other migrant
 13 vessels there.
 14 Q. Okay. Why don't we go back to the transcript Page 4
 15 {INQ007602/4}? So if we carry on, Mr Gibson gives some
 16 information about helicopter rescue, says:
 17 " ... 163 is going to come and help us ... with the
 18 search."
 19 And in your statement, you have said that you
 20 understood that the helicopter would be about 15 minutes
 21 to reach the Sandettie area. In fact, if we look here,
 22 Mr Gibson says the helicopter is lifting in 30 minutes.
 23 Did you understand that the helicopter was going to take
 24 15 minutes to come?
 25 A. I don't recall. I can't remember.

1 Q. Okay.
 2 If we carry on, page 4 of the transcript — it's
 3 this page — bottom of that first paragraph, Mr Gibson
 4 says they have got a WhatsApp position for Charlie.
 5 Why didn't you ask for those co-ordinates at the
 6 time?
 7 A. Sorry, where's this? What part?
 8 Q. So there is a first chunk from Neal Gibson,
 9 two paragraphs.
 10 A. Yes.
 11 Q. Top of the second one:
 12 "So, we've got the WhatsApp position which is
 13 Charlie ... "
 14 A. Yes. So whether they passed that to — Valiant was
 15 obviously en route, so the coastguard would have passed
 16 any update precision direct to Valiant, which was
 17 standard procedure.
 18 Q. Was that something that you knew at the time had been
 19 done?
 20 A. No, not — no, I can't recall. I can't comment on that,
 21 no.
 22 Q. We can see in the other calls you are asking for
 23 coordinates and you're recording them in the
 24 spreadsheet. Why didn't you do that here?
 25 A. As I say, the standard procedure would be that the

1 coastguard, as soon as they — if they had a different
 2 or updated position from an earlier one, they would
 3 obviously pass that to any assets which were en route.
 4 Q. Looking then at the next section of the transcript ,
 5 Mr Gibson says:
 6 " ... the Flamant has got — it was alongside one
 7 with 30 in it and there's another one with 40, so that
 8 would be potentially 110, worst-case scenario, which is
 9 probably pushing our luck for Valiant. "
 10 You say:
 11 "Oh yeah."
 12 At this point, you are being told by HM Coastguard
 13 that there are more persons in the area requiring rescue
 14 than the Valiant's maximum capacity. We know the
 15 Valiant could take 100 and he is saying 110:
 16 " ... potentially 110 ... which is probably pushing
 17 our luck for Valiant."
 18 And you agree. You say, "Yeah". Is that right?
 19 A. So a couple of things there, then. So all numbers at
 20 that stage are estimates. They are based on the initial
 21 reports of the incident, so it depends where that
 22 information has come from. So basically, those figures
 23 are not likely to be very accurate.
 24 Obviously, Valiant's capacity at that stage was 100.
 25 If the — the actual number of migrants might have only

1 been 100 and even if it was 110, Valiant would
 2 potentially either manage to get that number — squeeze
 3 that number on board anyway, or if there was more than
 4 that, then the coastguard would need to request or
 5 deploy additional assets, whether it was Border Force or
 6 RNLI.
 7 Q. So in each of these instances, for the 30 and the 40 and
 8 the different boats being calculated, the number might
 9 not have been accurate?
 10 A. Yes, that's correct, especially at nighttime, because
 11 sometimes the reports of incidents or events —
 12 initially, reports would come from passing commercial
 13 ships and their estimate — of course, you don't know
 14 what range they are actually seeing it from — could
 15 be — you know, the estimate that they have given for
 16 numbers could be well out for the actual number on
 17 board.
 18 So that's why you would always have to take initial
 19 reports of numbers on board, shall we say, with a pinch
 20 of salt until they are actually intercepted and picked
 21 up. Actual numbers sometimes would differentiate, you
 22 know, substantially.
 23 Q. So it could be considerably less, but it could, in fact,
 24 be more than is being assessed here.
 25 A. Correct.

1 Q. And in that scenario, if it is correct or, in fact, if
 2 it's an underestimation, there are a number of people in
 3 the Channel classed as being in distress and we don't
 4 have sufficient assets to take them. That was the
 5 position, wasn't it, Mr Willows?
 6 A. That's potentially the case, but, again, that would be
 7 down to the coastguard to make that assessment and
 8 request additional assets. That wasn't our decision to
 9 take. They were — they had all the information and it
 10 would be their assessment and decision around what
 11 assets were currently tasked. That phone conversation
 12 didn't at any stage result in a request for additional
 13 assets.
 14 Q. In this transcript, Mr Gibson says:
 15 " ... [it's] probably pushing our luck for Valiant."
 16 You say:
 17 "Oh yeah."
 18 And he says:
 19 "Fingers crossed the French can't count."
 20 And if we turn to the next page {INQ007602/5}, you
 21 say:
 22 "Right, yes."
 23 You were betting, banking, relying on the
 24 possibility that this intel being provided to you was
 25 wrong:

1 "Fingers crossed the French can't count."
 2 Is that right?
 3 A. As I said earlier, that whole issue is around resource
 4 management, so you wouldn't want to send any other
 5 assets out to sea unless you knew categorically that
 6 there were too many for Valiant to deal with initially.
 7 Otherwise, your — the knock-on effect is going to be
 8 the next day when you know it is going to be busy during
 9 the daytime and you are not going to have enough assets
 10 for daytime. So until you knew there was a necessity
 11 for assets to be tasked, that's the way — that's the
 12 way it worked at the time. There were limited —
 13 limited resources and you had to manage it one way or
 14 another.
 15 Q. Because if you are wrong and the French can count and
 16 there are 110 or more people in the Channel, there is
 17 no one available to take them, is there, because there
 18 is only one asset tasked with a max capacity of 100?
 19 A. Yes, but like I say, that wasn't our assessment or
 20 decision to make.
 21 Q. You have told me that you were concerned that if you
 22 tasked an asset, there might not be enough for the next
 23 shift. Was the reason why you didn't say, "Hey,
 24 Neal Gibson, why don't you consider tasking another
 25 asset if there is more than the Valiant can take"

1 because you believed there were insufficient assets to
 2 cover the two periods?
 3 A. Well, it wasn't our role to offer assets. The
 4 coastguard knew what assets were available. They were,
 5 in effect, co-ordinating and running all the events, so
 6 it was their decision. It was down to them to assess
 7 and make the decision as to whether or not there were
 8 enough assets tasked or not.
 9 Q. But you have just told us you had a concern about
 10 whether there would then be sufficient assets for the
 11 following day, and your role and the role of
 12 Karen Whitehouse is the management of Border Force
 13 assets; isn't that right?
 14 A. That's correct.
 15 Q. So did you have a concern that there would be
 16 insufficient assets to meet the demand?
 17 A. That concern was always there.
 18 Q. Okay.
 19 At this stage, why didn't you have a discussion with
 20 Karen Whitehouse about this? We can see all of this
 21 happens in the course of a call. Why didn't you turn to
 22 the person you have said was your line manager, more
 23 senior than you, and say, "Look, they are saying there's
 24 110. We know that it could be inaccurate. It could be
 25 more, could be less. Should we task another asset?"

1 Should we say to coastguard, 'Is this enough?'"
 2 A. Well, we would have had that discussion when I came off
 3 the phone no doubt and, as I have said, it was down to
 4 the coastguard to make that request in the first place.
 5 Q. But we have just seen you saying to the coastguard, "We
 6 don't want to call any other assets out just yet". Why
 7 would they ask if you have said, "We don't want to do
 8 that"?
 9 A. And the coastguard were in agreement with that statement
 10 during that conversation. They were fully aware of the
 11 resource available as well, so it was — it was what it
 12 was. There were only finite resources available and
 13 until you knew you needed for definite more assets, you
 14 wouldn't send them out.
 15 Q. Mr Gibson then goes on to go through the different boats
 16 that are in the Sandettie area in this transcript. He
 17 uses the French numbering system. We can see he talks
 18 about, down at the bottom:
 19 " ... 10 and 11 are pretty much slap bang on the
 20 Sandettie."
 21 So 10 and 11 he says are in UK waters and then
 22 pretty much slap bang on the Sandettie. He talks about
 23 3 in the middle. He says 3 is:
 24 " ... south of Valiant, in the same sort of place as
 25 Charlie ... "

1 And we know that 7 is Charlie.
 2 If we turn to the next page, page 6 {INQ007602/6},
 3 we can see "Uh huh" at the top, and then you say:
 4 "Yeah, they're certainly all in the same
 5 vicinity ..."
 6 So from this, at this stage, you have been talked
 7 through one by one. 10, 11, 3 and 7 are all in the
 8 Sandettie area; is that right?
 9 A. Yes.
 10 Q. That's important information to know for determining
 11 what assets might need to respond; would you agree?
 12 A. Yes.
 13 Q. Where did you record that information, Mr Willows?
 14 A. I can't recall categorically. That information would
 15 presumably have on the coastguard tracker at that stage.
 16 Q. I am asking about your recording, Mr Willows, not the
 17 coastguard's recording.
 18 A. Okay. Well, whether it's on our live update or not,
 19 I can't recall.
 20 Q. Did you tell Karen Whitehouse that were those four boats
 21 all in the Sandettie area, the area that the Valiant was
 22 going to?
 23 A. We would have discussed what the telephone conversation
 24 was about when I came off the phone, so yes, we would
 25 have both been aware of what the situation was.

1 Q. Again, you are saying "would have". Do you remember now
 2 whether you did?
 3 A. I don't recall night in question, no.
 4 MS WOODS: Sir, we are coming up to the hour mark, but
 5 I only have, I think, probably 10 minutes left.
 6 I wonder if it is worth pushing through, if you are
 7 amenable.
 8 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Yes, I think so. Let's get it finished,
 9 yes.
 10 MS WOODS: Thank you very much.
 11 I want to understand about the recording of this
 12 information from this call. It is quite a considerable
 13 chunk of information we have just been through piece by
 14 piece.
 15 Could we turn to the next live update, which is
 16 {INQ0005440/1}. That's the covering letter again,
 17 covering email, from Karen Whitehouse at 3.50, and if we
 18 turn to INQ000451, the spreadsheet itself{INQ000541/1}.
 19 Now, looking at this, we can see that some changes
 20 were made to this tracker, the Border Force tracker, as
 21 a result of that call because we can see that Bravo and
 22 India have been marked as duplicates. It says,
 23 "Duplicate of C", can you see, under B and I?
 24 A. Yes.
 25 Q. Is that something that was input by you or

1 Karen Whitehouse? Can you say either way?
 2 A. I can't say for definite, but if Karen was sending the
 3 live updates, then I assume Karen had updated the live
 4 update.
 5 Q. But if we look at the row for Charlie at this time,
 6 there have been no changes. There is no text in red and
 7 the "Brief Description" section is exactly the same as
 8 it was before that 3.11 call.
 9 A. Mm—hm.
 10 Q. It doesn't say Charlie is full of water. It doesn't say
 11 there are potentially 110 people in the Sandettie area
 12 needing rescue, and it doesn't say no other vessels are
 13 responding to the Mayday Relay or the Mayday Relay has
 14 been ignored by the vessel it was directed to.
 15 Why wasn't this written down, Mr Whitehouse —
 16 Mr Willows? Apologies.
 17 A. Well, as I say, it's — it reflects that Charlie was
 18 a Mayday at that stage. Valiant would have been passed
 19 directly by the coastguard the locations of any — of
 20 any other incidents, so they would have been aware
 21 direct from the coastguard what other incidents were
 22 potentially out there apart from Charlie. And, yes,
 23 apart from that, I can't — you know, can't comment on
 24 anything else there.
 25 Q. Could we go to INQ000572 {INQ000572/1}, please. I think

1 this is the next live update Border Force tracker.
 2 I think we can skip the covering email and go straight
 3 to the document itself.
 4 This is timed at 4.50 at the top, we can see, and
 5 there has now been new information added to the box for
 6 Charlie. It says:
 7 "Vessel found and Valiant embarked a number of
 8 migrants."
 9 Again, can you help us with who wrote that into the
 10 spreadsheet?
 11 A. Well, again, if Karen sent the email, then I would
 12 assume that Karen had updated the tracker.
 13 Q. Okay.
 14 Do you remember now how the boat that was
 15 intercepted by Valiant was identified as Charlie? Where
 16 did this information come from?
 17 A. Well, we wouldn't make the — we wouldn't ascertain
 18 which vessel was which on (inaudible). That was where,
 19 as I said earlier, the coastguard would ask the crews
 20 for details of numbers on board. If they had telephone
 21 numbers, that's when they would start cross-referencing
 22 contact numbers.
 23 Yes, that wasn't our remit, to ascertain which was
 24 which. Like I say, on some shifts, there would be, as
 25 there was here, multiple reports of boats and multiple

1 boats actually interdicted [sic], but it wasn't our role
 2 to ascertain which was which.
 3 Q. Just to confirm, do you remember now where that
 4 information came from, whether it was from the tracker
 5 or from another source?
 6 A. No. Presumably the coastguard tracker was updated to
 7 reflect it in some way, so we would have been, one way
 8 or another, told by the coastguard that Charlie had been
 9 intercepted.
 10 Q. And we can see that an M or Mike number has been added
 11 into the spreadsheet for Charlie. It's been given the
 12 number M957. Can you help us with who assigns
 13 an M number?
 14 A. So it is the MCC role. That's the reference number for
 15 our case register, just a sequential number for the next
 16 boat that's interdicted.
 17 Q. But would that be yourself or Karen Whitehouse?
 18 A. So whoever was running the case register. So if Karen
 19 was running the logs that night, Karen would have issued
 20 the M number.
 21 Q. Is that what the role of an MCC select officer is?
 22 There is an entry on the case register — I don't think
 23 we need to go to it — that says that you were the MCC
 24 select officer for M957. Is that that role?
 25 A. Yes, I can't recall where it says "select", but yes,

1 there would be a drop-down option and, yes, MCC
 2 obviously would be one of the drop-down options.
 3 Q. Okay.
 4 We know that over the course of the early hours of
 5 the 24th that Valiant intercepted a total of
 6 three boats, two in the Sandettie area and one in
 7 a different part of the Channel. We have heard on the
 8 call at 3.11 that you had been told that there were
 9 four boats, 10, 11, 3 and 7, in the area requiring
 10 rescue.
 11 Why was Valiant allowed to return to port with only
 12 three of those four intercepted?
 13 A. Well, again, that's a coastguard decision. Once
 14 they've — yes, when they can return to port, that's not
 15 an MCC decision. That's a combination of if they have
 16 reached their — their limit for number of migrants on
 17 board or the assessment that there's no outstanding
 18 vessels. But that's not an MCC decision.
 19 Q. So you have been told there are four out there and you
 20 know at that point that Valiant has found three. Are
 21 you saying it's not your role or responsibility to say,
 22 "Hang on, I think we might have missed a boat here"?
 23 A. Well, I don't know if it was — maybe the coastguard
 24 thought there was another duplicate. They had already
 25 identified duplicates from earlier in the evening, so

1 maybe they had decided that four was in fact three.
 2 I don't know. I can't comment on that, but that's one
 3 possible scenario.
 4 Q. I want to ask you about the end of your shift. Do you
 5 remember giving a handover to the next shift that night?
 6 A. Standard procedure is for a substantial lengthy handover
 7 between shifts.
 8 Q. Mr Willows, do you remember giving a handover that
 9 night?
 10 A. I don't recall the night, so no.
 11 Q. It therefore follows that you can't help us with what
 12 information was or wasn't shared with whoever was coming
 13 in for the next shift.
 14 A. Not categorically, no.
 15 Q. And you don't have any written records of what was said
 16 or shared on the handover.
 17 A. No, no.
 18 Q. We know that there was information that was shared with
 19 you on various calls through the night that was never
 20 input into the tracker or the spreadsheets and that you
 21 weren't using your daybook. Can you tell us now, given
 22 that information wasn't recorded in writing, whether or
 23 not that was shared with the next shift?
 24 A. All — all relevant information would have been shared
 25 with the oncoming shift.

1 Q. But you can't say for certain because you don't
 2 remember.
 3 A. No, but as standard procedure, that would have been the
 4 case.
 5 Q. Mr Willows, is it right you weren't on shift the
 6 following day when the recovery operation took place?
 7 A. I was back on duty that night.
 8 Q. Back on duty the night of the 24th?
 9 A. Correct.
 10 Q. But not during the day of the 24th?
 11 A. No. I had just finished the night shift.
 12 Q. When did you first realise that Charlie, the mass
 13 casualty situation which happened during the day on the
 14 24th, was the same boat that had — you had been dealing
 15 with on your shift on the night of the 23rd/morning of
 16 the 24th?
 17 A. I don't recall when we sort of became aware of —
 18 obviously I was aware that day of the incident, what had
 19 happened, but I don't recall when I was — when I became
 20 aware, you know, which event it related to.
 21 MS WOODS: Thank you, Mr Willows. I don't have any further
 22 questions.
 23 Thank you, chair.
 24 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Thanks very much, Mr Willows. Thanks
 25 for your evidence. I am grateful.

1 We shall have a short break, but can we continue
 2 with Mr Downs? Yes, okay. Fine, let us do that.
 3 (The witness withdrew)
 4 (12.09 pm)
 5 (A short break)
 6 (12.20 pm)
 7 MR STUART DOWNS (affirmed)
 8 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Good afternoon, Mr Downs.
 9 A. Afternoon.
 10 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Ms Moffatt has got some questions for
 11 you. If you could just read the affirmation first.
 12 Questions by MS MOFFATT
 13 MS MOFFATT: Can you please state your full name?
 14 A. Yes, Stuart Martin Downs.
 15 Q. And you have made a witness statement dated
 16 1 December 2024 which runs to 35 pages; correct?
 17 A. That's correct.
 18 Q. And in November 2021, you were employed by His Majesty's
 19 Coastguard; correct?
 20 A. Yes. Her Majesty's Coastguard then, but yes.
 21 Q. At the time, correct.
 22 A. HMCG.
 23 Q. And you joined HMCG, HM Coastguard, on 15 March 2021 as
 24 a trainee MOO or maritime operations officer.
 25 A. That's correct.

1 Q. And you left HM Coastguard's employment on 13 June 2022.
 2 A. Yes.
 3 Q. So starting with your role, you have told the Inquiry
 4 you completed the standard MOO training package in
 5 October 2021.
 6 A. (Nods).
 7 Q. If I could just put your statement on the screen, so
 8 this is Inquiry number {INQ010208/2}, paragraph 6. You
 9 list there the formal courses completed in parts by
 10 a trainee MOO.
 11 A. That's correct, yes.
 12 Q. Is that what you meant by the standard training package?
 13 A. It is, yes.
 14 Q. In November 2021, you were in a team that was led by the
 15 search and rescue mission co-ordinator or SMC,
 16 Neal Gibson.
 17 A. That's correct.
 18 Q. That was team 3.
 19 A. Yes, that's correct.
 20 Q. And Mr Gibson has described the qualifications status of
 21 those in his team in his statement, so perhaps let's put
 22 that on the screen now, please, {INQ010392/24},
 23 paragraph 55. So paragraph 55, please.
 24 So let's look at that paragraph. Starting on the
 25 second line, he says:

1 "My SAR team that night consisted of [you], a MOO-T
 2 ... and [the trainee] who was also a MOO-T ..."
 3 So MOO-T is the trainee --
 4 A. Yes, there's only ever one MOO-T. Though it says MOO-T
 5 and then the abbreviation in full, it's actually just
 6 the one maritime operations officer training.
 7 Q. I will just get to that in a minute. Let me just --
 8 A. Oh, right.
 9 Q. I will just read a bit more. So he says:
 10 "One MOO was on annual leave, and another MOO was
 11 off sick."
 12 So you were a bit short-staffed:
 13 "At the time, Stuart [you] was partially qualified,
 14 holding a Communications ticket, which met the minimum
 15 requirement for staff counting. However, he had not yet
 16 completed his Incident Response qualification, the final
 17 step to becoming fully certified."
 18 And then it goes on to talk about the trainee, who
 19 was a full trainee.
 20 So he is essentially comparing the full trainee,
 21 which was the person who had only been with coastguard
 22 for 30 days, I think, at the time, and you had the
 23 communications qualification, but not the incident
 24 response qualification.
 25 A. That's correct.

1 Q. Is that right?
 2 A. That's correct. I understand that I completed that in
 3 February 2022, so three months afterwards, after this
 4 event.
 5 Q. And was there anything that a -- I don't know if it's
 6 right to call someone without that qualification
 7 a trainee MOO or a MOO, but is there anyone -- anything
 8 that that person who didn't have the incident response
 9 qualification could not do as a result?
 10 A. I don't think formally. Structurally, the -- once
 11 a person had the -- slightly reversing that, once you
 12 had the comms ticket, then you could -- were able to do
 13 or be engaged in all activity, but I still wasn't
 14 qualified in mission co-ordination or any of that sort
 15 of format. I believe that came with the incident
 16 response part, which was February 2022.
 17 Q. So is that a way of saying that there were a few things
 18 that you couldn't do, but you could answer calls,
 19 999 calls, because you had the communications ticket?
 20 A. Yes, basically act as an assistant for the SMC, yes.
 21 Q. But would agree that you weren't fully qualified at --
 22 A. Yes, I hadn't done that course by then.
 23 Q. And just to confirm then, we saw in your statement,
 24 paragraph 6, that you confirmed that those were the core
 25 modules. Would incident response be additional to that?

1 A. Additional — incident response was in addition to —
 2 once I started on the programme, the courses I listed
 3 were the ones that I was advised were core ones and
 4 incident response was added as an additional one. When
 5 it was decided to add that on for all MOOs, whether it
 6 it's — exactly what date that was decided, when that
 7 was instigated, I don't know, but when I started on the
 8 programme, the ones listed were the ones to be qualified
 9 and then they added in the incident response section.
 10 When they did that, I don't know.
 11 Q. So you became fully qualified in February 2022,
 12 I believe —
 13 A. That's correct.
 14 Q. — and undertook the incident response qualification.
 15 And as someone who was partially qualified, did you
 16 receive any extra support from HM Coastguard?
 17 A. In what way, sorry?
 18 Q. Well, from extra supervision or any other type of
 19 support.
 20 A. No, it all went through the SMC, so the SMC was the
 21 linchpin to the whole (inaudible).
 22 Q. And in terms of the physical layout of the operations
 23 room in Dover, where were you sitting in relation to
 24 Neal Gibson and the trainee?
 25 A. Neal would be roughly sat on the side of the room, about

1 where you are now, and then the trainee MOO was sat to
 2 my — to my left, where I would be left now, and
 3 I was sat to their — next side, so —
 4 Q. Further up the room?
 5 A. Further up the room. So yes, Neal was desk-wise almost
 6 as far from — so — because there was only three desks
 7 on that side, so Neal, the trainee MOO and then myself
 8 in a similar distance that you have got here.
 9 Q. And how would you and the others in the team communicate
 10 and share information whilst you were working?
 11 A. Primarily — if it was busy, then primarily it would be
 12 via ViSION, but also trying to overhear what was going
 13 on with what other people were doing, what other
 14 activity there was. So via ViSION, but trying to talk
 15 to each other in person in the room.
 16 Q. I want to now turn to your experience and training
 17 regarding small boats in November 2021. You have
 18 already told us that you started in March 2021.
 19 A. Yes.
 20 Q. So between November and March of that area, had you
 21 previously worked shifts that were with significant
 22 small boat activity?
 23 A. Yes.
 24 Q. And in general terms, insofar as it's possible to say,
 25 how common an occurrence was it between March and

1 November 2021 to have a heavy shift in terms of small
 2 boats?
 3 A. I would say it was fairly common.
 4 Q. And in terms of how you learned about responding to
 5 small boats, let's look at your statement again. So
 6 010208, paragraph 9, please {INQ010208/3}. You say
 7 there paragraph 9, first line, no formal training for
 8 responding to small boat incidents and, second line, you
 9 said that you were told this was the case because small
 10 boat crossings were a relatively new phenomenon;
 11 correct?
 12 A. That's correct.
 13 Q. Just for completeness, do you recall attending
 14 a presentation at Dover in summer or autumn 2021 about
 15 small boat search and rescue?
 16 A. No, I do not.
 17 Q. You go on in your statement to explain how you did learn
 18 about search and rescue for small boats. So
 19 paragraph 10, as we can still see on the screen, and
 20 paragraph 11, you say that you can't recall any Standard
 21 Operating Procedures specific to small boat search and
 22 rescue, but you say you would have read them on the
 23 coastguard information portal, if they were there.
 24 And the coastguard information portal was
 25 an intranet; is that right?

1 A. Yes, that's correct.
 2 Q. And there was an element of self-learning, then.
 3 A. Oh, yes, that's correct.
 4 Q. And other than the intranet, the coastguard information
 5 portal, was there any other way in which information or
 6 guidance about small boats was shared or cascaded at
 7 Dover?
 8 A. Verbally or vicariously through experience.
 9 Q. Through experience. Let's get on to that.
 10 If we could just go to 13, bottom of the page, you
 11 say that Neal Gibson gave you an overview about small
 12 boat work in your first week and, second line, you say:
 13 "The approach to these incidents was based on what
 14 people had picked up on the job and the practice had
 15 evolved from there."
 16 So would it be fair to say that insofar as your
 17 experience goes, the coastguard's approach to small boat
 18 work was primarily learned and taught on the job by
 19 those doing the operational work at Dover?
 20 A. Yes, that's correct.
 21 Q. And would it be fair to say as well that the practices
 22 developed as people had learned and things had —
 23 experience had been gained in the ops room at Dover?
 24 A. That's correct. The way things occurred was evolving.
 25 Q. In terms of communicating with those on board small

1 boats, the Inquiry has heard from several of its
 2 witnesses about the difficulties in communicating with
 3 those on board, including language difficulties ,
 4 difficulties relating to patchy mobile phone signal,
 5 calls cutting out.
 6 In terms of the language barrier, how often, if at
 7 all, did you use interpretation services?
 8 A. Not at all .
 9 Q. And why was that?
 10 A. I wasn't aware that it was available and also, actually,
 11 there generally wasn't --- on the phone call, the calls
 12 quite often cut out. There wasn't time to actually ---
 13 of trying to work out what language. Also, the person
 14 that called generally understood enough English to get
 15 some information from, but there wasn't --- there wasn't
 16 generally time on the call to get more information,
 17 because the phones cut out quite often.
 18 Q. So you didn't know, no time on the call and also no need
 19 because there was enough English for you to ---
 20 A. Yes.
 21 Q. --- make sense.
 22 A. Yes.
 23 Q. Insofar as you can answer this, did you know if others
 24 in Dover were aware of coastguard's interpretation
 25 services?

97

1 A. I don't know.
 2 Q. In terms of difficulties around patchy mobile signal and
 3 calls cutting out, how common a problem was this?
 4 A. It was very common.
 5 Q. Had you received any guidance from HM Coastguard about
 6 how to mitigate the problems associated with calls
 7 dropping out?
 8 A. To try to encourage the caller to dial 999, because that
 9 sometimes gave us a position of where the boat was using
 10 the 999 system. So that was the guidance in relation to
 11 this particularly .
 12 Q. Where did that guidance come from?
 13 A. That, again, was the same. It was shared, as far as
 14 I know, around --- verbally around the control room.
 15 Q. So, again, it was people learning ---
 16 A. Learning by experience.
 17 Q. Learning by experience and then passing it on to
 18 trainees?
 19 A. Yes.
 20 Q. And just so we are clear, dialling 999, why would that
 21 assist ?
 22 A. Dialling 999, the computer system is set up --- a very
 23 good system. It would try to --- using where the mobile
 24 phone signal was pinging the respective mobile phone
 25 telephone masts, the computer would try to work out

98

1 where the position was. So, for example, we used that
 2 to find a gentleman that was lost, thought he was on the
 3 White Cliffs, but was actually in the middle of
 4 Leicestershire . He had Alzheimer's. But when he called
 5 from the 999 system, we were able to find out instead of
 6 being on dark cliffs , he was actually in a rugby field
 7 in Leicestershire and was able to speak to Leicester
 8 Constabulary, who went to assist him.
 9 So we tried to use the same technology if someone's
 10 stuck on the cliffs or on the shore. The closer you are
 11 to the coast, the more accurate it is . But that was one
 12 chance to try to get a geolocation for somebody; that
 13 you could utilise the systems. They didn't rely on them
 14 knowing where. They --- as I say, this gentleman thought
 15 he was on the cliffs , but he was in Leicestershire . So
 16 that's how --- that's why that was useful.
 17 Q. You have mentioned that it would be more accurate the
 18 closer you were to land.
 19 A. That's correct.
 20 Q. Obviously, these --- the people on board the small boats
 21 that were calling you were actually in the middle of the
 22 sea and sometimes around the median line.
 23 A. Sometimes, but they would get as close to the --- to the
 24 port of Dover. Below the White Cliffs would actually
 25 make a beach landing. So it --- at that time, people

99

1 would regularly make it across to the shore in the UK as
 2 well, so it was a --- sometimes they were quite close to
 3 the coast, sometimes quite a distance.
 4 Q. If they were close to the coast, it might work. Close
 5 to the median line, were you aware of any limitations
 6 around calling 99?
 7 A. The further away you were, the less well it would work,
 8 but that was --- without that, then you had nothing. At
 9 least it was an option.
 10 Q. And would you, for example, prioritise getting certain
 11 bits of information? If you were aware a call was going
 12 to cut off, would you prioritise getting --- I don't
 13 know --- name, phone number, passing the coastguard
 14 mobile phone? How did that work did?
 15 A. Yes.
 16 Q. You have an order of priority?
 17 A. Yes, generally, tried to find out if they called before,
 18 so you knew how many boats you were looking for. Tried
 19 to find out where they had set off from, where --- what
 20 time that was so you could try and work out where they
 21 had perhaps got to, knowing what time they set off, how
 22 fast --- roughly how fast they were going. As I say, the
 23 colour of the boat, if they could see anything else
 24 around them, because we try and triangulate from them,
 25 if they could see another vessel. Some --- some merchant

100

1 vessels, like MSC, the company, for example, it has
 2 "MSC" painted in large letters down the side. If they
 3 could see another large ship and see some writing on it,
 4 you could then find the large ship and then work out in
 5 relation to them where they were, so ...
 6 Q. Was that an order of priority? Because given me lots of
 7 things that you would want to find out that is the SOPs,
 8 for example, but did, in your head, you think, "Well,
 9 I need to get this in order to --- a phone number, for
 10 example, to make sure that I can call this person back
 11 afterwards" or ...
 12 A. Yes, quite --- if there was to be a phone number, it
 13 would appear on the screen. The large one was actually
 14 to try and get the --- initially the name so that you
 15 knew which incident that you were dealing with.
 16 Otherwise, we are going to divert resources looking for
 17 boats that didn't exist. If you're looking for --- if
 18 five people from the same boat had called, you're now
 19 looking for five boats instead of looking for one, so
 20 you're perhaps diverting resources away from being able
 21 to conduct an effective rescue because you are looking
 22 for boats that don't exist.
 23 Q. So name was important ---
 24 A. So name ---
 25 Q. --- location ---

1 A. --- (overspeaking) the boat, the location, yes, the
 2 colour of the boat, distance times. So sometimes, it
 3 varied from call to call in that it depended what the
 4 person was offering you. So if they were offering you
 5 certain information to start with, you would go with
 6 that as opposed to interrupting them and saying, "Well,
 7 I'll come to that later". No, if they offered you
 8 some --- a description, for example, of the number of
 9 occupants, etc, that might come early on. That's
 10 another way of trying to identify the vessel. So if
 11 they offered it first, so some would be tailored
 12 towards ---
 13 Q. It would be responsive to ---
 14 A. Responsive to the caller, yes.
 15 Q. --- what the caller was also saying.
 16 A. So ...
 17 Q. So you and others at HM Coastguard have told the Inquiry
 18 that callers from small boats exaggerated their level of
 19 distress.
 20 A. That's correct.
 21 Q. That's right, isn't it?
 22 And was this something that you and colleagues at
 23 Dover ever discussed?
 24 A. It --- yes, it probably did come up in conversation quite
 25 a bit because some of the things which were said, for

1 example I do remember raising one. A gentleman called
 2 me and said a lady was unconscious at the bottom of the
 3 boat, she was in the water. So I asked him, "Take her
 4 out of the water so she's not lying in the boat. Why is
 5 she unconscious?" "She's broken her arm." "Well, how
 6 can she be unconscious if she's broken her arm?"
 7 "I don't know. I'll ask her." "So she's not
 8 unconscious then."
 9 So just in that one phone call that stood out
 10 because obviously she wasn't unconscious. But then
 11 other times there would be reports of lots of activity
 12 going on in the boat and when the rescue vessel got
 13 there it wasn't the case.
 14 Q. If you could just look at paragraph 132 of your
 15 statement. We'll just wait for that to come up on the
 16 screen {INQ010208/31}.
 17 So second line of 132, you say you learnt how to
 18 deal with the content of calls from small boats. The
 19 third line; that about a week into starting your shift,
 20 you were advised what callers would say. So that was
 21 about March 2021.
 22 A. Yes, that's correct.
 23 Q. Yes. And who told you what callers would say?
 24 A. Neal Gibson was the team leader that briefed us on this,
 25 but then others corroborated that.

1 Q. And what were you told about what callers would say?
 2 A. That it would generally be overstated that the boat ---
 3 the boat was sinking, people were drowning, the make-up
 4 of the people on the boat, the state of people, that
 5 people were giving birth or --- at the time on the boat,
 6 etc. So that it would be overly --- whatever was going
 7 on would be overstated.
 8 Q. You were told to expect exaggeration?
 9 A. Yes. And also there would be some --- some of the calls
 10 would be abusive to you and blaming you for not actually
 11 coming to get people, although you didn't necessarily
 12 know where they were. But to be --- in order to generate
 13 a response, but there was going to be a response anyway
 14 because you are in a small boat in the Channel, but to
 15 be aware that you would be called sometimes abusive ---
 16 you would receive abusive calls sometimes, but also that
 17 what was going on was probably being overstated.
 18 Q. Did that influence how then you responded to calls if
 19 you were told that they might be abusive and would be
 20 exaggerated?
 21 A. Obviously it made it more difficult to deal with the
 22 abusive side because you are trying to get the
 23 information. So that was, could be frustrating because
 24 you are trying to get information to bring the aid to
 25 them, but you would still try to find out information so

1 resources could be vecting in by the SMC to actually
 2 effect the rescue.
 3 So did it -- did it stop you doing the activity in
 4 relation to actually being practically doing it? No.
 5 It wasn't necessary, it didn't need to be abusive. Just
 6 phone me up and say, "We are in a dinghy, in a boat, in
 7 the Channel" and being co-operative would have -- would
 8 have made it easier to have found the information.
 9 But did it stop us trying to deal with the rescue?
 10 No, it didn't.
 11 Q. If we look at 127 of your statement you say that in your
 12 experience the majority of callers from small boats
 13 exaggerated their level of distress. When you say
 14 "majority", are you saying insofar as that's possible to
 15 say, are we talking more just over half or are we
 16 talking nine out of ten for example?
 17 A. Nine out of ten.
 18 Q. You also refer to leaflets given to those up in small
 19 boats with pictures to explain what to say and who to
 20 call. What was the context in which you saw those
 21 leaflets?
 22 A. Sorry, how do you mean context?
 23 Q. So who had them? Was it coastguard that had them? How
 24 did you get those leaflets?
 25 A. Oh, no, the criminal financial investigation from --

1 side took photographs because when the boats were
 2 recovered they would take the photographs or the cutter
 3 crews may or the CTV crews might get that. Where the
 4 origin of the particular leaflets came from I don't know
 5 other than it was part of when the vessels were
 6 recovered that the information was gathered then.
 7 Q. Did coastguard hold copies of these leaflets?
 8 A. I saw it electronically, so I would take it that it was
 9 held by -- I don't know who owned the electronic version
 10 of --
 11 Q. But it was emailed to you?
 12 A. -- obviously it was a photograph, it was a photograph of
 13 a leaflet. How I came, how I came to see it, whether it
 14 was e-mailed to me or shown to me, I can't recall that.
 15 Q. You don't know if it was emailed to you?
 16 A. No, I don't know.
 17 Q. And how did you know, you have said they had pictures on
 18 them telling people to exaggerate, but how did you know
 19 those pictures were telling people to exaggerate? I am
 20 finding it difficult to understand what picture could
 21 show that.
 22 A. It showed sort of the journey, if you like, from sort of
 23 getting in the boat and then a picture of, like, the
 24 White Cliffs, which would be referred to in the phone
 25 calls as white mountains, and then with a picture with

1 a boat through it, shows if it was sinking and with the
 2 image "999" and a picture of the phone, and then
 3 a helicopter, I think. I can't remember all the
 4 pictures, but it was, if you looked at it, the picture
 5 was sort of when you -- and it showed the Channel with
 6 the -- from recollection it showed the Channel with the
 7 median and then basically and then another image once
 8 you are beyond that, that's when to make the calls.
 9 I can't remember all the pictures, but that was the
 10 general gist of it. So it was pictorial. It didn't
 11 matter what language the person with it spoke. The
 12 image portrayed that.
 13 Q. To me, from what you have just described, it doesn't
 14 sound to me like that would necessarily mean it was
 15 telling them to exaggerate. For example if they had a
 16 boat sinking and a 999, could it not also mean if your
 17 boat is sinking then you should call 999?
 18 A. It could.
 19 Q. Yes. Did you personally agree with HM Coastguard's
 20 policy that all small boats, due to factors such as
 21 their inherent unseaworthiness, overcrowding, should be
 22 classified as in distress?
 23 A. It wasn't really my position to make a view -- take
 24 a view on that. They were dealt with as if -- as they
 25 were in distress.

1 Q. And how do you think that the belief that you and others
 2 held about exaggeration, nine times out of ten from
 3 small boats, impacted on how calls from them might be
 4 dealt with and assessed?
 5 A. They were dealt with -- dealt with in line with the
 6 normal search and rescue process. In fact, as I just
 7 mentioned the fact that somebody's in a boat in the
 8 Channel would still bring a response.
 9 Q. Was anything that was said to you -- so if a boat,
 10 a caller on board said, "I was sinking", would that be
 11 treated at face value?
 12 A. Yes. As far as I am aware, we'd still send the
 13 resources to go and deal with it.
 14 Q. You say in your statement that it was fairly impossible
 15 for the call taker to work out whether a small boat was
 16 actually in imminent danger or not. So despite this,
 17 were you supposed, nonetheless, to record everything
 18 that was said at face value?
 19 A. Yes. Yes.
 20 Q. Let's move on now and talk about staffing and resources
 21 at Dover. The Inquiry has heard evidence about staff
 22 shortages in Dover in 2021.
 23 A. Yes.
 24 Q. Are you aware of that?
 25 A. Oh, yes. Yes.

1 Q. And how, if at all, were you affected by the staff
 2 shortages and resource problems?
 3 A. In relation to the ---
 4 Q. In relation to maybe altered shift patterns, being asked
 5 to do overtime. I think you changed your team, you went
 6 because of staff shortages, as I understand it?
 7 A. Sorry, I was going to say in relation to dealing with
 8 incidents, then, yes, it was perhaps less people, less
 9 experienced people --- there were less more experienced
 10 people to learn from to see that.
 11 So as a MOO, when I was a MOO trainee, before
 12 completing all the courses, you would still be actively
 13 involved in incidents.
 14 In relation to actual cover then yes, I was moved
 15 from one team to another to cover gaps because the
 16 retention rate was so poor. I was moved to try and
 17 cover some gaps in a particular team.
 18 Q. Did you ever feel overwhelmed?
 19 A. Oh, yes. Yes. Yes, we were.
 20 Q. Let's look at your statement again, paragraph 43, please
 21 {INQ010208/9}. So third line right at the bottom. You
 22 say it was concerning that the systems at MRCC Dover had
 23 not really adapted to deal with it, it being the
 24 increase in small boats and the combination of that and
 25 the staff shortage.

109

1 Can you explain what you mean by the systems at
 2 Dover not having adapted to deal with the volume?
 3 A. I think because the vessel --- incidents were dealt with
 4 as standard incidents, those standard incidents were
 5 geared towards dealing with perhaps two tankers
 6 colliding in the Channel, where you knew where the
 7 incident was, they were going to be reporting. So
 8 something that was more in line with JESIP, joint
 9 emergency services interoperability principles, and the
 10 joint decision model, something more aligned to that,
 11 that could cope with multiple incidents of an unknown
 12 number, an unknown location would be --- that's an
 13 adaptation that I would have thought would be developed.
 14 Q. So you thought the system itself perhaps couldn't handle
 15 this new type of search and rescue?
 16 A. That's correct.
 17 Q. You say later in your statement that you did raise some
 18 concerns regarding work practices, but you don't think
 19 your observations were well received. Why do you say
 20 that?
 21 A. Well, maritime operations officer is an administrative
 22 officer in the civil service structure, so very junior
 23 and so their observations were --- I just --- they were
 24 sort of maybe noted, but not moved on, so ...
 25 Q. I see. So you felt that the junior level of your role

110

1 meant what perhaps you weren't best placed to be making
 2 these types of observations ---
 3 A. That's correct.
 4 Q. --- or raising concerns?
 5 A. That's correct.
 6 Q. You also say there was high turnover of personnel and
 7 the staff retention problem at Dover at 2021. Insofar
 8 as you are able to say, do you know why this was the
 9 case?
 10 A. Quite often it gets brought up around the pay and the
 11 conditions and that other people --- people move because
 12 other agencies can pay more. But then also I think the
 13 working structure, the culture, etc. So there's a host of
 14 reasons.
 15 Also it's quite a --- it's a very junior position,
 16 perhaps quite a lot of responsibility so people maybe
 17 move on to do other things. People seem to stay about
 18 a year is the average. Some people stayed a lot longer,
 19 but ...
 20 Q. And when you refer to the working conditions and
 21 culture, what does that refer to? The volume of work,
 22 the ---
 23 A. The volume of the work, the whole --- the whole package,
 24 the whole experience for want of a better expression of
 25 the way it's structured in relation to managing the

111

1 incidents, the training programmes, etc.
 2 Q. Was this something that was specific to Dover in your
 3 view? I mean, perhaps you are not able to answer but
 4 was this the case for all MOOs across the coastguard
 5 network?
 6 A. I haven't worked at other locations and I would take it
 7 that the other locations didn't really have the small
 8 boat volume, so it would have affected them less. Also
 9 perhaps some are more geographically remote so whereas
 10 Dover is obviously in the southeast, it's got lots of
 11 opportunities for work elsewhere, whereas perhaps
 12 Stornoway for example is more remote, perhaps less
 13 opportunities to move to other locations.
 14 Q. And then you say paragraph 47 {INQ010208/10}:
 15 "The staffing levels and what organisationally
 16 H.M. Coastguard was comfortable with surprised [you]."
 17 And then you refer to routine remote cover, which we
 18 will come on to.
 19 So essentially, and I think you might have told me
 20 this already, is it fair to say that in your view
 21 coastguard didn't have adequate systems in November 2021
 22 to deal with both the surge in number of small boat
 23 crossings and the staff shortage at Dover?
 24 A. Yes.
 25 Q. Let's move on to remote cover. We can stay on

112

1 paragraph 47. The second line you talk there about zone
 2 flexing . By zone flexing you mean coastguard's practice
 3 of the remote involvement of one MRCC or the JRCC in the
 4 work of another?
 5 A. That's correct, except that zone flexing can either be
 6 2009 zone picked up and managed from a completely an
 7 entire zone was picked up and managed from a completely
 8 different location or included support from another
 9 location . So people ---
 10 Q. Yes.
 11 A. --- could either be geographically at the same place,
 12 picking up an entire zone or geographically at two
 13 different places . So the two are quite different .
 14 Q. So it's two different things and both things happened on
 15 the night in question because when initially you had
 16 your break and Neal Gibson went and covered VTS, Vessel
 17 Traffic Service, the whole, all the work at Dover moved
 18 to the JRCC and then when Neal Gibson came back, remote
 19 SMC cover ended --- sorry, then when you came back from
 20 your break it was remote SMC and then when he came back
 21 from VTS, then essentially SMC went back to him but the
 22 JRCC remained involved. So there were various parts of
 23 network flexing in Dover on the night in question?
 24 A. That's correct.
 25 Q. You refer to Humber in paragraph 37 and you say that

1 they were involved on numerous occasions.
 2 A. Yes, that's correct .
 3 Q. Was this also the case with the JRCC, that you were used
 4 to them being involved?
 5 A. Yes. Humber and JRCC were the ones we linked with most,
 6 sometimes other stations, but generally Humber and JRCC.
 7 Humber is in the same division, so we tend to have more
 8 links with them.
 9 Q. How frequently was it that another MRCC or the JRCC were
 10 remotely involved with Dover's work in 2021?
 11 A. It seemed to be fairly normal. I couldn't tell you what
 12 percentage it was but it --- doing that, on days when
 13 that occurred that didn't surprise me.
 14 Q. Did you receive any training or guidance on any
 15 adaptations that should be implemented when there was
 16 a remote SMC or when you were working with another MRCC?
 17 A. No.
 18 Q. Moving on to paragraph 49 {INQ010208/11}, you say first
 19 line , that whilst there were comments from others about
 20 short staffing , any concerns about this were, in your
 21 words, covered off with remote support via the zone
 22 flexing .
 23 When you say "others", do you mean other staff at
 24 Dover? So the paragraph ---
 25 A. Yes, yes, I believe so. Yes.

1 Q. --- starts:
 2 "Others did comment ..."
 3 A. Yes, I believe so.
 4 Q. Yes. And then you refer to it , the answer being it
 5 would be "covered off" using your words in the statement
 6 with remote support.
 7 How effective a solution in your view was zone
 8 flexing or remote support?
 9 A. If there's the entire zone moved to a completely
 10 different geographical location it was self-contained,
 11 then that wasn't an issue. It was as if that, the
 12 own --- home station, if you like, was managing its own
 13 patch because everybody's in one room and could
 14 communicate.
 15 When it was split it was difficult for example if
 16 the SMC or another element such as channel 16 was on
 17 location and you were somewhere else. Then that made it
 18 more --- it made it more complicated because also you
 19 couldn't hear what was going on, you couldn't get the
 20 situational awareness of what was happening. So when
 21 they were there and trying to assist it actually made it
 22 more difficult because the --- the better one was where
 23 the entire zone was picked up and moved as opposed to
 24 a mismatch --- part being in one location and part being
 25 in another.

1 Q. So you could miss things by not being physically present
 2 in the operations room?
 3 A. That's correct.
 4 Q. When you say it actually made it more difficult , can you
 5 explain that?
 6 A. Well, because you didn't have that shared situational
 7 awareness, so the --- it made it certainly more difficult
 8 as well as for operators, also for the SMC because you
 9 couldn't actually perhaps overhear parts of the
 10 conversation, direct people, see where people were
 11 struggling . It was more difficult to do it and it added
 12 in another --- perhaps on a busy night it added another
 13 link in the --- another communication to be done and then
 14 trying to brief that person to then come back again.
 15 Whereas if when it was done all in one geographic
 16 location they would probably be aware of what you were
 17 about to brief them and could understand what was
 18 happening and so it just added another leg.
 19 Q. It took more resource?
 20 A. It took more resource to actually make the zone flexing
 21 part work. When it was perhaps there to assist,
 22 sometimes it actually made it more complicated.
 23 Q. It hindered sometimes. Moving again to paragraph 52 of
 24 your statement, you explain how when you were a trainee
 25 you dealt with an incident involving a fatality with

1 help only from another trainee. Was this a small boat
 2 incident?
 3 A. No, it wasn't.
 4 Q. And you say you had the assistance only of another
 5 trainee also on duty at Dover. Was there no remote ---
 6 A. There was remote, but actually at Dover just the two of
 7 us.
 8 Q. I see. Finally on resources at Dover, let's look at
 9 what you say at paragraph 53, the first line. You say
 10 in your view staffing shortages did affect Dover's
 11 ability to respond to small boat activity and then you
 12 refer, at line 2, to not necessarily being able to
 13 follow all the relevant processes. You give an example
 14 of mission statements, the plans of action on how to
 15 respond to an incident being recorded after the event
 16 because of the volume of calls.
 17 Was this the main example of where the standard
 18 operating procedures could these could not be followed
 19 due to volume of calls or?
 20 A. I think, yes. It was quite common for mission
 21 statements and thing to be done a bit later because
 22 everybody knew what the reactions --- you know, which
 23 resources had been sent. But actually physically typing
 24 in the mission statement when you have active 999 calls,
 25 communications to be done, if there weren't enough ---

1 without enough people to actually do that task the
 2 process would be clunky. So you didn't necessarily have
 3 the time to do that part. You still would assign the
 4 resources, but the way it was documented ---
 5 Q. Where would the main --- how would that impact? Would it
 6 be mostly problematic if it was someone remotely trying
 7 to understand what was going on, or would it affect
 8 people in the operations room physically present as
 9 well?
 10 A. It wouldn't affect it that much in that --- so, for
 11 example, if a cutter or a lifeboat was assigned to
 12 an incident the tasking for that would be recorded, so
 13 it would be recorded into that asset's entry so you
 14 could see that a lifeboat, or whatever, had been tasked.
 15 But the actual almost double-keying of listing it
 16 again in a mission statement would take place was
 17 later ---
 18 Q. The mission statement would be the thinking, the
 19 rationale, the planning?
 20 A. It's largely identifying what each resource was then
 21 going to do in that incident, but that could be captured
 22 elsewhere as a free text option.
 23 Q. So are you saying that you weren't following standard
 24 procedures, but it wasn't having a material effect on
 25 prosecuting the mission?

1 A. That's correct, yes.
 2 Q. And if a tactical commander, for example was trying to
 3 oversee or do a RAG review, would they then be able to
 4 do that without it being recorded?
 5 A. They would be able to see which assets --- because you
 6 could see which assets were being assigned and what the
 7 assets were doing. So if you looked at the incident you
 8 would be able to see that.
 9 Q. You also say line 5 that the SMC would be answering
 10 calls, monitoring VHF because of the volume of work
 11 rather than focusing on the role of the SMC. Did that
 12 happen often in your experience?
 13 A. Yes. It was quite an impossible position for the SMC.
 14 Q. Then you say in line 7 that {INQ010208/12} the call
 15 volume was so great that it almost paralysed the
 16 HM Coastguard operating structure, as that structure
 17 could not cope with the volume of information that was
 18 incoming.
 19 It's quite strong language "almost paralysed". In
 20 your view, was remote support from other MRCCs or the
 21 JRCC able to mitigate what you have just described?
 22 A. To a certain extent, but not fully.
 23 Q. Then you say third line from the bottom, still on the
 24 same paragraph:
 25 "We became accustomed to this, but it did mean that

1 we could not action things as perhaps would have been
 2 optimal because the resources were not there to do
 3 [it]."
 4 So would it be fair to say that you and others at
 5 Dover became accustomed to not being able to follow all
 6 HM Coastguard's Standard Operating Procedures because of
 7 the combination of volume of the crossings and also the
 8 lack of resource or staff at Dover?
 9 A. Yes. We tried to follow the process as best as possible
 10 but some of the perhaps tidying up, by putting things in
 11 the mission statement, that might come later but you
 12 would still assign the assets and deal with the incident
 13 that was going on.
 14 MS MOFFATT: Sir, I don't know if now is a good time before
 15 I turn on to the night in question.
 16 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: It probably is. We will have a break
 17 and we will come back just before 2 o'clock, five to 2.
 18 Thanks very much.
 19 (12.56 pm)
 20 (The lunch break)
 21 (1.54 pm)
 22 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Yes, Ms Moffatt.
 23 MS MOFFATT: I am going to turn imminently to the events of
 24 the night in question. Before I do, I just want to
 25 cycle back to a couple of things we talked about before

1 lunch.

2 The first is in terms of what you have told me about

3 feeling overwhelmed sometimes whilst working at Dover,

4 in the context of the staffing shortage and the volume

5 of small boat crossings, how often did this happen?

6 A. I couldn't -- it would be difficult to give

7 a percentage, but it wasn't uncommon that the

8 (inaudible) until news of what occurred many days later

9 broke. It didn't seem particularly different to normal.

10 Q. And did you do anything about it?

11 A. In -- in what regard?

12 Q. Did you raise it with anyone? Did you say to

13 Neal Gibson or someone above him, "I am feeling

14 overwhelmed on a relatively regular basis", for example?

15 A. Oh, yes, the processes were (inaudible) and also, that

16 it was -- yes, we were overwhelmed at times and the

17 resourcing levels, as I said in the statement, weren't

18 really adequate to deal with -- the system and resources

19 weren't adequate to deal.

20 Q. And then when I asked you about concerns that you had

21 raised, you said your role was very junior and so you

22 weren't likely to be listened to.

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Just going back a step, how did you raise your concerns?

25 A. Verbally with the team leader, or if we had visitors, as

121

1 in visiting .

2 Q. Visiting?

3 A. Within -- seniors within the coastguard.

4 Q. Senior management?

5 A. Yes. If we had the opportunity to speak, then we would.

6 Q. And what response did you get, if any?

7 A. That they were aware of the staffing shortages. There

8 was going to be a recruitment programme. They were

9 coming up with plans. That's the way it was. Small

10 boats was an emerging thing. In maritime terms, as

11 I said in the statement, it was -- in their opinion, it

12 was, you know, a young phenomena.

13 Q. Let's turn now to the night in question. So

14 23/24 November on that night shift, the operational team

15 at Dover consisted of you and Neal Gibson. That's the

16 operational, because obviously we know there was

17 a trainee who was non-operational at that time.

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. You were supervised by Neal Gibson.

20 A. That's correct.

21 Q. In your statement, you said your role as a MOO was

22 essentially information gathering, as you understand it.

23 You would capture information to enable the SMC,

24 Neal Gibson, to review it and make decisions.

25 A. Yes, to act as his assistant, basically .

122

1 Q. Yes, and it would -- when you say information would be

2 captured, would that be in ViSION in the tracker?

3 A. That's correct, yes .

4 Q. Those were the two written documents.

5 And the Inquiry has heard some evidence that it was

6 difficult, due again to the volume of small boats, to

7 keep ViSION completely updated as to what was happening.

8 Was that something that you could recognise?

9 A. Yes, that probably connects to the comments about, for

10 example, mission statements, trying to keep that part of

11 the process up to date, yes.

12 Q. So things would be added late.

13 A. Oh, yes, it wasn't uncommon to see mission statements

14 being added just before an incident was closed because

15 it had already been dealt with.

16 Q. In addition to things being added late, would sometimes

17 things not get added at all, or was that not something

18 that you recognise?

19 A. I don't know on the individual cases. As far as myself

20 would be concerned, if I was aware of it, it would be

21 entered.

22 Q. And in terms of how the work on each shift was divided

23 up, in your statement you have said that each shift

24 would split 1.5 hour slots and that you would do

25 a different task in each hour and a half, essentially ,

123

1 so answering routine calls for hour and a half,

2 monitoring VHF for hour and a half. Is that right?

3 A. Yes, they'd be an hour and an half slots. You may end

4 up being on routines for three hours, but they were

5 divided into an hour and a half building blocks, if you

6 like .

7 Q. So that kind of leads to my next question, which is: on

8 the night in question, from what I understand, it

9 appears that you're answering calls all night. You

10 weren't monitoring VHF because that had gone to the

11 JRCC; is that right?

12 A. That's correct.

13 Q. Was it unusual that you would be doing the same task all

14 night or was that something that you'd become accustomed

15 to?

16 A. I'd become accustomed to it.

17 Q. And there was the full trainee present, as we have

18 discussed, and Neal Gibson has told the Inquiry that

19 that person had been with coastguard with only 30 days

20 at the time. Is that your recollection also?

21 A. I don't know the number of days, but yes, a month or

22 more.

23 Q. And you say in your statement that the trainee operated

24 the WhatsApp account --

25 A. Yes.

124

1 Q. --- on the coastguard's iPhone or mobile phone since she
 2 was not able to answer the 999 calls, not having
 3 a communications ticket, as you have referred to it, and
 4 that was a logical division of labour.
 5 Who allocated that role to her?
 6 A. I can't remember. I can't remember who allocated it
 7 specifically. It was probably the SMC, but I couldn't
 8 say for certain. But apart from the 999 calls and
 9 listening to VHF, then the MOO trainees in
 10 apprenticeship sort of learned by doing, were actively
 11 involved in things.
 12 Q. Could it have been you that allocated the role to her or
 13 was that not something that a MOO would be able to do?
 14 A. I wouldn't be able to allocate it to her. I could
 15 encourage her to --- perhaps to do it. Whether --- who
 16 specifically assigned it I don't know, but I wasn't
 17 there to task her, but to support her in sort of --- in
 18 the sort of coaching or mentoring.
 19 Q. It was the SMC that would do the allocation of roles?
 20 A. Allocation of duties was SMC, yes.
 21 Q. And did she or you receive any training on how to use
 22 the mobile phone that you are aware of?
 23 A. No.
 24 Q. Did you yourself monitor or operate the mobile phone
 25 that night?

125

1 A. No, I don't believe that I did.
 2 Q. And during the shift, were you aware of the mobile phone
 3 ringing perhaps in the background?
 4 A. I don't really --- I can't recall it. I can't recall
 5 hearing it ringing, no.
 6 Q. In your statement, you say you had been briefed not to
 7 answer any calls to the mobile phone.
 8 A. That's correct.
 9 Q. And who briefed you not to answer the phone, the mobile
 10 phone?
 11 A. I can't remember specifically who it was, but that was
 12 the operating procedure because it was there only to get
 13 WhatsApp messages, because they were insistent that
 14 calls went through the ICS system and the mobile phone
 15 didn't, so don't answer it because it's not getting
 16 recorded.
 17 Q. So that's what you understood to be the standard
 18 procedure.
 19 A. That's correct.
 20 Q. The mobile phone should not be answered.
 21 A. Correct.
 22 Q. And the trainee also made a call to French coastguard at
 23 1.06 on the night.
 24 A. Yes.
 25 Q. We will look at it later, but do you know who asked her

126

1 to call Gris-Nez, the French coastguard?
 2 A. Not for certain, but it may have been me because, as
 3 I say, the process was to learn by doing, so making
 4 an outgoing phone call to get some information from the
 5 French would be a normal part, because she wasn't
 6 precluded from doing that. That was --- that was --- the
 7 training process was to learn by doing, like
 8 an apprenticeship.
 9 Q. So, as you said, you thought she was permitted to do
 10 this. That was your understanding.
 11 A. Yes. The only thing she wasn't permitted to do was
 12 999 calls and VHF.
 13 Q. So you didn't recognise her role as being one of
 14 essentially observing someone who had been in the
 15 coastguard for ---
 16 A. No, having been a MOO trainee myself until only a couple
 17 of weeks --- a few weeks before, then no, the MOO trainee
 18 was actively involved what was going on. It was learn
 19 by doing. So, as I say, the only things that she's
 20 precluded from was that, because when I was in the same
 21 position, we also undertook activities ---
 22 Q. You were doing the same?
 23 A. Yes, exactly.
 24 Q. So fair to say that it was normal, in your experience,
 25 for a trainee MOO to make calls to MRCC Gris-Nez, the

127

1 French coastguard?
 2 A. Yes, it --- yes.
 3 Q. And you have said in your statement that the trainee was
 4 answering routine calls because there was no one else to
 5 take them, and you also say that there were multiple
 6 calls going unanswered due to demand out stripping
 7 capacity.
 8 A. Yes.
 9 Q. What about remote support from the JRCC? How did that
 10 fit in? Did they ---
 11 A. Well, they ---
 12 Q. Sorry, go ahead.
 13 A. Sorry, yes, as I say, the SA could answer calls which
 14 were unanswered, because if somebody logged in at
 15 another location as Dover, then the phones for Dover
 16 would ring for them also ---
 17 Q. So, sorry, if Dover couldn't answer, the JRCC would
 18 definitely pick it up? Is that how it worked?
 19 A. Not definitely pick it up, but if somebody was logged in
 20 anywhere in the network as Dover, then it --- their phone
 21 should ring as if they were physically at Dover. They'd
 22 also interact on the phone and answer, as I say, as
 23 Dover Coastguard. So it should do that, but obviously,
 24 if there were more calls coming in, then that could
 25 occur. Then they perhaps wouldn't. But also, the

128

1 999 calls should trip over -- should be a spillover, but
 2 that didn't always work, so sometimes the excess
 3 999 calls would go to another location, but didn't
 4 always work.
 5 Q. And the calls going unanswered, are you talking about
 6 999 calls, calls from Dover port, coastguard mobile
 7 phone?
 8 A. I can't recall specifically, but if there was multiple
 9 999 calls, then you would have run out of people to
 10 answer them.
 11 Q. And in terms of communicating with your colleagues on
 12 the night, how would those of you in the operations room
 13 at Dover communicate? Was there time to speak between
 14 calls? Would you update each other?
 15 A. It varied as the night progressed, but where opportunity
 16 was, then you would try to communicate. But it wasn't
 17 always possible, no.
 18 Q. In terms of communicating with those at the JRCC, who
 19 had maintained involvement in Dover's work, how did that
 20 work?
 21 A. There was an iPad which we had set up so that it was --
 22 kept an open call between JRCC and Dover.
 23 Q. Is that TalkBox?
 24 A. No, that's a separate --
 25 Q. That's a separate thing.

129

1 A. -- separate thing. There was the TalkBox or the iComm
 2 system, so it would be via the TalkBox, the iComm system
 3 or the standalone iPad.
 4 One of the calls I did take from Tom Barnett for
 5 Neal was -- came through via the iPad.
 6 Q. So it was a direct way -- a direct line, essentially,
 7 between --
 8 A. Yes, trying to sort of keep -- as best you could,
 9 an open --
 10 Q. An open line?
 11 A. An open line to them, yes.
 12 Q. How often were you in contact with Tom Barnett, let's
 13 say, from JRCC?
 14 A. I can't recall the number of times I spoke to him.
 15 Q. And in terms of your situational awareness on the night,
 16 were you aware that the planned fixed wings surveillance
 17 flight didn't happen?
 18 A. I was aware there was an issue with the aircraft, yes.
 19 Q. And you also didn't receive the French tracker until
 20 slightly before 1.00 am, whereas information on it
 21 showed that the French had already been aware of some
 22 boat activity since the evening, 9.00 pm.
 23 A. Yes.
 24 Q. The Inquiry has seen evidence that delay from the French
 25 in sending a tracker was a common or relatively common

130

1 occurrence in 2021. Were you aware of that?
 2 A. Yes, they seemed to send it a little bit later than
 3 you -- than perhaps might have been preferred. Not
 4 always, but quite often it was the case.
 5 Q. And in your statement, you say that the relationship
 6 with French coastguard was reactive rather than
 7 proactive and if you saw, for example, a French
 8 Government vessel in French waters, you might call
 9 Gris-Nez to ask them if something was going on.
 10 A. Yes.
 11 Q. You didn't call French coastguard earlier in the shift
 12 on 23 November. Do you know why you wouldn't have done
 13 that?
 14 A. Contact with them to do that would be directed by the
 15 SMC. I wasn't asked to do that and there wasn't any,
 16 say, indicators that there was small boat activity going
 17 on, as far as I can recall.
 18 Q. And in your experience, had you got the tracker earlier,
 19 would Border Force surface assets likely have been
 20 tasked before any small boats got to the median line?
 21 A. They may have been made aware, question -- no, we would
 22 inform Border Force MCC and then they would have made
 23 a decision at what time to stand the crew up, because
 24 the crew obviously cover a two-week period, so they
 25 don't want to raise them too soon because otherwise, you

131

1 are using their hours. So they may not have mobilised
 2 them any sooner, but may have got a heads-up. But they
 3 wouldn't be going to the median line to sit there and
 4 wait, no.
 5 Q. Let's now turn to talk about the calls that Dover
 6 started receiving on the night. So the first call from
 7 a small boat was just before half past midnight. You
 8 took it and it was Incident Alpha that you opened as
 9 a result. This was a call that cut off before it could
 10 be transferred to you, but the operator gave you
 11 a number. And then when you called it back, it was not
 12 a UK ringtone and the incident was downgraded from
 13 distress as a result of there not being a UK ringtone.
 14 Was that on the basis that it was considered to be
 15 in French waters because of the --
 16 A. Yes, if it was in French waters, it'd be monitoring.
 17 Q. But it was the ringtone that made you think it was in
 18 French waters?
 19 A. Yes. There was nothing else to go on.
 20 Q. What was your understanding of the accuracy of
 21 a ringtone to determine whether a small boat was in
 22 French or UK waters?
 23 A. That it would -- it would be lined up with the
 24 territorial boundary.
 25 Q. Were you aware that it may not always be a reliable

132

1 indicator of whether you had crossed the median line or
 2 not?
 3 A. No.
 4 Q. 1.06, the Dover Coastguard was first made aware of
 5 Incident Charlie, and this is a phone call that we have
 6 already spoken about between the trainee and MRCC
 7 Gris-Nez, French coastguard. The trainee said when she
 8 was interviewed by HM Coastguard for its internal review
 9 that she wrote down the notes of what she was told on
 10 this call on a piece of paper and you entered the
 11 information on ViSION and created the incident.
 12 Is that your recollection or does that sound likely
 13 to you?
 14 A. I got the information that I put into ViSION from her,
 15 so that sounds likely, yes. I don't recall the
 16 specifics of how it was done, but that's where I got the
 17 information from.
 18 Q. Let's just look at the ViSION log. So this is the
 19 Charlie log {INQ000237/1}. There we go. Page 1. So we
 20 see there at the bottom of the page at 1.15 the
 21 first entry opening the incident.
 22 And then if we go down to page 3 {INQ000237/3},
 23 bottom of the page, at 1.19, you record the information
 24 that had been received on the call from the trainee and
 25 at the bottom of the page, you see there, last words:

133

1 "Dinghy appears in good condition."
 2 Did you discuss the contents with the trainee, the
 3 contents of the call that she had had with the French at
 4 1.06?
 5 A. Exactly what we discussed, I can't recall.
 6 Q. You can't.
 7 A. But the information I got is from what she passed me
 8 from the call.
 9 Q. Did you become aware at any point that the information
 10 "dinghy appears in good condition" was incorrectly
 11 recorded against Charlie?
 12 A. No. Well, no, because that's why I was briefed that it
 13 was a --- in relation to that incident, Charlie, the
 14 information she passed me, because obviously now you can
 15 look at the transcript perhaps and look at that, but at
 16 the time, obviously I have only got the information that
 17 she's told me. So that's the information she told me
 18 that had come from the French.
 19 Q. And after entering the information on the log, at 1.20,
 20 so a minute after, you called Tom Willows at
 21 Border Force and you relayed the information from the
 22 same call at 1.06 and, again, you said, "Think it's in
 23 good condition".
 24 And, again, did you tell Border Force this because
 25 of what you got from the trainee?

134

1 A. Yes, that she had got from the French coastguard, yes.
 2 Q. So it would be right to say that at this point of the
 3 night at around 1.20, you understood that Incident
 4 Charlie was in good condition based on what you
 5 understood the French to have told the trainee?
 6 A. Yes.
 7 Q. After this, we know that Dover received distress calls
 8 from those on board Incident Charlie. Are you aware of
 9 a call at 1.48 of around 20 minutes with Neal Gibson,
 10 the SMC, and the 16-year-old boy called Mubin or
 11 possibly known to you as "Moomin", who was known to
 12 Dover to be on board Incident Charlie?
 13 A. I was aware that he was --- subsequently was ---
 14 Q. That's a subsequent call ---
 15 A. --- aware that he was talking to somebody called Moomin.
 16 Whether that's ---
 17 Q. So that was a subsequent call. Sorry to interrupt you
 18 there. There's a subsequent call that you discuss in
 19 your statement, but there was a first call at 1.48. If
 20 you're not --- if you don't remember that one, then
 21 that's ---
 22 A. No, no, I remember I was --- so recall I heard him
 23 talking to somebody. That's why I became aware of him
 24 talking to somebody called Moomin. What boat that was
 25 on and what the position was in relation to that I don't

135

1 know. I just was aware that I heard him using that ---
 2 that name.
 3 Q. So you overheard part of it because you were sitting
 4 proximate to Neal Gibson ---
 5 A. Yes.
 6 Q. --- but it wasn't discussed with you.
 7 A. No.
 8 Q. And you are aware, I think, that a Mayday Relay was then
 9 broadcast off the back of that call.
 10 A. Yes.
 11 Q. Were you aware that it was broadcast because of what
 12 Neal Gibson had heard on that call or was that not
 13 something you were aware of?
 14 A. I wasn't aware of that. Later on, I understood from
 15 Neal that he was doing it because he wanted the Flamant
 16 to respond to the incident. But why he chose to do
 17 a Mayday Relay --- he took the call, chose to do a Mayday
 18 Relay. I was doing what I was doing. He is the SMC.
 19 I really didn't discuss it.
 20 Q. Was it usual that he wouldn't tell you what he was doing
 21 or talk through his reasons with you?
 22 A. He was SMC. I was his assistant. So he was the one
 23 making the decisions.
 24 Q. Let's go down to page 5 of the log, look at the
 25 Mayday Relay quickly. Then, sorry, actually bottom of

136

1 the page of 6 so 2.24, so just down one page. So,
 2 actually, sorry, probably — there we go {INQ000237/6}:
 3 " ... Small craft with 40."
 4 And then next page, we see the rest of the Mayday
 5 Relay, I think, {INQ000237/7}, the position — gives the
 6 position the coordinates, next to the Sandettie
 7 Lightvessel:
 8 " ... taking water and requiring immediate
 9 [assistance] any vessel that can assist to contact Dover
 10 [Coastguard]."
 11 In your witness statement, you say that you became
 12 aware of the Mayday Relay when you heard Neal Gibson
 13 making it on the radio. It was, in fact, the JRCC that
 14 broadcast the Mayday Relay. Is it likely that this is
 15 what you heard?
 16 A. No. When I heard Neal Gibson talking about a Mayday
 17 Relay, I must have heard him talking to Tom Barnett or
 18 somebody at JRCC about — because I just heard "Mayday
 19 Relay". But we wouldn't have — I don't believe we
 20 would have heard channel 16 and the broadcast of the
 21 Mayday Relay, because that was being monitored —
 22 Q. By the JRCC.
 23 A. — by the JRCC.
 24 So what I may have heard — because, as I say, it is
 25 like the length of this room away from me. I may have

1 heard him talking to them about doing a Mayday Relay as
 2 opposed to him saying "Mayday Relay", because he was
 3 doing his part and I was doing what I was doing.
 4 Q. You say it was an unusual step in your statement.
 5 A. Yes.
 6 Q. Had you previously experienced a Mayday Relay whilst you
 7 had been working at the Dover Coastguard in relation to
 8 small boat search and rescue?
 9 A. No, I don't think so.
 10 Q. And you have said that Neal Gibson didn't discuss his
 11 reasons for broadcasting the Mayday Relay. You do
 12 mention that later, he told you about the Flamant and
 13 you came to understand that was why.
 14 A. Yes, later on from him, that that's why he was doing it.
 15 Q. And what did you understand about the status of
 16 Incident Charlie from the Mayday Relay? What did it
 17 tell you about —
 18 A. That he obviously had some concerns for the vessel.
 19 Q. Did, at that point, you believe there was an emergency?
 20 A. There was certainly a — well, yes, otherwise he
 21 couldn't have the — wouldn't have done the Mayday
 22 Relay. Something going on that he needed additional
 23 assistance for and he was asking for that.
 24 Q. Let's turn back to the calls. They kept coming in. And
 25 you, as the only MOO in Dover, that was your main role

1 in the night's events; is that fair to say? Taking the
 2 calls, logging it in VISION and the tracker.
 3 A. Yes, so probably, yes.
 4 Q. Let's look at the transcript of a call at 2.25. So this
 5 is {INQ007654/1}. Just before the first Mayday Relay
 6 was broadcast at 2.27, you took a call with someone who
 7 said he was called Jonas, as recorded in the logs, or
 8 perhaps Jomash here on the first page of the transcript.
 9 If we could go to page 2, please, {INQ007654/2}, you
 10 say there:
 11 "Hello ... Coastguard."
 12 Caller says straight away, halfway down the page:
 13 "We need a rescue boat, please. We are sinking. We
 14 almost sink."
 15 In response, you tell him to tell those around him
 16 to stop shouting. You ask his name. He tells you.
 17 And then if we go on to page 3 {INQ007654/3}, you
 18 ask where he is. You say:
 19 "... whereabouts are you?"
 20 And he's unable to tell you beyond being in the
 21 middle of the sea.
 22 So after some confusion, some inaudible parts, he
 23 then tells you that the boat has lost its engine. You
 24 see down the bottom, you say:
 25 "What did you lose?"

1 "The engine is open ... we lost our engine and we
 2 don't know our direction."
 3 Page 4, please {INQ007654/4}, you ask where and when
 4 he left. He tells you Dunkirk, 9.00 pm.
 5 Page 5, please {INQ007654/5}, you ask whether he
 6 phoned anyone apart from coastguard. He says no right
 7 at the top there, although the sentence then trails off.
 8 And then still on page 5, you ask whether he can see any
 9 ships. He says he can see a big ship to the left, but
 10 far away. You ask about lights.
 11 And then, page 6 {INQ007654/6}, it cuts off and you
 12 can only get limited information on the call from the
 13 operator. So we see there at the bottom, you have got
 14 the UK operator coming in and you can only get a service
 15 provider of Vodafone and what the phone is called, which
 16 isn't a telephone number, as I understand it.
 17 So this was around five minutes. You didn't attempt
 18 to get a WhatsApp position or a geolocation position
 19 from the caller. Can you tell me why that was?
 20 A. Yes. It cut out before I could do it.
 21 Q. Is it right that without having a position, you wouldn't
 22 have been able to work out what ship he could see, for
 23 example?
 24 A. Yes. No, if he could see the ship — as I mentioned
 25 earlier, some of the ships have large lettering. Some

1 of the companies have large letters down the side. So
 2 it wasn't uncommon to ask if they could see a ship. If
 3 they could, did it have any lettering? So MSC,
 4 whatever. You could then look on CSCOPE or
 5 MarineTraffic to see where MSC — a vessel with "MSC" on
 6 the side would be and then you could work out in
 7 relation to where that was to where they were.

8 So asking about vessels or — and the lights also,
 9 because they have coloured sequences, the lights in the
 10 Channel. So if they can see — like the foreign
 11 lightvessel, for example, has got a set sequence for the
 12 light that it emits. If they can see a set of coloured
 13 lights and can tell you what that frequency is in
 14 relation to where they are, you can then work — because
 15 you know where that is. You can then work out from
 16 there where they are. So that's all aimed towards
 17 trying to find out where they are.

18 Q. So that was your aim in asking whether you could see
 19 ships and the lights, but unfortunately, this person
 20 couldn't give you any information that could identify
 21 a ship —

22 A. That's correct.

23 Q. — or lights. So without that, it would be
 24 impossible — without a geolocation information from
 25 WhatsApp or on Google Maps, you wouldn't be able to find

141

1 out what the ship was without him telling you.
 2 A. No, that's correct. With the MSC, or whatever, or
 3 Costco or any of those large companies or the
 4 cross-Channel ferries, then yes, we'd be able to work
 5 out where they are then in relation to that —
 6 Q. But in this case, it wasn't possible.
 7 A. In this case, he couldn't give the name.
 8 Q. You didn't ask for a phone number from this caller. Why
 9 was that?
 10 A. I guess because we got cut off before we got to this
 11 stage. As I said earlier, they're giving information,
 12 so you're trying to follow the natural flow of what is
 13 going. Because on English isn't their first language,
 14 so trying to keep the conversation going in a way that
 15 they obviously could understand.
 16 Q. Would you have asked had you not got cut off?
 17 A. Yes, and kept the conversation going until we actually
 18 got the information we needed.
 19 Q. We know from the Incident Charlie log that Neal Gibson
 20 identified this call as coming from Incident Charlie,
 21 the incident for which the Mayday Relay had been
 22 broadcast.
 23 Let's bring that up again, so {INQ000237/9}, please.
 24 If we go to page 9, at 2.48 in the morning, top of the
 25 page, you can see there Neal Gibson writing the entry

142

1 about the Jonas call and it includes information that,
 2 "We are sinking", that they can see a big ship, and it's
 3 identified as a repeat of Charlie.

4 Insofar as you are able to answer, do you know why
 5 this call was made a repeat of Charlie? What was it
 6 about the call that —

7 A. I don't know, sorry.

8 Q. Would you agree that the information that HM Coastguard
 9 had from the call at face value was that
 10 Incident Charlie was a sinking small boat?

11 A. From that information, yes.

12 Q. "Yes" is that?

13 A. Yes, from that information, but ...

14 Q. And would you agree that the language "We are sinking,
 15 we almost sink" is not ambiguous?

16 A. It isn't, but it's not uncommon to receive that as
 17 a message when they weren't.

18 Q. But taking the call at face value —

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. — it's consistent with the content of the Mayday Relay
 21 broadcast that Charlie was taking on water and in need
 22 of immediate assistance.

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Did you believe then that Incident Charlie was sinking
 25 and in real and imminent danger as a result?

143

1 A. It was obviously — it was obviously of concern enough
 2 for the SMC to do a Mayday Relay, which is unusual. So
 3 yes, it was in a more precarious position than
 4 ordinarily we had come to expect.

5 Q. Just after you come off the call with Jonas or Jomash,
 6 at 2.31, Neal Gibson took his second call with Mubin,
 7 and this is the one that you talk about in your
 8 statement.

9 A. Oh, right, okay.

10 Q. And you say that Neal Gibson was speaking with a raised
 11 voice. The call was animated and that you told
 12 Tom Barnett at the JRCC that Neal Gibson was having
 13 a row with the caller.

14 Given that coastguard had information that the small
 15 boat on which Mubin was board was sinking at face value,
 16 it's difficult for me to understand why you would be
 17 having a row with a caller from that small boat. Are
 18 you able to assist on that, having been there during the
 19 night?

20 A. I don't know what — obviously Neal (inaudible) — he is
 21 trying to bring the assistance and he's being — he
 22 can't do this when he's talking to somebody who is
 23 passing information that they have given already. But
 24 exactly what is in his mind, I can't comment, obviously.

25 Q. Was it something out of the ordinary to hear coastguard

144

1 staff, in your words, having a row with small boat
 2 callers?
 3 A. Asking people to stop shouting or to keep quiet, that
 4 was normal because there would be lots of noise in the
 5 background and you couldn't hear what was going on. If
 6 you listen to the transcripts, you could hear that,
 7 actually, it's difficult to hear. So asking people ---
 8 trying to get people to ...
 9 Q. Is that what you meant by having a row? That he was ---
 10 A. Yes, he was trying to calm everybody down in a raised
 11 voice to be overheard above the noise of the phone, that
 12 you've got to keep --- otherwise, you can't assist
 13 because you can't hear. You can't work out what's going
 14 on.
 15 Q. Around 10 minutes later at 2.42 in the morning --- we can
 16 take this down from the screen, thank you --- Neal Gibson
 17 spoke to French coastguard about Incident Charlie and in
 18 the course of this call, French coastguard told
 19 Neal Gibson that those on board had said, "Help me, help
 20 me, help me. We are in the water."
 21 Were you aware of this call?
 22 A. I don't recall being aware of it, no.
 23 Q. Did Neal Gibson tell you that the information from
 24 Gris-Nez was that there were potentially people in the
 25 water?

145

1 A. No, not that I recall.
 2 Q. The next calls in the chronology are two calls that you
 3 took the first at 3.06 and the second at 3.12, and let's
 4 look at the transcript of the 3.06 call first, so this
 5 is {INQ007657/1}. We see there the time and your name.
 6 If we go to page 3, which is where the transcript
 7 starts {INQ007657/3}, you see there the operator stating
 8 there was no number displayed.
 9 A. Yes.
 10 Q. So they hadn't been able --- would this be a 999
 11 operator?
 12 A. Yes, if it is on to the coastguard rescue, it's
 13 a 999 call. If it is UK coastguard, it is a routine
 14 call, and the operator would only come on if there was
 15 a 999 call and they would be there throughout ---
 16 Q. So this is a 999?
 17 A. Yes.
 18 Q. And the operator states there's no number displayed, but
 19 the operator had guessed that this was for coastguard
 20 despite the caller not asking directly for coastguard.
 21 You say:
 22 "... good guess ..."
 23 And then you start speaking to the caller from the
 24 small boat. About halfway down on page 3, caller says:
 25 "We are in the middle of the sea."

146

1 They go on to say --- you say:
 2 "Okay, go on."
 3 "Yeah, we are on our way to England and our boat, we
 4 lose our (Inaudible) --- we are sinking. (Inaudible)
 5 part of our body is in the sea and it is very cold."
 6 There's then some information about who was on
 7 board, so bottom of page 3 and top of page 4
 8 {INQ007657/4}, and then if we could go on to page 4,
 9 there is some confusion about trying to provide numbers
 10 and then the call cuts off and then you see the operator
 11 and you ask for details on the call.
 12 So the caller told you in that call that part of his
 13 body was in the sea and the small boat was sinking. Was
 14 this something that you believed at face value?
 15 A. Saying that, I've got no reason to disbelieve it other
 16 than that's quite a common thing for people to say and
 17 there were other calls that night saying similar
 18 things ---
 19 Q. But you ---
 20 A. --- that clearly weren't sinking.
 21 Q. Sorry, say that again?
 22 A. Clearly weren't --- the others weren't --- now with
 23 hindsight, looking back, you can see that the others
 24 that also said they were sinking or in difficulty
 25 weren't sinking or weren't in difficulty when they came

147

1 across. But we responded to the incidents based on the
 2 information that was reported, so taking the
 3 information. They said they are sinking, said they are
 4 in the water, gets dealt with that way.
 5 Q. You created a new incident for this call, but you didn't
 6 give it a phonetic alphabet reference and you closed it
 7 as a repeat of the migrant admin log. Let's look at the
 8 admin log where that's recorded, so {INQ000235/1}.
 9 You know what I am talking about when I say the
 10 migrant administration log?
 11 A. Yes.
 12 Q. Can you just explain your understanding of how that
 13 should be used?
 14 A. There was administrative messages around that for the
 15 small boat activity for that particular watch, as far as
 16 I was aware.
 17 Q. Why would you have put that call into the migrant
 18 administration log?
 19 A. I don't know, but I couldn't --- wouldn't be able to
 20 close it and sort of move it around without the SMC
 21 say-so.
 22 Q. Let's look at the entry. So at page 7 {INQ000235/7},
 23 the entry is at 3.22. There we see at the top --- we see
 24 you recording that the caller didn't ask directly for
 25 the coastguard and you have recorded what they said

148

1 about losing the engine, who was on board.
 2 You didn't record that the caller said that he was
 3 sinking and part of his body was in the sea. Why was
 4 that not recorded?
 5 A. Obviously I have put there are people in the sea. Also
 6 obviously now we have got the benefit of listening the
 7 transcript. I am trying to remember what was said in
 8 the call. Fine. Now, having the transcript, you can
 9 read exactly what was said, but at the time, you are
 10 listening to noisy, noisy background, what was said, so
 11 I may have missed that part of the message. So with the
 12 transcript now, it's easy to look at that, but at the
 13 time, trying to listen to the garbled messages, the wind
 14 noise, the noise of the background, etc, it is
 15 difficult. So maybe I missed that part.
 16 Q. But you have pointed out that you said there were people
 17 in the sea at the bottom, even if you hadn't perhaps
 18 strictly recorded entirely what he had said.
 19 You have told me that Neal Gibson would have been
 20 the one who would have decided to close it as
 21 a repeat ---
 22 A. Yes.
 23 Q. --- of the migrant admin log. Are you able to tell me
 24 why it was closed as a repeat of this migrant
 25 administration?

1 A. I don't know. I don't know, sorry.
 2 Q. Just a final point. All the entries on ViSION in
 3 relation to this incident are by you. Is there any
 4 chance that Neal Gibson may not have been aware of this
 5 or was that not how it worked?
 6 A. No, no, it was --- as a MOO, I wouldn't have had the
 7 authority to shut it down.
 8 Q. The caller here has before told you they were sinking
 9 and partially in the water. Did you consider that this
 10 call resembled the other call from Incident Charlie that
 11 we have just looked at, the call with Jonas or Jomash
 12 and the Mayday Relay?
 13 A. It was similar, but it's similar to other calls that
 14 night as well. On other calls on other occasions, the
 15 messages were fairly similar.
 16 Q. Let's now look at the call at 3.12. So you took this
 17 more or less directly after the 3.06 call. So
 18 {INQ007658/2}, please, and there we see the time, date,
 19 you and the caller, page 2. You say:
 20 "... what's the problem?"
 21 After introductions. The caller says:
 22 "In the water ... in the water."
 23 You ask whether the caller had just called, but the
 24 speaker either doesn't hear or doesn't understand. You
 25 ask where the caller is. The caller is unable to say

1 beyond that he's in the water. You see there at the
 2 bottom, you say:
 3 "Whereabouts in the water are you?"
 4 And he says:
 5 "In the water, in the water."
 6 "Yeah, but where in the water? Where are you near?"
 7 "(Inaudible)."
 8 Next page, please {INQ007658/3}. So you say:
 9 "Where are you?"
 10 He says:
 11 "... Finished ..."
 12 And asks for coastguard to come. You say that you
 13 need to know where they are before you can come. Caller
 14 appears to misunderstand and starts giving information
 15 about people on board. We see some numbers there. You
 16 tell him to stop shouting. The caller doesn't hear or
 17 doesn't understand. You repeat not to shout and the
 18 caller continues giving numbers.
 19 Page 4 {INQ007658/4}, you then try to get
 20 a description of the vessel. Caller says that he
 21 doesn't understand, repeats it's finished. Middle of
 22 the page, you then ask again:
 23 "Whereabouts are you?"
 24 And he says:
 25 "What you say?"

1 You say:
 2 "Where are you? Where are you?"
 3 He says he doesn't understand and you then say to
 4 dial 999 as that might give a position. Caller again
 5 asks for help.
 6 Page 5 {INQ007658/5}, you say:
 7 "Okay, where are you?"
 8 He says:
 9 "On the water, on the water."
 10 You say:
 11 "Okay, whereabouts in the water?"
 12 He says:
 13 "In the water."
 14 You say:
 15 "Okay, I get you're in the water, but whereabouts?
 16 It's a big, big sea."
 17 He says:
 18 "Please can you help me? I am finished ... finished
 19 can you please? Hello?"
 20 You say:
 21 "Yeah ... yeah whereabouts are you? The English
 22 Channel is a big place. Hello?"
 23 He says:
 24 "Finish, finish ... finish."
 25 You say:

1 "But where are you?"
 2 He says:
 3 "On the water, on the water."
 4 You say:
 5 "I know you're on the water. You don't need to keep
 6 shouting at me that you're on the water. I know that.
 7 But whereabouts on the water?"
 8 He says:
 9 "England water, England water."
 10 Page 6, please {INQ007658/6}:
 11 "Yeah, yeah."
 12 You say:
 13 "Whereabouts?"
 14 "Yeah, yeah ..."
 15 "Whereabouts are you in the English waters?"
 16 "Yeah, yeah, English water."
 17 You then tell him to hang up and dial 999 as that
 18 might give you his position and when he says it's not
 19 working, then, page 7 {INQ007658/7}, you say that it's
 20 probably because he's still in French waters, and the
 21 call ends with him saying, "No".
 22 So you have said in your statement that it was
 23 extremely important to find the location of a small
 24 boat; correct?
 25 A. Correct.

1 Q. And it's right in this call, I think, that you were
 2 trying to get information about his location and this is
 3 presumably why you were asking him, "Where are you?"
 4 The caller couldn't give you any information, any
 5 precise information; correct?
 6 A. Correct.
 7 Q. You didn't ask him to share his location using WhatsApp
 8 or try to guide him through Google Maps. Is there
 9 a reason why you didn't do that as a priority given his
 10 inability to give you any meaningful information about
 11 where he was?
 12 A. No, as you said, I've just come from --- straight from
 13 another call and getting similar information, trying to
 14 work out what they have got. Perhaps I could have asked
 15 him to dial 999 sooner because obviously, as
 16 I explained, trying to get --- dial 999 is a way of
 17 trying to get that information, because with the
 18 systems, it may give us a better location.
 19 So also, it is quite common. People say they are in
 20 the water when they mean they are in a boat which is on
 21 the water. So from experience, people say it quite
 22 often, "We are in the water". When you actually drill
 23 down into it, they are not actually in the water. They
 24 are in a boat which is on the water.
 25 Q. So it is a language problem ---

1 A. It's quite common.
 2 Q. --- as opposed to exaggeration, potentially.
 3 A. Yes, that particular part, but people saying that they
 4 are sinking, they're all going to die, there is lots of
 5 women and children, pregnant people on board, etc, then
 6 when you get there, it isn't, that's quite normal.
 7 But obviously, in this one, as you say, I have just
 8 come from the other call. If you listen to the tape ---
 9 the transcript is easy to read and think: well, what
 10 about this point? You look at things saying: well, what
 11 about doing this? What about doing that? When you
 12 actually listen to the --- to the tapes, you can hear ---
 13 you say it earlier. You're trying to keep the --- engage
 14 them in conversation, trying to get some information,
 15 but then --- and try to --- okay, where? "Well, we have
 16 just left Dunkirk or we've just left Calais or we've
 17 just left the Pan or wherever", it gives you a bit of
 18 a clue.
 19 But yes, I could have perhaps asked dial 999 sooner.
 20 Q. And his name? Might you have asked his name sooner?
 21 A. Yes, I could have done.
 22 Q. And telephone number?
 23 A. Could have done.
 24 Q. At the end of the call, as you have told us, you asked
 25 him to dial 999. You say you could have done that

1 earlier.
 2 Now, how likely was it, in your view, that that
 3 would work? You had just been on a 999 call where it
 4 wasn't possible to get any information.
 5 A. It may have --- it may have worked. I've got nothing
 6 else. He can't give me the latitude and longitude. He
 7 can't tell me where they are in relation to France or
 8 the UK, other than between the two. So any options
 9 going --- we are actually trying to help people and
 10 actually trying to bring the rescue to people, so we are
 11 trying to elicit the information.
 12 We know the people --- somebody is in distress or in
 13 trouble. We want to bring help to them. Actually, we
 14 are trying to find out the information. It's not the
 15 case of, oh, we are not --- it's not that we are not
 16 interested. We are interested and we do want to bring
 17 the care, but trying to get the information is
 18 difficult.
 19 So yes, with hindsight, it is fantastic and, yes,
 20 maybe could have asked the questions in a slightly
 21 different order, but at the time, if you listen to the
 22 transcript --- listen to the recording, that seems --- it
 23 seems logical or appropriate at the time, but obviously
 24 you can always review things and come back, oh, we could
 25 have tried this or could have tried that.

1 Q. You say that in your statement that asking them to call
 2 999 was not part of your formal training, but it was
 3 a standard practice.
 4 A. Yes.
 5 Q. Correct? Was it a standard practice — had you learned
 6 it from others at Dover? Was that where —
 7 A. Yes.
 8 Q. And the call ends with you telling the caller that if
 9 his phone is not connecting to 999, as we have seen, he
 10 is probably still in French waters. In your statement,
 11 you say you would often explain to callers — tell
 12 callers they were still in French waters if a 999 call
 13 did not connect.
 14 A. Yes.
 15 Q. Yes. Again, did you learn this as part of any formal
 16 training or was it a practice picked up at Dover?
 17 A. It's a practice at Dover, because obviously, the more we
 18 had to try and work out — because even just narrowing
 19 it down to they are in the French side, that gives you
 20 at least an indicator of which side of the Channel to
 21 start looking for people. It wasn't that we — and then
 22 we could perhaps alert the French to that. But that —
 23 yes, that was a practice at Dover.
 24 Q. In your view then, was the ability to connect to the UK
 25 999 system a reliable indicator of which side of the

157

1 median line the small boat —
 2 A. As far as I was aware, yes.
 3 Q. And as with the 3.06 call, you created a new incident
 4 for this call. No phonetic alphabet reference again and
 5 it was again closed as a repeat of the migrant
 6 administration log.
 7 If we could just go back to that log again, so
 8 {INQ000235/6}, entry at 2.22 — sorry, yes, 2.21.
 9 That's right one. You record there what happened on the
 10 call:
 11 "... I am in [the water]."
 12 "Where are you?"
 13 You record in brief form the contents of the call.
 14 You may again not be able to answer this, but why
 15 was this never assigned to any incident?
 16 A. I don't know.
 17 Q. Again, was Neal Gibson informed about this call?
 18 A. I would take it, yes, because I wouldn't be able to
 19 shut — to close a log without the SMC saying so.
 20 Q. So even though you are entering the information, he will
 21 have had to authorised it in order for you to do so.
 22 A. I can't see it would have been different, no.
 23 Q. And did you consider that this call resembled the other
 24 calls from Incident Charlie?
 25 A. All the calls, whichever boat, tend to resemble them,

158

1 a similar message.
 2 Q. Following these calls, did you understand that there was
 3 a small boat sinking and that those on board were
 4 fully — sorry, in imminent danger of fully entering the
 5 water?
 6 A. I understood that there were the reports of that, but as
 7 I said, most boats most evenings would say exactly the
 8 same or very similar.
 9 Q. So are you saying that you are unsure or that this was
 10 a case of exaggeration?
 11 A. I don't know. We're obviously still treating it as
 12 an incident, but experience showed that once you got to
 13 an incident, it was rarely as catastrophic as it was
 14 being made out, but it would still be treated as if it
 15 was.
 16 Q. No further calls that night from Mubin, Jonas. Why did
 17 you believe the calls stopped?
 18 A. Normally, they stopped once people were collected by
 19 Border Force or a lifeboat asset. That was normally the
 20 reason why they stopped.
 21 Q. Did it ever cross your mind that they might have stopped
 22 because the small boat had become swamped or people had
 23 entered the water?
 24 A. Not for a specific case, no, because that's not what
 25 the — no, it didn't.

159

1 Q. I want to just now turn to the identification of the
 2 three small boats embarked by the Valiant on the night.
 3 A. Okay.
 4 Q. So let's turn up the Charlie ViSION log, {INQ000237/11},
 5 from page 11, please. So we can see there Neal Gibson's
 6 entry at 3.50 that Valiant was on scene with the
 7 first small boat, which was stopped in the water.
 8 And then at 03.56, we see your entry providing the
 9 Mike number. That's the number for Border Force that
 10 was sprayed on the vessel.
 11 A. Yes. Well, we didn't provide the Mike number. That's
 12 from Border Force.
 13 Q. Sorry, you are entering the Mike number in the
 14 ViSION log.
 15 A. I meant — that's me recording the message I can hear
 16 between Border — Border Force MCC talking to Valiant,
 17 so I have entered into Valiant's — the asset Valiant
 18 entered in the message, because one of the things we did
 19 where we could, if you heard a transmission between
 20 one resource to another resource, you would capture the
 21 message that they had passed, so typing into Valiant the
 22 resource from MCC, what MCC was saying to Valiant.
 23 That's why that was in there.
 24 Q. Oh, I see. That's why it says from MCC, because
 25 essentially, you are listening into someone else's call

160

1 and recording it.

2 A. Yes, that's it. MCC are talking directly to Valiant and

3 when you can hear, you do it for the incidents, coastal

4 teams, etc. If you overheard a message between

5 one asset to another, as best you could, you could type

6 that into that log. So try to capture as much

7 information as possible. So yes, that's why it is

8 Valiant, from MCC to Valiant. That's my number.

9 Q. Then 4.16, bottom of the page, Neal Gibson says:

10 "Persons on board ... haven't spoken to [coastguard

11 that] evening."

12 The next page, page 12 {INQ000237/12}, 04.36, again

13 Neal Gibson:

14 "All ... disembarked ... marked and strobe ..."

15 And then 04.45 --- sorry, then --- yes, 04.45, you

16 then add information about the Valiant going to a new

17 position from the helicopter, R 163. And 05.21, we see

18 there again you recording that the Valiant was engaging

19 that vessel, and you provide the location coordinates.

20 And, actually, everything else on this page is all you

21 entering it.

22 Then 6.07 at the bottom there, you see the

23 third tasking in the vicinity of Southwest Goodwin,

24 which, as I understand it, is a different area from the

25 Sandettie area, so Valiant then moved off.

161

1 Next page {INQ000237/13}, at 6.31 there, you see you

2 again entering from MCC M959. So, again, would that

3 have been you overhearing MCC speaking to Valiant?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. So would you agree that on the face of the Charlie log,

6 the entries from 3.50 in the morning until 6.45 in the

7 morning record the three vessels embarked by the

8 Valiant, the Mike numbers for two of them, the first and

9 the third, but at no point is there any positive

10 identification of any of those small boats as being

11 Incident Charlie?

12 A. Not that I am aware of. Obviously, the Valiant entries

13 for the asset --- if you enter information into an asset,

14 if the asset's assigned to an incident, it automatically

15 populates the incident that it's assigned to. So just

16 on this case, Valiant was assigned to Incident Charlie.

17 Every update that goes in a separate screen into

18 Valiant's asset, all those updates will automatically go

19 into the log that the assets assigned to, so ---

20 Q. It is the system doing it.

21 A. Yes ---

22 Q. It's not you choosing to put it in a Charlie log. The

23 system sends it into the ---

24 A. Correct, so I --- because you can see that --- from that,

25 from the fact it says "Valiant" in the column, you

162

1 see --- where you see my name and then "Valiant" ---

2 Q. Yes.

3 A. --- where "Valiant" is in the column, that's because

4 I made the entry into Valiant's --- updating the asset,

5 updating the information from the asset, and because it

6 is assigned to an incident, the computer automatically

7 populates the incident it is assigned to. So that's not

8 me doing it for that incident. It is me updating the

9 asset and information from them and then the computer is

10 automatically updating that incident.

11 Q. Would you agree that looking at the log and seeing

12 everything --- three small boats recorded on this log is

13 capable of causing some confusion perhaps if you are not

14 in the operations room or someone coming in on the next

15 day looking at this?

16 A. It could do. That's why earlier, I sort of said using

17 JESIP and a joint decision-making model, perhaps

18 recording things in that format for specific incidents

19 and perhaps having a box that you could tick to update

20 automatically an incident and the assets assigned to as

21 opposed to it just being part of the programme, that it

22 just did update the incident, it would change the

23 process.

24 Q. Is this part of the reason why you thought coastguard

25 systems weren't designed or weren't capable of managing

163

1 the small boat ---

2 A. Yes. Yes, because generally, say you've got a person

3 who's fallen down a cliff, a coastguard team,

4 a helicopter sector are all assigned to that incident.

5 So any update they pass is going to be connected to that

6 incident because they're only dealing with the one.

7 Obviously, on this --- this and other small boats,

8 they're dealing with multiple incidents, but the system,

9 while it is assigned to a particular incident, is going

10 to start updating that incident with everything to do

11 with that asset.

12 Q. As we have seen, just looking at again those entries

13 from 03.50 til 06.46, none of them are recorded as

14 a small boat that's swarmed or sinking or people in the

15 water.

16 Did you know on the night which of the small boats

17 embarked by the Valiant was Incident Charlie?

18 A. I didn't know, no. The SMC would keep track of that.

19 Q. And from your knowledge of what was happening in the

20 operation room on the night, do you know why there was

21 no written record that Incident Charlie had been rescued

22 by the end of the night watch?

23 A. I don't know. Again, that's a matter the SMC would be

24 overseeing.

25 Q. You have told the Inquiry that when you finished your

164

1 shift on 24 November, you believed that all vessels had
 2 been accounted for. Can you explain why you believed
 3 that?
 4 A. To the best of my knowledge, for example, Rescue 163, so
 5 the helicopter call sign R 163, Rescue 163, is assigned
 6 to dealing with search and rescue. It would be
 7 coastguard 163 if it wasn't. So Rescue 163 was out
 8 doing search and rescue missions. My understanding was
 9 it went to look for three small boats in a particular
 10 area and had found three small boats in that particular
 11 area. So as far as I was aware, there weren't any
 12 outstanding. But the actual conduct of all the missions
 13 would be down to the SMC, but as far as I was aware from
 14 the information I would overhear, everybody was
 15 accounted for.
 16 Q. So you sent the helicopter. Helicopter hadn't found
 17 a sinking small boat, so your assumption or your
 18 conclusion was that ---
 19 A. Well, I hadn't sent the helicopter to the small boat.
 20 Q. Sorry, Dover Coastguard had sent ---
 21 A. Yes, but my understanding was that it has gone to look
 22 for three small boats. It found three small boats. As
 23 I said before, most of the small boats report that they
 24 are in more severe distress than they were, so finding
 25 an asset --- finding a small boat that wasn't in that

165

1 much distress in line with --- compared to what had been
 2 reported was normal.
 3 It had been sent to look for three boats. It found
 4 three boats, my understanding is. So the correlation
 5 and connection of the incidents to each other, that's
 6 a matter that the SMC would oversee.
 7 Q. But the calls you had taken, for example, from Jomash or
 8 Jonas, that was identified as Charlie, had told you that
 9 it was sinking, the Mayday Relay identified a small boat
 10 taking on water and in need of immediate assistance,
 11 none of the small boats embarked by the Valiant found by
 12 R 163 were in that condition, so what happened to that
 13 small boat?
 14 A. I don't know. As I said, all the --- 99% of the small
 15 boats will report they are in a much more serious
 16 condition than they --- adverse condition than they are.
 17 So finding boats which weren't anywhere near as badly as
 18 was being reported was normal, so there was --- and
 19 obviously, in relation to boats, small boats, you don't
 20 know how many have set off. You don't know how many
 21 you're looking for. You are trying to piece --- and with
 22 no air assets, apart from the helicopter doing its
 23 search, you're --- you are trying to work out from all
 24 that what how many incidents you have actually got.
 25 So you don't know how many have set off. It's not

166

1 like you've set off on a cruise from one location to
 2 another where you know it starts at this time and
 3 finishes this time. So you don't know how many you are
 4 looking for really because you don't know how many
 5 started. You're getting multiple calls from multiple
 6 boats all saying that they are in a worse position than
 7 they actually are, but they are treated as if they are
 8 in a sinking position.
 9 How they get correlated, how they get closed off,
 10 etc, that's --- the SMC would do that. But as far as
 11 I was aware, the boats we were looking for had been
 12 found, but my view on it or opinion on it wasn't
 13 relevant because I am in the part of --- the decision of
 14 what had been found or not was a matter for the SMC, not
 15 for a MOO.
 16 Q. But in terms of your state of mind, your --- your belief
 17 at the end of the night watch, did you believe that
 18 those on board Charlie, the Jonas call, for example, had
 19 he exaggerated their level of distress and in fact they
 20 were not sinking, whereas they said they were?
 21 A. My belief was that we'd recovered and rescued everybody
 22 that we had gone to look for or were looking for. As
 23 I say, it was normal that people would overstate the
 24 level of distress that they were in, so I had nothing to
 25 tell me any different.

167

1 And I wasn't overseeing directly the actual
 2 resources. Sorry, I can't --- as far as I was aware, we
 3 had managed throughout the busyness of the night, etc,
 4 to recover and rescue everybody that we thought we were
 5 looking for. We didn't know --- I didn't know ---
 6 I wasn't aware. I thought we had managed, actually, to
 7 achieve success all round and had recovered everybody,
 8 because we were trying to find everybody.
 9 The questions and resources, etc, are --- we worked
 10 very hard to try and resolve this. It's --- being in
 11 a small boat in the English Channel is going to be in
 12 a difficult position, so actually trying to (inaudible)
 13 is something you are trying to resolve. No matter what
 14 the state people said the boat was in, you still would
 15 try to resource it and rescue it. It wasn't a case of,
 16 "Oh, no, it is going to be better than they said, so we
 17 won't". No, everybody is trying to rescue and do the
 18 recovery.
 19 So --- and as far as I was aware, that night ---
 20 again, you don't know how many have set off, so you
 21 don't actually know how many to account for. It's not
 22 like it's --- I don't know. Somebody hasn't given you
 23 a list of: these are the people that have started off.
 24 You've got to find people. You don't know how many you
 25 are looking for.

168

1 Q. But if you sent out a helicopter and a helicopter --- to
 2 look perhaps for a sinking small boat and the helicopter
 3 didn't find it, you might assume, with the history of
 4 what you knew about exaggeration, that actually perhaps
 5 it wasn't sinking in the first place.
 6 A. If it was sinking, you'd be finding debris or --- etc,
 7 but the search pattern, the --- the assignment of the
 8 rescue helicopter to the incident and a search pattern
 9 that's matching the SMC and the Rescue 163 crew, exactly
 10 what they thought, what they found, etc, that
 11 interpretation was not something that I would have been
 12 involved in. That's something that the SMC would do.
 13 It's not a MOO's task.
 14 Q. Before the break, you talked about those on board small
 15 boats being coached or told to exaggerate their
 16 situation. Did you and others at Dover ever consider
 17 that those on board, not being mariners, in
 18 an inherently perilous situation, given the nature of
 19 the small boats, may have genuinely believed themselves
 20 to be in grave danger perhaps more than objectively was
 21 the case?
 22 A. Yes, you are going to be in a difficult position, but to
 23 say the boat's sinking or there's pregnant people on
 24 board and they are actually giving birth now, when you
 25 get there and it's a boat full of males, clearly that's

169

1 an exaggeration. So yes, there were exaggerations, but,
 2 you know, claiming --- the lady that I mentioned earlier
 3 where they said, "Oh, she's unconscious, I'll talk to
 4 her", well, she's clearly not unconscious then.
 5 So yes, it's going to be a difficult position. It
 6 would be very unpleasant, and that's obviously why
 7 HM Coastguard classified vessels as being in distress.
 8 But when you have got, as I say, reports of pregnant
 9 people, people actually giving birth at the time, people
 10 unconscious or with various injuries, and you get there
 11 and actually that's not the case, so clearly there
 12 were --- some of the calls were exaggerated.
 13 Q. Were you involved in any handover to the day watch on
 14 24 November?
 15 A. No, that would be the SMC to SMC.
 16 Q. Do you recall whether Neal Gibson or anyone at Dover
 17 gave a handover to Richard Cockerill when he started his
 18 shift at 5.00 am?
 19 A. I don't recall that, no.
 20 MS MOFFATT: Thank you, Mr Downs. I don't have any further
 21 questions for you.
 22 Sir, I don't know if you have any.
 23 Questions by SIR ROSS CRANSTON
 24 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Mr Downs, you mentioned earlier in the
 25 evidence about this leaflet you saw ---

170

1 A. Yes.
 2 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: --- with the figures drawn and so on.
 3 You don't have that any more?
 4 A. I don't, sorry, no. I don't know who --- I saw it at
 5 Dover Coastguard. Who had it where it came from,
 6 I'm not sighted on, sorry.
 7 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: No, okay. Well, Mr Downs, thanks very
 8 much for your evidence. It has been very helpful, so
 9 thank you very much indeed.
 10 We will have a break and then we will have
 11 Mr Cockerill.
 12 (The witness withdrew)
 13 (2.52 pm)
 14 (A short break)
 15 (3.03 pm)
 16 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Mr Cockerill, good afternoon. Mr Davies
 17 has got some questions for you, but could you firstly
 18 read out the affirmation?
 19 MR RICHARD COCKERILL (affirmed)
 20 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Yes, thank you.
 21 Mr Davies.
 22 Questions by MR DAVIES
 23 MR DAVIES: Mr Cockerill, could you start please by
 24 repeating your full name for the transcript?
 25 A. Richard Michael William Cockerill.

171

1 Q. Thank you.
 2 Thank you, Mr Cockerill, for coming to assist the
 3 Inquiry today and thank you for providing a witness
 4 statement running to, I believe, 34 pages and signed by
 5 you, I think, on 31 October 2024; is that right?
 6 A. Correct.
 7 Q. I want to start, please, by asking you a few questions
 8 about your career in the coastguard and your
 9 qualifications, if I may.
 10 A. Okay.
 11 Q. So starting with when you joined the coastguard,
 12 His Majesty's Coastguard, 2012 I believe that was, and
 13 you joined as a coastguard watch assistant.
 14 A. Correct.
 15 Q. Am I right in thinking that's not a position which
 16 exists today?
 17 A. Correct.
 18 Q. And has since --- it is described --- correct me --- as
 19 an entry level position.
 20 A. Correct.
 21 Q. But since then, you have progressed through the ranks of
 22 the coastguard, taking the level of senior maritime
 23 operations officer in 2016; is that right?
 24 A. Correct.
 25 Q. And you obtained your SMC qualification shortly

172

1 thereafter in around May 2017.
 2 A. I can't remember the exact date, but that sounds about
 3 right, yes.
 4 Q. And, finally, you were promoted to your current position
 5 of team leader in June 2021; is that right?
 6 A. Correct.
 7 Q. And on the night of the events the Inquiry is looking
 8 into, you were a leader of a team at the JRCC in
 9 Fareham; is that right?
 10 A. Yes.
 11 Q. Now, could I just ask you, please, the difference
 12 between the team leader position and the SMC role? Am
 13 I right in thinking the team leader is a pastoral line
 14 management position whereas the SMC is a qualification
 15 and an operational role in a search and rescue mission?
 16 A. That's correct, yes.
 17 Q. Is that a fair summary?
 18 A. Yes.
 19 Q. Thank you.
 20 And looking at that distinction, if you are in work
 21 at the JRCC, are you always the SMC, if you are in, or
 22 could you be the team leader, but doing administrative
 23 functions, for example, or something of that nature when
 24 someone else of equivalent rank would be the SMC?
 25 A. Correct. An SMC could be done by — or is

173

1 a qualification that could be gained by a senior
 2 maritime operations officer, which is a role below
 3 a team leader, and the team leader is, as you say,
 4 a line management role, and we wouldn't always assume
 5 the role of an SMC on a watch. It would be done by
 6 different people at different times to — to ensure that
 7 they can maintain their competencies.
 8 Q. Thank you.
 9 And when you qualified as an SMC, were you given any
 10 specific training in relation to small boats search and
 11 rescue?
 12 A. At the time I qualified, no.
 13 Q. And am I right in thinking you are required by
 14 His Majesty's Coastguard to re-validate that
 15 qualification every five years?
 16 A. Correct.
 17 Q. And am I right in thinking you re-validated your SMC
 18 qualification in around March 2023?
 19 A. That would sound about right, yes.
 20 Q. When you did that re-validation exercise, were you then
 21 provided any specific training in relation to small
 22 boats search and rescue?
 23 A. No. The re-validation process is slightly different to
 24 when you take it for the first time.
 25 Q. What are the differences, please?

174

1 A. It — the re-validation process is looking at your
 2 competency to be able to manage a search and rescue
 3 operation and your ability to search and plan
 4 appropriately. There is no wider learning, as far as
 5 I can remember, with regards to refresher things. The
 6 small boats training is more an ongoing process.
 7 Q. I see.
 8 Thinking more generally, what formal search and
 9 rescue training in relation to small boats did members
 10 of the JRCC receive?
 11 A. The specific training would be through the production of
 12 Standard Operating Procedures and updates using the
 13 coastguard information portal, known as "hot topics".
 14 That's the training that we have received.
 15 Q. Do you recall ever receiving a presentation or something
 16 of that sort around August/September 2021?
 17 A. Not that I can recall.
 18 Q. Okay. Thank you.
 19 Thinking now about the relationship between the JRCC
 20 and MRCC Dover, please, I am right in thinking the JRCC
 21 is the default zone flexing station for the entire
 22 coastguard network; is that right?
 23 A. Correct.
 24 Q. And that would apply to MRCC Dover as much as any other
 25 MRCC.

175

1 A. Correct.
 2 Q. Now, in terms of the support that can be provided as
 3 part of the zone flexing function, is it just SMC
 4 support that can be provided remotely or, for example,
 5 could a SMOO or a MOO operate remotely and controlled by
 6 an SMC somewhere else?
 7 A. Yes. So the support that can be provided can be
 8 anything from monitoring an individual channel, such as
 9 channel 16, right all the way up to actually taking
 10 an entire station offline and it being managed remotely.
 11 Q. And thinking about your experience at the JRCC, across
 12 2021, how frequently were the JRCC being asked to cover
 13 remotely for MRCC Dover, that you can recall?
 14 A. It certainly happened. I can't remember as to how
 15 frequently, but it was certainly something that was not
 16 uncommon.
 17 Q. And in relation to that cover, are you able to assist
 18 the Inquiry with how much of it related — or indirectly
 19 or directly related to small boats?
 20 A. The remote assistance that was offered would normally
 21 have been to take their default SAR zones. The small
 22 boats would then be done specifically by the operators
 23 at Dover.
 24 Q. Did coastguard officers at the JRCC notice any change to
 25 their working patterns as a result of the increase in

176

1 small boat crossings?
 2 A. Sorry, did the operators at the JRCC ---
 3 Q. Yes. For example, were you being asked to cover so much
 4 that it affected your work patterns at the JRCC?
 5 A. I think because we were the default for the network, we
 6 were used to taking additional functions, additional
 7 zones on a regular basis from the network, so it didn't
 8 really have an impact on us, I don't think.
 9 Q. And in your view, was the zone flexing system
 10 an effective way of providing cover to MRCC Dover in
 11 relation to small boats?
 12 A. I think the way the network operates, yes, it is
 13 effective. It does what it's designed to do.
 14 Q. The Inquiry has heard a lot of evidence about how
 15 important it is to be in the room and the information
 16 that's communicated orally between those involved in
 17 a search and rescue mission.
 18 A. Yes.
 19 Q. Do you think that's a possible limitation of remote
 20 cover; that your --- that the SMC might not be part of
 21 that dynamic, if I can put it that way?
 22 A. Being a remote SMC does have its challenges. It is
 23 certainly more difficult to maintain overall situational
 24 awareness being remote. That's not to say it doesn't
 25 work. It can be effective, but it's no substitute for

177

1 actually being there.
 2 Q. If I could just explore with you some of those
 3 challenges. What do you think they are, in terms of
 4 your answer previously?
 5 A. I think being there, you pick up on phone calls, radio
 6 communications that, being remote, obviously you are not
 7 privileged to. So you tend to lose the feel of what's
 8 actually happening in the room. You are relying on
 9 being told information rather than actually hearing it
 10 yourself firsthand.
 11 Q. So if something --- you may perhaps, for example, lose
 12 a sense of urgency of a particular phone call, for
 13 example, if you were remote that someone else had taken,
 14 for example.
 15 A. You could do, yes.
 16 Q. I want to ask you now, please, about the migrant admin
 17 ViSION log. That is {INQ000235/1}, please, if we could
 18 just bring that up. This is a document which you are
 19 familiar with. Am I right in thinking that?
 20 A. Correct.
 21 Q. And this is where I believe, and correct me if I am
 22 wrong, incidents, small boats incidents, which were
 23 unable to be attributed at the moment they were
 24 received, the details of those incidents were placed
 25 into this log rather than, for example, a log with

178

1 an alphanumeric reference number; is that right?
 2 A. Yes.
 3 Q. And could we please next bring up your statement at
 4 {INQ009634/19}, please. You describe at paragraph (f),
 5 subparagraph (f) there, that you wouldn't typically
 6 access information in the admin log if you were acting
 7 as an SMC.
 8 Was that your own practice or was that something
 9 that was recognised across the coastguard --- the SMC
 10 function across His Majesty's Coastguard to be the
 11 appropriate way to treat this migrant admin log?
 12 A. I think the contents of what goes in the administration
 13 log you would be told about verbally. So as an SMC, you
 14 would --- I would hope that I was being told everything
 15 that is being put in that log verbally. The purpose of
 16 that is to record it as well, so that there is a written
 17 record of it. But as an SMC, it's not something, as
 18 I say, that you would access regularly because you
 19 would --- I would hope that the information that's going
 20 in there would have been told to me by another means.
 21 Q. So when you say "verbally", thinking about your position
 22 at the JRCC ---
 23 A. Yes.
 24 Q. --- remote from MRCC Dover ---
 25 A. Yes.

179

1 Q. --- how do you mean "verbally"?
 2 A. So if I was remote SMC at the JRCC, I would use what we
 3 call a TalkBox, which is an internal communications
 4 method using the coastguard communications system, and
 5 I would be in regular verbal contact with whoever was in
 6 the room. And if I was operating remotely, it may be
 7 something that I would look at more frequently, but if
 8 I was actually within the room, then I would expect to
 9 be told it verbally. I think a lot of it depends on
 10 where you are based. If you are within the room,
 11 obviously you are party to the conversations, but
 12 remotely, it is probably something that you would more
 13 look at frequently.
 14 Q. I understand. Thank you.
 15 I want to talk to you now about the provision of
 16 cover to MRCC Dover that you gave prior to 23 and
 17 24 November 2021. I would like to start with first your
 18 understanding of what the staffing situation was at
 19 MRCC Dover. Did you have any sense of that prior to the
 20 events of 23 and 24 November?
 21 A. I think MRCC Dover had its challenges in maintaining
 22 suitable staff numbers, which was borne out by the
 23 amount of support that was offered and given throughout
 24 the course of the year, be it a lone operator or two.
 25 I think things were starting to increase, were starting

180

1 to get better.
 2 Q. How did you become aware of those difficulties, if you
 3 don't mind my asking? Was it through colleagues? Word
 4 of mouth?
 5 A. I mean, the way the national network works is that we
 6 would be asked by the network commanders to offer Dover
 7 assistance or to take a zone off of them and add it to
 8 our usual zones. That generally is how we were aware of
 9 it.
 10 Q. So an increase in frequency of being asked to offer
 11 support to MRCC Dover?
 12 A. Correct.
 13 Q. Could we bring up please {INQ000233/10}. This is the
 14 network management log for the 24 November 2021. Can we
 15 just move to the bottom of the page, the very last
 16 entry, it looks like it's cut off. There we are. You
 17 can see your name at the bottom there and you are
 18 referred to in this log as: Op Deveran support.
 19 Could you help the Inquiry, please, with what was
 20 Operation Deveran support?
 21 A. Operation Deveran was the — was what was used to
 22 describe small boat activity. The Op Deveran support
 23 was me being present at MRCC Dover in person for
 24 a period of time to observe and learn firsthand how it
 25 was dealt with within the ops room in MRCC Dover.

181

1 Q. I see. Could we bring up, please, {INQ000409/1}. It's
 2 a spreadsheet so I think we will need the native
 3 version, please. As we see at the top left there this
 4 is the Dover watch bill. Could we please go to row 85
 5 of this spreadsheet? Thank you.
 6 Now, your name appears there with your colleague at
 7 the JRCC Tom Barnett as red days.
 8 Was red days here the same thing as Operation
 9 Deveran support? Was it referred to as red days as well
 10 as Operation Deveran?
 11 A. Sorry, which, which red days are we referring to?
 12 Q. Forgive me. It's row 83 just by the cursor there?
 13 A. Okay.
 14 Q. Just above your name. Was your Operation Deveran
 15 support role ever colloquially referred to or otherwise
 16 as red day support?
 17 A. Not that I'm aware of.
 18 Q. Okay. So could we move in the spreadsheet, please, to
 19 column "WQ", please. Thank you. This appears to be the
 20 first day on which this red day support was provided.
 21 Was this a time when you were at MRCC Dover in person?
 22 A. No, that would have probably been when I was present at
 23 the JRCC.
 24 Q. Okay. Perhaps just taking a step back. How would one
 25 be selected to provide Operation Deveran support?

182

1 A. It would be determined by the network commanders on the
 2 day to see if we had a suitable number of SMCs and who
 3 in the network would be available. Dover support
 4 primarily came from the JRCC and MRCC Humber, so they
 5 would look to free up an SMC at the JRCC or Humber to be
 6 able to provide SMC assistance to Dover if it was an SMC
 7 in particular that they required.
 8 Q. Yes. We can see it on the left—hand side of the screen
 9 there that in fact there is a range of qualifications ,
 10 MOOs and SMOOs, etc.
 11 So on this first day that it appears this support
 12 was being provided — well, first of all , does the
 13 September dates that we see here accord with your
 14 recollection of when you first started providing support
 15 to MRCC Dover?
 16 A. I'm afraid I can't recall that.
 17 Q. Can you roughly remember when, when it started in your
 18 career?
 19 A. It — it was in 2021 is, is the most I can narrow it
 20 down to I'm afraid.
 21 Q. Okay. Well, let's just stick with this spreadsheet for
 22 the moment. It seems to record your attendance or your
 23 cover rather to MRCC Dover. You don't recall the first
 24 day that we see here that's highlighted?
 25 A. I'm afraid not.

183

1 Q. If we scroll along, please, if we could highlight row 85
 2 so we can see Mr Cockerill's days and just scroll along,
 3 please, until we come to the next entry.
 4 There we are. We see another entry there
 5 25 September — 26 September rather, 27 September again
 6 please onwards and then on the 9 October and finally can
 7 we move forward please to the 22 November.
 8 There is a little bit of a gap here which we will
 9 come to. So this period of time is where you were
 10 stationed at MRCC Dover —
 11 A. Correct.
 12 Q. — around the time of the events with which the Inquiry
 13 is concerned.
 14 Prior to this period, we can see that you were
 15 providing this cover to MRCC Dover on five occasions.
 16 Does that accord with your recollection of the amount of
 17 cover you provided; there was perhaps a handful of times
 18 before you eventually —
 19 A. Yes, it would.
 20 Q. Do you see that?
 21 A. It would be about right, yes.
 22 Q. I gather from your statement that you provided to the
 23 Inquiry this was the first time, 22 November that you
 24 had been there in person, is that right?
 25 A. That I recall , yes.

184

1 Q. That you recall, okay. You may be able to help with
 2 this, but you may not. Could we just go back please to
 3 the beginning of the spreadsheet, well, to the September
 4 dates we were looking at previously.
 5 Perfect. Most of these entries are day entries
 6 apart from the four nightshifts we see here, not for
 7 you. Are you able to assist with why most of the red
 8 day cover that was provided to MRCC Dover was during the
 9 day when the Inquiry has heard quite a lot about calls
 10 which were coming through in the early hours of the
 11 morning and would be covered by a night shift. So, why
 12 were they day shifts please?
 13 A. I would say predominantly the reason would be because
 14 the boats would leave the shore under cover of darkness
 15 with a view to arriving into the middle of the English
 16 Channel for about daybreak or just after. So most
 17 support was required for when UK assets were actually
 18 going to be engaged in operations.
 19 Q. I see. So the focus was on supporting the operation of
 20 assets rather than the call collection phases perhaps,
 21 is that fair?
 22 A. I think it would depend on the assessment as to how busy
 23 it was expected to be.
 24 Q. So prior to the first time you provided this cover, were
 25 you given any training about what to expect at

185

1 MRCC Dover?
 2 A. I wasn't given any specific training that I can recall.
 3 That was one of the reasons for my attendance at Dover,
 4 was to gain experience and understand how it was
 5 happening. Most or all of the support prior to that had
 6 been as a remote SMC that I can recall.
 7 Q. And can you help us with this please. How did it come
 8 to be that you were going to be there in person? Did
 9 you volunteer?
 10 A. I requested it, yes.
 11 Q. You requested it. Why? Why?
 12 A. To help me get a better understanding of the types of
 13 calls that were received, how they were taken and as
 14 a remote SMC, as I stated earlier, you miss a lot of the
 15 conversations that happen in the room and a feel for it.
 16 So my attendance at MRCC Dover was to provide me with
 17 that understanding of the types of phone calls you get,
 18 how often they are which you don't always understand as
 19 a remote SMC.
 20 Q. So this was something you requested of your own
 21 initiative. Were you encouraged to do it by those above
 22 you or was this something which was suggested to you to
 23 be a good idea or was it your own idea that you wanted
 24 to do this?
 25 A. I can't --- I can't recall. The idea of me going was

186

1 certainly not put off. It was encouraged. I can't
 2 remember specifically whether it was something that
 3 I was directed to do, but it was something that
 4 I certainly volunteered to do.
 5 Q. I understand. Thank you. So can we go to
 6 {INQ006233/1}, please. This is a request for overtime
 7 at MRCC Dover that went out I believe on a wide
 8 circulation, all stations, requesting support for the
 9 week with which the events took place.
 10 Am I right in thinking, based on what you have told
 11 us today, that your presentation at Dover had nothing to
 12 do with this request for overtime, your physical
 13 presence at Dover I should say --- we will come to the
 14 time you started in a moment --- but your physical
 15 presence was nothing to do with this request for
 16 overtime. You were going to be there in any event?
 17 A. I was going to be there whether this --- yes.
 18 Q. This was preplanned since when?
 19 A. I can't remember the timescale that it was preplanned,
 20 but it certainly will have been a few weeks beforehand.
 21 Q. Do you recall personally seeing this email at the time?
 22 A. I --- yes, I am aware of the email.
 23 Q. And when you saw the email, what action did you take, if
 24 any?
 25 A. When this email came out, this is when I discussed the

187

1 ability to start earlier to assist night shift. As
 2 I said earlier, the vast majority of the work, the help
 3 that was required, was during the day shift which is why
 4 that particular week I was working four days in a row.
 5 If I had have worked the night shift it would have
 6 been for a period of 12 hours which would have taken me
 7 out of 24 hours of day shift work. So I suggested
 8 a 5:5 to help assist the night shift at the end of the
 9 night and then be around to assist the day shift for the
 10 majority of the day.
 11 Q. Around that daybreak period that you referenced earlier.
 12 A. Yes.
 13 Q. You mentioned discussing this email. Who did you
 14 discuss it with, please?
 15 A. I can't remember who exactly it was I discussed it with.
 16 Q. Might it have been the small boat tactical commander
 17 George Papadopoulos?
 18 A. It could have been. It might have even been Duncan Ley,
 19 it might have been the originator of the email himself.
 20 But I can't remember specifically who it was, but it was
 21 agreed.
 22 Q. During that discussion, did the person who you spoke to
 23 about it tell you anything about the red day forecast,
 24 for example that had happened on the 22 November, that
 25 it was going to be a busy period at Dover?

188

1 A. My recollection is that when I started on the Monday, we
 2 were aware that it was going to be a challenging week.
 3 The actual numbers was unknown but we were aware that it
 4 was amber and red days, yes.
 5 Q. Could we please go back to the spreadsheet {INQ000409},
 6 please. Thank you. Can we go to the November dates,
 7 please, 22 November, please.
 8 We can see two comments on the boxes of the 23rd and
 9 24th. Could you just hover the cursor over the first
 10 box on the 23rd please, the red dot, or expand it so we
 11 can see the comment, thank you.
 12 So this is a comment as you indicated, early finish
 13 on the 23rd to allow enough rest before a 5 o'clock
 14 start shift on Wednesday.
 15 A. (Nods).
 16 Q. As part of the discussion — you received this on the
 17 22nd you worked the day shift. Was there any discussion
 18 of skipping the following day shift and then working the
 19 night of the 23rd rather than simply starting early and
 20 working day shifts if you understand my meaning?
 21 A. Not that I can recall, no.
 22 Q. Okay. And was it your suggestion to start early or was
 23 it something that was suggested to you?
 24 A. I think it was my suggestion, if I remember correctly.
 25 Q. If we can take that off the screen, please. Thank you.

189

1 Can we bring up your statement, {INQ009634/13},
 2 paragraph 28. You explain what your role was at
 3 MRCC Dover in that paragraph. You say you attended in
 4 an observational capacity supporting/observational
 5 capacity as a maritime co-ordinator, which is
 6 essentially the same function as a MOO.
 7 Why are you referred to, if you can assist with
 8 this, please, as a maritime co-ordinator rather than
 9 a MOO? What attracts that different title?
 10 A. The maritime co-ordinator is also referred to as
 11 a mission co-ordinator. Again it's a lower
 12 qualification to the SMC, but the maritime co-ordinator
 13 was part of my role, the vast majority of my role on the
 14 days there was exactly to co-ordinate assets, which is
 15 essentially what I was doing.
 16 Q. If I could put it another way. So how is it different
 17 to a MOO and why does it have a different name?
 18 A. I suppose it's used to differentiate because I am a team
 19 leader, so it's to differentiate that I am not a MOO,
 20 I am a team leader. But at that time, I was not
 21 operating in the capacity as a team leader, but as
 22 a co-ordinator.
 23 Q. You go on to say in paragraph 29 that neither
 24 Neal Gibson or James Crane took a break and so you
 25 weren't required to provide cover. Had you anticipated

190

1 perhaps providing cover to them?
 2 A. It — it was a possibility. If it would have happened,
 3 it meant that I was suitably qualified to cover their
 4 breaks. As it is, they didn't and so I wasn't required
 5 to.
 6 Q. So, in principle, even though you were there in
 7 an observational capacity you could have if need
 8 required act as SMC?
 9 A. Correct.
 10 Q. Did you act as an SMC at any point during your shift?
 11 A. No.
 12 Q. Could we bring up, please, {INQ000258/1}, please. This
 13 is incident Tango. Could we go to {INQ000258/5},
 14 please. The reason that I want to take you to this,
 15 it's because we can see an entry midway down the page
 16 here from George Close at 11 minutes past 10 in the
 17 morning and he conducts a RAGs assessment, which the
 18 Inquiry has heard about, and refers to you as the SMC in
 19 relation to that exercise.
 20 Can you help us, please, with why he considered you
 21 to be the SMC at this point or in relation to this
 22 particular entry?
 23 A. The only reason, the only thing I can suggest for what
 24 is because I worked closely with George Close at the
 25 JRCC and that's the role that he was familiar in which

191

1 I operated. So that's the only reason I can think
 2 because we did have a conversation that day on the
 3 telephone. I can only assume that that was
 4 an assumption on his part.
 5 Q. Can we go to {INQ000235/1}, please, which is the admin
 6 log we have previously seen, and at {INQ000235/13},
 7 please. We can see an entry from you at 9.31, an SMC
 8 comment. Why does it appear as an SMC comment in
 9 relation to your name when you weren't acting as the
 10 SMC? Are you able to help with that, please?
 11 A. I can only assume that that's an error on my part in
 12 that I was used to putting SMC comments in incidents,
 13 and working at pace I can only assume that I've actually
 14 misused the wrong, the wrong tag for it.
 15 Q. Would you consider an entry like that to possibly
 16 confuse —
 17 A. I can.
 18 Q. — someone?
 19 A. I can understand how it may be confusing, yes.
 20 Q. And can we go back to your statement please at
 21 paragraph 51, {INQ009634/29}. Thank you. Sorry, it's
 22 actually paragraph, yes, the end of paragraph 51:
 23 "The closure of an incident requires authority from
 24 a SMC. As explained earlier in my statement ..."
 25 You go on to say:

192

1 "I cannot recall if I had a conversation with
 2 James Crane in relation to the closure of
 3 Incident Alpha 1 as a repeat or whether I authorised
 4 myself as SMC to close this incident."
 5 So even though you weren't the SMC, you appear to
 6 have acted with the authority of an SMC. Was that
 7 something that would happen if you had that
 8 qualification ?
 9 A. Looking at that entry, I can't remember the specifics of
 10 it which is why I was unsure as to how it was closed.
 11 But I think the incident that I closed I would have
 12 informed the SMC about that incident and sought his
 13 authorisation for it to be closed.
 14 Q. There was only one dedicated SMC if I could put it that
 15 way.
 16 A. Mm--hm.
 17 Q. And you were there in an observational capacity,
 18 although SMC qualified. Why not have two SMCs? Why not
 19 have James Crane or Neal Gibson and you dividing up the
 20 work in the ops room? Why is that not possible or was
 21 it possible?
 22 A. Usually where you have multiple operations in different
 23 parts of the country yes, it would be sensible for -- to
 24 have a different SMC for each incident. However, the
 25 small boats is multiple events of one incident, so to

1 maintain that situational awareness it does help to have
 2 one SMC in charge of them all.
 3 Q. So the particular challenge of small boats, is that what
 4 you are saying, means it is beneficial to have one
 5 person with oversight of everything that's happening?
 6 A. Yes. Due to the number of incidents that can be
 7 created, it helps if you have that overall situational
 8 awareness if you have just the one person in charge
 9 making the decisions.
 10 Q. I want to talk to you now about the events immediately
 11 prior to your watch on 24 November. We have seen the
 12 entry you can take the statement off screen, please.
 13 We have seen the entry from George Papadopoulos on
 14 the watch bill discussing your early start and early
 15 finish the day before so that you were sufficiently
 16 rested.
 17 You describe in your statement how 23 November was
 18 a day which you worked at MRCC Dover?
 19 A. Correct.
 20 Q. And it was a busy shift, in your words. You say that
 21 you worked 7 to 7 that day, is that something you recall
 22 happening?
 23 A. Yes.
 24 Q. And when you say it was a busy shift, do you mean it in
 25 relation to small boats incidents or other work with

1 which MRCC Dover was concerned?
 2 A. That, I'm afraid, I can't recollect .
 3 Q. If I were to suggest to you that there were in fact no
 4 small boats incidents on the 23rd of November, does that
 5 accord with your recollection of what happened or can't
 6 you say one way or the other?
 7 A. I can't remember. There's nothing that stands out
 8 specifically about the 23rd.
 9 Q. Is it possible that you are perhaps mistaken about the
 10 level of activity on the 23rd or how busy your shift was
 11 or do you remember that quite clearly?
 12 A. I -- I -- I can't remember the level, I can't recollect
 13 the level of work that was involved. It might not have
 14 been relevant to small boats, but I -- there probably
 15 would have possibly been other things going on. It might
 16 have been reviewing or discussing small boats activity .
 17 I'm afraid I can't recollect .
 18 Q. Okay. And are you certain that it was definitely
 19 a 7 until 7 shift on 23rd of November?
 20 A. Having seen the entry, I can't recollect what time it
 21 was I actually finished on the 23rd.
 22 Q. Okay. And when you were about to start your shift on
 23 the 24th, did you feel sufficiently rested and --
 24 A. Yes.
 25 Q. -- able to take on what you were about to take on?

1 Okay. I want to talk to you now about the moment
 2 just before you entered the ops room at 5 am.
 3 At that moment, before you walked through the door,
 4 were you expecting to receive a handover from
 5 Neal Gibson?
 6 A. I wasn't expecting to receive a handover. That is
 7 usually given when you change over a full watch shift.
 8 I would have expected a brief of what was ongoing, if
 9 there was anything ongoing, but not a full handover.
 10 Q. When you say a "full handover" you mean a presentation,
 11 a PowerPoint presentation?
 12 A. Correct.
 13 Q. Were you expected -- would you expect to, at that time,
 14 did you expect to have been told of something like
 15 a Mayday that had been previously issued during the
 16 shift?
 17 A. If it was still ongoing, I would have expected to be
 18 told.
 19 Q. Any vessels or incidents in significant distress, would
 20 you expect to have been told about that?
 21 A. Yes. If they were in the process of an active SAR
 22 operation, yes.
 23 Q. Had you -- have you previously, in your coastguard
 24 career, begun a shift without a formal handover?
 25 A. Not that I can recollect .

1 Q. Did you have any reservations about beginning a 12-hour
 2 shift without receiving a full handover?
 3 A. No.
 4 Q. Why was that, please?
 5 A. I -- in my experience, I would be quite comfortable to
 6 be able to pick up incidents as they are happening, if
 7 they are ongoing, to be able to read them and be able to
 8 just carry on without a full handover.
 9 Q. So turning to the night and the moment you enter the ops
 10 room. What's the atmosphere like when you walk in?
 11 A. My recollection is, is that it was quite calm, it was
 12 quite relaxed. There was no immediate incidents going
 13 on that required a vast amount of, of actions. There
 14 was some ongoing incidents which were coming to
 15 conclusion when I arrived in the ops room.
 16 Q. Could we bring up {INQ006802/1}, please. This is the
 17 version of the tracker at 03:37 am, it is the tracker
 18 that immediately preceded the start of your shift. The
 19 next one occurs at 18 minutes past 5.
 20 We can see here there are eight open incidents. In
 21 your experience, was that a significant number of small
 22 boats incidents to be outstanding when you started your
 23 shift?
 24 A. It's not uncommon from my recollection.
 25 Q. And thinking about the room and the team in the room, we

197

1 have got these eight open incidents, a single SMC,
 2 Neal Gibson, a single MOO and a trainee MOO, and of
 3 course yourself. And just to situate ourselves in the
 4 chronology of what happened, R 163 is out on search and
 5 rescue missions and the Valiant was tasked as well.
 6 Other witnesses have impressed upon the Inquiry how
 7 it was quite a busy night and does that accord with your
 8 recollection at all?
 9 A. As I say, when I went in, when I started my shift, the
 10 Valiant was in the process of recovering three migrant
 11 vessels and Rescue 163 was carrying out an observational
 12 sweep and wasn't involved in, in active rescues at the
 13 time. It was more a case of looking for migrant vessels
 14 which we were unaware of.
 15 Q. So you enter the operations room. The first thing you
 16 do, what's that? Do you go to Neal Gibson first? Do
 17 you go to your desk first and logon? Talk us through
 18 your first moments in the operations room.
 19 A. The first thing to do would be to -- I did was find an
 20 empty desk to log in to load up all the various pieces
 21 of software we require. Whilst those are loading,
 22 I would have expected to be told by Neal what I needed
 23 to do to familiarise myself with what was ongoing at the
 24 time.
 25 Q. And what do you recall from that conversation?

198

1 A. Unfortunately not very -- not a lot.
 2 Q. Did he draw any particular incidents to your attention
 3 that you remember?
 4 A. Not that I can recall.
 5 Q. And logging on and that business, how long would that
 6 usually take you?
 7 A. It takes a few minutes to -- for the various pieces of
 8 software to come up and position them on screens, how
 9 you feel comfortable with them. So two or three minutes
 10 to organise your desktop.
 11 Q. And then do you recall how long the conversation with
 12 Neal Gibson last add at all?
 13 A. I'm afraid I don't, no.
 14 Q. Could we bring up, please, {INQ000235/9}. I believe
 15 this is the first ViSION log entry you make in what the
 16 Inquiry has received. 18 minutes past 5, so starting
 17 your shift at 5 and there being eight ongoing incidents.
 18 You can't have spent any longer than 18 minutes
 19 looking at them before you started getting about the
 20 business of recording things in KRAKEN. Is that
 21 something that sounds like your experience or do you
 22 think you spent longer going through ViSION logs or
 23 preparing for what you were about to do over the next
 24 12 hours?
 25 A. I am not sure what the other people -- depending on what

199

1 other people in the ops room were engaged in, I might
 2 have taken that call because there was nobody else to do
 3 it. I can't recall what happened between 5 o'clock and
 4 5.18 I'm afraid.
 5 Q. When Neal Gibson asked you to familiarise yourself with
 6 what was happening operationally, how did you do that?
 7 A. It would have been a case of looking through the open
 8 incidents to read through to see which assets were
 9 engaged in operations with which incidents and where
 10 they were as well.
 11 Q. This might sound like a silly question but I am going to
 12 ask it anyway. You wouldn't have checked any incidents
 13 that would have been marked as closed to -- to
 14 reassess --
 15 A. No.
 16 Q. -- them or look at the detail of them?
 17 A. No.
 18 MR DAVIES: No. Okay. Sir, it's been 45 minutes. Would it
 19 be a convenient moment to have a short break, there is
 20 not much longer?
 21 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: How much do you think you have got?
 22 MR DAVIES: 15, 20 minutes, I think.
 23 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Is that all right with the shorthand
 24 writer, another 15 minutes? Is that all right with you,
 25 Mr Cockerill? Okay, yes.

200

1 MR DAVIES: I am grateful.
 2 Could we turn to your statement please at
 3 {INQ009634/1}, paragraphs 46 and 47, please,
 4 {INQ009634/25}. Thank you.
 5 This is the part of your statement where you discuss
 6 how you weren't aware of the following, this entry, in
 7 the migrant admin log from the maritime tactical
 8 commanders.
 9 Are you able to explain why you didn't see that if
 10 you read the ViSION logs before you started your shift?
 11 A. Reading the ViSION logs would be reading the open
 12 incidents. It wouldn't — I wouldn't have gone through
 13 the admin log all the way back up to when it was opened.
 14 At best, it would have been from the point at which
 15 I signed into the system. Review of the ViSION logs
 16 would have been the actual open incidents that they were
 17 engaged in operations at the time.
 18 Q. In your experience, were the messages of maritime
 19 tactical commanders known to you to be recorded in the
 20 admin log in this way?
 21 A. In my experience, the network commanders put comments in
 22 the network management log rather than the admin log.
 23 That would be my experience. Having not done many small
 24 boats prior to November 2021, it's not something I am
 25 overly familiar with, with them putting comments in.

201

1 Q. And no one specifically drew your attention to the
 2 concerns of the maritime tactical commander —
 3 A. No, not that I am aware of.
 4 Q. — when you started your shift?
 5 A. No.
 6 Q. Okay. Given you hadn't received a proper handover, did
 7 you not consider it more important to read all of the
 8 available information on ViSION that you could see
 9 rather than rely on the sort of summary Neal Gibson had
 10 given you?
 11 A. I think my recollection is that because we had assets
 12 out at the time, it was more important to familiarise
 13 myself with the incidents that they were dealt with —
 14 dealing with immediately at that time.
 15 Whilst that was ongoing, I don't recollect going
 16 back through and looking at other things after the —
 17 after I had familiarised myself with those events.
 18 Q. With hindsight, should you have read this log in
 19 a little bit more detail?
 20 A. If I was the SMC, probably. But the admin log is more
 21 there to record things that are not attributable to
 22 a specific incident. As an SMC you would probably be
 23 aware of them, as I explained, from — by other means
 24 more often verbally. In hindsight yes, it probably
 25 would be a good idea to go back through and look at it.

202

1 Q. My final question on this. We saw earlier how you
 2 closed Incident Alpha 1 as a repeat and the unattributed
 3 incidents which come in are placed in this log. If you
 4 hadn't read this log thoroughly as a call taker, which
 5 you were acting as, would you not be at a disadvantage
 6 not having seen all the other information that had been
 7 unattributed to marry these pieces of information up?
 8 Do you see my meaning?
 9 A. Yes. At the time of ongoing incidents, looking for
 10 corroborating incidents to marry up with other open
 11 incidents would be low down on the priority list because
 12 we would be dealing with live and SAR operations.
 13 Q. I see. Thank you. I want to ask you now about your
 14 specific knowledge of Incident Charlie during the hours
 15 of your shift. What was your understanding of that
 16 incident when you started your shift?
 17 A. It was one of the ongoing incidents that Valiant was
 18 engaged with at the time I started my shift is my
 19 understanding.
 20 Q. And what was your understanding of Incident Charlie at
 21 the start of the day shift, for example, at 7 am?
 22 A. My understanding was it had been finalised with Valiant
 23 recovering the vessels.
 24 Q. Could we please bring up the tracker, {INQ006802} again,
 25 please. Did you review the tracker when you started

203

1 your shift or just the ViSION logs?
 2 A. Not that I can recall.
 3 Q. Okay. Sorry, could we bring up {INQ006802}. You see
 4 the entry "M957" against Incident Charlie. This is the
 5 version of the tracker that would have been available to
 6 you?
 7 A. (Nods).
 8 Q. Did that have any impact on your understanding of the
 9 status of Incident Charlie when you started the shift?
 10 A. If it's been allocated a M number, that would indicate
 11 that Border Force vessel has recovered the vessel.
 12 Q. And to you oncoming, had you looked, had you seen this
 13 document you would have believed that the incident was
 14 closed?
 15 A. Correct.
 16 Q. The Inquiry has heard evidence about the belief within
 17 His Majesty's Coastguard, members of His Majesty's
 18 Coastguard that calls from small boats exaggerated the
 19 level of distress they were in. Is that your
 20 understanding of the calls which come from small boats?
 21 A. It is, yes.
 22 Q. What's the basis for that, please?
 23 A. During prosecution of incidents, comments had been made
 24 with regards to various states of persons onboard those
 25 vessels. Once those vessels had then been recovered by

204

1 UK assets the situations described onboard didn't match
 2 what the SAR assets recovered when they arrived on
 3 scene, for instance unconscious people or people in the
 4 water. When they actually arrived on scene and started
 5 to board them, there was no signs of distress or any
 6 persons in the water.
 7 Q. The Inquiry has also heard about some of the issues with
 8 language barriers of call taking. Could we bring up
 9 your statement, please, {INQ009634/32} at paragraph 60.
 10 It's something you talk about here. You describe it as
 11 one of the biggest challenges in relation to small boats
 12 incidents.
 13 Could we go, please, to {INQ010695/1}. This is
 14 a call that you took at 11.30 on the morning of the
 15 24th. If we could scroll down, please, to the third
 16 page, please, okay. So the male speaker of this call
 17 says: France, no, please, please (inaudible). You say:
 18 No. Male speaker: All you did please, please help
 19 please. And then you say: This is not the police.
 20 Is this an example of the kind of thing you are
 21 talking about in your statement when you describe
 22 language barriers?
 23 A. Correct.
 24 Q. Clearly a misunderstanding here about what the caller
 25 has — is saying?

205

1 A. (Nods).
 2 Q. And were you aware at the time of any standard operating
 3 procedure or guidance or training about how to deal with
 4 an example such as this of a language issue?
 5 A. Not that I can recall.
 6 Q. And so you weren't familiar with the language line?
 7 A. Yes, the language line is an option we have. However,
 8 if I remember correctly, that is reliant upon having
 9 a contact number to be able to call them back or keep
 10 them on the phone. It can be quite a time-consuming
 11 process to establish which interpreter is required for
 12 the language they are speaking.
 13 Q. Final topic. I want to talk to you about the closure of
 14 ViSION log incidents. {INQ010349/1}, please, if we
 15 could bring that up.
 16 This was a message we can see at the bottom
 17 originally from George Papadopoulos to James Crane and
 18 it is a generic entry to be used in the ViSION logs
 19 where there are limited — which are unresolved
 20 essentially at the time at the end of the shift.
 21 If we scroll up, please, we can see that it's sent
 22 to you at 5.41 in the evening of 24 November.
 23 The first question about this document. Were you
 24 still at work at 5.41?
 25 A. I don't believe so, no.

206

1 Q. Okay. Are you able to explain why this was sent to you
 2 if you weren't still working?
 3 A. I can't comment. No, I'm afraid not.
 4 Q. Was there any discussion in the operations room that you
 5 recall before you left about the use of this statement?
 6 A. Not that I can recall.
 7 Q. Have you ever used this to close a ViSION log incident
 8 and I say this because, having reviewed the incident
 9 logs, there's no indication that you did in fact use
 10 this?
 11 A. No, I have no recollection of using that.
 12 MR DAVIES: Those were the questions I had for you,
 13 Mr Cockerill, thank you. Chair, do you have any further
 14 questions?
 15 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: No, I don't thank so you very much
 16 indeed, Mr Cockerill. The evidence has been very
 17 helpful.
 18 Now, next, I know everyone is working at pace and
 19 under pressure so I was discussing earlier with
 20 Mr Phillips and Ms Le Fevre about next Wednesday and we
 21 thought it better not to read out the statements but to
 22 make them available on the website. You could perhaps
 23 explain when we are going to do that, when we are in
 24 a position to do that.
 25 MS LE FEVRE: Yes, Chair, that will take place in the course

207

1 of the fourth week of our hearings in stages. So there
 2 will be tranches probably on Tuesday and the Wednesday
 3 and the Thursday, the final three days of our hearings,
 4 and we will publish the balance of the witness statement
 5 evidence we hold in that fourth week.
 6 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Yes. We just thought it was, in terms
 7 of preparing evidence and preparing the closings, it was
 8 better to use the Wednesday that way.
 9 So I hope that's acceptable. Is there anything more
 10 about next week that we need to —
 11 MS LE FEVRE: No, thank you, chair. We just wanted to
 12 confirm that the Inquiry won't sit on Wednesday.
 13 SIR ROSS CRANSTON: Yes, of course. Yes. Thanks very much
 14 indeed and thanks again, Mr Cockerill.
 15 (4.01 pm)
 16 (The Inquiry adjourned until 10 o'clock,
 17 on Monday, 17 March 2025)

208

I N D E X

1 MR THOMAS GREGORY1
 WILLOWS (affirmed)

2 Questions by MS WOODS1

3 MR STUART DOWNS89
 (affirmed)

4 Questions by MS MOFFATT89

5 Questions by SIR ROSS CRANSTON170

6 MR RICHARD COCKERILL171
 (affirmed)

 Questions by MR DAVIES171

7
 8
 9
 10
 11
 12
 13
 14
 15
 16
 17
 18
 19
 20
 21
 22
 23
 24
 25

A	<p>abbreviation (1) 91:5</p> <p>ability (6) 37:16 38:9 117:11 157:24 175:3 188:1</p> <p>able (48) 7:4 12:5 21:11 22:6 34:25 37:3 48:19 49:25 50:7 64:24 92:12 99:5,7 101:20 111:8 112:3 117:12 119:3,5,8,21 120:5 125:2,13,14 140:22 141:25 142:4 143:4 144:18 146:10 148:19 149:23 158:14,18 175:2 176:17 183:6 185:1,7 192:10 195:25 197:6,7,7 201:9 206:9 207:1</p> <p>above (4) 121:13 145:11 182:14 186:21</p> <p>abusive (6) 104:10,15,16,19,22 105:5</p> <p>accept (3) 38:8 45:12 68:8</p> <p>acceptable (1) 208:9</p> <p>access (26) 32:23,25 33:3,6,14 35:6,8,12,13 36:17 37:4,12,14,15,19,20 38:9,12,18 39:13 40:4,24 41:3 61:9 179:6,18</p> <p>accessed (2) 39:9,14</p> <p>accessing (1) 40:5</p> <p>accord (4) 183:13 184:16 195:5 198:7</p> <p>according (2) 51:4 62:10</p> <p>account (2) 124:24 168:21</p> <p>accounted (2) 165:2,15</p> <p>accuracy (1) 132:20</p> <p>accurate (7) 41:9 44:20 45:6 75:23 76:9 99:11,17</p> <p>accurately (1) 45:21</p> <p>accustomed (4) 119:25 120:5 124:14,16</p> <p>achieve (1) 168:7</p> <p>across (8) 24:7 41:4 100:1 112:4 148:1 176:11 179:9,10</p> <p>acted (1) 193:6</p> <p>acting (3) 179:6 192:9 203:5</p> <p>action (3) 117:14 120:1 187:23</p> <p>actions (3) 44:16 45:4 197:13</p> <p>active (3) 117:24 196:21 198:12</p> <p>actively (3) 109:12 125:10 127:18</p> <p>activities (1) 127:21</p> <p>activity (19) 4:2,4 31:14 39:7,23 40:9 58:5 92:13 94:14,22 103:11 105:3 117:11 130:22 131:16 148:15 181:22 195:10,16</p> <p>actual (11) 47:12 58:9 75:25 76:16,21 109:14 118:15 165:12 168:1 189:3 201:16</p> <p>actually (60) 10:14 27:7 30:6 53:15 54:18 59:24 60:21 76:14,20 85:1 91:5 97:10,12 99:3,6,21,24 101:13 104:10 105:1,4 108:16 115:21 116:4,9,20,22 117:6,23 118:1 136:25 137:2 142:17 145:7 154:22,23 155:12 156:9,10,13 161:20 166:24 167:7 168:6,12,21 169:4,24 170:9,11 176:9 178:1,8,9 180:8 185:17 192:13,22 195:21 205:4</p> <p>adaptation (1) 110:13</p> <p>adaptations (1) 114:15</p> <p>adapted (2) 109:23 110:2</p> <p>add (4) 93:5 161:16 181:7 199:12</p> <p>added (12) 57:12 84:5 85:10 93:4,9 116:11,12,18 123:12,14,16,17</p>	<p>addition (2) 93:1 123:16</p> <p>additional (14) 14:3 62:25 63:16 64:9 73:2 76:5 77:8,12 92:25 93:1,4 138:22 177:6,6</p> <p>adequate (3) 112:21 121:18,19</p> <p>adjoined (1) 208:16</p> <p>admin (12) 148:7,8 149:23 178:16 179:6,11 192:5 201:7,13,20,22 202:20</p> <p>administration (5) 148:10,18 149:25 158:6 179:12</p> <p>administrative (3) 110:21 148:14 173:22</p> <p>adverse (1) 166:16</p> <p>advice (1) 7:24</p> <p>advised (2) 93:3 103:20</p> <p>advising (1) 68:5</p> <p>affect (3) 117:10 118:7,10</p> <p>affected (3) 109:1 112:8 177:4</p> <p>affirmation (3) 1:5 89:11 171:18</p> <p>affirmed (6) 1:6 89:7 171:19 209:2,4,6</p> <p>afraid (9) 14:14 183:16,20,25 195:2,17 199:13 200:4 207:3</p> <p>after (23) 5:15,17 9:8,10 12:10 13:18,21 26:3,16,24 64:18 92:3 117:15 134:19,20 135:7 139:22 144:5 150:17,21 185:16 202:16,17</p> <p>afternoon (3) 89:8,9 171:16</p> <p>afterwards (2) 92:3 101:11</p> <p>again (50) 28:3 32:20 33:9 34:3 36:23 48:5 54:17 60:9 69:9 70:6,11 71:1 73:7 77:6 82:1,16 84:9,11 86:13 95:5 98:13,15 109:20 116:14,23 118:16 123:6 134:22,24 142:23 147:21 151:22 152:4 157:15 158:4,5,7,14,17 161:12,18 162:2,2 164:12,23 168:20 184:5 190:11 203:24 208:14</p> <p>against (2) 134:11 204:4</p> <p>agencies (4) 5:18 19:3 44:20 111:12</p> <p>ago (3) 20:4 21:12 51:3</p> <p>agree (13) 8:12 17:9 22:8 46:2 55:18 75:18 81:11 92:21 107:19 143:8,14 162:5 163:11</p> <p>agreed (4) 24:19 26:13 59:18 188:21</p> <p>agreement (2) 22:23 80:9</p> <p>ahead (1) 128:12</p> <p>aid (1) 104:24</p> <p>aim (1) 141:18</p> <p>aimed (1) 141:16</p> <p>air (1) 166:22</p> <p>aircraft (1) 130:18</p> <p>airports (1) 15:1</p> <p>airwave (1) 27:25</p> <p>airwaves (2) 11:21,25</p> <p>alert (1) 157:22</p> <p>aligned (1) 110:10</p> <p>allocate (1) 125:14</p> <p>allocated (4) 125:5,6,12 204:10</p> <p>allocating (1) 55:12</p> <p>allocation (4) 26:18 47:1 125:19,20</p> <p>along (3) 16:3 184:1,2</p> <p>alongside (2) 48:16 75:6</p> <p>alpha (3) 132:8 193:3 203:2</p> <p>alphabet (3) 30:5 148:6 158:4</p> <p>alphanumeric (1) 179:1</p> <p>already (14) 29:13 31:7 46:24 56:22 57:5 73:8,9 86:24 94:18 112:20 123:15 130:21 133:6 144:23 31:22 39:20 40:21 45:9 50:22 63:4 91:2 94:12 97:10,13,18 102:15 104:9,16 105:18 107:16 111:6,12,15 112:8 114:3 115:18 116:8 117:5 119:9 120:7 121:15 124:20 126:22 127:21 128:5,16,22,25 130:19 141:8 147:24 149:5 154:19 190:10 205:7</p> <p>altered (1) 109:4</p> <p>alternate (1) 26:2</p> <p>although (4) 26:10 104:11 140:7 193:18</p> <p>always (17) 6:19 7:1 10:20 18:7 25:25 53:22 76:18 79:17 129:2,4,17 131:4 132:25 156:24 173:21 174:4 186:18</p> <p>alzheimers (1) 99:4</p> <p>amber (8) 21:16 22:5,12,17,20,23 27:5 189:4</p> <p>ambiguous (1) 143:15</p> <p>amenable (1) 82:7</p> <p>amend (1) 38:9</p> <p>amount (4) 46:10 180:23 184:16 197:13</p> <p>and/or (1) 44:2</p> <p>animated (1) 144:11</p> <p>annual (1) 91:10</p> <p>another (50) 24:12,24 25:12,13 32:15,19 35:16 41:25 63:2,12,24 64:7,9 67:21 69:16 75:7 78:14,24 79:25 85:5,8 86:24 91:10 100:25 101:3 102:10 107:7 109:15 113:4,8 114:9,16 115:16,25 116:12,12,13,18 117:1,4 128:15 129:3 154:13 160:20 161:5 167:2 179:20 184:4 190:16 200:24</p> <p>answer (18) 6:17 18:9 38:17 92:18 97:23 112:3 115:4 125:2 126:7,9,15 128:13,17,22 129:10 143:4 158:14 178:4</p> <p>answered (1) 126:20</p> <p>answering (4) 119:9 124:1,9 128:4</p> <p>anticipated (1) 190:25</p> <p>anyone (4) 92:7 121:12 140:6 170:16</p> <p>anything (16) 4:18 31:8 47:10 54:14 55:11 69:7 83:24 92:5,7 100:23 108:9 121:10 176:8 188:23 196:9 208:9</p> <p>anyway (3) 76:3 104:13 200:12</p> <p>anywhere (2) 128:20 166:17</p> <p>apart (6) 83:22,23 125:8 140:6 166:22 185:6</p> <p>apologies (1) 83:16</p> <p>appear (3) 101:13 192:8 193:5</p> <p>appears (7) 124:9 134:1,10 151:14 182:6,19 183:11</p> <p>apply (1) 175:24</p> <p>appreciate (3) 47:13 63:18 68:19</p> <p>apprenticeship (2) 125:10 127:8</p> <p>approach (2) 96:13,17</p> <p>appropriate (7) 4:25 7:6 44:1 53:25 55:7 156:23 179:11</p> <p>appropriately (1) 175:4</p>	<p>approximately (1) 12:4</p> <p>april (1) 43:1</p> <p>area (20) 15:21 71:11,13 72:24 73:2,7,21 75:13 80:16 81:8,21,21 83:11 86:6,9 94:20 161:24,25 165:10,11</p> <p>areas (1) 36:3</p> <p>arent (2) 45:24 68:4</p> <p>arm (2) 103:5,6</p> <p>around (27) 39:1 46:6 49:19 60:3 61:15 77:10 78:3 98:2,14,14 99:22 100:6,24 111:10 135:3,9 139:15 140:17 145:15 148:14,20 173:1 174:18 175:16 184:12 188:9,11</p> <p>arrangement (5) 10:2 22:8 24:22 25:22 26:6</p> <p>arrangements (2) 19:9 20:24</p> <p>arrived (3) 197:15 205:2,4</p> <p>arriving (1) 185:15</p> <p>ascertain (4) 60:10 84:17,23 85:2</p> <p>aside (1) 68:17</p> <p>ask (41) 3:15 14:13,15 19:8,23 25:15 29:6 31:6,25 34:1 36:4 47:12 49:23 55:17 57:14 68:15 72:18 74:5 80:7 84:19 87:4 103:7 131:9 139:16,18 140:3,5,8,10 141:2 142:8 147:11 148:24 150:23,25 151:22 154:7 173:11 178:16 200:12 203:13</p> <p>asked (19) 17:5 20:19 62:23 103:3 109:4 121:20 126:25 131:15 142:16 154:14 155:19,20,24 156:20 176:12 177:3 181:6,10 200:5</p> <p>asking (24) 1:19 32:22,24 37:15 47:6,7 51:13 55:21 64:3 65:17 69:9,10 74:22 81:16 138:23 141:8,18 145:3,7 146:20 154:3 157:1 172:7 181:3</p> <p>asks (2) 151:12 152:5</p> <p>aspects (1) 16:6</p> <p>assess (1) 79:6</p> <p>assessed (4) 21:14,16 76:24 108:4</p> <p>assessment (13) 16:22 18:18 68:12,24 69:11 70:10,18 77:7,10 78:19 86:17 185:22 191:17</p> <p>asset (53) 7:19,25 8:23 10:14,17 11:11,16,19 12:10,17,24 39:20 47:1 51:8 53:10,15,16,20,22 55:7,12 56:22 62:10,18 63:3,12,23 64:7,9,9 69:5,22 71:3 72:2,4,10,18 78:18,22,25 79:25 159:19 160:17 161:5 162:13,13,18 163:4,5,9 164:11 165:25</p> <p>assets (54) 5:15 8:25 17:6 18:23 26:16,25 28:25 59:8 62:19,22,25 63:11 64:3,14 71:17 72:6,25 73:1 75:3 76:5 77:4,8,11,13 78:5,9,11 79:1,3,4,8,10,13,16 80:6,13 81:11 118:13 119:5,6,7 120:12 131:19 162:14,19 163:20 166:22 185:17,20 190:14 200:8 202:11 205:1,2</p> <p>assign (2) 118:3 120:12</p> <p>assigned (17) 25:24 29:24 31:4 118:11 119:6 125:16 158:15 162:14,15,16,19 163:6,7,20 164:4,9 165:5</p> <p>assignment (1) 169:7</p> <p>assigns (1) 85:12</p> <p>assist (20) 7:20 47:17 50:6 54:8 55:11,12 98:21 99:8 115:21 116:21 137:9 144:18 145:12 172:2 176:17 185:7 188:1,8,9 190:7</p> <p>assistance (18) 5:19 7:11,16 61:24 62:6,15,17 63:23 68:15 117:4 137:9 138:23 143:22 144:21 166:10 176:20 181:7 183:6</p> <p>assistant (4) 92:20 122:25 136:22 172:13</p> <p>assisting (2) 2:16 19:5</p> <p>associated (3) 16:8,17 98:6</p> <p>assume (7) 83:3 84:12 169:3 174:4 192:3,11,13</p> <p>assumed (1) 64:13</p> <p>assumption (2) 165:17 192:4</p> <p>atmosphere (1) 197:10</p> <p>attempt (1) 140:17</p> <p>attend (2) 70:3,8</p> <p>attendance (3) 183:22 186:3,16</p> <p>attended (1) 190:3</p> <p>attending (2) 61:1 95:13</p> <p>attention (2) 199:2 202:1</p> <p>attracts (1) 190:9</p> <p>attributable (1) 202:21</p> <p>attributed (1) 178:23</p> <p>audio (2) 50:2,3</p> <p>august (1) 43:1</p> <p>augustseptember (1) 175:16</p> <p>author (1) 38:3</p> <p>authorisation (1) 193:13</p> <p>authorised (2) 158:21 193:3</p> <p>authority (4) 10:13 150:7 192:23 193:6</p> <p>automatically (5) 162:14,18 163:6,10,20</p> <p>autumn (1) 95:14</p> <p>available (13) 6:24 7:1 11:20 62:23 78:17 79:4 80:11,12 97:10 183:3 202:8 204:5 207:22</p> <p>average (1) 111:18</p> <p>aware (67) 2:20 40:23,25 46:9 52:11 62:15,22 63:15 100:10 81:25 83:20 88:17,18,20 97:10,24 100:5,11 104:15 108:12,24 117:12,15 119:4,6 120:5 123:14,16 124:4 127:13 132:13 137:21 139:20 134:21 145:12 159:14 162:10 163:21 166:18 168:10 169:15,17 170:7 176:10,12 177:3,22,24 178:1,5,6,9 179:14,15 181:10,23 183:12 199:17</p> <p>awareness (7) 45:7 115:20 116:7 130:15 177:24 194:1,8</p> <p>away (8) 12:6 40:9 70:23 100:7 101:20 137:25 139:12 140:10</p>	<p>B</p> <p>b (1) 82:23</p> <p>back (33) 5:2 18:17 46:8,8 54:23 69:24 70:3 73:14 88:7,8 101:10 113:18,19,20,21 116:14 120:17,25 121:24 132:11 136:9 138:24 147:23 156:24 158:7 182:24 185:2 189:5 192:20 201:13 202:16,25 206:9</p> <p>background (6) 15:6,24 126:3 145:5 149:10,14</p> <p>badly (1) 166:17</p> <p>balance (1) 208:4</p> <p>bang (2) 80:19,22</p> <p>banking (1) 77:23</p> <p>barnett (5) 130:4,12 137:17 144:12 182:7</p> <p>barrier (1) 97:6</p> <p>barriers (2) 205:8,22</p> <p>based (20) 1:20,23 2:25 12:7 22:4,15,17 27:10,12 33:12,16,16 35:3 48:5 75:20 96:13 135:4 148:1 180:10 187:10 121:14 132:14 177:7</p> <p>basic (1) 15:10</p> <p>basically (9) 16:19 28:19 30:2 70:4 72:5 75:22 92:20 107:7 122:25</p> <p>basing (1) 27:8</p> <p>basis (8) 5:16 22:13 66:9,15 121:14 132:14 177:7 204:22</p> <p>beach (1) 99:25</p> <p>became (11) 22:12 23:1 39:12 46:11 88:17,19 93:11 119:25 120:5 135:23 137:11</p> <p>become (9) 4:11 14:20 30:10 63:15 124:14,16 134:9 159:22 181:2</p> <p>becoming (1) 91:17</p> <p>before (44) 11:11 19:12 21:13,22 31:14 33:1 34:5 35:11 37:9 39:17 41:23 49:14 50:13 60:21 61:18 63:19 83:8 100:17 109:11 120:14,17,24,25 123:14 127:17 130:20 131:20 132:7,9 139:5 140:20 142:10 150:8 151:13 165:23 169:14 184:18 189:13 194:15 196:2,3 199:19 201:10 207:5 192:23 193:6</p> <p>beginning (3) 26:13 185:3 197:1</p> <p>begins (2) 24:2 50:12</p> <p>begun (1) 196:24</p> <p>being (76) 11:15 17:5,8 18:6,19 33:5 36:20,24 37:20 40:25 55:9 57:4 58:5,10 59:7 60:16 65:23 66:13 67:19 68:2,20 71:25 75:12 76:8,24 77:3,24 99:6 101:20 104:17 105:4,7 109:4,23 114:4 115:4,24,24 116:1 117:12,15 119:4,6 120:5 123:14,16 124:4 127:13 132:13 137:21 139:20 134:21 145:12 159:14 162:10 163:21 166:18 168:10 169:15,17 170:7 176:10,12 177:3,22,24 178:1,5,6,9 179:14,15 181:10,23 183:12 199:17</p> <p>belief (4) 108:1 167:16,21 204:16</p> <p>believe (35) 24:8 27:10 32:25 34:7 38:25 39:20 41:7 42:3 47:21,23 48:15,23 49:7 50:23 60:12 61:12 65:1,13 68:5 92:15 93:12 114:25 115:3 126:1 137:19 138:19 143:24 159:17 167:17 172:4,12 178:21 187:7 199:14 206:25</p> <p>believed (8) 56:22 57:5 79:1 147:14 165:1,2 169:19 204:13</p> <p>below (3) 36:13 99:24 174:2</p> <p>beneficial (1) 194:4</p> <p>benefit (1) 149:6</p> <p>best (9) 20:23 48:4 50:25 111:1 120:9 130:8 161:5 165:4 201:14</p> <p>better (8) 111:24 115:22 154:18 168:16 181:1 186:12 207:21 208:8</p> <p>betting (1) 77:23</p> <p>between (32) 6:4 8:3,10 9:18 10:12 14:8 24:18 25:16,17</p>	<p>35:13 37:7 41:5 42:25 46:7 53:19 64:21 66:13 87:7 94:20,25 129:13,22 130:7 133:6 156:8 160:16,19 161:4 173:12 175:19 177:16 200:3</p> <p>beyond (4) 20:11 107:8 139:20 151:1</p> <p>bf (1) 21:5</p> <p>bfm (1) 55:12</p> <p>bfmc (1) 2:19</p> <p>bfmcc (13) 2:8,17 3:12 21:4,6 22:4,5,17 47:24,24 48:16 55:11 56:5</p> <p>big (5) 140:9 143:2 152:16,122</p> <p>biggest (1) 205:11</p> <p>bill (2) 182:4 194:14</p> <p>birth (3) 104:5 169:24 170:9</p> <p>bit (24) 3:15,20 5:3 10:23 13:12 14:13 19:8 23:21 26:23 28:7 29:6,12 31:6,25 36:2 47:12 91:9,12 102:25 117:21 131:2 155:17 184:8 202:19</p> <p>bits (1) 100:11</p> <p>blaming (1) 104:10</p> <p>blocks (1) 124:5</p> <p>blue (1) 56:15</p> <p>board (32) 4:25 11:21 13:8 17:23 51:15 55:6,9 57:16 76:3,17,19 84:20 86:17 96:25 97:3 99:20 108:10 135:8,12 144:15 145:19 147:7 149:1 151:15 </p>
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book (4) 44:2,8,23 45:5
books (1) 44:17
border (47) 3:11,17
 5:15,19,22 7:18 22:3
 29:11,22 30:1,18 31:2
 33:6,10,12 34:19 35:18
 36:13 40:19 46:20 52:9,3
 53:16,17 56:17 57:24 59:3
 60:15 63:2 64:6,8,9 65:7
 76:5 79:12 82:20 84:1
 131:19,22 134:21,24
 159:19 160:9,12,16,16
 204:11
borne (1) 180:22
both (20) 2:19 8:13 9:20
 10:8 11:2,20,20 13:5
 22:19,24 25:2 26:20 27:4
 28:24 31:1 32:4 65:23
 81:25 112:22 113:14
bottom (29) 21:1 22:2 24:3
 26:9 32:4,12 47:22 53:3
 71:8 74:3 80:18 96:10
 103:2 109:21 119:23
 133:20,23,25 136:25
 139:24 140:13 147:7
 149:17 151:2 161:9,22
 181:15,17 206:16
boundary (1) 132:24
box (3) 84:5 163:19 189:10
boxes (1) 189:8
boy (1) 135:10
brand (2) 40:3,4
bravo (3) 65:17,22 82:21
break (18) 27:22,22 28:11,12
 41:14,19,23 89:1,5
 113:16,20 120:16,20
 169:14 171:10,14 190:24
 200:19
breaks (3) 27:23 28:5 191:4
brief (6) 57:9 83:7 116:14,17
 158:13 196:8
briefed (4) 103:24 126:6,9
 134:12
briefing (2) 16:13,15
briefings (2) 16:13,18
bring (20) 37:23 104:24
 108:8 142:23 144:21
 156:10,13,16 178:18 179:3
 181:13 182:1 190:1 191:12
 197:16 199:14 203:24
 204:3 205:8 206:15
broadcast (19) 61:8,21
 62:2,8,14 63:7 64:13 65:14
 67:12 68:14 70:1,9
 136:9,11 137:14,20 139:6
 142:22 143:21
broadcasting (2) 63:4 138:11
broadcasts (2) 62:3 70:12
broke (1) 121:9
broken (2) 103:5,6
brought (1) 111:10
building (1) 124:5
business (6) 19:17 26:14,23
 42:18 199:5,20
busy (11) 13:8 27:6 78:8
 94:11 116:12 185:22
 188:25 194:20,24 195:10
 198:7
busyness (1) 168:3

C

100:11 101:10 102:3,3
 103:9 105:20 107:17
 108:15 119:14 126:22
 127:1,4 129:22 131:8,11
 132:6,9 133:5,10,24
 134:3,8,22
 135:9,14,17,18,19
 136:9,12,17 139:4,6
 140:12 142:20
 143:1,5,6,9,18 144:5,6,11
 145:18,21 146:4,13,14,15
 147:10,11,12 148:5,17
 149:8 150:10,10,11,16,17
 153:21 154:1,13 155:8,24
 156:3 157:1,8,12
 158:3,4,10,13,17,23
 160:25 165:5 167:18
 178:12 180:3 185:20 200:2
 203:4 205:8,14,16 206:9
called (23) 2:1 29:11,15
 40:21 50:13 56:23 57:5
 64:21 65:17 97:14 99:4
 100:17 101:18 103:1
 104:15 132:11 134:20
 135:10,15,24 139:7 140:15
 150:23
caller (29) 98:8 102:14,15
 108:10 139:12 140:19
 142:8 144:13,17
 146:20,23,24 147:12
 148:24 149:2
 150:8,19,21,23,25,25
 151:13,16,18,20 152:4
 154:4 157:8 205:24
callers (8) 102:18 103:20,23
 104:1 105:12 145:2
 157:11,12
calling (5) 50:22 66:5,6
 99:21 100:6
calls (82) 13:15,22 14:10
 20:1 25:18 27:1,13 28:24
 47:23 48:2,7,12,18,24
 51:23,24 62:24 66:7,10,17
 74:22 87:19 92:18,19
 97:5,11 98:3,6 103:18
 104:9,16,18 106:25 107:8
 108:3 117:16,19,24 119:10
 124:1,9 125:2,8 126:7,14
 127:12,25 128:6,13,24
 129:1,3,5,6,9,14 130:4
 132:5 135:7 138:24 139:2
 146:2,2 147:17 150:13,14
 158:24,25 159:2,16,17
 166:7 167:5 170:12 178:5
 185:9 186:13,17 204:18,20
calm (2) 145:10 197:11
came (21) 4:3 10:11 15:8
 36:6 49:7 80:2 81:24 85:4
 92:15 106:4,13,13
 113:18,19,20 130:5 138:13
 147:25 171:5 183:4 187:25
cannot (7) 19:16,20 21:3
 24:17 26:10 68:19 193:1
cant (69) 21:7 38:17 40:5
 48:8 54:20 57:12
 59:22,25,25 67:10,10
 69:16,18 73:25 74:20,20
 77:19 78:1 81:14,19
 83:2,23,23 85:25 87:2,11
 88:1 95:20 106:14 107:3,9
 125:6,6 126:4,4,11 129:8
 130:14 134:5,6 144:22,24
 145:12,13,13 156:6,7
 158:22 168:2 173:2 176:14
 183:16 186:25,25 187:1,19
 188:15,20 193:9
 195:2,5,7,12,17,20
 199:18 200:3 207:3
capable (2) 163:13,25
capacity (11) 2:18 15:15
 75:14,24 78:18 128:7
 190:4,5,21 191:7 193:17
capture (3) 122:23 160:20
 161:6
captured (2) 118:21 123:2
care (1) 156:17

career (3) 172:8 183:18
 196:24
carried (1) 8:13
carry (3) 73:15 74:2 197:8
carrying (3) 35:4 62:7 198:11
cascaed (1) 96:6
cases (1) 123:19
casualty (1) 88:13
catastrophic (1) 159:13
categorically (3) 78:5 81:14
 87:14
categorised (1) 18:19
causing (1) 163:13
causal (6) 1:24 2:23 5:6,14
 15:3,8
certain (8) 70:1 88:1 100:10
 102:5 119:22 125:8 127:2
 195:18
certifications (1) 4:24
certified (1) 91:17
cfi (1) 4:18
cglo (3) 33:11 34:17 35:7
chain (2) 35:18 36:9
chair (5) 41:22 88:23
 207:13,25 208:11
challenge (1) 194:3
challenges (6) 16:5,8 177:22
 178:3 180:21 205:11
challenging (1) 189:2
chance (2) 99:12 150:4
change (10) 17:12 38:3,3,8
 68:24 69:13 70:10 163:22
 176:24 196:7
changed (1) 109:5
changes (4) 37:17,25 82:19
 83:6
channel (25) 3:2 5:21 6:1
 11:17 12:11 15:19 16:4
 77:3 78:16 86:7 104:14
 105:7 107:5,6 108:8 110:6
 115:16 137:20 141:10
 152:22 157:20 168:11
 176:8,9 185:16
charge (2) 194:2,8
charlie (64) 50:14,15,22,24
 51:11 56:21 60:25
 61:6,10,22 62:17 66:1,23
 67:4,13,19 68:23 70:19,20
 71:10 74:4,13 80:25 81:1
 83:5,10,17,22 84:6,15
 85:8,11 88:12 133:5,19
 134:11,13 135:4,8,12
 138:16 142:19,20
 143:3,5,10,21,24 145:17
 150:10 158:24 160:4
 162:5,11,16,22 164:17,21
 166:8 167:18 203:14,20
 204:4,9
chasing (1) 36:19
check (4) 12:14 39:17 40:2
 52:3
checked (3) 40:15 42:11
 200:12
checking (1) 39:24
checklist (1) 60:5
children (4) 51:16 55:9 57:17
 155:5
choose (1) 25:17
choosing (1) 162:22
chose (2) 136:16,17
chronological (1) 45:6
chronology (2) 146:2 198:4
chunk (2) 74:8 82:13
circulated (3) 56:17 60:16
 64:19
circulating (1) 56:10
circulation (1) 187:8
circumstances (5) 7:10,14
 12:9,12 52:9
civil (3) 2:3,7 110:22
claiming (1) 170:2
clarify (2) 19:12 23:16
classified (8) 17:14,17,19
 18:2,6,12 107:22 170:7
clear (3) 27:11 47:6 98:20

clearly (8) 48:21 147:20,22
 169:25 170:4,11 195:11
 205:24
cliff (1) 164:3
cliffs (6) 99:3,6,10,15,24
 106:24
close (14) 10:1 36:15 68:16
 99:23 100:2,4,4 148:20
 149:20 158:19 191:16,24
 193:4 207:7
closed (11) 123:14 148:6
 149:24 158:5 167:9
 193:10,11,13 200:13 203:2
 204:14
closely (1) 191:24
closer (3) 64:15 99:10,18
closings (1) 208:7
closure (3) 192:23 193:2
 206:13
clue (1) 155:18
clunky (1) 118:2
coached (1) 169:15
coaching (1) 125:18
coast (3) 99:11 100:3,4
coastal (1) 161:3
coastguard (164) 2:16 9:1
 11:5,23 12:18,18,25
 13:5,25 14:2 17:1,3,12
 18:13 19:4 30:3,23
 31:11,15,17,19,22 32:1,15
 33:3,6,14 34:20 35:6,9
 36:17 37:5,14 39:6,19,24
 40:6,20,22 41:2 49:8,12
 50:24 51:22,23
 52:6,6,21,22 53:1,19
 55:16,22 56:18 57:3
 58:1,3,7 59:4,12 60:3
 61:13,14 62:4,7,21 63:10
 64:19 65:4,12 68:3,11,17
 69:5,16 70:13 71:4 72:18
 74:15 75:1,12 76:4 77:7
 79:4 80:1,4,5,9 81:15
 83:19,21 84:19 85:6,8
 86:13,23 89:19,20,23
 91:21 93:16 95:23,24 96:4
 98:5 100:13 102:17 105:23
 106:7 112:4,16,21 119:16
 122:3 124:19 126:22
 127:1,15 128:1,23 129:6
 131:6,11 133:4,7,8 135:1
 151:12 161:10 163:24
 143:8 144:14,25 145:17,18
 146:12,13,19,20 148:25
 151:12 161:10 163:24
 164:3 165:7,20 170:7
 171:5 172:8,11,12,13,22
 174:14 175:13,22 176:24
 179:9,10 180:4 196:23
 204:17,18
coastguards (14) 30:14
 31:2,6 34:17 38:1 66:11
 81:17 90:1 96:17 97:24
 107:19 113:2 120:6 125:1
cockerill (12) 170:17
 171:11,16,19,23,25 172:2
 200:25 207:13,16 208:14
 209:5
cockerills (1) 184:2
cod (1) 147:5
collaborative (1) 46:25
collaboratively (1) 9:4
colleague (4) 1:25 21:4
 26:12 182:6
colleagues (4) 2:20 102:22
 129:11 181:3
collected (1) 159:18
collection (1) 185:20
colliding (1) 110:6
colloquially (1) 182:15
colour (2) 100:23 102:2
coloured (2) 141:9,12
column (4) 57:8 162:25
 163:3 182:19
columns (1) 38:2
combating (2) 3:22,22
combination (5) 21:21 30:24

86:15 109:24 120:7
come (30) 73:17,24 75:22
 76:12 84:16 98:12
 102:7,9,24 103:15 112:18
 116:14 120:11,17 134:18
 144:4,5 146:14 151:12,13
 154:12 155:8 156:24
 184:3,9 186:7 187:13
 199:8 203:3 204:20
comfort (2) 27:23 28:11
comfortable (3) 112:16
 197:5 199:9
coming (15) 18:17 29:25
 39:21 82:4 87:12 104:11
 122:9 128:24 138:24
 140:14 142:20 163:14
 172:2 185:10 197:14
command (12) 1:23 2:15,23
 3:6 5:6,14 15:3,8 22:3
 35:19 36:14 65:7
commander (7) 3:20 11:12
 42:7 48:13 119:2 188:16
 202:2
commanders (6) 58:6 181:6
 183:1 201:8,19,21
commenced (1) 4:2
comment (12) 59:22 67:25
 74:20 83:23 87:2 115:2
 144:24 189:11,12 192:8,8
 207:3
comments (8) 34:11 114:19
 123:9 189:8 192:12
 201:21,25 204:23
commercial (2) 63:8 76:12
common (11) 67:18 94:25
 95:3 98:3,4 117:20
 130:25,25 147:16 154:19
 155:1
comms (2) 28:1 92:12
communicate (8) 11:19 13:2
 23:24 24:5 94:9 115:14
 129:13,16
communicated (2) 48:20
 177:16
communicating (6) 11:6
 28:25 96:25 97:2
 129:11,18
communication (3) 12:17,24
 116:13
communications (13) 10:25
 13:13 23:22 48:13,22
 91:14,23 92:19 117:25
 125:3 178:6 180:3,4
companies (2) 141:1 142:3
company (1) 101:1
compared (1) 166:1
comparing (1) 91:20
competencies (1) 174:7
competency (1) 175:2
compile (1) 44:21
completed (5) 45:20 90:4,9
 91:16 92:2
completely (5) 70:4 113:6,7
 115:9 123:7
completeness (1) 95:13
completing (1) 109:12
compliant (1) 45:12
complicated (2) 115:18
 116:22
composition (1) 58:24
composer (5) 37:23 98:22,25
 163:6,9
concern (4) 79:9,15,17 144:1
concerned (5) 63:11 78:21
 123:20 184:13 195:1
concerning (1) 109:22
concerns (8) 37:1 110:18
 111:4 114:20 121:20,24
 138:18 202:2
concert (1) 9:4
concluded (2) 13:7,10
conclusion (2) 165:18 197:15
conclusion (9) 53:6 57:18
 134:1,10,23 135:4
 166:12,16,16
conditions (2) 111:11,20

conduct (2) 101:21 165:12
conducts (1) 191:17
confident (2) 54:12,21
confirm (7) 14:1 48:17 49:25
 65:22 85:3 92:23 208:12
confirmation (1) 65:21
confirmed (1) 92:24
confirms (2) 51:8 65:25
confuse (1) 192:16
confusing (1) 192:19
confusion (6) 25:1 34:12
 41:6 139:22 147:9 163:13
connect (2) 157:13,24
connected (1) 164:5
connecting (1) 157:9
connection (1) 166:5
connects (1) 123:9
consider (9) 48:16 58:23
 71:4 78:24 150:9 158:23
considerable (2) 70:23 82:12
considerably (1) 76:23
considered (3) 72:20 132:14
 191:20
consisted (2) 91:1 122:15
consistent (2) 36:1 143:20
consists (1) 1:15
constabulary (1) 99:8
consult (1) 10:20
consulting (1) 10:18
contact (16) 5:18 7:3,5,7,10
 8:1 10:4 12:23 39:19 53:1
 84:22 130:12 131:14 137:9
 180:5 206:9
contacted (1) 55:16
contacting (2) 12:12 24:17
content (3) 16:12 103:18
 143:20
contents (4) 134:2,3 158:13
 179:12
context (4) 37:3 105:20,22
 121:4
continue (1) 89:1
continues (1) 151:18
continuous (1) 36:17
control (1) 98:14
controlled (1) 176:5
convenient (2) 41:14 200:19
conversation (24) 21:23 25:5
 26:1 27:9 33:9 35:2 54:11
 61:15 69:19 73:5,5,6 77:11
 80:10 81:23 102:24 116:10
 142:14,17 155:14 192:2
 193:1 198:25 199:11
conversations (2) 180:11
 186:15
cooperative (1) 105:7
coordinate (1) 190:14
coordinates (11) 49:7,9,9,11
 55:6 56:19 57:3 74:5,23
 137:6 161:19
coordinating (1) 79:5
coordination (1) 92:14
coordinator (7) 90:15
 190:5,8,10,11,12,22
cope (2) 110:11 119:17
copies (2) 31:12 106:7
copyypasting (1) 41:5
core (2) 92:24 93:3
correct (105) 1:14,17,23 2:9
 3:3,9,18 4:13 5:24 12:4,8
 14:12 20:9,13,17 22:10,19
 24:14 25:14 26:21 27:4,15
 29:5 30:16,19 31:5 33:25
 34:7 35:10 42:23
 43:2,11,20 44:7 45:11
 55:24 66:18 76:10,25 77:1
 79:14 88:9
 89:16,17,19,21,25
 90:11,17,19 91:25 92:2
 93:13 95:11,12
 96:1,3,20,24 99:19 102:20
 103:22 110:16 111:3,5
 113:5,24 114:2 116:3
 119:1 122:20 123:3 124:12
 126:8,19,21 141:22 142:2

153:24,25 154:5,6 157:5
 162:24
 172:6,14,17,18,20,24
 173:6,16,25 174:16 175:23
 176:1 178:20,21 181:12
 184:11 191:9 194:19
 196:12 204:15 205:23
correctly (2) 189:24 206:8
correlated (1) 167:9
correlation (1) 166:4
corroborated (1) 103:25
corroborating (1) 203:10
costco (1) 142:3
couldnt (19) 67:20,24 68:1
 71:1 92:18 110:14 114:11
 115:19,19 116:9 121:6
 125:7 128:17 138:21
 141:20 142:7 145:5 148:19
 154:4
count (3) 77:19 78:1,15
counting (1) 91:15
country (1) 193:23
couple (3) 75:19 120:25
 127:16
course (15) 10:7 13:13 24:24
 28:21 55:8 73:7 76:13
 79:21 86:4 92:22 145:18
 180:24 198:3 207:25
 208:13
courses (3) 90:9 93:2 109:12
cover (23)

cycle (1) 120:25

D

d (1) 209:1

danger (4) 108:16 143:25
159:4 169:20

dangers (1) 70:20

dark (1) 99:6

darkness (1) 185:14

date (7) 16:19 38:3 49:4
93:6 123:11 150:18 173:2
200:18,22 201:1 207:12

dated (2) 1:13 89:15

dates (3) 183:13 185:4 189:6

davies (9) 171:16,21,22,23
200:18,22 201:1 207:12
209:6

day (4) 22:13,14,21 23:9
33:1 37:8,9 44:2,17,23
45:5 72:14 78:8 79:11
80:6,10,13,18 163:15
170:13 182:16,20,20
183:2,11,24 185:5,8,9,12
188:3,7,9,10,23
189:17,18,20 192:2
194:15,18,21 203:21

daybook (25)
42:1,7,10,11,14,16,21,25
43:10 44:9,10
45:14,18,22,23 46:5,18
47:10 49:4 56:4,6 57:22
58:16,18 87:21

daybooks (1) 42:5

daybreak (2) 185:16 188:11

days (23) 22:5,5,6,17,17
23:4 30:5 37:9 53:20 91:22
114:12 121:8 124:19,21
182:7,8,9,11 184:2 188:4
189:4 190:14 208:3

daytime (2) 78:9,10

daytoday (2) 5:16 8:16

deal (14) 17:3 71:15 78:6
103:18 104:21 105:9
108:13 109:23 110:2
112:22 120:12 121:18,19
206:3

dealing (12) 5:22 14:25 17:1
88:14 101:15 109:7 110:5
164:6 165:6 202:14
203:12

dealt (11) 71:10 107:24
108:4,5,5 110:3 116:25
123:15 148:4 181:25
202:13

dear (1) 35:21

debriefs (1) 34:11

debris (1) 169:6

december (4) 1:13 2:15 3:6
89:16

decide (4) 9:6,12 13:17 25:6

decided (4) 87:1 93:5,6
149:20

decision (26) 7:24 8:3
10:14,18,22 42:9 44:4 45:4
53:15,24,25 54:9 62:21
71:6 73:1 77:8,10 78:20
79:6,7 86:13,15,18 110:10
131:23 167:13

decisionmaking (8) 10:13
46:17,18,19,20 47:2 58:16
163:17

decisions (19) 8:22 9:4 17:5
43:24,25 44:16 45:13
46:23,23,24 47:1,7,8 54:16
55:5 62:19 122:24 136:23
194:9

dedicated (1) 193:14

deduced (1) 21:19

default (3) 175:21 176:21
177:5

definite (6) 37:8 48:21
73:9,12 80:13 83:2

definitely (3) 128:18,19
195:18

delay (1) 130:24

demand (2) 79:16 128:6

demands (1) 22:7

departments (1) 44:21

depend (1) 185:22

depended (1) 102:3

depending (5) 4:24 12:14
14:7 25:24 199:25

depends (2) 75:21 180:9

deploy (3) 63:2 64:7 76:5

deployed (4) 11:11,16 12:10
69:5

deploying (3) 5:16 58:11
71:4

describe (5) 179:4 181:22
194:17 205:10,21

described (6) 10:16 90:20
107:13 129:21 172:18
205:1

description (7) 9:3 25:20
56:20 57:9 83:7 102:8
151:20

designed (2) 163:25 177:13

desk (4) 10:1 28:7 198:17,20

desks (3) 9:15 10:3 94:6

desktop (1) 199:10

deskwise (1) 94:5

despite (2) 108:16 146:20

detail (2) 200:16 202:19

details (13) 13:23,25 14:1,3
45:18 51:12 57:10,25
58:2,12 84:20 147:11
178:24

determine (1) 132:21

determined (1) 183:1

determining (2) 55:7 81:10

developed (3) 15:21 96:22
110:13

develops (1) 71:18

deveran (29) 5:8 6:6,10 7:12
8:17 15:18,23 16:15 17:24
19:3 22:7 26:15,25 27:4
29:15 35:23 43:13,19 46:6
56:11 72:7
181:18,20,21,22
182:9,10,14,25

dial (7) 98:8 152:4 153:17
154:15,16 155:19,25

dialling (2) 98:20,22

didnt (58) 4:11 33:14 40:24
42:20,25 45:17,23 47:10
51:19,21 61:9 73:9 74:5,24
77:12 78:23 79:19,21 92:8
97:18 99:13 101:17 104:11
105:10 107:10 112:7,21
114:13 116:6 118:2 121:9
126:15 127:13 129:2,3
130:17,19 131:11 136:19
138:10 140:17 142:8
148:5,24 149:2 154:7,9
159:25 160:11 164:18
168:5,5 169:3 177:7 191:4
201:9 205:1

die (1) 155:4

difference (2) 8:10 173:11

differences (1) 174:25

different (45) 5:13
6:20,21,21 10:25 13:12
15:5,14 16:6 25:23 26:23
28:3 29:22 30:1 31:19 38:2
40:18 41:4,24 55:3
67:14,16 75:1 76:8 80:15
86:7 113:8,13,13,14
115:10 121:9 123:25
156:21 158:22 161:24
167:25 174:6,8,23
190:9,16,17 193:22,24

differentiate (4) 66:13 76:21
190:18,19

difficult (19) 18:9 66:12
104:21 106:20 115:15,22
116:4,7,11 121:6 123:6
144:16 145:7 149:15
156:18 168:12 169:22
170:5 177:23

difficulties (5) 97:2,3,4 98:2
181:2

difficulty (3) 16:9 147:24,25

dinghy (5) 53:5 57:18 105:6

134:1,10

direct (15) 8:7 13:25
31:20,21,24 37:12 52:7
58:7 59:5,7 74:16 83:21
116:10 130:6,6

directed (3) 83:14 131:14
187:3

direction (2) 55:8 140:2

directly (19) 4:9 13:2 14:5
31:22 42:13 45:16,19
46:14 47:4 52:10,13 59:2
83:19 146:20 148:24
150:17 161:2 168:1 176:19

disadvantage (1) 203:5

disbelieve (1) 147:15

disclosed (1) 23:14

discretion (1) 43:10

discuss (8) 9:6 10:21 134:2
135:18 136:19 138:10
188:14 201:5

discussed (8) 54:22 81:23
102:23 124:18 134:5 136:6
187:25 188:15

discussive (6) 41:23 46:25
188:13 194:14 195:16
207:19

discussion (7) 53:19 79:19
80:2 188:22 189:16,17
207:4

disembarked (1) 161:14

displayed (2) 146:8,18

distance (4) 70:23 94:8
100:3 102:2

distinction (2) 17:18 173:20

distinguish (1) 66:16

distress (34) 16:23,24
17:4,7,8,16,17,19,20
18:2,5,6,8,13,20 68:14
69:15 70:4 77:3 102:19
105:13 107:22,25 132:13
135:7 156:12 165:24 166:1
167:19,24 170:7 196:19
204:19 205:5

distressed (1) 17:14

divert (1) 101:16

diverting (4) 27:24 28:8,12
101:20

divide (1) 25:17

divided (2) 123:22 124:5

dividing (1) 193:19

division (4) 14:8 25:15 114:7
125:4

document (23) 4:6 23:5,14
26:8 27:20 29:18 35:16
36:8 37:17,22 38:16 40:3
43:15 46:1,3,4,16 56:9
57:15 84:3 178:18 204:13
206:23

documentary (1) 20:7

documented (1) 118:4

documents (4) 20:11 37:2
44:1 123:4

does (16) 18:5 26:17 42:20
57:20 69:13 111:21 133:12
177:13,22 183:12 184:16
190:17 192:8 194:1 195:4
198:7

doesnt (16) 46:5 57:15,21
60:4 67:14 83:10,10,12
107:13 150:24,24
151:16,17,21 152:3 177:24
15:13 24:19 25:8,18,19
26:23 54:2,18 94:13 96:19
105:3,4 114:12 119:7
124:13 125:10
127:3,6,7,19,22
136:15,18,18,20
138:1,3,3,3,14 155:11,11
162:20 163:8 165:8 166:22
173:22 190:15

done (32) 11:5,13,14 23:25
24:6 25:9 36:24 52:5 64:4
69:3,7,21 70:15,17 71:2
72:19 74:19 92:22
116:13,15 117:21,25

131:12 133:16 138:21
155:21,23,25 173:25 174:5
176:22 201:23

dont (108) 11:22 20:4,10
23:4,13 27:9 29:18 36:6
37:8,19 38:13 40:17 41:7
42:7 47:15 49:15,24 50:2,4
51:18 56:25 58:22 59:21
61:5 67:10 69:19,19
71:17,20 72:24 73:14,25
76:13 77:3 78:24 80:6,7
82:3 85:22 86:23
87:2,10,15 88:1,17,19,21
92:5,10 93:7,10 98:1
100:12 101:22 103:7
106:4,9,15,16 110:18
120:14 123:19 124:21
125:16 126:1,4,15 131:25
133:15 135:20,25 137:19
138:9 140:2 143:7 144:20
145:22 148:19 150:1,1
153:5 158:16 159:11
164:23 166:14,19,20,25
167:3,4 168:20,21,22,24
170:19,20,22 171:3,4,4
177:8 181:3 183:23 186:18
199:13 202:15 206:25
207:15

door (1) 196:3

dot (1) 189:10

doublekeying (1) 118:15

doubt (1) 80:3

dover (88) 11:17 16:15
33:13,17,18 63:5 93:23
95:14 96:7,19,23 97:24
99:24 102:23 108:21,22
109:22 110:2 111:7
112:2,10,23 113:17,23
114:24 117:5,6,8 120:5,8
121:3 122:15
128:15,15,17,20,21,23
129:6,13,22 132:5 133:4
135:7,12 137:9 138:7,25
157:6,16,17,23 165:20
169:16 170:16 171:5
175:20,24 176:13,23
177:10 179:24
180:16,19,21
181:6,11,23,25 182:4,21
183:3,6,15,23 184:10,15
185:8 186:1,3,16
187:7,11,13 188:25 190:3
194:18 195:1

dovers (3) 114:10 117:10
129:19

down (42) 4:14 13:14 16:25
32:12,17 34:9 35:4 36:14
42:24 47:11 50:15 53:3,9
62:9 63:1 68:11 71:4 77:7
79:6 80:3,18 83:15 101:2
133:9,22 136:24 137:1
139:12,24 141:1 145:10,16
146:24 150:7 154:23
157:19 164:3 165:13
183:20 191:15 203:11
205:15

downgraded (1) 132:12

downs (11) 49:22 50:16 53:4
89:2,7,8,14 170:20,24
171:7 209:3

draw (1) 199:2

drawn (1) 171:2

dream (2) 71:20 72:1

drew (1) 202:1

drill (1) 154:22

drills (1) 18:22

driveway (2) 86:1,2

dropping (1) 98:7

drowning (1) 104:3

due (5) 107:20 117:19 123:6
128:6 194:6

duncan (1) 188:18

dunkirk (2) 140:4 155:16

duplicate (2) 82:23 86:24

duplicates (3) 73:8 82:22
86:25

duplicating (1) 46:15

duration (1) 9:13

during (21) 4:8 6:25 8:25
23:1 42:11 48:24 72:19
73:8 78:8 80:10 88:10,13
126:2 144:18 185:8
188:3,22 191:10 196:15
203:14 204:23

duties (1) 125:20

duty (10) 7:8 9:17 10:21
20:2 22:24 23:16 46:22
88:7,8 117:5

dynamic (1) 177:21

E

e (1) 209:1

earlier (25) 13:16 23:7 25:17
39:8 50:25 75:2 78:3 84:19
86:25 131:11,18 140:25
142:11 155:13 156:1
163:16 170:2,24 186:14
188:1,2,11 192:24 203:1
207:19

earlies (1) 32:7

early (10) 32:11 40:6 86:4
102:9 185:10 189:12,19,22
194:14,14

ease (1) 36:22

easier (1) 105:8

easy (2) 149:12 155:9

eat (1) 28:7

editing (1) 38:16

effect (4) 78:7 79:5 105:2
118:24

effective (5) 101:21 115:7
177:10,13,25

effectively (1) 37:11

efficient (1) 61:17

eight (4) 57:17 197:20 198:1
199:17

either (15) 7:6,17 10:9
11:20,24 24:20 31:11,16
57:12 63:2 76:2 83:1
113:5,11 150:24

electronic (10) 9:9 14:5
42:15 45:16,19,21,23
46:14 47:5 106:9

electronically (1) 106:8

element (3) 45:9 96:2 115:16

elicit (1) 156:11

else (16) 55:11 69:2,7,21
70:14 83:24 100:23 115:17
128:4 132:19 156:6 161:20
173:24 176:6 178:13 200:2

elses (1) 160:25

elsewhere (2) 112:11 118:22

email (18) 32:2,4 33:8 34:2
35:18,19 36:13 56:8 60:15
82:17 84:2,11
187:21,22,23,25 188:13,19

emailed (3) 106:11,14,15

emails (5) 19:21 24:18
26:15,24 39:21

embarked (6) 13:1 84:7
160:2 162:7 164:17 166:11

embarking (1) 13:9

emergency (4) 18:8 69:14
110:9 138:19

emerging (1) 122:10

emits (1) 141:12

employed (1) 89:18

employment (1) 90:1

empty (1) 198:20

en (6) 12:11 64:5 69:2,20
74:15 75:3

enable (1) 122:23

encourage (2) 98:8 125:15

encouraged (2) 186:21 187:1

end (10) 27:22 72:13 87:4
124:3 155:24 164:22
167:17 188:8 192:22
206:20

ended (1) 113:19

ends (2) 153:21 157:8

enforcement (6) 3:13
4:16,17 42:18 43:4 45:9

engage (1) 155:13

engaged (6) 92:13 185:18
200:1,9 201:17 203:18

engaging (1) 161:18

engine (4) 139:23 140:1,1
149:1

england (3) 147:3 153:9,9

english (8) 97:14,19 142:13
152:21 153:15,16 168:11
185:15

enough (10) 78:9,22 79:8
80:1 97:14,19 117:25
118:1 144:1 189:13

enquiring (1) 65:14

ensure (1) 174:6

enter (3) 162:13 197:9
198:15

entered (12) 17:11,13 18:3
30:12 56:3,20 123:21
133:10 159:23 160:17,18
196:2

entering (6) 134:19 158:20
159:4 160:13 161:21 162:2
175:21 176:10

entire (6) 113:7,12 115:9,23
175:21 176:10

entirely (1) 149:18

entries (12) 35:4 44:24
45:5,16 50:8 53:9 150:2
162:6,12 164:12 185:5,5

entry (34) 38:4,14 49:4,10
56:24 60:25 61:3,6 85:22
118:13 133:21 142:25
148:22,23 158:8 160:6,8
163:4 172:19 181:16
184:3,4 191:15,22
192:7,15 193:9 194:12,13
195:20 199:15 201:6 204:4
206:18

eo (1) 2:1

equipped (1) 17:24

equivalent (1) 173:24

error (1) 192:11

escalated (1) 7:23

escalating (2) 7:2,17

especially (2) 8:17 76:10

essential (2) 59:6,7

essentially (18) 8:6,15 20:18
25:18 30:22 43:18 55:15
91:20 112:19 113:21
122:22 123:25 127:14
130:6 160:25 190:6,15
206:20

establish (1) 206:11

established (1) 37:6

estimate (2) 76:13,15

estimates (1) 75:20

estimating (1) 62:11

eta (1) 61:1

etc (19) 21:10 26:4,15
28:8,13 72:9 102:9 104:6
111:13 112:1 149:14 155:5
161:4 167:10 168:3,9
169:6,10 183:10

even (8) 18:5 76:1 149:17
157:18 158:20 188:18
191:6 193:5

evening (12) 19:21 20:12
22:11 23:2 34:3,7 35:14
65:5 86:25 130:22 161:11
206:22

evenings (1) 159:7

event (13) 12:21 13:7,19
17:10 30:4,6 56:22 57:10
58:8 88:20 92:4 117:15
187:16

events (30) 6:4 13:10,24
15:22,25 16:2,17 19:18
30:2,23 36:20 38:24
39:10,12,15,16 46:10
63:15 66:13 76:11 79:5
120:23 139:1 173:7 180:20
184:12 187:9 193:25
194:10 202:17

eventually (1) 184:18

ever (16) 9:16,16 19:2
52:9,13,19,22 72:3 91:4

102:23 109:18 159:21
169:16 175:15 182:15
207:7

everincreasing (1) 42:15

every (4) 17:10 30:4 162:17
174:15

everybody (9) 4:23 117:22
145:10 165:14 167:21
168:4,7,8,17

everybodies (1) 115:13

everyone (2) 1:3 207:18

everything (8) 54:12,15
108:17 161:20 163:12
164:10 179:14 194:5

evidence (23) 8:9 17:7 21:7
22:11 23:15 26:22,25 27:8
28:2 42:6 45:7 67:17 88:25
108:21 123:5 130:24
170:25 171:8 177:14
204:16 207:16 208:5,7
evolved (2) 46:12 96:15

evolving (2) 46:6 96:24

exact (1) 173:2

exactly (3) 9:18 19:20
62:13 83:7 93:6 127:23
13

face (7) 108:11,18 143:9,18
144:15 147:14 162:5
facets (1) 16:5
factor (1) 2:19
factored (1) 27:18
factors (2) 55:9 107:20
factual (1) 45:6
fair (14) 3:5 9:3 20:6 25:20
34:17 44:5 96:16,21
112:20 120:4 127:24 139:1
173:17 185:21
fairly (5) 28:18 95:3 108:14
114:11 150:15
fallen (1) 164:3
familiar (6) 43:15 46:3
178:19 191:25 201:25
206:6
familiarise (3) 198:23 200:5
202:12
familiarised (1) 202:17
fantastic (1) 156:19
far (18) 6:4 12:6 46:7 63:11
94:6 98:13 108:12 123:19
131:17 140:10 148:15
158:2 165:11,13 167:10
168:2,19 175:4
fareham (1) 173:9
fast (2) 100:22,22
faster (1) 71:1
fatalities (1) 7:22
fatality (1) 116:25
february (3) 92:3,16 93:11
fed (1) 30:24
feed (1) 31:2
feel (5) 109:18 178:7 186:15
195:23 199:9
feeling (2) 121:3,13
felt (4) 62:25 63:12 68:13
110:25
ferries (1) 142:4
few (3) 207:20,25 208:11
few (9) 6:4 35:4,22 46:7
92:17 127:17 172:7 187:20
199:7
field (1) 99:6
figures (2) 75:22 171:2
files (1) 44:21
filling (1) 9:8
filled (1) 29:23
filling (1) 44:6
final (6) 10:13 91:16 150:2
203:1 206:13 208:3
finalised (1) 203:22
finally (3) 117:8 173:4 184:6
financial (1) 105:25
find (18) 28:17 41:4 69:11
99:2,5 100:17,19 101:4,7
104:25 141:17,25 153:23
156:14 168:8,24 169:3
198:19
finding (6) 70:8 106:20
165:24,25 166:17 169:6
fine (3) 71:13 89:2 149:8
fingers (2) 77:19 78:1
finish (5) 152:24,24,24
189:12 194:15
finished (8) 82:8 88:11
151:11,21 152:18,18
164:25 195:21
finishes (1) 167:3
finite (1) 80:12
first (55) 5:9 6:4 14:15 20:18
23:20 25:1 26:2 31:8,9,15
39:4 49:2,4 54:23 56:17
74:3,8 80:4 88:12 89:11
95:7 96:12 102:11 114:18
117:9 121:2 132:6
133:4,21 135:19 139:5,8
142:13 146:3,4 160:7
162:8 169:5 174:24 180:17
182:20 183:11,12,14,23
184:23 185:24 189:9
198:15,16,17,18,19 199:15
206:23
firsthand (2) 178:10 181:24
firstly (1) 171:17

fit (1) 128:10
five (8) 28:19 53:9 101:18,19
120:17 140:17 174:15
184:15
fifteenminute (1) 28:11
fixed (1) 130:16
flag (1) 70:2
flagged (1) 7:21
flamant (3) 75:6 136:15
138:12
fleet (4) 5:15,22,24 15:7
flexing (10) 113:2,2,5,23
114:22 115:8 116:20
175:21 176:3 177:9
flight (1) 130:17
flow (1) 142:12
focus (2) 26:15 185:19
focused (3) 5:21 6:1 27:4
focusing (1) 119:11
follow (4) 117:13 120:5,9
142:12
followed (1) 117:18
following (8) 22:21 56:18
79:11 88:6 118:23 159:2
189:18 201:6
follows (1) 87:11
force (46) 3:11,17 5:15,19,22
7:18 22:3 29:11,22 30:1,18
31:2 33:6,10,12 34:19
35:18 36:13 40:19 46:20
52:2,9 53:16,17 56:17
57:24 59:3 60:15 63:2
64:6,8,9 65:7 76:5 79:12
82:20 84:1 131:19,22
134:21,24 159:19
160:9,12,16 204:11
forecast (1) 188:23
foreign (1) 141:10
forgive (2) 71:23 182:12
form (1) 158:13
format (6) 90:9 95:7
157:2,15 175:8 196:24
formally (2) 18:6 92:10
format (2) 92:15 163:18
forward (1) 184:7
forwarded (1) 36:9
found (12) 68:23 84:7 86:20
105:8 165:10,16,22
166:3,11 167:12,14 169:10
four (7) 81:20 86:9,12,19
87:1 185:6 188:4
fourth (2) 208:1,5
france (3) 65:24 156:7
205:17
free (2) 118:22 183:5
french (39) 7:19 17:13
31:12,14 51:4,8 65:23 70:2
77:19 78:1,15 80:17
126:22 127:1,5 128:1
130:19,21,24 131:6,7,8,11
132:15,16,18,22 133:7
134:3,18 135:1,5
145:17,18 153:20
157:10,12,19,22
frequency (2) 141:13 181:10
frequently (6) 28:18 114:9
176:12,15 180:7,13
frontline (2) 14:25 15:14
frontlinebased (1) 15:2
frustrating (1) 104:23
full (24) 37:14,19,19
67:7,13,19 68:23 69:12,25
70:1,22 83:10 89:13
91:5,19,20 124:17 169:25
171:24 196:7,9,10 197:2,8
fully (7) 80:10 91:17 92:21
93:11 119:22 159:4,4
function (4) 5:3 176:3
179:10 190:6
functions (3) 8:13 173:23
177:6
further (14) 32:12 38:20
42:24 51:12 52:25 58:2
64:3 88:21 94:4,5 100:7
159:16 170:20 207:13
fyi (1) 36:12

G
gain (1) 186:4
gained (3) 35:12 96:23 174:1
gap (1) 184:8
gaps (2) 109:15,17
garbled (1) 149:13
gather (1) 184:22
gathered (1) 106:6
gathering (1) 122:22
gave (6) 59:12 96:11 98:9
132:10 170:17 180:16
geared (1) 110:5
general (8) 5:9 14:15,19
15:24 16:7 35:24 94:24
107:10
generally (20) 9:5,16 10:9
11:8,9 18:10 27:17 28:6,15
39:8 67:22 97:11,14,16
100:17 104:2 114:6 164:2
175:8 181:8
generate (1) 104:12
generic (1) 206:18
gentleman (3) 99:2,14 103:1
genuinely (2) 18:4 169:19
geographic (1) 116:15
geographical (1) 115:10
geographically (3) 112:9
113:11,12
geolocation (3) 99:12 140:18
141:24
george (5) 188:17 191:16,24
194:13 206:17
get (51) 14:19 31:13 51:21
62:12,13 64:8,11 66:9 70:1
71:20 72:1 76:2 82:8 91:7
96:9 97:14,16 99:12,23
101:9,14 104:11,22,24
105:24 106:3 115:19 122:6
123:17 126:12 127:4
140:12,14,18 145:8 151:19
152:15 154:2,16,17
155:6,14 156:4,17 167:9,9
169:25 170:10 181:1
186:12,17
gets (2) 111:10 148:4
getting (10) 31:18 39:22
53:10 100:10,12 106:23
126:15 154:13 167:5
199:19
gibson (56) 64:22 65:25
66:21 69:24 71:8,19
72:1,23 73:15,22 74:3,8
75:5 77:14 78:24 80:15
90:16,20 93:24 96:11
103:24 113:16,18 121:13
122:15,19,24 124:18 135:9
136:4,12 137:12,16 138:10
142:19,25 144:6,10,12
145:16,19,23 149:19 150:4
158:17 161:9,13 170:16
190:24 193:19 196:5
198:2,16 199:12 200:5
202:9
gibsons (1) 160:5
gist (1) 107:10
give (15) 37:3 50:18 51:17
59:13 117:13 121:6 141:20
142:7 148:6 152:4 153:18
154:4,10,18 156:6
given (31) 15:19 16:5 20:23
24:18 28:24 30:11 32:25
37:14,19 42:15 48:15
49:8,11 68:3 76:15 85:11
87:21 101:6 105:18
144:14,23 154:9 168:22
169:18 174:9 180:23
185:25 186:2 196:7
202:6,10
gives (6) 50:24 51:10 73:15
137:5 155:17 157:19
giving (8) 87:5,8 104:5
142:11 151:14,18 169:24
170:9
goes (10) 24:16 44:18 55:25
63:5 71:8 80:15 91:18

96:17 162:17 179:12
going (79) 9:7,13,18 24:7
25:6,7,7 26:11 33:8
39:15,16,23 40:9 48:9,9
53:12 58:5 63:23 64:6,11
70:8 73:17,23 78:7,8,9
81:22 94:12 100:11,22
101:16 103:12 104:6,13,17
109:7 110:7 115:19
118:7,21 120:13,23 121:24
122:8 127:18 128:6 129:5
131:9,16 132:3 138:22
142:13,14,17 145:5,13
155:4 156:9 161:16
164:5,9 168:11,16 169:22
170:5 179:19 185:18
186:8,25 187:16,17 188:25
189:2 195:15 197:12
199:22 200:11 202:15
207:23
gone (6) 42:6 71:1 124:10
165:21 167:22 201:12
good (17) 1:3,4,10 53:5
57:18 65:5 89:8 98:23
120:14 134:1,10,23 135:4
146:22 171:16 186:23
202:25
goods (1) 3:22
goodwin (1) 161:23
google (2) 141:25 154:8
governed (1) 46:2
government (2) 5:18 131:8
governs (1) 43:18
grade (3) 2:4,5,6
grading (2) 2:3 17:10
granted (1) 36:16
grateful (2) 88:25 201:1
grave (1) 169:20
great (1) 119:15
green (5) 21:14 22:6 24:25
25:4,11
gregory (2) 1:6 209:2
grey (1) 70:2
grinez (15)
31:12,16,18,20,21,23,24
39:21 40:1,20 127:1,25
131:9 133:7 145:24
guess (3) 16:1 142:10 146:22
guessed (1) 146:19
guidance (6) 96:6 98:5,10,12
114:14 206:3
guide (1) 154:8
guidelines (2) 60:6,9

H
hadnt (11) 4:2 38:21,24 39:5
92:22 146:10 149:17
165:16,19 202:6 203:4
half (11) 2:13 20:5 21:2
27:17 105:15 123:25
124:1,2,3,5 132:7
halfway (4) 8:21 34:9 139:12
146:24
handful (1) 184:17
handle (1) 110:14
handover (15) 27:18
87:5,6,8,16 170:13,17
196:4,6,9,10,24 197:2,8
202:6
handset (2) 10:8 27:25
hang (2) 86:22 119:12
happen (6) 66:8 119:12
121:5 130:17 186:15 193:7
happened (15) 20:7,19 63:14
66:15 88:13,19 113:14
158:9 166:12 176:14
188:24 191:2 195:5 198:4
200:3
happening (11) 10:25 115:20
116:18 123:7 164:19 178:8
186:5 194:5,22 197:6
200:6
happens (1) 79:21
hard (1) 168:10
hasnt (1) 168:22

haven't (4) 11:22 12:1 112:6
161:10
having (23) 5:16 13:13 19:25
21:12 27:12 37:2 110:2
118:24 125:2 127:16
140:21 144:12,17,18
145:1,9 149:8 163:19
195:20 201:23 203:6 206:8
207:8
head (1) 101:8
heading (1) 44:23
heads up (2) 31:16 132:2
hear (16) 10:5,6,9 61:7 62:3
115:19 144:25
145:5,6,7,13 150:24
151:16 155:12 160:15
161:3
heard (38) 1:25 3:20 5:20
9:19 10:8 17:7 19:25 22:11
29:21 41:2 50:2,3 62:2,16
65:1 67:17 72:1 86:7 97:1
108:21 123:5 135:22
136:1,12
137:12,15,16,17,18,20,24
138:1 160:19 177:14 185:9
191:18 204:16 205:7
hearing (2) 126:5 178:9
hearings (2) 208:1,3
heavy (1) 95:1
held (2) 106:9 108:2
helicopter (17) 71:25
73:16,20,22,23 107:3
161:17 184:2
165:5,16,16,19 166:22
169:1,1,2,8
hello (3) 139:11 152:19,22
help (26) 9:22 16:22 17:18
65:10 73:17 84:9 85:12
87:11 117:1 145:19,19,20
152:5,18 156:9,13 181:19
185:1 186:7,12 188:2,8
191:20 192:10 194:1
205:18
helpful (2) 171:8 207:17
helps (1) 194:7
hence (1) 18:1
here (29) 32:7 50:8 56:20
57:3 58:12,18 65:3,8
67:13,18 68:2 70:8 73:21
74:24 76:24 84:25 86:22
94:8 139:8 150:8 182:8
183:13,24 184:8 185:6
191:16 197:20 205:10,24
herself (1) 48:25
hes (6) 34:13 139:20
144:21,22 151:1 153:20
hey (1) 78:23
high (1) 111:6
higher (13) 2:4 6:13,20
8:1,5,6,11 10:12,18 11:1
21:5 24:1 72:20
highlight (1) 184:1
highlighted (2) 16:16 183:24
himself (1) 188:19
hindered (1) 116:23
hindsight (4) 147:23 156:19
202:18,24
history (1) 169:3
hm (38) 2:16 11:5 19:4
30:14 31:2,6,22 32:1,15
34:17 38:1 39:24 40:20,22
49:8,12 50:24 55:16 56:18
57:3 60:3 64:19 65:4 68:3
72:18 75:12 89:23 90:1
93:16 98:5 102:17 107:19
112:16 119:16 120:6 133:8
143:8 170:7
hmcg (4) 47:24,24 89:22,23
ho (9) 2:4 6:18 8:14
10:15,20,20,22 46:22,22
hold (2) 106:7 208:5
holding (1) 91:14
home (8) 21:15,23 25:5,7
29:10 34:8 42:13 115:12
hope (3) 179:14,19 208:9
hopefully (1) 36:15

hos (1) 6:21
host (1) 111:13
hour (13) 27:17 60:17
62:12,13 63:24 64:7 82:4
123:24,25 124:1,2,3,5
hourly (4) 13:24 14:2 36:22
60:22
hours (12) 39:4 64:8 72:8,11
86:4 124:4 132:1 185:10
188:6,7 199:24 203:14
hover (1) 189:9
however (5) 22:5 70:3 91:15
193:24 206:7
hr (1) 61:1
huh (1) 81:3
humber (6) 113:25 114:5,6,7
183:4,5

I
icom (2) 130:1,2
ics (1) 126:14
id (1) 124:16
idea (5) 34:16 186:23,23,25
202:25
ideal (1) 72:3
identification (2) 160:1
162:10
identified (8) 49:21 73:8
84:15 86:25 142:20 143:3
166:8,9
identify (2) 102:10 141:20
identifying (4) 16:10 55:13
57:19 118:20
ignored (4) 70:4,9,24 83:14
ill (3) 102:7 103:7 170:3
illegal (1) 3:22
im (11) 14:14 171:6 182:17
183:16,20,25 195:2,17
199:13 200:4 207:3
image (3) 107:2,7,12
imagine (1) 51:6
immediate (9) 61:24
62:5,14,17 63:23 137:8
143:22 166:10 197:12
immediately (3) 194:10
197:18 202:14
immigration (13) 1:21 2:7,21
3:23 5:2,4,12 6:12
14:17,21,24,25 15:10
imminent (3) 108:16 143:25
159:4
imminently (1) 120:23
impact (3) 118:5 177:8 204:8
impacted (1) 108:3
implemented (1) 114:15
importance (1) 41:8
important (11) 14:7 36:1
57:6 59:1,18 81:10 101:23
153:23 177:15 202:7,12
impossible (4) 48:17 108:14
119:13 141:24
impressed (1) 198:6
impression (1) 24:10
inability (1) 154:10
inaccurate (1) 79:24
inaudible (11) 84:18 93:21
121:8,15 139:22 144:20
147:4,4 151:7 168:12
205:17
incident (101) 7:17,22 16:21
17:1 18:18 20:16 29:24
31:3 33:1 52:23 54:3 56:20
59:3,10,14 66:1,17
68:12,25 70:25 75:21
88:18 91:16,23 92:8,15,25
93:1,4,9,14 101:15 110:7
116:25 117:2,15 118:12,21
119:7 120:12 123:14
132:8,12 133:5,11,21
134:13 135:3,8,12 136:16
138:16 142:19,20,21
143:10,24 145:17 148:5
150:3,10 158:3,15,24
159:12,13 162:11,14,15,16
163:6,7,8,10,20,22
164:4,6,9,10,17,21 169:8

191:13 192:23
193:3,4,11,12,24,25
202:22 203:2,14,16,20
204:4,9,13 207:8,8
incidents (54) 31:9 42:17
46:7 55:23 65:17,22 76:11
83:20,21 95:8 96:13
109:8,13 110:3,4,4,11
112:1 148:1 161:3 163:18
164:8 166:5,24
178:22,22,24 192:12
194:6,25 195:4 196:19
197:6,12,14,20,22 198:1
199:2,17 200:8,9,12
201:12,16 202:13
203:3,9,10,11,17 204:23
205:12 206:14
include (1) 44:3
included (1) 113:8
includes (1) 143:1
including (2) 26:14 97:3
incoming (1) 119:18
inconsistencies (1) 41:6
incorrectly (1) 134:10
increase (4) 109:24 176:25
180:25 181:10
increased (1) 6:3
incredibly (1) 66:12
independent (3) 19:24 20:10
47:15
india (3) 65:17,22 82:22
indicate (2) 40:1 204:10
indicated (2) 67:3 189:12
indication (3) 31:13 39:22
207:9
indicator (3) 133:1 157:20,25
indicators (1) 131:16
indirectly (1) 176:18
individual (3) 42:9 123:19
176:8
influence (1) 104:18
influx (3) 30:17 68:8 131:22
information (148) 13:15 14:9
15:25 25:19 27:2 29:1,7,7
30:15,17,20 31:1,8,9 40:23
41:5,24,25 42:10,13 45:18
46:15 50:13 51:10,13
52:8,14,23 53:1,8
54:7,9,21
55:3,4,15,17,19,21 56:2,4
57:2,6,15,19 58:17,23
59:1,2,7,13,17,19,19
60:6,7,10 67:8 68:3,19
73:16 75:22 77:9
81:10,13,14 82:12,13
84:5,16 85:4
87:12,18,22,24 94:10
95:23,24 96:4,5 97:15,16
100:11 102:5 104:23,24,25
105:6 106:6 119:17
122:22,23 123:1 127:4
130:20 133:11,14,17,23
134:7,9,14,16,17,19,21
140:12 141:20,24
142:11,18 143:1,8,11,13
144:14,23 145:23 147:6
148:2,3 151:14
154:2,4,5,10,13,17 155:14
156:4,11,14,17 158:20
161:7,16 162:13 163:5,9
165:14 175:13 177:15
197:9 179:6,19 202:8
203:6,7
informed (2) 158:17 193:12
inherent (1) 107:21
inherently (1) 169:18
initial (7) 12:11 25:1 59:12
60:18 62:24 75:20 76:18
initially (8) 37:18,20 38:12
56:3 76:12 78:6 101:14
113:15
initiative (1) 186:21
injuries (2) 7:22 170:10
input (3) 58:21 82:25 87:20
inputting (2) 14:8 27:3
inq0023310 (1) 181:13

inq0002351 (3) 148:8 178:17
192:5
inq00023513 (1) 192:6
inq0002356 (1) 158:8
inq0002357 (1) 148:22
inq0002359 (1) 199:14
inq0002371 (1) 133:19
inq00023711 (1) 160:4
inq00023712 (1) 161:12
inq00023713 (1) 162:1
inq0002373 (1) 133:22
inq0002376 (1) 137:2
inq0002377 (1) 137:5
inq0002379 (1) 142:23
inq0002581 (1) 191:12
inq0002585 (1) 191:13
inq000409 (1) 189:5
inq0004091 (1) 182:1
inq000451 (1) 82:18
inq0004711 (1) 56:8
inq0004721 (1) 56:13
inq0005071 (1) 60:14
inq0005081 (1) 60:19
inq00054401 (1) 82:16
inq000572 (1) 83:25
inq0005721 (1) 83:25
inq0062331 (1) 187:6
inq006802 (2) 203:24 204:3
inq0068021 (1) 197:16
inq0070581 (1) 37:22
inq0076021 (1) 64:20
inq0076022 (1) 64:23
inq0076023 (1) 66:20
inq0076024 (2) 71:22 73:15
inq0076025 (1) 77:20
inq0076026 (1) 81:2
inq0076481 (1) 49:18
inq0076482 (1) 50:7
inq0076483 (1) 51:1
inq0076484 (1) 53:7
inq0076541 (1) 139:5
inq0076542 (1) 139:9
inq0076543 (1) 139:17
inq0076544 (1) 140:3
inq0076545 (1) 140:5
inq0076546 (1) 140:11
inq0076571 (1) 146:5
inq0076573 (1) 146:5
inq0076574 (1) 147:8
inq0076582 (1) 150:18
inq0076583 (1) 151:8
inq0076584 (1) 151:19
inq0076585 (1) 152:6
inq0076586 (1) 153:10
inq0076587 (1) 153:19
inq0076601 (1) 61:17
inq0076602 (1) 61:20
inq0096341 (1) 201:3
inq00963413 (1) 190:1
inq00963419 (1) 179:4
inq00963425 (1) 201:4
inq00963429 (1) 192:21
inq00963432 (1) 205:9
inq01013515 (1) 26:8
inq01013516 (1) 26:11
inq01013518 (1) 24:4
inq01013519 (3) 23:23 24:16
27:20
inq01013521 (1) 49:3
inq0101356 (1) 54:25
inq0101357 (1) 56:1
inq01020810 (1) 112:14
inq01020811 (1) 114:18
inq01020812 (1) 119:14
inq0102082 (1) 90:8
inq0102083 (1) 95:6
inq01020831 (1) 103:16
inq0102089 (1) 109:21
inq0102141 (2) 4:6 21:1
inq0102142 (2) 19:14 42:2
inq0102144 (2) 8:21 72:16
inq0103491 (1) 206:14
inq01039224 (1) 90:22
inq0106311 (1) 32:2
inq0106331 (1) 34:1
inq0106401 (2) 35:16 36:8

inq0106403 (1) 35:17
inq0106661 (1) 43:12
inq01066614 (1) 44:23
inq0106666 (1) 43:22
inq0106667 (1) 44:11
inq0106951 (1) 205:13
inq0106983 (1) 47:21
inq0106984 (1) 48:11
inq012145 (1) 2:11
inq0106982 (1) 22:1
inquiry (29) 1:13 20:20
23:13 42:5 67:17 90:3,8
97:1 102:17 108:21 123:5
124:18 130:24 164:25
172:3 173:7 176:18 177:14
181:19 184:12,23 185:9
191:18 198:6 199:16
204:16 205:7 208:12,16
insistent (1) 126:13
insofar (6) 94:24 96:16 97:23
105:14 111:7 143:4
instance (3) 32:8 38:20
205:3
instances (1) 76:7
instead (3) 58:16 99:5
101:19
instigated (1) 93:7
insufficient (2) 79:1,16
intel (1) 77:24
interact (1) 128:22
interacted (2) 8:4 31:25
intercepted (6) 12:20 76:20
84:15 85:9 86:5,12
interdicted (2) 85:1,16
interested (2) 156:16,16
internal (2) 133:8 180:3
interoperability (1) 110:9
interpretation (3) 97:7,24
169:11
interpreter (1) 206:11
interrupt (1) 135:17
interrupting (1) 102:6
interviewed (2) 20:15 133:8
into (37) 7:19 14:5,9 17:11
19:9,16 27:3 30:25 31:3
32:3 36:6,6 40:11 45:22
56:3 84:9 85:11 87:20
103:19 118:13 124:5
133:14 148:17 154:23
173:8,21 175:10,19,20
176:11,12,24 177:4,2
179:22 180:2 182:7,23
183:4,5 191:25
201:15
intranet (2) 95:25 96:4
introductions (1) 150:21
investigation (2) 20:16
105:25
investigations (1) 45:3
involved (20) 4:9 13:8 27:21
34:24 39:12 48:22 51:21
70:14 109:13 113:22
114:1,4,10 125:11 127:18
169:12 170:13 177:16
195:13 198:12
involvement (3) 19:3 113:3
129:19
involves (1) 3:16
involving (1) 116:25
ipad (3) 129:21 130:3,5
iphone (1) 125:1
isnt (10) 57:7 63:23 70:16
71:20 79:13 102:21 140:16
142:13 143:16 155:6
issued (4) 30:9 38:22 85:19
196:15
issues (1) 205:7
issuing (3) 38:15,20 70:12
itd (1) 132:16
item (1) 38:5
its (114) 2:3 3:5,6 4:13 10:7
11:17 12:7 15:4,4,13 18:9
20:3 21:16 27:11,12 29:19
31:8 33:9,10 36:1 37:7
38:5 41:2 44:5 48:8 49:17
50:3 51:6 53:5,5,11,12
58:18,19,19 63:13 65:7

66:11 67:7,17 68:11 69:25
70:13 73:10 74:2 77:2,15
81:18 83:17 85:11 86:21
91:5 92:5 93:6 94:24 97:1
111:15,15,25 112:10
113:14 115:12 118:20
119:19 126:15 133:8
134:22 139:23 143:2,16,20
144:16 145:7 146:12
149:12 150:13 151:21
152:16 153:18,19 154:1
155:1 156:14,15 157:17
162:15,22 166:22,25
168:10,21,22 169:13,25
170:5 177:13,22,25 179:17
180:21 181:16 182:1,12
190:11,18,19 191:15
192:21 197:24 200:18
201:24 204:10 205:10
206:21
itself (10) 15:23 20:5 29:18
38:10 48:8 56:12 60:20
61:16 84:3 110:14
itselfinq005411 (1) 82:18
ive (4) 147:15 154:12 156:5
192:13

J

jackets (3) 51:16 57:17
58:25
james (4) 190:24 193:2,19
206:17
jer (3) 33:13,18,19
jesip (2) 110:8 163:17
job (6) 16:1 43:19 46:2
52:21 96:14,18
joined (3) 89:23 172:11,13
joint (3) 110:8,10 163:17
jomash (4) 139:8 144:5
150:11 166:7
jonas (7) 139:7 143:1 144:5
150:11 159:16 166:8
167:18
journey (1) 106:22
jrcc (36) 113:3,18,22
114:3,5,6,9 119:21 124:11
128:9,17 129:18,22 130:13
137:13,18,22,23 144:12
173:8,21 175:10,19,20
176:11,12,24 177:4,2
179:22 180:2 182:7,23
183:4,5 191:25
june (2) 90:1 173:5
junior (4) 110:22,25 111:15
121:21

K

karen (52) 1:25 2:4 5:20
6:18,19,22 7:4,14
8:9,14,24 9:8,23,24 13:16
21:5,23 22:1,21 23:21 25:1
26:3 29:21 32:5,7 34:4,10
35:4 36:9 39:7,7 42:6
47:20 48:22,25 53:19
54:8,14 56:9 72:20
79:12,20 81:20 82:17
83:1,2,3 84:11,12
85:17,18,19
keep (10) 123:7,10 130:8
142:14 145:3,12 153:5
155:13 164:18 206:9
kept (5) 16:19 45:20 129:22
138:24 142:17
kind (3) 3:23 124:7 205:20
kinds (1) 3:21
knew (21) 9:17 27:5 41:8
53:21,23 55:17 63:20 67:3
70:6,22,23 74:18 78:5,10
79:4 80:13 100:18 101:15
110:6 117:22 169:4
knockon (1) 78:7
know (117) 14:24 15:21 16:7
17:2,11 19:18,19 20:2 21:4
26:2 29:10 33:13 34:25
36:23 37:8,19 38:13 39:16

40:17,25 50:2,4 52:4,25
56:6 58:22 59:5 60:21
62:12 67:10,20 68:16
69:2,7,16,19 73:9 75:14
76:13,15,22 78:8 79:24
81:1,10 83:23 86:4,20,23
87:2,18 88:20 92:5 93:7,10
97:18,23 98:1,14 100:13
103:7 104:12
106:4,9,15,16,17,18 111:8
117:22 120:14 122:12,16
123:19 124:21 125:16
126:25 131:12 135:7 136:1
140:2 141:15 142:19
143:4,7 144:20 148:9,19
150:1,1 151:13 153:5,6
168:5,5,20,21,22,24
170:2,22 171:4 207:18
knowing (3) 73:12 99:14
100:21
knowledge (5) 18:21 48:4
164:19 165:4 203:14
known (6) 62:16 64:1
135:11,11 175:13 201:19
kraken (1) 199:20

L

labour (1) 125:4
lack (1) 120:8
lady (2) 103:2 170:2
land (1) 99:18
landing (1) 99:25
language (14) 97:3,6,13
107:11 119:19 142:13
143:14 154:25 205:8,22
206:4,6,7,12
large (8) 29:19 101:2,3,4,13
140:25 141:1 142:3
largo (1) 118:20
last (5) 34:11 35:22 133:25
181:15 199:12
late (2) 123:12,16
later (14) 57:12 58:21 102:7
110:17 117:21 118:17
120:11 121:8 126:25 131:2
136:14 138:12,14 145:15
latest (1) 9:1
latitude (1) 156:6
layout (1) 93:22
le (3) 207:20,25 208:11
lead (1) 7:10
leader (12) 103:24 121:25
173:5,8,12,13,22 174:3,3
190:19,20,21
leading (1) 8:24
leads (1) 124:7
leaflet (2) 106:13 170:25
leaflets (5) 105:18,21,24
106:4,7
learn (7) 95:17 109:10
127:3,7,18 157:15 181:24
learned (5) 95:4 96:18,22
125:10 157:5
learning (4) 98:15,16,17
175:4
learnt (4) 16:3 61:10 70:21
103:17
least (2) 100:9 157:20
leave (5) 6:22 22:21 28:20
91:10 185:14
leaving (1) 28:1
led (1) 90:14
led (12) 11:17 82:5 90:1
94:2,2 140:4,9
155:16,16,17 182:3 207:5
lefthand (1) 183:8
leg (1) 116:18
legal (1) 63:6
legally (1) 63:9
leicester (1) 99:7
leicestershire (3) 99:4,7,15
length (1) 137:25
lengthy (1) 87:6

less (9) 76:23 79:25 100:7
109:8,8,9 112:8,12 150:17
let (2) 89:2 91:7
lets (24) 64:17 82:8 90:21,24
95:5 96:9 108:20 109:20
112:25 117:8 122:13
130:12 132:5 133:18
136:24 138:24 139:4
142:23 146:3 148:7,22
150:16 160:4 183:21
letter (1) 82:16
lettering (2) 140:25 141:3
letters (2) 101:2 141:1
level (13) 4:24,25 102:18
105:13 110:25 167:19,24
172:19,22 195:10,12,13
204:19
levels (2) 112:15 121:17
ley (1) 188:18
liaison (3) 33:12 34:17,19
life (6) 18:1 45:1,10 51:15
57:17 58:25
lifboat (4) 71:5 118:11,14
159:19
lifting (1) 73:22
light (2) 35:22 141:12
lights (6) 140:10
141:8,9,13,19,23
lightvessel (3) 66:23 137:7
141:11
like (32) 4:18 34:4 37:6
39:25 54:3 55:2,9 60:4
65:3 69:3 70:12 71:3 78:19
84:24 101:1 106:22,23
107:14 115:12 124:6 127:7
137:25 141:10 167:1
168:22 180:17 181:16
192:15 196:14 197:10
199:21 200:11
likely (10) 22:13 35:12 65:25
75:23 121:22 131:19
133:12,15 137:14 156:2
limit (1) 86:16
limitation (1) 177:19
limitations (1) 100:5
limited (5) 72:6 78:12,13
140:12 206:19
linchpin (1) 93:21
line (38) 2:4 6:17,19 8:6,15
12:5 38:4 79:22 90:25
95:7,8 96:12 99:22 100:5
103:17,19 108:5 109:21
110:8 113:1 114:19
117:9,12 119:9,14,23
130:6,10,11 131:20 132:3
133:1 158:1 166:1 173:13
174:4 206:6,7
lined (1) 132:23
lines (1) 36:14
link (1) 116:13
linked (1) 114:5
links (1) 114:8
list (5) 50:17 60:5 90:9
168:23 203:11
listed (2) 93:2,8
listen (8) 12:2 73:4 145:6
149:13 155:8,12 156:21,22
listened (1) 121:22
listening (4) 125:9 149:6,10
160:25
listing (1) 118:15
lists (1) 59:16
literally (1) 32:25
little (20) 3:15,20 5:3 8:10
10:23 13:12 14:13 19:8
23:21 26:23 28:3 29:6,12
31:6,25 39:5 47:12 131:2
184:8 202:19
live (25) 9:9 13:19,24
29:1,11 30:2,18,23 35:24
36:4,17 45:25 46:21 47:5
56:11 58:4,7 59:6 60:16
81:18 82:15 83:3,3 84:1
203:12
load (1) 198:20
loading (1) 198:21

locate (1) 18:16
located (2) 19:21 24:18
locating (2) 16:10 55:13
location (19) 61:1 62:12
101:25 102:1 110:12
113:8,9 115:10,17,24
116:16 128:15 129:3
153:23 154:2,7,18 161:19
167:1
locations (4) 83:19
112:6,7,13
log (49) 40:22 44:2,6 56:5,7
133:18,19 134:19 136:24
142:19 148:7,8,10,18
149:23 158:6,7,19
160:4,14 161:6
162:5,19,22 163:11,12
178:17,25,25
179:6,11,13,15 181:14,18
192:6 198:20 199:15
197:13,13,20,22,22
202:18,20 203:3,4 206:14
207:7
logged (8) 38:13 39:5,8,17
40:10,12 128:14,19
logging (4) 40:8 51:25 139:2
199:5
logical (2) 125:4 156:23
logically (1) 21:19
logistics (1) 9:22
logon (1) 198:17
logs (10) 14:9 85:19 139:7
199:22 201:10,11,15 204:1
206:18 207:9
lone (1) 180:24
long (5) 12:15 27:16 72:9
199:5,11
longer (6) 2:18,25 111:18
199:18,22 200:20
longitude (1) 156:6
look (39) 5:16 9:8 32:12
39:5 53:10 56:7 65:16
73:21 79:23 83:5 90:24
95:5 103:14 105:11 109:20
117:8 126:25 133:18
134:15,15 136:24 139:4
141:4 146:4 148:7,22
149:12 150:16 155:10
165:9,21 166:3 167:22
169:2 180:7,13 183:5
200:16 202:25
looked (9) 21:12 23:14 60:11
61:19 62:11 107:4 119:7
150:11 204:12
looking (50) 5:15 9:10
13:18,21 24:9 26:3,16,24
30:14 37:2 38:8 42:8,20
47:19 50:12 53:3 60:18
64:18,24 65:19 69:24 75:4
82:19 100:18
101:16,17,19,19,21 147:23
157:21 163:11,15 164:12
166:21 167:4,11,22
168:5,25 173:7,20 175:1
185:4 193:9 198:13 199:19
200:7 202:16 203:9
looks (4) 34:4 37:6 65:3
181:16
lose (4) 139:25 147:4
178:7,11
losing (1) 149:1
lost (3) 99:2 139:23 140:1
lot (11) 13:23,24 46:24
67:24 111:16,18 177:14
180:9 185:9 186:14 199:1
lots (5) 101:6 103:11 112:10
145:4 155:4
low (1) 203:11
lower (1) 190:11
luck (3) 75:9,17 77:15
lunch (2) 120:20 121:1
lying (1) 103:4

M

m (10) 12:22 29:23 31:3
38:15,20,22 85:10,13,20

204:10
m957 (3) 85:12,24 204:4
m959 (1) 162:2
mail (1) 20:16
main (3) 117:17 118:5
138:25
maintain (3) 174:7 177:23
194:1
maintained (1) 129:19
maintaining (1) 180:21
majestys (8) 9:1 89:18,20
172:12 174:14 179:10
204:17,17
majority (8) 6:5,9 48:23
105:12,14 188:2,10 190:13
makeup (1) 104:3
making (19) 9:4 14:9 18:11
32:13 45:5 46:23 47:8
49:23 54:8 55:5 62:8 65:3
66:10 72:25 111:1 127:3
136:23 137:13 194:9
male (2) 205:16,18
males (1) 169:25
manage (3) 76:2 78:13 175:2
managed (6) 69:4 113:6,7
168:3,6 176:10
management (13) 8:15
25:19 27:3 29:1 72:6,13
78:4 79:12 122:4 173:14
174:4 181:14 201:22
manager (5) 2:4 6:17,19 8:7
79:22
managers (1) 16:18
managing (4) 8:24 111:25
115:12 163:25
manic (1) 35:22
manually (1) 56:3
many (17) 34:24 58:24 72:8
73:9 78:6 100:18 121:8
166:20,20,24,25 167:3,4
168:20,21,24 201:23
maps (2) 141:25 154:8
march (8) 1:1 89:23
94:18,20,25 103:21 174:18
208:17
marine (1) 4:23
mariner (2) 4:22 63:18
mariners (2) 17:23 169:17
marinetraffic (1) 141:5
maritime (26) 1:23 2:23 3:12
4:15 5:6,14 15:3,8,24 16:7
22:3 35:18 65:7 89:24 91:6
110:21 122:10 172:22
174:2 190:5,8,10,12
201:7,18 202:2
mark (1) 82:4
marked (4) 50:8 82:22
161:14 200:13
marry (2) 203:7,10
martin (1) 89:14
mass (1) 88:12
masts (1) 98:25
match (2) 66:2 205:1
matches (1) 66:2
matching (1) 169:9
material (2) 20:7 118:24
matter (6) 43:9 107:11
164:23 166:6 167:14
168:13
matters (2) 42:19 43:19
max (1) 78:18
maximum (1) 75:14
maybe (8) 48:22 86:23 87:1
109:4 110:24 111:16
149:15 156:20
mayday (48)
61:2,6,7,11,15,16,21 62:16
63:4 64:13 65:14
67:1,4,12,12 68:15
70:1,4,7,9,12,24
83:13,13,18
136:8,17,17,25
137:4,12,14,16,18,21
138:1,2,6,11,16,21 139:5
142:21 143:20 144:2
150:12 166:9 196:15

mcc (25) 6:14 14:18 20:3
28:18 33:15 36:15
44:13,14,16,19
85:14,21,23 86:1,15,18
131:22 160:16,22,22,24
161:2,8 162:2,3
mcccglo (1) 34:12
mcga (1) 36:16
meals (1) 28:7
mean (19) 14:24 17:20
18:5,24 42:20 68:1 105:22
107:14,16 110:1 112:3
113:2 114:23 119:25
154:20 180:1 181:5 194:24
196:10
meaning (2) 189:20 203:8
meaningful (1) 154:10
means (6) 11:20,20 67:14
179:20 194:4 202:23
meant (7) 34:25 49:10 90:12
111:1 145:9 160:15 191:3
median (7) 99:22 100:5
107:7 131:20 132:3 133:1
158:1
meet (1) 79:16
member (3) 4:16,20,20
members (2) 175:9 204:17
memory (3) 20:10 48:6 49:13
mention (1) 138:12
mentioned (9) 12:1 23:7
25:16 99:17 108:7 140:24
170:2,24 188:13
mentions (2) 55:10 61:6
mentoring (1) 125:18
merchant (1) 100:25
message (8) 143:17 149:11
159:1 160:15,18,21 161:4
206:16
messages (5) 126:13 148:14
149:13 150:15 201:18
met (1) 91:14
method (2) 41:25 180:4
methods (1) 41:24
michael (1) 171:25
middle (10) 8:23 43:3,23
80:23 99:3,21 139:21
146:25 151:21 185:15
midnight (1) 132:7
midway (1) 191:15
might (43) 3:21 5:12,18 6:22
7:10,15 12:9,12 14:3 24:1
25:17 40:15 48:24,25
62:18 70:20 75:25 76:8
78:22 81:11 86:22 100:4
102:9 104:19 106:3 108:3
112:19 120:11 131:3,8
152:4 153:18 155:20
159:21 169:3 177:20
188:16,18,19 195:13,15
200:1,11
migrant (28) 2:16,18 4:2,3,9
12:21 15:22 30:7 42:19
49:11 50:13,17,21
51:10,23 52:1 73:12
148:7,10,17 149:23,24
158:5 178:16 179:11
198:10,13 201:7
migrants (5) 13:9 52:3 75:25
84:8 86:16
mike (10) 12:22 29:23
30:8,12 31:3 85:10
160:9,11,13 162:8
miles (2) 12:5 51:5
mind (5) 70:21 144:24
159:21 167:16 181:3
minimum (1) 91:14
minute (5) 14:20 66:24
68:17 91:7 134:20
minutes (21) 41:17 50:25
51:3 60:17 64:18
73:20,22,24 82:5 135:9
140:17 145:15 191:16
197:19 199:7,9,16,18
200:18,22,24
mirror (1) 30:3
mismatch (1) 115:24

miss (2) 116:1 186:14
missed (3) 86:22 149:11,15
missing (1) 57:6
mission (14) 90:15 92:14
117:14,20,24 118:16,18,25
120:11 123:10,13 173:15
177:17 190:11
missions (3) 165:8,12 198:5
mistaken (1) 195:9
misunderstand (1) 151:14
misunderstanding (1) 205:24
misused (1) 192:14
mitigating (2) 98:6 119:21
mitigating (1) 55:9
mm (3) 29:14 53:14 60:24
mmhm (3) 63:25 83:9
193:16
mobile (18) 23:25 24:6 27:24
28:8 97:4 98:2,23,24
100:14 125:1,22,24
126:2,7,9,14,20 129:6
mobilised (1) 132:1
model (2) 110:10 163:17
modules (1) 92:25
moftatt (8) 89:10,12,13
120:14,22,23 170:20 209:4
moment (10) 41:14 47:7
67:1 178:23 183:22 187:14
196:1,3 197:9 200:19
moments (1) 198:18
monday (3) 3:20 189:1
208:17
monitor (1) 125:24
monitored (1) 137:21
monitoring (5) 119:10
124:2,10 132:16 176:8
month (1) 124:21
months (1) 92:3
moor (27) 89:24 90:4,10
91:10,10 92:7,7 94:1,7
109:11,11 122:21 125:9,13
127:16,17,25 138:25 150:6
167:15 176:5
190:6,9,17,19 198:2,2
moonin (3) 135:11,15,24
moos (4) 93:5 112:4 169:13
183:10
moot (5) 91:1,2,3,4,4
more (64) 6:24 7:11 14:19
39:5 44:22 50:17 51:13
52:14,22 53:8 71:20,23
72:10 75:13 76:3,24
78:16,25 79:22,25 80:13
91:9 97:16 99:11,17
104:21 105:15 109:9
110:8,10 111:12 112:9,12
114:7 115:18,18,22
116:4,7,11,19,20,22
124:22 128:24 144:3
150:17 157:17 165:24
166:15 169:20 171:3
175:6,8 177:23 180:7,12
198:13 202:7,12,19,20,24
208:9
morning (23) 1:3,4,10,11
25:23,23 32:7,9 35:13
36:10 38:6,19 39:11
49:6,19 56:10 142:24
145:15 162:6,7 185:11
191:17 205:14
most (13) 12:16,24 46:13
57:25 114:5 159:7,7
165:23 183:19 185:5,7,16
186:5
mostly (1) 118:6
mountains (1) 106:25
mouth (1) 181:4
move (11) 16:11 42:15
108:20 111:11,17
112:13,25 148:20 181:15
182:18 184:7
moved (7) 109:14,16 110:24
113:17 115:9,23 161:25
moving (4) 15:17 32:17
114:18 116:23
mrcc (31) 109:22 113:3

114:9,16 127:25 133:6
175:20,24,25 176:13
177:10 179:24
180:16,19,21 181:11,23,25
182:21 183:4,15,23
184:10,15 185:8 186:1,16
187:7 190:3 194:18 195:1
mrccs (1) 119:20
ms (32) 1:8,9,10 23:23
41:13,16,21,22 47:22
48:11 49:2 55:2
59:9,16,20,23 61:4 82:4,10
88:21 89:10,12,13
120:14,22,23 170:20
207:20,25 208:11 209:3,4
msc (6) 101:1,2 141:3,5,5
142:2
mubin (4) 135:10 144:6,15
159:16
much (35) 1:7,18 2:10 3:4,10
5:1 6:1 8:18 14:14 24:4
41:16,22 42:4 43:21 50:11
55:15 56:14 80:19,22
82:10 88:24 118:10 120:18
161:6 166:1,15 171:8,9
175:24 176:18 177:3
200:20,21 207:15 208:13
multiple (17) 36:20 41:4
46:9 63:15 66:6,9,10
84:25,25 110:11 128:5
129:8 164:8 167:5,5
193:22,25
must (6) 21:19 43:25 44:16
45:5 46:4 137:17
myself (8) 50:4 94:7 123:19
127:16 193:4 198:23
202:13,17

N

n (1) 209:1
name (20) 32:5 34:12 89:13
100:13 101:14,23,24 136:2
139:16 142:7 146:5
155:20,20 163:1 171:24
181:17 182:6,14 190:17
192:9
narrow (1) 183:19
narrowing (1) 157:18
national (4) 5:21,25 6:2
181:5
native (1) 182:2
natural (1) 142:12
nature (6) 16:9 17:15 18:14
27:23 169:18 173:23
nautilus (1) 51:5
neal (50) 64:22 74:8 78:24
90:16 93:24,25 94:5,7
96:11 103:24 113:16,18
121:13 122:15,19,24
124:18 130:5 135:9
136:4,12,15 137:12,16
138:10 142:19,25
144:6,10,12,20
145:16,19,23 149:19 150:4
158:17 160:5 161:9,13
170:16 190:24 193:19
196:5 198:2,16,22 199:12
200:5 202:9
near (2) 151:6 166:17
necessarily (9) 17:16,19
39:14 57:11 64:5 104:11
107:14 117:12 118:2
necessary (3) 62:25 63:12
105:5
necessity (2) 40:10 78:10
need (27) 5:19 7:23 14:22
24:20 28:20 29:18 35:7
36:2 37:23 51:18,19 56:7
64:2 76:4 81:11 85:23
97:18 101:9 105:5 139:13
143:21 151:13 153:5
166:10 182:2 191:7 208:10
needed (20) 7:2,3,7,17,24
11:12 12:15,16 23:24 24:5
25:8 28:10 33:21 39:9,20

59:1 80:13 138:22 142:18
198:22
needing (1) 83:12
neither (1) 190:23
network (14) 112:5 113:23
128:20 175:22 177:5,7,12
181:5,6,14 183:1,3
201:21,22
never (5) 4:8 20:15 52:15
87:19 158:15
news (1) 121:8
next (43) 10:3 24:7,14
26:4,11 49:9,17 50:6 55:25
60:15,15 61:20 64:17
66:20 71:22,24 75:4 77:20
78:8,22 81:2 82:15 84:1
85:15 87:5,13,23 94:3
124:7 137:4,6 146:2 151:8
161:12 162:1 163:14 179:3
184:3 197:19 199:23
207:18,20 208:10
night (103) 19:9,13,16,18,24
20:3,8,11,19,24
21:6,13,14,16,16,20,22
22:22 23:1,22
24:10,17,24,25
25:4,11,23,23 26:18
27:5,5,6,14 28:24 33:1
34:5 37:10,10 38:1,4,9,14
39:2 40:13,16 47:13,25
48:8,20 54:19,20 59:24
63:17 69:18 73:8 82:3
85:19 87:5,9,10,19
88:7,8,11,15 91:1
113:15,23 116:12
120:15,24 122:13,14
124:8,9,14 125:25 126:23
129:12,15 130:15 132:6
133:3 144:19 147:17
150:14 159:16 160:2
164:16,20,22 167:17
168:3,19 173:7 185:11
188:1,5,8,9 189:19 197:9
198:7
nights (1) 139:1
nightshifts (1) 185:6
nighttime (1) 76:10
nine (3) 105:16,17 108:2
ninenine (1) 27:17
nobody (1) 200:2
nodes (8) 11:10 29:17 63:21
67:5 90:6 189:15 204:7
206:1
noise (4) 145:4,11 149:14,14
noisy (2) 149:10,10
none (2) 164:13 166:11
nonetheless (1) 108:17
nonoperational (1) 122:17
normal (12) 24:22 54:3
108:6 114:11 121:9
127:5,24 145:4 155:6
166:2,18 167:23
normally (6) 25:11 29:4
67:24 159:18,19 176:20
noted (1) 110:24
notes (3) 19:21 42:11 133:9
nothing (12) 69:2,21
70:11,14 71:2 100:8
132:19 156:5 167:24
187:11,15 195:7
notice (1) 176:24
notification (1) 39:25
notify (1) 13:4
november (46) 1:20 6:8 7:13
19:10,16,17 27:16 32:3
34:2,5 35:19 36:10,14
37:11 38:2 42:12,22 47:25
49:20 56:2,10 64:22 89:18
90:14 94:17,20 95:1
112:21 122:14 131:12
165:1 170:14 180:17,20
181:14 184:7,23 188:24
189:6,7 194:11,17
195:4,19 201:24 206:22
number (55) 12:22,22,22,24
13:1 27:13 29:23,23

30:9,12 31:4 32:13 38:5
51:17 55:6 75:25
76:2,3,8,16 77:2 84:7
85:10,12,13,14,15,20
86:16 90:8 100:13
101:9,12 102:8 110:12
112:22 124:21 130:14
132:11 140:16 142:8
146:8,18 155:22
160:9,11,13 161:8 179:1
183:2 194:6 197:21 204:10
206:9
numbering (1) 80:17
numbers (25) 13:5,11
38:15,20,22 51:20,25
52:5,11,16 66:2 71:14
75:19 76:16,19,21
84:20,21,22 147:9
151:15,18 162:8 180:22
189:3
numerous (1) 114:1

O

objectively (1) 169:20
obligations (1) 63:20
obliged (1) 63:9
observational (4) 190:4
191:7 193:17 198:11
observations (3) 110:19,23
111:2
observe (1) 181:24
observing (1) 127:14
obtain (6) 13:10 30:15 33:4
52:14 55:19 60:7
obtained (4) 14:3 57:19 60:6
172:25
obtaining (1) 13:15
obvious (1) 28:23
obviously (56) 11:21 13:7
17:23,24 18:9 20:2 23:11
25:9 28:10,13 30:11 32:24
39:10 41:8 51:24 53:21
62:3,22 67:20 68:13 72:6,7
74:15 75:3,24 86:2 88:18
99:20 103:10 104:21
106:12 112:10 122:16
128:23 131:24 134:14,16
138:18 142:15
144:1,1,20,24 149:5,6
154:15 155:7 156:23
157:17 159:11 162:12
164:7 166:19 170:6 178:6
180:11
occasions (3) 114:1 150:14
184:15
occupants (1) 102:9
occur (1) 128:25
occurred (3) 96:24 114:13
121:8
occurrence (2) 94:25 131:1
occurs (1) 197:19
oclock (5) 39:2 120:17
189:13 200:3 208:16
october (3) 90:5 172:5 184:6
offer (3) 79:3 181:6,10
offered (4) 102:7,11 176:20
180:23
offering (2) 102:4,4
offers (1) 51:17
office (27) 7:8 8:3 9:14,20
11:1,3,22 12:3 21:15,17,24
22:14,19,25 23:9 24:11
25:2 26:20 28:10,14
29:8,10 33:16,17 42:14
45:15 46:12
officer (41) 1:22
2:2,4,5,6,7,22 3:13 4:16
5:3,4,12 6:13,24 7:11,15
8:1,2,5,6,11 10:12,19 11:2
14:17,21 15:7 21:5 33:12
34:18,19 44:14 72:21
85:21,24 89:24 91:6
110:21,22 172:23 174:2
officers (13) 6:12,20
14:24,25 15:11,14,15 42:9
44:13,16,19 56:3 176:24

official (5) 27:22 28:5,8
30:7,10
offline (1) 176:10
often (15) 17:7 18:4 28:17
97:6,12,17 111:10 119:12
121:5 130:12 131:4 154:22
157:11 186:18 202:24
oh (15) 75:11 77:17 91:8
96:3 105:25 108:25 109:19
121:15 123:13 144:9
156:15,24 160:24 168:16
170:3
okay (51) 5:11 10:4,12,23
12:9 19:7 21:25 27:19 36:7
44:10 47:11 48:5 49:16
50:20 53:10 57:1 60:2
64:17 71:13 73:14 74:1
79:18 81:18 84:13 86:3
89:2 144:9 147:2
152:7,11,15 155:15 160:3
171:7 172:10 175:18
182:13,18,24 183:21 185:1
189:22 195:18,22 196:1
200:18,25 202:6 204:3
205:16 207:1
onboard (2) 204:24 205:1
oncall (2) 7:1,16
once (32) 11:16
12:10,17,20,24 13:6,7,9
16:2,2 18:2 29:23 30:7
31:3 34:3 39:9,9,21
53:19,24,25 58:7 69:9
71:10 86:13 92:10,11 93:2
107:7 159:12,18 204:25
oncoming (2) 87:25 204:12
ones (5) 93:3,3,8,8 114:5
ongoing (16) 16:17,20 17:3
39:9 52:23 175:6
196:8,9,17 197:7,14
198:23 199:17 202:15
203:9,17
onto (2) 42:13 56:4
onwards (2) 38:19 184:6
op (15) 6:10 7:12 8:17 15:23
16:15 19:3 22:7 26:15,25
27:4 29:15 46:6 72:7
181:18,22
open (12) 30:4 129:22
130:9,10,11 140:1 197:20
198:1 200:7 201:11,16
203:10
opened (2) 132:8 201:13
opening (1) 133:21
operate (2) 125:24 176:5
operated (2) 124:23 192:1
operates (1) 177:12
operating (11) 35:25 43:13
95:21 117:18 119:16 120:6
126:12 175:12 180:6
190:21 206:2
operation (21) 2:14 3:5 5:8
6:6 15:18 17:24
43:13,19,25 56:11 88:6
164:20 175:3 181:20,21
182:8,10,14,25 185:19
196:22
operational (4) 96:19
122:14,16 173:15
operationally (1) 200:6
operations (22) 2:16 3:25
4:1,9 89:24 91:6 93:22
110:21 116:2 118:8 129:12
163:14 172:23 174:2
185:18 193:22 198:15,18
200:9 201:17 203:12 207:4
operator (10) 132:10
140:13,14
146:7,11,14,18,19 147:10
180:24
operators (3) 116:8 176:22
177:2
opinion (2) 122:11 167:12
opportunities (3) 27:25
112:11,13
opportunity (2) 122:5 129:15
opposed (8) 6:2 32:9 45:21

102:6 115:23 138:2 155:2
163:21
ops (7) 96:23 181:25 193:20
196:2 197:9,15 200:1
optimal (1) 120:2
option (5) 28:12 86:1 100:9
118:22 206:7
options (2) 86:2 156:8
oral (1) 28:2
orally (1) 177:16
order (9) 3:7 45:6 54:8
100:16 101:6,9 104:12
156:21 158:21
ordinarily (2) 7:14 144:4
ordinary (1) 144:25
organisation (2) 19:5 69:17
organisationally (1) 112:15
organise (1) 199:10
origin (1) 106:4
original (1) 18:17
originally (2) 65:16 206:17
originator (1) 188:19
others (14) 29:9 94:9 97:23
102:17 103:25 108:1
114:19,23 115:5 120:4
147:22,23 157:6 169:16
otherwise (8) 57:13 72:11
78:7 101:16 131:25 138:20
145:12 182:15
ours (1) 18:13
ourselves (3) 15:2 16:18
198:3
outgoing (1) 127:4
outline (1) 57:9
output (1) 36:2
outstanding (3) 86:17
165:12 197:22
over (10) 6:3 26:11 51:1
53:7 86:4 105:15 129:1
189:9 196:7 199:23
overall (4) 68:12 69:4 177:23
194:7
overcrowding (1) 107:21
overhear (3) 94:12 116:9
165:14
overheard (3) 136:3 145:11
161:4
overharing (1) 162:3
overlapped (1) 48:25
overly (2) 104:6 201:25
overnight (3) 12:12 23:2
32:9
oversee (2) 119:3 166:6
overseeing (2) 164:24 168:1
oversight (1) 194:5
overspeaking (1) 102:1
overstate (1) 167:23
overstated (3) 104:2,7,17
overtime (4) 10

109:20 112:14 113:1,25
 114:18,24 116:23 117:9
 119:24 179:4 190:2,3,23
 192:21,22,22 205:9
paragraphs (2) 74:9 201:3
paralysed (2) 119:15,19
part (46) 3:24 4:11 14:7
 18:22 20:16,19 41:11,24
 42:5 51:25 52:1 61:14
 64:19 66:16 68:12 70:12
 74:7 86:7 92:16 106:5
 115:24,24 116:21 118:3
 123:10 127:5 136:3 138:3
 147:5,12 149:3,11,15
 155:3 157:2,15 163:21,24
 167:13 176:3 177:20
 189:16 190:13 192:4,11
 201:5
partially (3) 91:13 93:15
 150:9
participating (1) 49:13
particular (19) 1:19 9:8
 15:12 16:5,8 53:18 106:4
 109:17 148:15 155:3 164:9
 165:9,10 178:12 183:7
 188:4 191:22 194:3 199:2
particularly (2) 98:11 121:9
parties (1) 10:8
partner (1) 44:20
parts (5) 90:9 113:22 116:9
 139:22 193:23
party (1) 180:11
pass (5) 12:21,22,23 75:3
 164:5
passed (9) 57:25 59:2,7
 74:14,15 83:18 134:7,14
 160:21
passing (4) 76:12 98:17
 100:13 144:23
past (4) 132:7 191:16 197:19
 199:16
pasted (1) 32:3
pastoral (1) 173:13
patch (1) 115:13
patchy (2) 97:4 98:2
pattern (2) 169:7,8
patterns (3) 109:4 176:25
 177:4
pausing (1) 67:8
pay (2) 111:10,12
people (7) 9:17 13:1 28:20
 34:24 46:13 51:15,20
 52:16 57:17 58:24 66:9
 68:6 69:14 77:2 78:16
 83:11 94:13 96:14,22
 98:15 99:20,25 101:18
 104:3,4,4,5,11 106:18,19
 109:8,9,10
 111:11,11,16,17,18 113:9
 116:10,10 118:1,8 129:9
 145:3,7,8,24 147:16
 149:5,16 151:15 154:19,21
 155:3,5 156:9,10,12
 157:21 159:18,22 164:14
 167:23 168:14,23,24
 169:23 170:9,9 174:6
 199:25 200:1 205:3,3
per (1) 46:10
percentage (2) 114:12 121:7
perfect (1) 185:5
perhaps (42) 19:4 50:6 90:21
 100:21 101:20 109:8
 110:5,14 111:1,16
 112:3,9,11,12 116:9,12,21
 120:1,10 125:15 126:3
 128:25 131:3 134:15 139:8
 149:17 154:14 155:19
 157:22 163:13,17,19
 169:2,4,20 178:11 182:24
 184:17 185:20 191:1 195:9
 207:22
perilous (1) 169:18
period (9) 21:13 28:17
 131:24 181:24 184:9,14
 188:6,11,25
periods (1) 79:2

permission (1) 36:16
permitted (2) 127:9,11
person (33) 10:5,10 11:2
 13:18,20 21:8 22:14
 25:7,18 28:10,20 32:5
 33:10 79:22 91:21 92:8,11
 94:15 97:13 101:10 102:4
 107:11 116:14 124:19
 141:19 164:2 181:23
 182:21 184:24 186:8
 188:22 194:5,8
personally (7) 15:6 19:1,6
 45:17 46:13 107:19 187:21
personnel (2) 22:4 111:6
persons (5) 55:6 75:13
 161:10 204:24 205:6
perspective (1) 64:6
pertinent (1) 47:4
phases (1) 185:20
phenomena (1) 122:12
phenomenon (1) 95:10
phillips (1) 207:20
phone (59) 7:9 10:11,24
 11:6,18 24:13 39:25
 48:2,23 51:17,19,22,24
 52:3,5,11 60:18 61:12
 62:24 65:12,13 66:10
 77:11 80:3 81:24 97:4,11
 98:24,24 100:13,14
 101:9,12 103:9 105:6
 106:24 107:2 125:1,22,24
 126:2,7,9,10,14,20 127:4
 128:20,22 129:7 133:5
 140:15 142:8 145:11 157:9
 178:5,12 186:17 206:10
phoned (3) 59:22 61:14
 140:6
phones (5) 27:24 28:8,12
 97:17 128:15
phonetic (2) 148:6 158:4
photograph (2) 106:12,12
photographs (2) 106:1,2
physical (3) 93:22 187:12,14
physically (7) 11:2 22:4,17
 116:1 117:23 118:8 128:21
pick (6) 18:16 65:11
 128:18,19 178:5 197:6
picked (11) 13:6 30:8 38:24
 52:1 65:23 76:20 96:14
 113:6,7 115:23 157:16
picking (1) 113:12
pictorial (1) 107:10
picture (6) 6:2 106:20,23,25
 107:2,4
pictures (5) 105:19
 106:17,19 107:4,9
piece (4) 82:13,14 133:10
 166:21
pieces (4) 57:14 198:20
 199:7 203:7
pinch (1) 76:19
pinging (1) 98:24
place (12) 20:24 43:14 49:19
 80:4,24 88:6 113:11
 118:16 152:22 169:5 187:9
 207:25
placed (3) 111:1 178:24
 203:3
places (1) 113:13
plan (1) 175:3
planned (1) 130:16
planning (3) 23:5 53:21
 118:19
plans (2) 117:14 122:9
play (1) 36:15
please (113) 1:5 2:12 5:4
 8:20 19:14 22:2 23:23 26:7
 32:2,16,19 34:1 35:16,17
 36:7 37:22 42:2
 43:12,12,22 44:11,22
 48:10 49:3,17 50:7 54:24
 56:13 60:14,19 61:16
 64:17,20,23 68:20 72:15
 83:25 89:13 90:22,23 95:6
 109:20 139:9,13 140:3,5
 142:23 150:18 151:8

152:18,19 153:10 160:5
 171:23 172:7 173:11
 174:25 175:20 178:16,17
 179:3,4 181:13,19
 182:1,3,4,18,19
 184:1,3,6,7 185:2,12 186:7
 187:6 188:14
 189:5,6,7,7,10,25 190:8
 191:12,12,14,20
 192:5,7,10,20 194:12
 197:4,16 199:14 201:2,3
 203:24,25 204:22
 205:9,13,15,16,17,17,18,18,19
 206:14,21
plot (1) 53:10
pm (10) 34:3 89:4,6
 120:19,21 130:22 140:4
 171:13,15 208:15
pocket (1) 44:8
pocketbook (1) 44:3
pointed (1) 149:16
police (1) 205:19
policy (1) 107:20
poor (2) 67:23 109:16
poorly (1) 17:23
populates (2) 162:15 163:7
port (5) 11:17 86:11,14
 99:24 129:6
portal (4) 95:23,24 96:5
 175:13
portrayed (1) 107:12
ports (1) 15:1
portsmouth (1) 12:7
position (37) 26:22 28:2
 50:18,24 74:4,12 75:2 77:5
 98:9 99:1 107:23 111:15
 119:13 127:21 135:25
 137:5,6 140:18,18,21
 144:3 152:4 153:18 161:17
 167:6,8 168:12 169:22
 170:5 172:15,19
 173:4,12,14 179:21 199:8
 207:24
positive (1) 162:9
possibility (2) 77:24 191:2
possible (13) 27:24 87:3
 94:24 105:14 120:9 129:17
 142:6 156:4 161:7 177:19
 193:20,21 195:9
possibly (4) 40:3 135:11
 192:15 195:15
potentially (1) 7:15 73:6,7
 75:8,16 76:2 77:6 83:11,22
 145:24 155:2
powerpoint (1) 196:11
practicable (1) 44:2
practical (1) 18:22
practically (1) 105:4
practice (11) 54:3,5,18 96:14
 113:2 157:3,5,16,17,23
 179:8
practices (2) 96:21 110:18
precarious (1) 144:3
preceded (1) 197:18
precise (1) 154:5
precision (1) 74:16
precluded (2) 127:6,20
predominantly (1) 185:13
preferred (1) 131:3
pregnant (3) 155:5 169:23
 170:8
preparation (1) 23:15
preparing (3) 199:23 208:7,7
preplanned (2) 187:18,19
presence (2) 187:13,15
present (5) 116:1 118:8
 124:17 181:23 182:22
presentation (5) 95:14
 175:15 187:11 196:10,11
pressure (2) 36:22 207:19
presumably (3) 81:15 85:6
 154:3
presume (1) 50:10
pretty (4) 8:17,18 80:19,22
prevent (1) 36:19
previous (2) 24:2,3

previously (9) 60:13 63:14
 94:21 138:6 178:4 185:4
 192:6 196:15,23
primarily (7) 3:25 8:13 68:11
 94:11,11 96:18 183:4
primary (7) 5:14 17:25 18:15
 41:11 53:13,21,23
principle (1) 191:6
principles (1) 110:9
prior (8) 3:11 180:16,19
 184:14 185:24 186:5
 194:11 201:24
prioritise (2) 100:10,12
priority (4) 100:16 101:6
 154:9 203:11
privileged (1) 178:7
proactive (1) 131:7
proactively (1) 52:23
probably (27) 26:2,5 36:2
 51:18 53:12 64:7 75:9,16
 77:15 82:5 102:24 104:17
 116:16 120:16 123:9 125:7
 137:2 139:3 153:20 157:10
 180:12 182:22 195:14
 202:20,22,24 208:2
problem (4) 98:3 111:7
 150:20 154:25
problematic (1) 118:6
problems (2) 98:6 109:2
procedure (7) 74:17,25 87:6
 88:3 126:12,18 206:3
procedures (7) 43:13 45:3
 95:21 117:18 118:24 120:6
 175:12
proceeding (1) 66:22
process (15) 51:25 52:2
 98:9 118:2 120:9 123:11
 108:6 118:2 120:9 123:11
 127:3,7 163:23 174:23
 175:1,6 196:21 198:10
 206:11
processes (2) 117:13 121:15
produce (1) 36:1
production (1) 175:11
programme (4) 93:2,8 122:8
 163:21
programmes (1) 112:1
progressed (2) 129:15 172:21
promoted (1) 173:4
proper (1) 202:6
proportion (1) 6:3
prosecuting (1) 118:25
prosecution (1) 204:23
provide (8) 64:2 147:9
 160:11 161:19 182:25
 183:6 186:16 190:25
provided (13) 1:12 59:4
 77:24 174:21 176:2,4,7
 182:20 183:12 184:17,22
 185:8,24
provider (1) 140:15
providing (7) 44:19 160:8
 172:3 177:10 183:14
 184:15 191:1
provision (2) 62:19 180:15
proximate (1) 136:4
publish (1) 208:4
purpose (2) 59:6 179:15
purposes (2) 42:18 43:4
pushing (4) 75:9,16 77:15
 82:6
putting (5) 57:23 58:17
 120:10 192:12 201:25

Q

q (653) 1:12,15,18,25
 2:6,10,25 3:4,10,15,20
 4:1,5,14,22 5:1,7,9,12,20
 6:1,8,11,15,19,24
 7:3,7,10,13,24 8:4,9,19
 9:22 10:1,4,12,16,23
 11:5,9,11,16 12:1,7,9
 13:1,12 14:6,13,19
 15:10,16 16:4,21 17:5,18
 18:4,17,22,25 19:2,7,12
 20:6,10,14,18,22 21:18,25
 22:11,16 23:1,6,13,18,20

24:16 25:10,15,22 26:7,22
 27:7,12,16,19 28:17,23
 29:4,6,15,18,21
 30:14,17,20
 31:1,6,18,21,25 32:12
 33:4,10,16,19,21,23
 34:1,9,17,21 35:4,11,16
 36:7 37:11,13,22 38:19,23
 39:1,4,16,24
 40:12,15,18,25 41:4 42:24
 43:3,7,9,12,18,21
 44:8,10,16 45:3,12,23
 46:1,16,24 47:6,11,19
 48:5,10 49:1,16,25
 50:6,11,24
 52:9,13,16,19,22 53:2,15
 54:2,6,12,17,23 55:21,25
 57:1,14,22 58:14,21,23
 59:9,15,23 60:2,11,13,25
 61:6,10,16 62:9 63:18,22
 64:1,17 65:3,16 66:16,19
 67:6,12,16 68:1,8,17,23
 69:9,24 70:16 71:8 72:15
 73:14 74:1,8,11,18,22 75:4
 76:7,23 77:1,14 78:15,21
 79:9,15,18 80:5,15
 81:10,13,16,20 82:1,25
 83:5,10,25 84:13
 85:3,10,17,21 86:3,19
 87:4,8,11,15,18
 88:1,5,8,10,12
 89:15,18,21,23
 90:1,3,7,12,14,18,20
 91:7,9 92:1,5,17,21,23
 93:11,14,18,22
 94:4,9,16,20,24 95:4,13,17
 96:2,4,9,21,25
 97:9,18,21,23
 98:2,5,12,15,17,20
 99:17,20 100:4,10,16
 101:6,23,25
 102:13,15,17,21 103:14,23
 104:1,8,18 105:11,18,23
 106:7,11,15,17 107:13,19
 108:1,9,14,20,24
 109:1,4,18,20
 110:14,17,25 111:4,6,20
 112:2,14,25 113:10,14,25
 114:3,9,14,18 115:1,4
 116:1,4,19,23 117:4,8
 118:5,18,23 119:2,9,14,23
 121:10,12,20,24
 122:2,4,6,13,19,21
 123:1,4,12,16,22
 124:7,13,17,23
 125:1,12,19,21,24
 126:2,6,9,17,20,22,25
 127:9,13,22,24
 128:3,9,12,17
 129:5,11,18,23,25
 130:6,10,12,15,19,24
 131:5,11,18
 132:5,17,20,25 133:4,18
 134:6,9,19 135:2,7,14,17
 136:3,6,8,11,20,24 137:22
 138:4,6,10,15,19,24 139:4
 140:21 141:18,23
 142:6,8,16,19
 143:8,12,14,18,20,24
 144:5,10,25 145:9,15,23
 146:2,10,16,18 147:19,21
 148:5,12,17,22 149:16,23
 150:2,8,16 154:1,7,25
 155:2,20,22,24
 157:1,5,8,15,24
 158:3,17,20,23
 159:2,9,16,21
 160:1,4,13,24 161:9
 162:5,20,22 163:2,11,24
 164:12,19,25 165:16,20
 166:7 167:16 169:1,14
 170:13,16
 172:1,7,11,15,18,21,25
 173:4,7,11,17,19
 174:8,13,17,20,25
 175:7,15,18,24

176:2,11,17,24
 177:3,9,14,19
 178:2,11,16,21
 179:3,21,24 180:1,14
 181:2,10,13
 182:1,12,14,18,24
 183:8,17,21
 184:1,12,20,22
 185:1,19,24 186:7,11,20
 187:5,18,21,23
 188:11,13,16,22
 189:5,16,22,25 190:16,23
 191:6,10,12
 192:5,15,18,20 193:14,17
 194:3,10,20,24
 195:3,9,18,22,25
 196:10,19,23
 197:1,4,9,16,25 198:15,25
 199:2,5,11,14 200:5,11,16
 201:18 202:1,4,6,18
 203:1,13,20,24
 204:3,8,12,16,22 205:7,24
 206:2,6,13 207:1,4,7
qualification (13)
 91:16,23,24 92:6,9 93:14
 172:25 173:14 174:1,15,18
 190:12 193:8
qualifications (6) 4:23
 14:16,22 90:20 172:9
 183:9
qualified (11) 4:22 91:13
 92:14,21 93:8,11,15
 174:9,12 191:3 193:18
quality (2) 17:22 67:23
query (3) 9:1 24:21 25:12
question (19) 14:16 18:17
 37:10 64:1 69:18 70:16,17
 82:3 113:15,23 120:15,24
 122:13 124:7,8 131:21
 200:11 203:1 206:23
questioning (1) 68:10
questions (19) 1:8,9 60:5
 88:22 89:10,12 156:20
 168:9 170:21,23 171:17,22
 172:7 207:12,14
 209:3,4,5,6
quicker (3) 64:10 71:3,5
quickly (1) 136:25
quiet (1) 145:3
quite (32) 14:15 17:6 29:19
 46:11 72:22 82:12
 97:12,17 100:2,3 101:12
 102:24 111:10,15,16
 113:13 117:20 119:13,19
 131:4 147:16 154:19,21
 155:1,6 185:9 195:11
 197:5,11,12 198:7 206:10

R

r (4) 161:17 165:5 166:12
 198:4
radio (19) 9:19 10:4,6,7,8,24
 11:6,21,24,25 12:1,2 13:21
 14:4 20:1 28:13 59:5
 137:13 178:5
radios (1) 9:11
rag (3) 21:20 22:15 119:3
rags (1) 191:17
raise (4) 110:17 121:12,24
 131:25
raised (4) 72:23 121:21
 144:10 145:10
raising (2) 103:1 111:4
ran (1) 9:21
range (1) 8:25
range (7) 5:13 11:23 12:2,4
 40:18 76:14 183:9
rank (1) 173:24
ranks (1) 172:21
rare (1) 42:14
rarely (1) 159:13
rate (1) 109:16
rather (16) 24:12 26:23
 36:20 42:18 43:4 119:11
 131:6 178:9,25 183:23

184:5 185:20 189:19 190:8
 201:22 202:9
rating (2) 21:20,20
rational (6) 44:4 45:13
 46:17,20 47:3 118:19
rcu (1) 58:10
reach (1) 73:21
reached (1) 86:16
reactions (1) 117:22
reactive (1) 131:6
read (18) 1:4 34

164:13 201:19
recording (31) 9:9
 13:14,18,23 15:25 25:19
 26:3 41:24,25 43:24 45:13
 46:4,11,14,19 47:2,4
 50:2,3 65:1 74:23 81:16,17
 82:11 148:24 156:22
 160:15 161:1,18 163:18
 199:20
recordinretainee (1) 45:4
records (7) 14:10 42:15
 45:19 46:14 47:14,16
 87:15
recover (1) 168:4
recovered (7) 106:2,6 167:21
 168:7 204:11,25 205:2
recovering (2) 198:10 203:23
recovery (2) 88:6 168:18
recruitment (1) 122:8
red (17) 22:5,12,17,22,23
 23:1 83:6
 182:7,8,9,11,16,20 185:7
 188:23 189:4,10
redacted (2) 32:6 34:12
redambergreen (1) 21:20
refer (8) 2:1 105:18
 111:20,21 112:17 113:25
 115:4 117:12
reference (7) 12:21 61:13
 67:13 85:14 148:6 158:4
 179:1
referenced (1) 188:11
referred (7) 106:24 125:3
 181:18 182:9,15 190:7,10
referring (4) 34:13 45:8 72:5
 182:11
refers (3) 26:19 65:13 191:18
reflect (2) 30:3 85:7
reflected (1) 23:5
reflects (1) 83:17
refresher (1) 175:5
regard (1) 121:11
regarding (2) 94:17 110:18
regards (3) 16:20 175:5
 204:24
region (1) 62:14
register (19) 13:19 26:3
 29:16,25 30:7,13,20,25
 31:3 35:24 37:25 40:20
 44:21 45:17,25 47:5
 85:15,18,22
regular (5) 66:8,15 121:14
 177:7 180:5
regularly (3) 66:5 100:1
 179:18
related (6) 2:18 66:7,17
 88:20 176:18,19
relating (2) 59:13 97:4
relation (33) 3:1 16:4 43:25
 52:11 93:23 98:10 101:5
 105:4 109:3,4,7,14 111:25
 134:13 135:25 138:7
 141:7,14 142:5 150:3
 156:7 166:19 174:10,21
 175:9 176:17 177:11
 191:19,21 192:9 193:2
 194:25 205:11
relationship (2) 131:5 175:19
relatively (4) 67:18 95:10
 121:14 130:25
relaxed (1) 197:12
relay (30) 61:21 63:4 64:13
 67:12 70:7,24 83:13,13
 136:8,17,18,25
 137:5,12,14,17,19,21
 138:1,2,6,11,16,22 139:5
 142:21 143:20 144:2
 150:12 166:9
relayed (1) 134:21
relevant (19) 2:19 42:14,17
 43:14 45:14 54:15
 55:4,4,7,19 56:4 57:23,23
 58:15 59:16 87:24 117:13
 167:13 195:14
reliable (2) 132:25 157:25
reliant (3) 20:6 47:14 206:8

rely (2) 99:13 202:9
relying (2) 77:23 178:8
remained (1) 113:22
remember (57) 19:13
 21:3,7,18 23:3 27:7 28:4
 37:13,16 40:12 47:17
 49:23 54:2,7,18,20
 56:24,25 59:23 61:3,10,25
 67:9,11 68:19,21 73:25
 82:1 84:14 85:3 87:5,8
 88:2 103:1 107:3,9 125:6,6
 126:11 135:20,22 149:7
 173:2 175:5 176:14 183:17
 187:2,19 188:15,20 189:24
 193:9 195:7,11,12 199:3
 206:8
remit (4) 17:3 70:13 71:7
 84:23
remote (27) 22:9
 112:9,12,17,25
 113:3,18,20 114:16,21
 115:6,8 117:5,6 119:20
 128:9 176:20 177:19,22,24
 178:6,13 179:24 180:2
 186:6,14,19
remotely (16) 21:3,9 22:6
 24:10,23 25:10 26:13,20
 114:10 118:6
 176:4,5,10,13 180:6,12
repeat (9) 143:3,5 148:7
 149:21,24 151:17 158:5
 193:3 203:2
repeating (1) 171:24
repeats (2) 66:1 151:21
report (8) 8:7 14:3 36:23
 53:21 58:9 63:9 165:23
 166:15
reported (5) 17:11 66:14
 148:2 166:2,18
reporting (5) 41:8,10 46:10
 68:5 110:7
reports (15) 13:24 14:5
 16:14,16 26:15,24 30:24
 75:21 76:11,12,19 84:25
 103:11 159:6 170:8
request (20) 7:18 10:17
 33:23 52:7,22,24 54:15
 63:2,13,17,17 72:20 76:4
 77:8,12 80:4 187:6,12,15
requested (4) 53:20
 186:10,11,20
requesting (1) 187:8
requests (2) 32:13 33:5
require (3) 45:4 63:16
 198:21
required (18) 14:16 39:13
 54:16 58:2 62:6,15,17
 63:12 72:12 174:13 183:7
 185:17 188:3 190:25
 191:4,8 197:13 206:11
requirement (4) 18:16 28:14
 45:12 91:15
requires (2) 46:16 192:23
requiring (5) 61:24 63:22
 75:13 86:9 137:8
rescue (41) 2:16 3:1 7:20
 45:10 71:25 73:16 75:13
 83:12 86:10 90:15
 95:15,18,22 101:21 103:12
 105:2,9 108:6 110:15
 138:8 139:13 146:12
 156:10 165:4,5,6,7,8
 168:4,15,17 169:8,9
 173:15 174:11,22 175:2,9
 177:17 198:5,11
rescued (2) 164:21 167:21
rescues (3) 2:18 4:9 198:12
rescuees (1) 158:25
resembled (2) 150:10 158:23
reservations (1) 197:1
resolve (2) 168:10,13
resource (13) 72:5,13 78:3
 80:11 109:2 116:19,20
 118:20 120:8 160:20,20,22
 168:15
resources (14) 78:13 80:12

101:16,20 105:1 108:13,20
 117:8,23 118:4 120:2
 121:18 168:2,9
resourcing (2) 63:16 121:17
respective (1) 98:24
respond (8) 16:22 59:10
 63:6,9 81:11 117:11,15
 136:16
responded (3) 64:16 104:18
 148:1
responder (1) 53:13
responding (6) 15:18 55:22
 72:4 83:13 95:4,8
response (25) 16:6,21 17:6
 18:18 53:17 54:3 58:11
 68:9 70:11 72:17 73:2
 91:16,24 92:8,16,25
 93:1,4,9,14 104:13,13
 108:8 122:6 139:15
responsibilities (3) 5:5 25:15
 29:1
responsibility (8) 2:15 8:15
 27:1,2 62:7 63:6 86:21
 111:16
responsible (3) 28:24 44:19
 58:11
responsive (2) 102:13,14
rest (3) 24:9 137:4 189:13
rested (2) 194:16 195:23
restricted (1) 72:8
result (7) 77:12 82:21 92:9
 132:9,13 143:25 176:25
resulting (1) 7:22
retention (2) 109:16 111:7
return (2) 86:11,14
returned (1) 65:24
revalidate (1) 174:14
revalidated (1) 174:17
revalidation (3) 174:20,23
 175:1
reversing (1) 92:11
review (6) 119:3 122:24
 133:8 156:24 201:15
 203:25
reviewed (2) 54:11 207:8
reviewing (1) 195:16
revisit (1) 37:1
richard (4) 170:17 171:19,25
 209:5
ring (2) 128:16,21
ringing (2) 126:3,5
ringtone (4) 132:12,13,17,21
risk (3) 16:22 18:18 70:19
risks (1) 16:17
rnli (3) 19:4 63:3 76:6
role (61) 1:19,20 2:8 3:8,24
 4:18 5:2,9,14,20,23,25
 6:14,16 7:13 8:4,10
 14:7,14,21
 15:4,12,13,17,20 16:12
 17:25 29:7 41:12,25
 43:16,18 66:11,16
 79:3,11,11 85:1,14,21,24
 86:21 90:3 110:25 119:11
 121:21 122:21 125:5,12
 127:13 138:25 173:12,15
 174:2,4,5 182:15
 190:2,13,13 191:25
roles (5) 5:13 8:16,17 15:5
 125:19
room (32) 9:23 93:23,25
 94:4,5,15 96:23 98:14
 115:13 116:2 118:8 129:12
 137:25 163:14 164:20
 177:15 178:8 180:6,8,10
 181:25 186:15 193:20
 196:2 197:10,15,25,25
 198:15,18 200:1 207:4
ross (23) 1:3,7 41:15,17,21
 82:8 88:24 89:8,10
 120:16,22 170:23,24
 171:2,7,16,20 200:21,23
 207:15 208:6,13 209:5
roster (1) 23:12
rosters (2) 21:12 23:9
roughly (3) 93:25 100:22

183:17
round (6) 5:24 26:5 30:5
 39:11,12 168:7
route (6) 12:11 64:5 69:2,20
 74:15 75:3
routine (4) 112:17 124:1
 128:4 146:13
routines (1) 124:4
row (10) 38:5 83:5 144:13,17
 145:1,9 182:4,12 184:1
 188:4
rugby (1) 99:6
run (5) 9:7 36:25 45:15,17
 129:9
running (8) 15:25 16:14
 27:11 40:6 79:5 85:18,19
 172:4
runs (1) 89:16

S

sa (1) 128:13
safety (3) 18:1 45:1,10
salt (1) 76:20
same (26) 4:6 8:13,18 11:18
 26:8 27:19 66:4,9 71:13
 80:24 81:4 83:7 88:14
 98:13 99:9 101:18 113:11
 114:7 119:24 124:13
 127:20,22 134:22 159:8
 182:8 190:6
sandette (12) 62:14 66:23
 73:21 80:16,20,22 81:8,21
 83:11 86:6 137:6 161:25
sar (5) 91:1 176:21 196:21
 203:12 205:2
sat (4) 24:14 93:25 94:1,3
save (1) 46:15
saw (10) 23:19 52:24 92:23
 105:20 106:8 131:7 170:25
 171:4 187:23 203:1
saying (27) 38:19,21 53:4
 54:17 64:12 75:15 79:23
 80:5 82:1 86:21 92:17
 102:6,15 105:14 118:23
 138:2 147:15,17 153:21
 155:3,10 158:19 159:9
 160:22 167:6 194:4 205:25
sayso (1) 148:21
scenario (3) 75:8 87:1 87:3
scenarios (1) 17:4
scene (6) 64:15 69:6,23
 160:6 205:3,4
scientific (1) 68:9
scope (1) 65:24
screen (10) 90:7,22 95:19
 101:13 103:16 145:16
 162:17 183:8 189:25
 194:12
screens (1) 199:8
scroll (4) 184:1,2 205:15
 206:21
sea (17) 12:15,17 45:1,10
 72:9,10,12 78:5 99:22
 139:21 146:25 147:5,13
 149:3,5,17 152:16
search (22) 45:9 73:18 90:15
 95:15,18,21 108:6 110:15
 138:8 165:6,8 166:23
 169:7,8 173:15 174:10,22
 175:2,3,8 177:17 198:4
second (14) 2:12 21:25
 37:23 47:20 61:22 64:23
 74:11 90:25 95:8 96:12
 103:17 113:1 144:6 146:3
section (4) 43:23 75:4 83:7
 93:9
sector (1) 164:4
see (124) 2:12 4:6 25:6 31:9
 32:3,12 33:5,21 34:9
 35:8,19 36:8,13 38:2,3,6
 43:23 44:12 46:16 47:16
 49:18,20 50:14 51:2,10
 53:3,8 56:10,14,19 60:20
 61:21,22 64:14 65:21
 66:21 71:14,18 74:22

79:20 80:17 81:3
 82:19,21,23 84:4 85:10
 95:19 100:23,25 101:3,3
 106:13 109:10 110:25
 116:10 117:8 118:14
 119:5,6,8 123:13
 133:20,25 137:4 139:24
 140:8,9,13,22,24
 141:2,5,10,12,18 142:25
 143:2 146:5,7 147:10,23
 148:23,23 150:18 151:1,15
 158:22 160:5,8,24
 161:17,22 162:1,24
 163:1,1 175:7 181:17
 182:1,3 183:2,8,13,24
 184:2,4,14,20 185:6,19
 188:8,11 191:15 192:7
 197:20 200:8 201:9 202:8
 203:8,13 204:3 206:16,21
seeing (5) 59:25 61:12 76:14
 163:11 187:21
seeking (2) 53:8 60:7
seek (4) 28:23 60:4 111:17
 121:9
seemed (2) 114:11 131:2
seems (5) 22:16 35:12
 156:22,23 183:22
seen (18) 19:25 23:9 27:12
 37:2 39:20 48:5 61:13
 72:22 80:5 130:24 157:9
 164:12 192:6 194:11,13
 195:20 203:6 204:12
select (3) 85:21,24,25
selected (1) 182:25
selfcontained (1) 115:10
selflearning (1) 96:2
send (6) 62:20 72:10 78:4
 80:14 108:12 131:2
sending (2) 83:2 130:25
sends (1) 162:23
senior (8) 6:24 7:11,15 8:1
 79:23 122:4 172:22 174:1
seniors (2) 58:10 122:3
sense (3) 97:21 178:12
 180:19
sensible (1) 193:23
sent (13) 56:9 58:10
 60:21,22 84:11 117:23
 165:16,19,20 166:3 169:1
 206:21 207:1
sentence (1) 140:7
sentences (1) 17:4
separate (6) 4:17 33:17
 129:24,25 130:1 162:17
september (5) 183:13
 184:5,5,5 185:3
sequence (1) 141:11
sequences (1) 141:9
sequential (1) 85:15
serious (2) 7:22 166:15
seriously (1) 41:11
service (5) 2:3,7 110:22
 113:17 140:14
services (3) 97:7,25 110:9
set (11) 49:7 98:22
 100:19,21 129:21
 141:11,12 166:20,25 167:1
 168:20
sets (1) 49:9
setting (1) 68:17
several (2) 36:14 97:1
severe (1) 165:24
shall (2) 76:19 89:1
share (8) 31:21 36:16 54:9
 55:4 59:17,19 94:10 154:7
shared (10) 29:8 59:20
 87:12,16,18,23,24 96:6
 98:13 116:6
sharing (2) 10:1 29:7
shes (8) 103:4,5,6,7 127:19
 134:17 170:3,4
shift (92) 6:20 8:25
 9:6,7,8,12,14,24
 13:14,17,20 19:19,22 20:5
 23:2 25:6,13,24
 26:1,2,4,13 27:10,11,21,23
 28:16 32:9,10,11 34:5

35:11 39:1,5,8 42:12,21
 46:10 48:24 53:18 78:23
 87:4,5,13,23,25 88:5,11,15
 95:1 103:19 109:4 122:14
 123:22,23 126:2 131:11
 165:1 170:18 185:11
 188:1,3,5,7,8,9
 189:14,17,18 191:10
 194:20,24 195:10,19,22
 196:7,16,24 197:2,18,23
 198:9 199:17 201:10 202:4
 203:15,16,18,21 204:1,9
 206:20
shifts (11) 6:23,25 22:6
 27:16,17 35:23 84:24 87:7
 94:21 185:12 189:20
ship (10) 67:24 101:3,4
 140:9,22,24 141:2,21
 142:1 143:2
ships (8) 44:2,6 63:5,8 76:13
 140:9,25 141:19
shore (3) 99:10 180:1 185:14
shoreside (1) 58:11
short (6) 41:19 89:1,5
 114:20 171:14 200:19
shortage (3) 109:25 112:23
 121:4
shortages (5) 108:22 109:2,6
 117:10 122:7
shorthand (1) 200:23
shortly (1) 172:25
shortstaffed (1) 91:12
short (23) 22:16 36:22,25
 40:2 44:3 55:21 58:17
 60:7,19 69:10 79:25 80:1
 169:2,14,19 174:10,21
 128:21,23 129:1,1 148:13
 187:13 202:18
shout (1) 151:17
shouting (4) 139:16 145:3
 151:16 153:6
show (1) 106:21
showed (5) 106:22 107:5,6
 130:21 159:12
shown (1) 106:14
shows (2) 21:22 107:1
shut (2) 150:7 158:19
 (1) 85:1
sick (1) 91:11
sick (16) 9:9 18:2 27:3 51:21
 93:25 94:3,7 101:2 104:22
 106:1 141:1,6
 157:19,20,25 183:8
right (1) 12:5
sighted (1) 171:6
sighting (1) 55:8
sign (1) 165:5
signal (3) 97:4 98:2,24
signed (2) 172:4 201:15
significant (3) 94:21 196:19
 197:21
signs (1) 205:5
silly (1) 200:11
similar (9) 34:2 94:8 147:17
 150:13,13,15 154:13
 159:1,8
since (8) 2:14 3:7 62:24
 125:1 130:22 172:18,21
 187:18
single (5) 5:17 30:4 66:7
 198:1,2
sink (2) 139:14 143:15
sinking (30) 104:3
 107:1,16,17 108:10 139:13
 143:2,10,14,24 144:15
 147:4,13,20,24,25 148:3
 149:3 150:8 155:4 159:3
 164:14 165:17 166:9
 167:8,20 169:2,5,6,23
sir (28) 1:3,7 41:14,15,17,21
 82:4,8 88:24 89:8,10
 120:14,16,22 170:22,23,24
 171:2,7,16,20
 200:18,21,23 207:15
 208:6,13 209:5
sit (2) 132:3 208:12

sitting (3) 10:1 93:23 136:3
situate (1) 198:3
situation (19) 17:15 63:22
 64:2 65:15 67:1,4,25
 68:13,25 69:4,11 70:10,18
 73:11 81:25 88:13
 169:16,18 180:18
situational (6

70:13 74:18 82:25 102:22
110:8,10 112:2 123:8,17
124:14 125:13 131:9
136:13 138:22 144:25
147:14 168:13 169:11,12
173:23 175:15 176:15
178:11 179:8,17 180:7,12
186:20,22 187:2,3 189:23
193:7 194:21 196:14
199:21 201:24 205:10
sometime (1) 35:13
sometimes (20) 12:14 31:13
34:24 35:13 76:11,21 98:9
99:22,23 100:2,3 102:2
104:15,16 114:6 116:22,23
121:3 123:16 129:2
somewhere (3) 3:7 115:17
176:6
soon (4) 17:13 44:1 75:1
131:25
sooner (4) 132:2 154:15
155:19,20
sop (2) 60:9,11
sops (1) 101:7
sort (22) 4:17 7:10 12:9
16:12 20:10 60:4 71:14
80:24 88:17 92:14
106:22,22 107:5 110:24
125:10,17,18 130:8 148:20
163:16 175:16 202:9
sought (1) 193:12
sound (5) 26:17 107:14
133:12 174:19 200:11
sounds (3) 133:15 173:2
199:21
source (2) 31:19 85:5
south (1) 80:24
southeast (1) 112:10
southwest (2) 66:23 161:23
speak (18) 7:3 12:6,9,20
13:6,10 24:20,23
25:8,11,13 30:10 31:16
52:6 69:16 99:7 122:5
129:13
speaker (4) 49:25 150:24
205:16,18
speakers (1) 49:21
speaking (12) 10:23,24 11:5
24:12,13 34:4,18 67:22
206:12
144:10 146:23 162:3
206:12
specialised (2) 15:11,13
specific (21) 14:19 15:17,23
16:21 20:4,5,11 42:17
57:14 59:13 67:25 95:21
112:2 159:24 163:18
174:10,21 175:11 186:2
202:22 203:14
specifically (20) 5:8 6:14
7:12 14:18 18:21 48:8
54:20 56:25 59:21 67:10
69:20 125:7,16 126:11
129:8 176:22 187:2 188:20
195:8 202:1
specifics (2) 133:16 193:9
speed (1) 55:9
spent (3) 3:18 199:18,22
spillover (1) 129:1
split (3) 27:6 115:15 123:24
spoke (4) 107:11 130:14
145:17 188:22
spoken (3) 29:12 133:6
161:10
sporadically (1) 36:21
sprayed (1) 160:10
spreadsheet (21) 29:19
46:21 56:5,12,14 57:7,8
58:4,19 60:20 61:18 74:24
82:18 84:10 85:11
182:2,5,18 183:21 185:3
189:5
spreadsheets (1) 87:20
squeeze (1) 76:2
staff (12) 36:15 91:15 108:21
109:1,6,25 111:7 112:23
114:23 120:8 145:1 180:22

staffing (7) 108:20 112:15
114:20 117:10 121:4 122:7
180:18
stage (31) 6:5 24:8 29:25
32:22 33:2,4,21 35:8 36:5
38:21,25 39:18 40:11 46:9
57:11 58:19,21 62:6 67:3
69:3,8,22 70:15 75:20,24
77:12 79:19 81:6,15 83:18
142:11
stages (1) 208:1
stakeholders (2) 19:2 28:25
stand (1) 131:23
standalone (1) 130:3
standard (24) 25:22 26:6
43:13 54:5,6,18 55:22
74:17,25 87:6 88:3 90:4,12
95:20 110:4,4 117:17
118:23 120:6 126:17
157:3,5 175:12 206:2
standby (2) 53:22,23
stands (1) 195:7
start (26) 1:18 4:11 9:6,12
13:17 14:19 25:5 26:1 27:9
30:14 47:19 84:21 102:5
146:23 157:21 164:10
171:23 172:7 180:17 188:1
189:14,22 194:14 195:22
197:18 203:21
started (31) 4:4 6:4 15:22
16:2 39:1,21,22 40:8
46:7,8 93:2,7 94:18 132:6
167:5 168:23 170:17
183:14,17 187:14 189:1
197:22 198:9 199:19
201:10 202:4 203:16,18,25
204:9 205:4
starting (9) 35:17 90:3,24
103:19 172:11 180:25,25
189:19 199:16
starts (7) 8:23 35:20 49:3
115:1 146:7 151:14 167:2
180:23 181:11 180,20,22
182:9,15,16,20,25
183:3,11,14 185:17 186:5
187:8
supporting (2) 44:3 185:19
supportingobservational (1)
190:4
suppose (1) 190:18
supposed (1) 108:17
supposedly (2) 51:4,16
sure (4) 34:23 40:8 101:10
199:25
surface (2) 8:25 131:19
surge (1) 112:22
surprise (1) 114:13
surprised (1) 112:16
surveillance (1) 130:16
swamped (1) 159:22
swap (1) 26:5
swapped (1) 6:22
swarmed (1) 164:14
sweep (1) 198:12
system (23) 22:15 36:4
37:11,21 40:4 41:2 80:17
98:10,22,23 99:5 110:14
121:18 126:14 130:2,2
157:25 162:20,23 164:8
177:9 180:4 201:15
121:2 122:10 123:22
129:11,18 130:15 167:16
176:2 178:3 208:6
territorial (2) 7:19 132:24
text (5) 32:3 61:16,21 83:6
118:22
table (1) 18:24
tactical (5) 119:2 188:16
201:7,19 202:2

stop (5) 105:3,9 139:16
145:3 151:16
stopped (5) 159:17,18,20,21
160:7
stornorway (1) 112:12
story (1) 66:2
straight (4) 40:8 84:2 139:12
154:12
straits (1) 63:5
strictly (1) 149:18
stripping (1) 128:6
strobe (1) 161:14
strong (1) 119:19
structurally (1) 92:10
structure (6) 6:16 60:5
110:22 111:13 119:16,16
structured (1) 111:25
struggling (1) 116:11
stuart (6) 49:22 50:16
89:7,14 91:13 209:3
stuck (1) 99:10
subject (1) 50:14
subparagraph (1) 179:5
subsequent (3) 135:14,17,18
subsequently (3) 15:9 25:3
135:13
substantial (2) 46:11 87:6
substantially (1) 76:22
substitute (1) 177:25
success (1) 168:7
sufficient (4) 12:2 62:20 77:4
79:10
sufficiently (2) 194:15
195:23
suggest (2) 191:23 195:3
suggested (3) 186:22 188:7
189:23
suggesting (1) 58:21
suggestion (3) 35:23
189:22,24
suitable (2) 180:22 183:2
suitably (1) 191:3
summary (2) 173:17 202:9
summer (1) 95:14
supervised (1) 122:19
supervision (1) 93:18
support (34) 7:11,16,24
15:4,4,15 93:16,19 113:8
114:21 115:6,8 119:20
125:17 128:9 176:2,4,7
180:23 181:11,18,20,22
182:9,15,16,20,25
183:3,11,14 185:17 186:5
187:8
supporting (2) 44:3 185:19
190:4
suppose (1) 190:18
supposed (1) 108:17
supposedly (2) 51:4,16
sure (4) 34:23 40:8 101:10
199:25
surface (2) 8:25 131:19
surge (1) 112:22
surprise (1) 114:13
surprised (1) 112:16
surveillance (1) 130:16
swamped (1) 159:22
swap (1) 26:5
swapped (1) 6:22
swarmed (1) 164:14
sweep (1) 198:12
system (23) 22:15 36:4
37:11,21 40:4 41:2 80:17
98:10,22,23 99:5 110:14
121:18 126:14 130:2,2
157:25 162:20,23 164:8
177:9 180:4 201:15
121:2 122:10 123:22
129:11,18 130:15 167:16
176:2 178:3 208:6
territorial (2) 7:19 132:24
text (5) 32:3 61:16,21 83:6
118:22
table (1) 18:24
tactical (5) 119:2 188:16
201:7,19 202:2

tag (1) 192:14
tailored (1) 102:11
taken (12) 6:6 13:25 17:21
27:22 30:21 44:17 58:3
145:16 170:20 171:9,20
172:1,2,3 173:19 174:8
175:18 180:14 182:5,19
187:5 189:6,11,25 192:21
201:4 203:13 207:13,15
208:11
taker (2) 108:15 203:4
takes (2) 4:23 199:7
taking (23) 10:16
27:1,2,13,25 28:13 31:1
46:23 47:1 61:24 67:13,16
137:8 139:1 143:18,21
148:2 166:10 172:22 176:9
177:6 182:24 205:8
talk (18) 6:11 11:23,24
29:24 91:18 94:14 108:20
113:1 132:5 136:21 144:7
170:3 180:15 194:10 196:1
198:17 205:10 206:13
talkbox (4) 129:23 130:1,2
180:3
talked (5) 10:23 40:19 81:6
120:25 169:14
52:5,18 54:17 55:24
64:12,12 66:15,15
68:14 71:6,13,20 72:22
76:10,18 77:6 78:11,11
79:14 81:10 82:16 84:21
85:14,16 86:13,14,15,18
87:2 89:17,25 90:11,17,19
91:25 92:2 93:13 95:12
96:1,3,20,24 99:16,16,19
102:9,20,21 103:22 105:14
107:8 110:12,16 111:3,5
113:5,24 114:2 116:3
119:1 122:9,15,20 123:3
124:12 126:8,17,19
129:24,25 133:16
134:12,17 135:14,16,21,23
138:14 141:16,22 142:2
147:16 148:8 155:6 158:9
159:24 160:9,11,15,23,24
161:2,7,8 163:3,7,16
164:14,23 166:5 167:10
169:9,12,25 170:6,11
172:15 173:16 175:14
177:16,19,24 179:19
183:24 191:25 192:1,11
194:5 208:9
themselves (3) 31:24 64:16
169:19
thereafter (1) 173:1
therefore (3) 2:17 70:7 87:11
theres (18) 38:15 48:21
51:15 57:6 70:11 71:2 75:7
79:23 86:17 91:4 111:13
115:9 135:18 146:18 147:6
169:23 195:7 207:9
theyd (2) 124:3 128:21
theyre (6) 51:24 81:4 142:11
155:4 164:6,8
theyve (5) 65:23 67:7 69:25
70:3 86:14
thing (12) 40:21 117:21
122:10 127:11 129:25
130:1 147:16 182:8 191:23
198:15,19 205:20
thinking (13) 118:18 172:15
173:13 174:13,17
175:8,19,20 176:11 178:19
179:21 187:10 197:25
third (6) 103:19 109:21
119:23 166:12 169:15 178:9
205:15
thomas (2) 1:6 209:2
thomaswillowshomeoffice
(1) 38:7
thoroughly (1) 203:4
though (6) 18:7 34:24 91:4
158:20 191:6 193:5
thought (15) 38:17 68:18
69:10 86:24 99:2,14
110:13,14 127:9 163:24
168:4,6 169:10 207:21
208:6
threats (1) 16:20
three (24) 3:7 9:15 20:3

24:4 41:16,22 42:3 43:21
50:11 53:2 56:13 62:9
71:24 82:10 88:21,23
145:16 170:20 171:9,20
172:1,2,3 173:19 174:8
175:18 180:14 182:5,19
187:5 189:6,11,25 192:21
201:4 203:13 207:13,15
208:11
thanks (9) 1:7 32:18,21
88:24,24 120:18 171:7
208:13,14
thats (174) 1:14,17,23 2:5,9
3:3,9,14,18 4:10 5:24 8:8
9:25 12:4,8 14:12 16:19
20:9,13,17,21 22:10,19
23:13 24:14 25:14
26:19,21,21 27:4,6,10
28:6,6 30:11,12,16,19
31:5,15 33:25 34:7 35:10
38:12,13 42:3,23
43:2,6,11,20 45:1 51:3,3
52:5,18 54:17 55:24
64:12,12 66:15,15
68:14 71:6,13,20 72:22
76:10,18 77:6 78:11,11
79:14 81:10 82:16 84:21
85:14,16 86:13,14,15,18
87:2 89:17,25 90:11,17,19
91:25 92:2 93:13 95:12
96:1,3,20,24 99:16,16,19
102:9,20,21 103:22 105:14
107:8 110:12,16 111:3,5
113:5,24 114:2 116:3
119:1 122:9,15,20 123:3
124:12 126:8,17,19
129:24,25 133:16
134:12,17 135:14,16,21,23
138:14 141:16,22 142:2
147:16 148:8 155:6 158:9
159:24 160:9,11,15,23,24
161:2,7,8 163:3,7,16
164:14,23 166:5 167:10
169:9,12,25 170:6,11
172:15 173:16 175:14
177:16,19,24 179:19
183:24 191:25 192:1,11
194:5 208:9
themselves (3) 31:24 64:16
169:19
thereafter (1) 173:1
therefore (3) 2:17 70:7 87:11
theres (18) 38:15 48:21
51:15 57:6 70:11 71:2 75:7
79:23 86:17 91:4 111:13
115:9 135:18 146:18 147:6
169:23 195:7 207:9
theyd (2) 124:3 128:21
theyre (6) 51:24 81:4 142:11
155:4 164:6,8
theyve (5) 65:23 67:7 69:25
70:3 86:14
thing (12) 40:21 117:21
122:10 127:11 129:25
130:1 147:16 182:8 191:23
198:15,19 205:20
thinking (13) 118:18 172:15
173:13 174:13,17
175:8,19,20 176:11 178:19
179:21 187:10 197:25
third (6) 103:19 109:21
119:23 166:12 169:15 178:9
205:15
thomas (2) 1:6 209:2
thomaswillowshomeoffice
(1) 38:7
thoroughly (1) 203:4
though (6) 18:7 34:24 91:4
158:20 191:6 193:5
thought (15) 38:17 68:18
69:10 86:24 99:2,14
110:13,14 127:9 163:24
168:4,6 169:10 207:21
208:6
threats (1) 16:20
three (24) 3:7 9:15 20:3

21:11 30:6 86:6,12,20 87:1
92:3 94:6 124:4 160:2
162:7 163:12
165:9,10 22:22 166:3,4
198:10 199:9 208:3
through (36) 8:21 12:18
16:18 18:12 27:21 28:5,15
29:24 52:5 59:15 60:4
80:15 81:7 82:6,13 87:19
93:20 96:8,9 107:1 126:14
130:5 136:21 154:8 172:21
175:11 181:3 185:10 196:3
198:17 199:22 200:7,8
201:12 202:16,25
throughout (3) 146:15 168:3
180:23
thursday (2) 1:1 208:3
tick (1) 163:19
ticket (4) 91:14 92:12,19
125:3
tidying (1) 120:10
til (1) 164:13
time (90) 4:8 6:1,3,6,18 7:6
9:18 13:8 14:22 17:2 19:20
20:18 21:13 22:9 26:4
33:21 34:2 37:6 38:14 40:7
43:7,14 44:14 45:14 46:2,6
55:1,8 56:6,14,16 58:13
62:1 63:19 66:22 67:9
72:2,7 74:6,18 78:12 83:5
89:21 91:13,22
97:12,16,18 99:25
100:20,21 104:5 118:3
120:14 122:17 124:20
129:13 131:23 134:16
146:5 149:9,13 150:18
156:21,23 167:2,3 170:9
174:12,24 181:24 182:21
184:9,12 185:24
187:14,21 190:20 195:20
196:13 198:13,24 201:17
202:12,14 203:9,18
206:2,20
timeconsuming (1) 206:10
timed (6) 49:5 56:18
times (10) 6:22 30:6 66:6
102:2 103:11 108:2 121:16
130:14 174:6 184:17
timescale (1) 187:19
title (3) 2:7 29:11 190:9
titled (2) 43:23 44:23
today (3) 172:16 187:11
todays (1) 23:15
together (6) 9:4 10:21 24:11
26:4 47:1 72:20
toilet (1) 28:11
told (69) 4:10 8:5,9 13:12
14:10 14:8 31:7 36:23
40:18 46:1,3,24 47:14 51:5
54:7,12,13,14 57:22 58:14
59:18,21 67:7,19 68:6
69:25 70:6 71:25 75:12
78:21 79:9 85:8 86:8,19
90:3 94:18 95:9 102:17
103:23 104:1,8,19 112:19
121:2 124:18 133:9
134:17,17 135:5 138:12
144:11 145:18 147:12
149:19 150:8 155:24
164:25 166:8 169:15 178:9
179:13,14,20 180:9 187:10
196:14,18,20 198:22
tom (8) 36:11 50:8 130:4,12
134:20 137:17 144:12
182:7
tomorrow (1) 36:15
too (4) 27:25 34:23 78:6
131:25
took (19) 3:23 4:10 45:18
49:19 55:15 64:19 88:6
106:1 116:19,20 132:8
136:17 139:6 144:6 146:3
150:16 187:9 190:24
205:14

topic (1) 206:13
topics (1) 175:13
toptype (1) 18:24
total (1) 86:5
totally (1) 18:15
towards (4) 32:12 102:12
110:5 141:16
toy (3) 3:20 42:7 48:13
track (1) 164:18
tracker (83) 9:2 14:1,2 17:12
18:13 29:11,22
30:1,2,3,15,18,22,23
31:2,2,7,11,12,15,17,18
32:1,13,19,21,22
33:3,4,7,14,21 35:7,9,12
36:18 37:5,15 38:1,9,13
39:6,14,17,24
40:1,6,15,19,20,21 45:25
46:21 52:25 56:17 57:24
58:1,3 60:16 61:13 62:11
64:18 65:19,21 81:15
82:20,20 84:1,12 85:4,6
87:20 123:2 130:19,25
131:18 139:2 197:17,17
203:24,25 204:5
trackers (6) 14:9 27:3 29:2
40:18 41:5 45:24
traffic (1) 113:17
traff (1) 19:18
trails (1) 140:7
trained (4) 15:6,14 17:23
63:18
trainee (30) 89:24 90:10
91:2,3,18,19,20 92:7 93:24
94:1,7 109:11 116:24
117:1,5 122:17 124:17,23
126:22 127:16,17,25 128:3
133:6,7,24 134:2,25 135:5
198:2
trainees (2) 98:18 125:9
training (34) 14:13,23
15:5,10,19,23 16:1,5,11,21
18:18 19:2 28:21 63:19
90:4,12 91:6 94:16 95:7
112:1 114:14 125:21 127:7
157:2,16 174:10,21
175:6,9,11,14 185:25
186:2 206:3
tranches (1) 208:2
transcript (22) 49:22 50:12
61:12 64:21 65:16 69:24
73:14 74:2 75:4 77:14
80:16 134:15 139:4,8
146:4,6 149:7,8,12 155:9
156:22 171:24
transcripts (11) 19:25 20:12
21:10,21 27:10,13
48:6,9,21 60:1 145:6
transferred (3) 2:17 56:4
132:10
transmission (3) 9:19 14:4
160:19
transmissions (1) 20:1
travel (1) 16:11
treat (1) 179:11
treated (4) 17:8 108:11
159:14 167:7
treating (2) 18:7 159:11
trends (1) 16:16
trial (2) 36:24,25
triangulate (1) 100:24
tried (6) 99:9 100:17,18
120:9 156:25,25
trip (1) 129:1
trouble (1) 156:13
true (3) 5:23 6:8 68:10
try (19) 66:12,16 98:8,23,25
99:12 100:20,24 101:14
104:25 109:16 129:16
151:19 154:8 155:15
157:18 161:6 168:10,15
trying (42) 14:1 23:16 64:14
94:12,14 97:13 102:10
104:22,24 105:9 115:21
116:14 118:6 119:2 123:10
130:8 141:17 142:12,14

144:21 145:8,10 147:9
 149:7,13 154:2,13,16,17
 155:13,14
 156:9,10,11,14,17
 166:21,23 168:8,12,13,17
tuesday (7) 1:25 5:20 8:9
 26:22 28:3 29:21 208:2
tune (1) 36:2
turn (42) 2:11 19:13 20:25
 26:7 29:6 32:1 34:1 35:16
 42:2 43:12,22 44:22 48:10
 49:2 50:15 53:7 54:23
 56:13 60:14,19 61:16,20
 64:17,22 66:20 71:22,24
 72:15 77:20 79:21 81:2
 82:15,18 94:16 120:15,23
 122:13 132:5 138:24
 160:1,4 201:2
turning (5) 5:2 20:23 49:17
 50:14 197:9
turnover (1) 111:6
twoperson (1) 29:4
twothirds (1) 50:15
twoway (1) 73:6
twoweek (1) 131:24
type (5) 17:22 55:10 93:18
 110:15 161:5
types (4) 55:3 111:2
 186:12,17
typically (3) 42:16 43:4
 179:5
typing (2) 117:23 160:21

U

uh (1) 81:3
uhhh (1) 29:20
uk (20) 5:25 17:14 18:2,3
 51:6,6 53:11 56:23 57:5
 80:21 100:1 132:12,13,22
 140:14 146:13 156:8
 157:24 185:17 205:1
ultimately (5) 8:14 10:22
 13:4 15:5 62:21
unable (4) 68:20 139:20
 150:25 178:23
unanswered (3) 128:6,14
 129:5
unattended (1) 28:1
unattributed (2) 203:2,7
unaware (1) 198:14
uncommon (7) 28:22 121:7
 123:13 141:2 143:16
 176:16 197:24
unconscious (9)
 103:2,5,6,8,10 170:3,4,10
 205:3
underestimation (1) 77:2
understand (38) 5:9 8:4 9:22
 10:24 17:18 28:4 50:21
 60:22 67:16 68:18,21
 70:21 73:23 82:11 92:2
 106:20 109:6 116:17 118:7
 122:22 124:8 138:13,15
 140:16 142:15 144:16
 150:24 151:17,21 152:3
 159:2 161:24 180:14
 186:4,18 187:5 189:20
 192:19
understanding (22) 23:8
 43:7 50:22 52:17 66:8
 69:13 72:2 127:10 132:20
 148:12 165:8,21 166:4
 180:18 186:12,17
 203:15,19,20,22 204:8,20
understood (20) 8:19 14:6
 15:16 23:6,18 26:25 27:12
 34:21 38:23 41:13 43:9
 49:1 66:19 73:20 97:14
 126:17 135:3,5 136:14
 159:6
undertake (2) 3:21 15:19
undertaking (2) 4:17 7:13
undertook (2) 93:14 127:21
underway (3) 18:11 57:18
 58:25
unfolded (1) 19:19

unfortunately (2) 141:19
 199:1
unknown (3) 110:11,12
 189:3
unless (4) 24:20 25:12 72:10
 78:5
unpleasant (1) 170:6
unresolved (1) 206:19
unseaworthiness (1) 107:21
unsuitable (1) 18:15
unsure (2) 159:9 193:10
until (13) 4:11 39:25 76:20
 78:10 80:13 121:8 127:16
 130:19 142:17 162:6 184:3
 195:19 208:16
unusual (7) 25:13 42:12
 66:5,14 124:13 138:4
 144:2
update (22) 12:16 30:2,23
 36:4,19,22 45:25 46:21
 58:4 59:6 60:16 61:14
 74:16 81:18 82:15 83:4
 84:1 129:14 162:17
 163:19,22 164:5
updated (8) 16:17 25:3
 33:23 75:2 83:3 84:12 85:6
 123:7
updates (17) 9:1,10 13:19,24
 29:2,12 30:18 35:24 44:20
 45:16 47:5 52:24 56:11
 58:7 83:3 162:18 175:12
updating (5) 163:4,5,8,10
 164:10
upon (2) 198:6 206:8
urgency (4) 68:24 69:11
 70:19 178:12
urgent (1) 69:13
used (16) 30:17 40:25
 43:4,10 45:7 58:5 68:8
 99:1 114:3 148:13 177:6
 181:21 190:18 192:12
 206:18 207:7
useful (1) 99:16
uses (1) 80:17
using (18) 13:14 37:13 40:22
 42:14 56:6 57:22 58:15
 87:21 98:9,23 115:5 132:1
 136:1 154:7 163:16 175:12
 180:4 207:11
usual (6) 19:17 26:14,24
 42:18 136:20 181:8
usually (4) 9:24 193:22
 196:7 199:6
utilize (1) 99:13

V

valiant (70) 12:13 38:24
 39:10 48:13,20 52:6 53:13
 56:23 57:4 59:10,17,20,24
 61:1 62:13,23 64:5,10,15
 66:22 69:1,2,20 70:22
 71:1,6,10,15 74:14,16
 75:9,15,17 76:1 77:15
 78:6,25 80:24 81:21 83:18
 84:7,15 86:5,11,20
 160:2,6,16,17,21,22
 161:2,8,8,16,18,25
 162:3,8,12,16,25 163:1,3
 164:17 166:11 198:5,10
 203:17,22
valiants (5) 75:14,24 160:17
 162:18 163:4
value (6) 108:11,18 143:9,18
 144:15 147:14
variances (1) 35:25
varied (2) 102:3 129:15
various (7) 19:25 87:19
 113:22 170:10 198:20
 199:7 204:24
vast (3) 188:2 190:13 197:13
vecting (1) 105:1
verbal (1) 180:5
verbally (9) 96:8 98:14
 121:25 179:13,15,21
 180:1,9 202:24

version (6) 33:23 45:21
 106:9 182:3 197:17 204:5
vessel (22) 30:7 59:3 66:10
 70:2 72:12 83:14 84:7,18
 100:25 102:10 103:12
 110:3 113:16 131:8 137:9
 138:18 141:5 151:20
 160:10 161:19 204:11,11
vessels (29) 2:19 11:24 12:6
 13:8 18:1 51:23 52:1 53:22
 55:17 58:6 68:15 70:7
 71:11 73:11,13 83:12
 86:18 101:1 106:5 141:8
 162:7 165:1 170:7 196:19
 198:11,13 203:23
 204:25,25
vhf (12) 11:21,23 12:1,2,4
 61:8 62:3 119:10 124:2,10
 125:9 127:12
via (7) 10:4 11:8 94:12,14
 114:21 130:2,5
vicariously (1) 96:8
vicinity (3) 63:8 81:5 161:23
vision (23) 40:21 94:12,14
 123:2,7 133:11,14,18
 139:2 150:2 160:4,14
 178:17 199:15,22
 201:10,11,15 202:8 204:1
 206:14,18 207:7
visiting (2) 122:1,2
visitors (1) 121:25
vodafone (1) 140:15
voice (2) 144:11 145:11
volume (12) 110:2 111:21,23
 112:8 117:16,19
 119:10,15,17 120:7 121:4
 123:6
voluntary (1) 19:4
volunteer (1) 186:9
volunteered (1) 187:4
vts (2) 113:16,21

W

wait (5) 37:23 71:14,18
 103:15 132:4
walk (1) 197:10
walked (1) 196:3
wasnt (6) 21:10 28:22
 39:15 58:5 59:5,6,10,19
 63:17 66:14,14,16 69:6,7
 77:5,8 78:19 79:3 83:15
 84:23 85:1 87:12,22 92:13
 97:10,11,12,15,15
 103:10,13 105:5 107:23
 115:11 117:3 118:24 121:7
 123:13 125:16 127:5,11
 129:16 131:15,15 136:6,14
 141:2 142:6 156:4 157:21
 165:7,25 167:12
 168:1,6,15 169:5 186:2
 191:4 196:6 198:12
wasting (1) 72:11
watch (10) 148:15 164:22
 167:17 170:13 172:13
 174:5 182:4 194:11,14
 196:7
water (55) 18:12 61:24
 67:7,13,14,17,18,19,24
 68:23 69:12,25 70:22
 83:10 103:3,4 137:8
 143:21 145:20,25 148:4
 150:9,22,22 151:1,3,5,5,6
 152:9,9,11,13,15
 153:3,3,5,6,7,9,9,16
 154:20,21,22,23,24 158:11
 159:23 160:7 164:15
 166:10 205:4,6
waters (20) 7:19 17:13,14
 18:3 31:14 51:6,6 53:11
 56:23 57:5 80:21 131:8
 132:15,16,18,22 153:15,20
 157:10,12
way (48) 9:5,20 13:16 18:11
 25:25 27:6 43:18 45:15,15
 46:2 50:15 54:21 60:23
 67:21 68:1 69:6,22

78:11,12,13 83:1 85:7,7
 92:17 93:17 96:5,24
 102:10 111:25 118:4 122:9
 130:6 142:14 147:3 148:4
 154:16 176:9 177:10,12,21
 179:11 181:5 190:16
 193:15 195:6 201:13,20
 208:8
ways (1) 16:10
wearing (1) 58:25
website (1) 207:22
wed (3) 108:12 142:4 167:21
wednesday (5) 189:14
 207:20 208:2,8,12
week (8) 96:12 103:19 187:9
 188:4 189:2 208:1,5,10
weekly (2) 16:13,15
weeks (3) 127:17,17 187:20
welfare (2) 5:17 12:14
went (12) 16:3 40:7,7 93:20
 99:8 109:5 113:16,21
 126:14 165:9 187:7 198:9
werent (45) 4:18 7:8 12:7
 17:16,22 18:4,6 38:15,20
 39:17,24 44:5,6 45:12 56:6
 57:22 62:4,5 72:12 87:21
 88:5 92:21 111:1 117:25
 118:23 121:17,19,22
 124:10 143:17
 147:20,22,22,25,25
 163:25,25 165:11 166:17
 190:25 192:9 193:5 201:6
 206:6 207:2
weve (3) 74:12 155:16,16
whatever (4) 104:6 118:14
 141:4 142:2
whats (7) 65:24 145:13
 150:20 178:7 197:10
 198:16 204:22
whatsapp (7) 74:4,12 124:24
 126:13 140:18 141:25
 154:7
whereabouts (9) 139:19
 151:3,23 152:11,15,21
 153:7,13,15
whereas (8) 2:7 29:4
 112:9,11 116:15 130:20
 167:20 173:14
wheres (1) 74:7
wherever (1) 155:17
whichever (2) 52:7 158:25
whilst (9) 4:2 19:18,19 94:10
 114:19 121:3 138:6 198:21
 202:15
white (4) 99:3,24 106:24,25
whitehouse (36) 1:25 5:20
 6:18 7:4,14 8:9 9:23,24
 21:5 22:1 23:21,23 29:21
 32:5 34:4,10 35:4 36:9
 42:6 47:20,22 48:11 54:8
 55:2 56:9 59:9,20,23 61:4
 79:12,20 81:20 82:17
 83:1,15 85:17
whitehouses (2) 49:2 59:16
whoever (5) 8:14 16:14
 85:18 87:12 180:5
whole (12) 5:22,24 9:18
 17:25 46:6 54:11 78:3
 93:21 111:23,23,24 113:17
whos (2) 33:9 164:3
whose (1) 32:5
wide (1) 187:7
wider (1) 175:4
william (1) 171:25
willows (29) 1:4,6,10 2:21
 19:23 23:24 24:5 41:23
 43:15 48:1,15,18 50:8
 57:20 58:14 59:9 63:18
 64:24 70:16 77:5 81:13,16
 83:16 87:8 88:5,21,24
 134:20 209:2
wind (1) 149:13
wings (1) 130:16
withdrew (2) 89:3 171:12
witness (7) 1:12 89:13,5
 137:11 171:12 172:3 208:4

witnesses (2) 97:2 198:6
woman (3) 51:16 57:16
 155:5
wonder (4) 34:12,23 35:6
 82:6
wont (2) 168:17 208:12
woods (11) 1:8,9,10
 41:13,16,21,22 82:4,10
 88:21 209:3
work (71) 2:17 3:11,21,23
 4:11 5:24 6:7,9,11,20 8:16
 14:8,17 15:21 16:6,7 19:20
 22:6,9 25:17 26:14,18
 27:23 46:6,12 66:6 72:9
 96:12,18,19 97:13 98:25
 100:4,7,14,20 101:4
 108:15 110:18 111:21,23
 112:11 113:4,7 114:10
 116:21 119:10 123:22
 129:2,4,19,20 140:22
 141:6,14,15 142:4 145:13
 154:14 156:3 157:18
 166:23 173:20 177:4,25
 188:2,7 193:20 194:25
 195:13 206:24
worked (22) 3:12 6:13,21 9:5
 13:16 15:7,8 25:25 28:15
 54:21 78:12 94:21 112:6
 128:18 150:5 156:5 168:9
 188:5 189:17 191:24
 194:18,21
working (59) 1:21 2:21,23
 3:1,8,16,18 4:8,15,23 6:19
 9:3 15:1,17 19:8 20:24
 21:3,4,5,9,14,23 22:8,22
 24:10,23 25:4,7,10
 26:12,20 27:21
 28:5,9,17,21,23 32:9
 34:8,19 41:4 46:25 48:15
 60:4 72:6 94:10 111:13,20
 114:16 121:3 138:7 153:19
 176:25 188:4 189:18,20
 192:13 207:2,18
works (1) 181:5
worse (1) 167:8
worstcase (1) 75:8
worth (1) 82:6
wouldnt (37) 12:5 15:22
 21:10,11 24:23 25:11,12
 39:14 41:3 52:20 62:2,3
 64:10 72:10 73:11 78:4
 80:14 84:17,17 118:10
 125:14 128:25 131:12
 132:3 136:20 137:19
 138:21 140:21 141:25
 148:19 150:6 158:18 174:4
 179:5 200:12 201:12,12
wq (1) 182:19
writer (1) 200:24
writing (4) 13:14 87:22
 101:3 142:25
written (6) 47:14 83:15
 87:15 123:4 164:21 179:16
wrong (5) 77:25 78:15
 178:22 192:14,14
wrote (5) 24:8 49:10 61:3
 84:9 133:9

X

x (1) 209:1

Y

yeah (15) 71:13 75:11,18
 77:17 81:4 147:3 151:6
 152:21,21
 153:11,11,14,14,16,16
year (2) 111:18 180:24
years (6) 3:7,18 6:3 20:4
 21:12 174:15
yet (4) 71:18 72:25 80:6
 91:15
young (2) 124:14 169:6
youd (1) 122:12
your (14) 74:23
 101:17,18,20 124:9 135:20

142:12 152:15 153:5,6
 155:13 166:21,23 167:5
yourself (25) 6:12 7:5 9:23
 10:12,18 21:8 28:17
 32:4,23 34:3 37:4 49:22
 50:1 52:13,19 59:9,23
 61:4,7 64:21 85:17 125:24
 178:10 198:3 200:5
youve (4) 145:12 164:2
 167:1 168:24

Z

zone (15) 113:1,2,5,6,7,12
 114:21 115:7,9,23 116:20
 175:21 176:3 177:9 181:7
zones (3) 176:21 177:7 181:8

0

010208 (1) 95:6
0112 (1) 49:5
0150 (1) 56:16
0337 (1) 197:17
0350 (1) 164:13
0356 (1) 160:8
0436 (1) 161:12
0445 (2) 161:15,15
0521 (1) 161:17
0612 (1) 32:11
0646 (1) 164:13

1

1 (12) 4:5 21:1 36:7 43:1
 50:13 61:1 89:16 133:19
 193:3 203:2 209:2,3
10 (12) 41:17 50:25 51:3
 80:19,21 81:7 82:5 86:9
 95:19 145:15 191:16
 208:16
100 (5) 75:15,24 76:1 78:18
 130:20
1000 (1) 1:2
10135 (2) 49:3 54:24
1054 (1) 41:18
106 (4) 126:23 133:4
 134:4,22
10698 (1) 47:20
11 (9) 8:20 72:16 80:19,21
 81:7 86:9 95:20 160:5
 191:16
110 (7) 75:8,15,16 76:1
 78:16 79:24 83:11
1105 (1) 41:20
112 (3) 49:6,14,14
1124 (1) 34:3
1130 (1) 205:14
115 (1) 133:20
119 (1) 133:23
12 (4) 48:10 161:12 188:6
 199:24
120 (4) 49:19 60:3 134:19
 135:3
1209 (1) 89:4
1220 (1) 89:6
1256 (1) 120:19
127 (1) 105:11
12hour (1) 197:1
13 (6) 1:1 2:12 51:16 57:16
 90:1 96:10
130 (1) 39:10
132 (2) 103:14,17
14 (3) 44:22 51:15 57:17
148 (2) 135:9,19
15 (8) 3:18 26:8 73:20,24
 89:23 123:24 200:22,24
150 (1) 56:18
151 (1) 56:9
154 (1) 120:21
157 (1) 35:20
16 (6) 54:24 55:1 59:15
 115:16 137:20 17

90:18 133:22 139:17
 146:6,24 147:7
 30 (6) 51:15 73:22 75:7 76:7
 91:22 124:19
 303 (1) 171:15
 3040 (1) 12:5
 306 (4) 146:3,4 150:17 158:3
 31 (1) 172:5
 311 (3) 64:22 83:8 86:8
 312 (2) 146:3 150:16
 322 (1) 148:23
 34 (1) 172:4
 35 (2) 26:7 89:16
 350 (3) 82:17 160:6 162:6
 37 (1) 113:25

4

4 (12) 8:21 22:1,18 42:3
 48:10 72:16 73:14 74:2
 140:3 147:7,8 151:19
 40 (3) 75:7 76:7 137:3
 401 (1) 208:15
 416 (1) 161:9
 43 (4) 23:22 24:1,2 109:20
 44 (1) 27:19
 45 (1) 200:18
 450 (1) 84:4
 46 (1) 201:3
 47 (3) 112:14 113:1 201:3
 471 (1) 56:8
 472 (1) 56:12
 49 (2) 49:3 114:18

5

5 (13) 2:12 19:14 119:9
 136:24 140:5,8 152:6
 189:13 196:2 197:19
 199:16,17 200:3
 500 (1) 170:18
 508 (1) 60:19
 51 (2) 192:21,22
 518 (1) 200:4
 52 (1) 116:23
 53 (1) 117:9
 541 (2) 206:22,24
 55 (3) 90:23,23 188:8

6

6 (10) 43:22 47:20 51:5
 54:25 81:2 90:8 92:24
 137:1 140:11 153:10
 60 (1) 205:9
 602 (1) 32:6
 606 (1) 36:10
 607 (1) 161:22
 631 (1) 162:1
 645 (1) 162:6

7

7 (15) 44:11 50:17,21 51:10
 81:1,7 86:9 119:14 148:22
 153:19 194:21,21
 195:19,19 203:21
 7308 (1) 39:2
 7648 (1) 49:17

8

8 (1) 51:16
 83 (1) 182:12
 830845 (1) 39:3
 85 (2) 182:4 184:1
 89 (2) 209:3,4

9

9 (4) 95:6,7 142:24 184:6
 900 (2) 130:22 140:4
 931 (1) 192:7
 99 (2) 100:6 166:14
 999 (32) 92:19 98:8,10,20,22
 99:5 107:2,16,17 117:24
 125:2,8 127:12 129:1,3,6,9
 146:10,13,15,16 152:4
 153:17 154:15,16
 155:19,25 156:3
 157:2,9,12,25