

THE CRANSTON INQUIRY

FOURTH WITNESS STATEMENT OF MATTHEW LEAT

I, Matthew Leat, Assistant Chief Coastguard at His Majesty's Coastguard ('HMCG') c/o Spring Place, 105 Commercial Road, Southampton, SO15 1EG, will say as follows:-

1. I make this statement on behalf of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency ('MCA') in response to a witness evidence request from the Cranston Inquiry ('the Inquiry') dated 4 June 2025. This statement is provided on behalf of the MCA and is made further to my first witness statement dated 1 November 2024 [INQ010098], my second witness statement stated dated 17 February 2025 [INQ010510] and my third witness statement dated 30 June 2025.
2. I confirm that I am duly authorised to make this statement.
3. This statement is to be read alongside the witness statement provided by Neil Cunningham, Head of the Regulatory, Compliance and Investigations Team ('RCIT') at the MCA, dated 15 July 2025. This statement was provided in response to the same request from the Inquiry dated 4 June 2025 regarding enforcement action available to the MCA for failure to respond to mayday relay broadcasts.

4. As part of this request, the Inquiry have specifically asked that if no enforcement action has been taken in respect of any potential breaches for an alleged failure to respond to a mayday relay on 24 November 2021, why this is the case.
5. At paragraph 36 of Neil Cunningham's witness statement, he correctly states that HMCG did not refer any suspected failure by a vessel or vessels to respond to the mayday relay broadcast on 24 November 2021 to the MCA's RCIT. He goes on to say that without a specific vessel or vessels and specific potential non-compliance being highlighted, he is unable to comment on this any further.
6. Within this statement, I address why such a referral was not made to RCIT as this is understandably not within the knowledge of Neil Cunningham or RCIT.
7. At 0227, 0247, 0301 and 0320, the following mayday relay was broadcast:
"Mayday Relay (x3), All Stations (x3), This is Dover Coastguard (x3), Mayday information number 1, Small craft with 40 persons onboard in position 51° 08.5N 001° 44.5E, this position bears 244°, distance 1.8 nautical miles from Sandettie Light Vessel, Taking Water and requires immediate assistance, Any vessel that can assist call Dover Coastguard, Date time group 240224UTC. This is Dover Coastguard."
8. The wording of the broadcast was specific in that it said 'any vessel that can assist call Dover Coastguard'. It was therefore not requiring a response from every vessel in the vicinity as the wording was to make positive contact if a

vessel could assist. It was not expected, nor required, that a vessel would respond in the negative.

9. At the time of each of the broadcasts of this mayday relay, Automatic Identification System ('AIS') shows that there were approximately seven to nine vessels in the vicinity of the mayday position, all of which were large commercial vessels transiting the Traffic Separation Scheme ('TSS') in the Channel.
10. As detailed in the statement of Neil Cunningham, there are many challenges and limitations associated with a large commercial vessel being able to assist as it navigated the TSS in the Channel, which is the busiest shipping lane in the world.
11. There are inherent serious safety risks associated with a large commercial vessel making manoeuvres and altering its course (for example, a serious collision risking potential loss of life) and also the potential for a vessel of such a size to swamp and overwhelm a small boat.
12. MRCC Dover received two responses to the mayday relay from motor tanker KWK Excelsus and cargo vessel Sixtine. Both were large commercial vessels transiting the Channel and, for the reasons set out above, they were requested to keep a sharp lookout and continue their passage.
13. Any vessel of a similar size and nature in the TSS in Channel would be extremely limited as to what assistance it could practically provide given wider safety considerations. In such cases, the assistance they could provide would primarily be limited to keeping a lookout.

14. HMCG has also subsequently learnt as a result of the MAIB's report that a third vessel, tanker Concerto, also responded to the mayday relay broadcast by contacting Gris-Nez. For the avoidance of doubt, this information was never passed to HMCG.
15. At 0324UTC, HMC Valiant informed HMCG that they were on scene at the mayday relay position for small boat Charlie. This was 4 minutes after the final mayday relay broadcast was made at 0320UTC.
16. The rationale behind the decision to issue a mayday relay broadcast is also a relevant consideration in the circumstances. The Inquiry has received evidence from the Search Mission Coordinator ('SMC') on this.
17. Prior to, during and following the mayday relay broadcasts, Channel Navigation Information Service ('CNIS'), which is operated by HMCG, continually transmitted small boat alerts to shipping in the area. This is standard procedure when small boat activity has been confirmed. Ongoing SAR operations were also in progress relating to small boats.
18. In the circumstances, HMCG did not consider that there had been any potential failure by a vessel or vessels to respond to the mayday relay on 24 November 2021 and therefore no referral was made to RCIT.

Statement of Truth

I believe the content of this statement to be true.

Personal Data

Signed:

Dated:17/07/2025