

Interim report on the investigation of the search and rescue response to the accident involving a small migrant vessel resulting in the loss of at least 27 lives in the Dover Strait on 24 November 2021

The information contained in this interim report is based on the various aspects of the investigation completed to date. Readers are cautioned that there is the possibility new evidence may become available that might alter the circumstances as depicted in this report.

FACTUAL INFORMATION

At about 1300 UTC on 24 November 2021, the crew of a French fishing vessel reported sighting bodies in the water about 9 nautical miles from Calais in French territorial waters. This triggered a French search and rescue operation, with UK assistance, resulting in 2 survivors and 27 bodies being recovered from the sea and taken to France.

INVESTIGATION

The MAIB was aware of this incident at the time but did not take any action. This was because the reported events were assessed to fall outside the MAIB's investigative jurisdiction, given that the location where the survivors and bodies were found was in French waters, and the boat was not UK registered. In January 2022, the Chief Inspector of Marine Accidents started an investigation when it became evident that some of the events relating to this loss of life had occurred inside UK waters.

The scope of the subsequent MAIB investigation has focused on the UK search and rescue response at the time; the MAIB is not investigating the reasons why the voyage was being attempted nor the conduct of the voyage itself. The investigation has established that, during the evening of 23 November 2021, about 34 migrants left a beach near Dunkirk, France on board a small inflatable boat to proceed to the UK. During the passage, the migrants got into difficulties and entered the sea. Along with many other migrants that were transiting the Dover Strait that night, some of those on board the boat made phonecalls to alert Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres (MRCC) ashore about their situation. Staff at the Dover MRCC responded to the calls for help and dispatched UK surface and air assets to search the area where the distressed migrants were assessed to be. However, nothing was found until the report from the French fishing vessel later on 24 November 2021.

ONGOING ACTION

The MAIB's investigation and some aspects of evidence collection are ongoing. A draft of the report is being prepared and will be distributed to stakeholders for a 30-day consultation period in due course.

Extract from The United Kingdom Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2012 – Regulation 5:

“The sole objective of a safety investigation into an accident under these Regulations shall be the prevention of future accidents through the ascertainment of its causes and circumstances. It shall not be the purpose of such an investigation to determine liability nor, except so far as is necessary to achieve its objective, to apportion blame.”

As the full investigation report will not be published within 12 months of the accident date, this interim report is published, pursuant to Regulation 14(2)(b) of the Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2012.

NOTE

This report is not written with litigation in mind and, pursuant to Regulation 14(14) of the Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations 2012, shall be inadmissible in any judicial proceedings whose purpose, or one of whose purposes is to attribute or apportion liability or blame.

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For all enquiries:

Email: maib@dft.gov.uk
Tel: +44 (0)23 8039 5500

VESSEL PARTICULARS

Vessel's name	Unnamed
Flag	Not applicable
Classification society	Not applicable
IMO number/fishing numbers	Not applicable
Type	Unknown
Registered owner	Not applicable
Manager(s)	Not applicable
Construction	Rubber inflatable
Year of build	Unknown
Length overall	Unknown
Registered length	Unknown
Gross tonnage	Unknown
Minimum safe manning	Unknown
Authorised cargo	Unknown

VOYAGE PARTICULARS

Port of departure	Near Dunkirk, France
Port of arrival	UK coastline (intended)
Type of voyage	International (Intended passage for immigration purposes)
Cargo information	Not applicable
Manning	About 34 (not seafarers)

MARINE CASUALTY INFORMATION

Date	24 November 2021
Type of marine casualty or incident	Very Serious Marine Casualty
Location of incident	Dover Strait
Place on board	Unknown
Injuries/fatalities	At least 27 fatalities
Damage/environmental impact	Unknown
Ship operation	Unknown
Voyage segment	Mid-water
External & internal environment	Wind: north-easterly force 3 in darkness; low to moderate visibility; sea state slight; sea temperature 13°C.
Persons on board	About 34 migrants, planning to reach the UK