

# OFFICIAL

## **The DNA sampling process for Burials at Sea at the Needles, Isle of Wight.**

### **Information for those planning a Burial at Sea.**

#### **Why is a DNA sample required?**

In order to obtain a licence for a Burial at Sea at the Needles, it is now a requirement for a number of DNA samples to be taken from the deceased before they enter the water. Although a rare occurrence, remains from burials at sea at this site have been known to come ashore and consequently need to be identified. Taking DNA from deceased individuals who wish to be buried before they enter the water aids the identification process, reducing upset for families of the deceased and demand on both Police and Coroner's Services.

As remains can come ashore years after a burial has taken place, the DNA profile will be stored indefinitely on the Missing Persons DNA Database (MPDD). This Database holds DNA profiles relating to missing persons and unidentified remains found across the UK and is managed by the Home Office. DNA stored as part of the Burials at Sea process will not be checked against DNA taken as part of criminal investigations.

#### **Will consent have to be provided for the DNA sample to be taken?**

Consent will have to be provided by the most appropriate person as detailed by the Human Tissue Act 2004. This will be explained in more detail to you by the Funeral Director/ Burial at Sea company who are organising the burial on your behalf. They will request this person signs a consent form and ensure that they fully understand what they are consenting to and why a DNA sample is required. There will be the opportunity for questions and further discussion about the process and any concerns they might have. As a DNA sample is one of the conditions for applying for a license, if they are not willing or able to provide consent for it to be taken, the deceased person will not be able to be buried at sea at the Needles site. There are alternative options available: These include burying the deceased at a different Burial at Sea site or cremating them and scattering their ashes at sea at this site. Further details about these options are available on the MMO website.

#### **What will the process involve?**

Once the application process has begun, the Funeral Director or Burial at Sea company responsible for the burial will contact the Hospital and ensure the appointment for DNA sampling is made. To ensure a full usable DNA profile can be obtained, multiple samples in the form of a deep muscle sample, blood sample and mouth swab sample will be taken by trained mortuary staff at University Hospital Southampton. In the rare event that one of the above DNA sample types cannot be taken from the deceased, consent will need to be provided for Mortuary staff to take a tooth from the deceased. The tooth will be taken from the back of the mouth. All samples will be taken at the same appointment and will not affect the physical appearance of the deceased. The DNA sampling appointment will take approximately 90 minutes and once completed, the body will be returned to the care of the Funeral Director. The samples will then be taken by a Police Courier to Southampton Police station to be processed before being sent to the Forensic Service Provider where a DNA profile is obtained from the samples. This DNA profile is then uploaded to the Missing Persons DNA Database where it will be retained indefinitely. There will be a standardised cost for this service and your Funeral Director will be able to provide more information on this. Please see the detailed guidance document on the MMO website for additional information on the different steps and parties involved in the DNA sampling process.

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### **What is the Missing Persons DNA Database and what information will it hold?**

The Missing Persons DNA Database (MPDD) is managed by the Home Office and holds DNA profiles relating to missing people and unidentified remains found across the UK. The profiles stored within it are **only** used to identify missing persons or human remains and are not used for any other purpose. The DNA profile for your loved one will be searched against any unidentified remains which may come ashore. Access to the Missing Persons DNA Database is restricted to a small number of security cleared staff who undertake searching and matching of DNA profiles on the database.

### **Can I request my loved one's DNA profile is removed from the Missing Persons DNA Database once the burial has taken place?**

As providing a DNA sample is a condition of the Burial at Sea licensing agreement, its deletion from the Missing Persons DNA Database cannot be requested once the burial has taken place. As the sea is an uncontrolled environment, remains may come shore many years in the future and we would need to retain all profiles to assist with future identifications. If consent is withdrawn prior to the burial taking place, any samples which may have already been taken will be destroyed and your Funeral Director will be able to take you through alternate burial options.

### **Will I be notified if any remains come ashore and are identified as belonging to my loved one?**

Although a rare occurrence, if remains are found which prove to be a match to the DNA held on the Missing Persons DNA Database for a Burial at Sea, the Burial at Sea company who conducted the burial will be notified. They will then make contact with the individual(s) who organised the burial on behalf of the deceased. They will be able to provide additional advice and support on next steps.

If you require any additional information on the Burials at Sea process, please visit the Marine Management Organisation website where additional resources are available.

[www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-get-a-license-for-a-burial-at-sea-in-england](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-get-a-license-for-a-burial-at-sea-in-england)