

## **Modern Slavery Bill**

### **Factsheet: Enforcement Powers in Relation to Ships (Part 3)**

Minister for Modern Slavery and Organised Crime, Karen Bradley:

“At the moment a loophole in the law means that law enforcement officers can’t always act to prevent modern slavery offences taking place at sea. This could expose vulnerable people to extended periods of exploitation and even risk of death.

This is unacceptable and I am determined to put it right. It is essential that we are able to pursue slave drivers relentlessly wherever they operate.”

#### **Background**

The National Crime Agency (NCA) has identified a gap in existing legislation which means law enforcement officers are not always able to act where it is suspected that modern slavery offences are being committed at sea.

Currently, police jurisdiction is limited to UK territorial waters, and even within UK territorial waters there are no express powers to stop or divert ships. This means that law enforcement officers have to wait for vessels to return to a UK port, before they can take action to protect suspected victims.

Over the last two years the NCA has identified seven occasions where law enforcement officers were restricted in this way. If vessels spend long periods of time at sea, this can expose victims to extended periods of abuse and even put their lives at risk if the traffickers become aware that the authorities may be investigating them.

#### **What we are going to do**

We are going to give law enforcement officers the necessary powers to investigate and act on modern slavery offences taking place at sea.

We will give law enforcement officers similar powers to those they have in relation to drug traffickers. In summary, the powers would be to stop, board, divert and detain ships, search those on board, make arrests, and seize any relevant evidence.

These powers will apply to UK flagged ships in any waters, and subject to the agreement of the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly, to all ships in UK territorial waters. They can be exercised by the police, Border Force, the National Crime Agency, and the Royal Navy.

Part 3 also sets out powers of hot pursuit, where law enforcement seek to pursue a suspected vessel between waters adjacent to different jurisdictions within the UK or between UK and international waters.

### **Benefits**

- Law enforcement officers will be able to intervene when they suspect that modern slavery is taking place at sea, and thereby prevent abuse as soon as possible.
- Law enforcement officers will also be able to act quickly to seize evidence to support prosecutions and help bring more slave drivers to justice.
- Overall, more modern slavery victims should be rescued, and more perpetrators brought to justice.

### **Q&A**

#### **Do law enforcement officers want these powers?**

- Yes. The National Crime Agency specifically identified this as a gap in the law. There have been seven cases over the last two years where serious abuse was allowed to continue for longer than necessary because police lacked the powers to intervene. In any one case, there may be multiple victims at serious risk. This is totally unacceptable and this Government intends to put it right.

**Home Office  
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