



Department
for Transport

Cranston Inquiry Report – Interim Response



Government of the United Kingdom
Department for Transport

Cranston Inquiry Report – Interim Response

Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Transport
by Command of His Majesty

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Introduction and Background

On 9 November 2023, the then Secretary of State for Transport announced an Inquiry into the tragic events of November 2021 when at least 30 people died attempting to cross the channel in a small boat. On 5 February 2026, Sir Ross Cranston published the Inquiry's report.

The Inquiry made 18 recommendations. 15 were principally operational, and three focused on policy matters related to legislation, oversight and ownership of rescue vessels. This interim report focuses on the 15 operational recommendations, which have all been accepted in full, and sets out where action has been taken, or is being taken, against each recommendation.

Many of the recommendations, and the responses to them, are based on an on-going approach, rather than having a single end point - for example, the provision and refreshing of up-to-date training on small boat operations. The Department (DfT), the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), and His Majesty's Coastguard (HMCG) are committed to on-going learning and improvement, and will regularly review our processes and practices, learning from best practice, to ensure that they are fit to meet the evolving challenges of maritime search and rescue (SAR). Therefore, the actions set out in this document will continue to be built upon and improved.

The Department is conducting a review of the MCA which will consider its functions, form, governance and performance. It will report to Ministers this year and inform Government's response to the outstanding recommendations of the Cranston Inquiry.

Recommendations accepted in full

Recommendation 1: Given the risks associated with HM Coastguard’s use of network flexing for small boat search and rescue – whereby its workforce is split between different geographical locations – HM Coastguard must ensure the effectiveness of measures in mitigating them (including the consequent loss of situational awareness) and regularly assess their effectiveness.

HMCG recognises that whilst its national network does provide critical business resilience, small boat operations pose particular challenges due to the nature of multiple interconnected incidents. Since 2021, an extra 24 people (20 Watchkeepers and 4 Team Leaders) have been recruited to the Dover Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC), which is responsible for the initiation and coordination of maritime search and rescue (SAR) for the Clacton to Dungeness region. All were in post by May 2022. Additional Watchkeepers are dedicated to small boat crossing SAR on days when crossings take place, increasing resilience and mitigating the risk of overload identified in the Cranston Inquiry Report. Furthermore, two team leaders are now allocated to every watch, one dedicated to small boat activity and another for other non-small boat SAR.

As a result, there has been a significant reduction in the use of network flexing arrangements to respond to small boat incidents. Since January 2024, there has been no occasion where incident management of small boat crossings have been split between different geographical MRCC centres.

SAR Mission Coordinators (SMC) are the qualified person in charge of a SAR incident. They assess information, develop plans for response and coordinate facilities to carry out the SAR mission. SMCs outside of Dover MRCC may still be nominated to lead coordination of a small boat incident when SMC staff are not available in Dover (for example, due to sickness or leave) to ensure appropriately qualified oversight.

In these cases, arrangements to support this model have been strengthened. The SMC is now solely dedicated to small boat operations for the watch and is able to utilise a ‘talk box’ function (a direct and dedicated line to Dover), video conferencing and is signed in as a Dover Officer to gain access to all transmissions, calls and aircraft video downlink feeds. This maintains the SMC’s situational awareness, improves communication with those at the MRCC and ensures everyone has access to the same information.

Additional staffing changes since 2021 include the creation and recruitment of a new role of Assistant Chief Coastguard. This role reports directly to the Chief Coastguard and

provides strategic oversight of coastguard operations involving small boats, maritime security, and collaborations with other interested agencies. This role was filled in January 2022 and remains in place today. The role is supported by a Divisional Commander who is based at Dover, providing additional oversight and reporting to the Assistant Chief Coastguard. Since August 2021, there has also been a Staff Officer for small boat SAR based at MRCC Dover who provides tactical leadership and operational oversight of small boat operations to HMCG stakeholders. This includes liaising with Border Security Command and the French Coastguard, acting as a subject matter expert for small boat crossing operations. The role also provides strategic benefits by having dedicated subject matter expertise to better understand the trends, challenges and changes in small boat crossings.

National oversight of all MRCCs continues to be done by the National Network Commander team at the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC) in Fareham. The Network commanders provide tactical leadership and operational oversight, looking across the whole of the UK's national network. This includes providing guidance during major incidents and ensuring that resources are optimally deployed alongside dynamically allocating staffing and maintaining operational resilience.

HMCG, and the MCA, will continue to keep staffing and flexing arrangements under review to ensure they remain sufficient.

Recommendation 2: HM Coastguard should seek, at pace, to invest in the technology required to support its ability to reconcile duplicate small boat incidents. Where this cannot be accommodated within the existing budgets of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, the Department for Transport should ensure that further funding is made available for this purpose.

Duplicate incidents are those where multiple calls are received about the same boat and/or there are multiple boats in the channel simultaneously, creating a complex and unclear operational picture. Technology and procedures that would usually be deployed to clarify identity, positions, statuses and locations of callers are not applicable to unregistered small boats that are without distinctive markings and not fitted with safety equipment or devices to provide accurate location.

Since November 2021, HMCG has reviewed and updated its procedures to reconcile duplicate small boat incidents. Each caller is now given a unique alpha-numeric identifier which is reconciled with each small boat when it is rescued to maintain an overall picture of incidents in the channel.

In February 2022 HMCG introduced the ICU-Hub (initially known as MX Locate), a web-based solution that aids in the location, communication, and recovery of casualties on land and sea. The ICU-Hub provides a translation function on WhatsApp messaging, position information, and video function, supporting communication between the Coastguard and people onboard the small boats who have access to mobile phones.

This is in addition to procuring and deploying drones which provide a single line of tasking, specifically dedicated to small boats with downlink capabilities (data transmission of video footage). This helps with surveillance and covers broader areas of the sea, improving the overall situational awareness of teams working on SAR in the channel. HMCG's capability

to deploy drones, helicopters and fixed-wing aircrafts, provides a multi-layered approach to situational awareness that delivers reconciliation of small boats.

Alongside this, HMCG launched the Command-and-Control Programme in October 2025, which is a modernisation initiative of existing systems. This will provide an opportunity to test the market for technologies that could support the reconciliation of duplicate small boat incidents.

HMCG continues to assess the market and explore technologies that may support its wider small boat operations by attending public safety technology events - such as those hosted by the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials, and Critical Communications World - and through engagement with international partners to monitor global developments.

The MCA is also seeking to engage with academia through a knowledge exchange approach, to draw on applied academic expertise, practical insight, and cross-sector learning. This will inform MCA's understanding of what may be feasible in practice for small boat reconciliation within the constraints of live SAR operations.

Recommendation 3: There should be regular assessments by HM Coastguard of the adequacy of the available assets and human resources to respond to both current and reasonably foreseeable levels of small boat activity. Where the forecast level of resourcing need cannot be delivered within budget, the position must be escalated rapidly to the Department for Transport.

HMCG recognises the importance of regular assessments and has the following operational measures in place for the review of assets:

- SAR asset availability (surface vessels and aircraft) is assessed daily, and every watch assesses asset allocation at the start of and throughout their watch. Should availability of assets change (e.g. due to technical defect), contingency measures will be implemented as required.
- The network resource (Dover, JRCC, and Humber) is used to support unpredicted small boat crossings. This allows incidents to be coordinated from specific sites that have experience with small boat crossings rather than flexing through using any location in the network, ensuring critical resilience. The measures outlined in response to Recommendation 1 support situational awareness if the JRCC or Humber MRCC is coordinating incidents.
- Network Commanders dynamically allocate staffing resources across the network to ensure the best possible response to incidents, especially during high-demand or complex situations.
- Biannual MCA reviews of overall adequacy of resourcing to meet projected demand.

The MCA formally presents all key risks for discussion to the DfT's MCA sponsorship board (chaired by the responsible Director General) on a quarterly basis. MCA also shares its monthly Executive risk report, enabling discussion and escalation of MCA risks up through DfT's risk management structures as required to ensure sufficient sight within the Department. MCA is also able to communicate emerging or worsening risks as needed

directly at any point in the quarterly cycle. There is regular engagement between the responsible DfT Director General and the MCA CEO, as well as the responsible DfT Director and MCA CEO and Chair. There is also frequent engagement between the DfT sponsorship team and MCA officials (both MCA's central governance team and other operational leads). When risks or issues are identified where joint action or DfT support is required, MCA and DfT officials work closely at all levels to identify and implement solutions.

Recommendation 4: HM Coastguard should provide frequent training and retraining for their staff in aspects of search and rescue specific to small boats, one being the need to avoid normalcy bias, in particular, assumptions about exaggeration in calls from small boats.

HMCG recognises the importance of specific training and retraining on small boats for its staff. Training was introduced in the summer of 2021 in recognition of the increasing numbers of crossings, and has been updated, iterated and strengthened since its introduction. HMCG is committed to continue to regularly review and update all contents to ensure training remains relevant and fit for purpose.

Key training for operational roles includes courses for new Maritime Operations Officers (MOO) and Senior Maritime Operations Officers (SMOO), which both include small boat specific training and include operational exercises for small boat incident response. These courses were most recently reviewed in 2025. Feedback from attendees is also captured and the courses are reviewed and adapted accordingly to ensure the training is relevant and clear to maritime operations officers – for example, on the information gathering process for small boat incidents. Changes to training are also made as required when updates are made to HMCG's operational procedures. Continued Professional Development training on small boats is also conducted (see table below).

The efficacy of training is ensured through regular operation standards and performance reviews. If these reviews highlight actions or conduct that is not consistent with procedure, learnings are shared and training is updated. This ensures that training and guidance is up to date, under constant review and continuously developed. The table below outlines small boat specific training introduced since 2021:

Training	Details	Date introduced	Purpose
Directed Network Continued Professional Development training (CPD) on small boats.	This is completed twice a year by all staff who work on small boats. Examples of this might include: • Attending additional training courses. • Structured liaison visits that improve	Prioritised Network training was delivered from summer 2021 and incorporated nationally from mid-2023.	This ensures staff learning is regularly refreshed and kept up to date with the latest developments in small boat crossings.

	operational understanding. • Learning or training done in response to issues identified during incident response. • Presentations from relevant stakeholders. • Personal learning to improve professional competence. • On watch exercises and debriefs. • Engaging with multi-agency exercises. In addition, training on normalcy bias will be added as part of annual CPD.		
Human Element and confirmation bias	This is covered within MOO and SMOO training. This is also part of the Search and Rescue Maritime Commander (SMC) training completed by all SMCs.	Whilst this has been and remains part of SMC training since 2013, in that period it has been regularly reviewed and updated. Additional training was run in June and August	This helps embed the culture of challenging confirmation bias across HMCG, as leaders and direct reports across the UK complete this training.

		2021, following significant increases in small boat crossings.	
Normalcy Bias mandatory learning	An independent body, the US Coastguard, initially delivered this training to all HMCG Operations staff, and the recording remains available online to all HMCG staff. This is now included in all HMCG training for new officers (MOO and SMOO course).	April 2024	This ensures the training is embedded for operational staff across grades and refreshed for those taking on leadership positions.

Recommendation 5: Those involved in maritime search and rescue should adopt formally the Mass Persons in the Water Triage procedure to govern the operational response to a maritime search and rescue incident when the number of people requiring rescue exceeds the capability of the search and rescue units on scene.

The Multiple Persons in Water Triage Tool developed by HMCG has been adopted by the RNLI and vessels that are contracted by Border Security Command (BSC). Following international consultation and endorsement through the International Mass Rescue Federation (IMRF), the RNLI have now implemented the tool throughout the UK to all their lifeboat crews. In March 2026, HMCG shared the tool with all other SAR delivery partners, including independent lifeboats and Bristow Helicopters. The tool is also included in HMCG's Mass Rescue Operations Plan, which is used by operational HMCG staff as a framework for how to best respond to a large-scale mass rescue operation. It outlines the roles within a response, how HMCG should respond and requirements to train, exercise and continuously develop.

Recommendation 6: Those involved in maritime search and rescue should continue to undertake joint exercises on the application of the Mass Persons in the Water Triage procedure.

All of those involved in maritime SAR recognise the importance and value of joint exercises on the recovery of multiple persons from the water. HMCG and BSC have participated in RNLI's annual mass rescue live-play exercise in 2023, 2024 and 2025 and will continue to do so. The Multiple Persons in Water Triage Tool was tested in the last two live-play exercises and will be tested again in the exercise planned for October 2026.

Recommendation 7: The Department for Transport must consider recommending to the International Maritime Organization that it consider incorporating an in-water mass casualty triage tool within its policies and procedures.

Government agrees that the international sharing of best practice and knowledge is beneficial, including in the form of guidance where appropriate. The IMRF updated its Mass Rescue Operations Guidance in June 2025. This provides extensive information and guidance on planning for and executing mass rescue operations, including endorsement of the Multiple Persons in Water Triage Tool, which was developed in the UK and presented internationally by HMCG's Medical Director and Head of Operational Procedures.

The International Maritime Organization's (IMO) current International Maritime and Aeronautical Search and Rescue (IAMSAR) Manual references this updated IMRF guidance in section 6.15.6. Given this, the Department considers that the intent of this recommendation has been fulfilled through this delivery route and does not plan to make a separate recommendation to the IMO.

Recommendation 8: HM Coastguard should amend its existing policies to incorporate the need to provide more comprehensive advice about survivability to people in distress at sea.

HMCG Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were reviewed and updated in May 2024, providing assurance that they align to internationally recognised requirements contained within the IMO's IAMSAR Manual. The standard operating procedure covers factors that may affect survivability, predicting survival times, information and characteristics on hypothermia and heat stress.

These are available to staff through an online management system, which hosts operational detail, procedure, process, and training content. This information is easily accessible, and the information is shared and cascaded across teams for consistency. SOPs are regularly reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis to keep up to date with both internal and international developments, lessons learned and international best practice and guidance. For example, regular operation standards and performance reviews and operational learning reviews help to ensure that SOPs and guidance remain up to date.

When updates are made to a SOP these are listed in an operational update message for officers to see on the front page of the Coastguard Information Portal, alerting them to the update. Updates are reflected in CPD and exercises, as well as being highlighted through participation in reviews and the reports from these.

Recommendation 9: HM Coastguard should examine whether it is using the most appropriate modelling for survivability in cold water. HM Coastguard should amend its existing policies to ensure that they consistently identify the key variables about which information is to be collected from people in the water. In the event that the number of people in the water makes information gathering more difficult, HM Coastguard's policies should prioritise the collection of the key variables.

HMCG have carefully considered and confirmed it is using the most appropriate model for survivability in cold water. This is because it adheres to the internationally set guidance

from the IMO within IAMSAR (Volume 2) and aligns with guidance produced from the IMO's Maritime Safety Committee. The model HMCG uses is supported by a SOP which draws upon the IAMSAR guidance to predict the time people can survive in cold water under a range of different scenarios.

SOPs for people in the water group the collection of variables into who (e.g. name, age, physical condition, swimming ability and clothes), lifesaving equipment (e.g. use of life jackets), where (e.g. where they were last seen), when (e.g. when they were last seen), what (e.g. what happened to cause them to enter the water), how many and weather (e.g. sea state). For multiple people in the water, the information gathering is prioritised where required to understand how many people are in the water, if floatation devices have been deployed, has the location been identified and what is the on-scene weather, visibility, and water temperature. HMCG staff will also try to talk callers through the Float to Live advice, which guides people to control their breathing and float until help arrives.

The US Coastguard is currently leading a project, working with other coastguard states, on a Probability of Survival Decision Aid (PSDA) on survivability in cold water. The aim is to gather sufficient data to establish whether a determination can be made to the IMO on whether the current IAMSAR guidance should be updated. Since 2022, HMCG has collaborated with the US Coastguard on this project and has shared all UK immersion data (such as age, sex, build, ability to swim, personal flotation devices are worn, time in the water) in support of this project.

HMCG will continue to collaborate with this project and participate in any further activity related to the update of the IMO IAMSAR guidance.

Recommendation 10: HM Coastguard must continue to liaise with search and rescue partners in the UK and abroad to identify opportunities for the development or deployment of equipment and techniques to assist in search and rescue operations.

HMCG recognises the importance of liaising with SAR partners in the UK and abroad and will continue to do so. HMCG meets monthly with the RNLI and has bilateral meetings with international coastal partners such as the French, Netherlands, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, Italy, Norway, US Coastguard and Canada. This is alongside its participation in forums such as:

- North Atlantic Coastguard Forum - Annually
- Global Coastguard Summit (8 years old) - Biannually
- EU Coastguard Forum - ad hoc
- Mass Rescue Overseas Territories forum - Annually
- ASEAN CG Forum - Annually
- North Atlantic MRCC meeting - Annually
- Arctic CG SAR Forum – Biannually

- International Maritime Rescue Federation (IMRF) - Annually
- IMO: Navigations Comms SAR Meetings - Annually
- Anglo-French Accident Technical Group (including Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey, and Belgium)

Liaising with SAR partners in the UK and abroad has resulted in the sharing of experiences and lessons learned as well as updating international best practices. Examples include:

- Learning from international partners, for example, lessons learned and experiences from Mass Rescue Operations (Viking Sky) were shared at the North Atlantic Coast Guard Forum Search and Rescue Working Group and implemented in mass rescue operation training for British Overseas Territories.
- HMCG sharing its experience and expertise in SAR in windfarms, submarine, and submersible rescue, and psychological first aid at the ICAO-IMO Joint Working Group on the Harmonization on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue.

Recommendation 14: For so long as the current arrangements in relation to search and rescue in the English Channel remain in place, the roles and responsibilities of HM Coastguard and Border Force should be set out in a memorandum of understanding.

The Department is working with HMCG and Border Security Command (within the Home Office) to put in place a memorandum of understanding setting out roles and responsibilities. An update will be provided in the Department's final response to the Inquiry.

Recommendation 15: HM Coastguard should develop and implement a plan for joint training exercises, to occur at set intervals, with participation by those involved in maritime search and rescue in the English Channel and elsewhere.

The most recent joint exercise involving all participants simultaneously was at Dover MRCC on 7 December 2023. Representatives from French Coast Guard and SNSM (the French lifeboat service) were present, alongside UK Border Force and the RNLI. Since then, HMCG has participated in monthly meetings with the RNLI and Border Force (now Border Security Command) and 6-monthly meetings with the French Coastguard, at which tactics, techniques and procedures are discussed so that best practices can be shared. This culminates each year in the live Mass Person in Water Exercises hosted by the RNLI, where the last live play exercise occurred on 10 September 2025.

The most recent Table-Top Exercise took place at the end of March 2026. Going forward there will be two table-top exercises each year. Key internal stakeholders and external partners will participate, including French authorities, RNLI, HMCG Aviation, JRCC, and Network Commanders. The next live exercise is planned to take place in October 2026.

Recommendation 16: HM Coastguard should develop a mass rescue operation plan that includes command and control, co-ordination, external stakeholders, medical and law enforcement roles, and public and external affairs.

HMCG refreshed its Mass Rescue Operations Plan in April 2026 (introduced in 2017 and previously amended in 2018 and 2021). It has been updated to ensure continued alignment with IAMSAR and internationally recognised documents such as the IMO COMSAR/Circ.31 - Guidance for Mass Rescue Operations (MROs) and to reflect the newly published International Mass Rescue Federation's Mass Rescue Operations Guidance. The plan covers all aspects of a HMCG-coordinated mass-rescue response, including incident command and stakeholder roles. The plan, together with relevant procedures and documents, is routinely reviewed after each training exercise.

Recommendation 17: HM Coastguard and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency should establish a protocol for referrals by HM Coastguard to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's regulatory compliance investigations team, identifying the threshold for making a referral on a potential breach by a vessel of the duty to render assistance, the information to be communicated and how the numbers of referrals are to be annually reported.

HMCG accepts the importance of a protocol for making referrals to the Regulatory Compliance and Investigations team (RCIT) and revised its SOPs in October 2023 to enshrine this practice. This update reminded all staff of the legal requirement for a vessel to proceed with all speed to the assistance of the persons in distress (unless the master considers it unreasonable or unnecessary to do so).

The SOP states that network commanders must inform RCIT at the earliest opportunity when vessels near to a distress position do not respond to a mayday relay broadcast. Failure to respond is considered during operational reviews by HMCG, with referrals made when the threshold is reached. This takes into consideration vessels that are not required to respond - for example, if it would be unsafe to do so, if they would not be able to assist, or not able to assist in time. HMCG would take action to understand why a nearby vessel that appeared able to support did not respond, and this would result in a referral if no adequate reason were evident. It is rare for vessels not to comply.

HMCG will develop a process to maintain awareness of referrals and support data collection.

Recommendation 18: The Marine Accident Investigation Branch should make publicly available on its website, as soon as possible after they are received, the details of implementation measures taken by those to whom a recommendation is addressed, or an explanation for not taking implementing measures, unless there are strong reasons not to do so. If needs be, the 2012 Regulations should be amended accordingly.

The Marine Accident and Investigation Branch (MAIB) and Department for Transport (DfT) agree that implementing this recommendation will be beneficial in improving visibility and transparency on the actions that have been taken in response to recommendations that have been made by MAIB. It is not expected that regulatory change will be required, and MAIB anticipates implementing this recommendation by May 2027.

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