

News story: People smuggler from Newport jailed for 5 years

Adriano Bettoja-Allen, a British national aged 37, was sentenced at Blackfriars Crown Court on Thursday 14 December after pleading guilty to 2 offences of assisting illegal immigration which happened on 2 October and 9 October 2016 at Calais and Coquelles ports.

Sentenced alongside Bettoja-Allen for 1 count of the same offence was 50-year-old Wendy Thomas, also British, who was his co-conspirator in the Coquelles smuggling attempt. She received a jail sentence of 2 years and 9 months having also admitted the offence. Bettoja-Allen's wife Jeanette, aged 49 and from the Philippines, was linked to the Calais incident and was sentenced to 11 months, suspended for 2 years, 150 hours unpaid work, and a curfew. She pleaded guilty to assisting illegal immigration 3 days into her trial.

The Calais incident was uncovered after the arrest of Dawood Shahbeik at St Pancras International station on 2 October 2016. Shahbeik, a British national, was questioned and had his luggage searched by Border Force after arriving on the Eurostar from Calais. Examination of his mobile phone revealed several suspicious text messages referring to an individual who had been transported to a house in Newport. The luggage search also revealed a damaged Iranian passport and a large amount of cash. Shahbeik was arrested on suspicion of facilitating illegal immigration, an offence which he later admitted*.

One week after the Calais incident on 9 October, a second people smuggling attempt was identified, this time at the UK juxtaposed controls in Coquelles. On this occasion, Border Force officers stopped and searched a car driven by Wendy Thomas. A large black holdall covered by pillows and a large soft toy was discovered filling the entire boot space. When Thomas was asked what was inside she claimed it contained towels. When an officer unzipped the bag, two women were discovered lying side by side. Both were unresponsive and were taken to hospital for medical attention before being handed to the French authorities.

Officers then opened the rear passenger door and found a man hiding underneath two cushions and quilt spread across the car covering the foot wells. The man subsequently claimed to be an Iranian national and he was handed to the French authorities to be removed from the UK control zone. Thomas was arrested on suspicion of facilitating illegal immigration.

Both cases were passed to Immigration Enforcement Criminal and Financial Investigation officers.

Analysis of mobile phones belonging to Shahbeik and Thomas found that both of them had been in regular contact with Adriano Bettoja-Allen.

Bettoja-Allen and his wife Jeanette were both arrested and further enquiries revealed they had travelled through Calais on 2 October having earlier met up with Shahbeik in Dunkirk. When questioned about the text messages exchanged with Shahbeik the pair initially claimed that they referred to a soft toy which they had carried back to the UK on his behalf.

Checks also confirmed Thomas and Adriano Bettoja-Allen had travelled in separate vehicles from Folkestone to Coquelles on the same Eurotunnel train on 8 October. Bettoja-Allen returned to the UK alone the next day less than 2 hours after Thomas had been stopped by Border Force. Financial checks also confirmed a large cash deposit into Thomas' bank account in September 2016.

Assistant Director David Fairclough, from the CFI team, said:

Adriano Bettoja-Allen was revealed by our investigations to be the common link between what initially appeared to be unconnected incidents. Our investigations showed that far from being opportunistic attempts to undermine the UK's border controls, the offences had been carefully planned. The fact that two women ended up in hospital demonstrates the dangerous lengths people smugglers will go to.

We work closely with Border Force colleagues to rigorously investigate allegations of immigration related criminality. This case should serve as a warning to anyone tempted to get involved with this kind of criminality. We will catch you, and put you before the courts.

Anyone with information about suspected immigration abuse can contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 anonymously or visit the [crimestoppers](#) website.

*Dawood Shahbiek pleaded guilty to assisting illegal immigration and was sentenced at Blackfriars Crown Court in May 2017 to 18 months imprisonment.