

Press release: Home Secretary bolsters Border Force fleet in the Channel

Two Border Force cutters, currently operating abroad, are to be brought back to the UK to help patrol the Channel, the Home Secretary Sajid Javid announced today.

The move comes in response to growing concerns that the increase in attempts by migrants to cross the Channel in small boats over recent weeks could lead to the loss of life.

The Home Secretary announced the decision after chairing a cross-agency meeting including Border Force and National Crime Agency.

The addition of two further cutters significantly strengthens Border Force capability and resilience in the Channel. However, the Home Secretary stressed that the key to addressing the issue lay in close cooperation with the French and continuing work upstream to prevent migrants travelling and to disrupt organised criminals.

Home Secretary Sajid Javid said:

As Home Secretary I have a duty to protect the UK border as well as a duty to protect human life. Anyone crossing the Channel – one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world – is taking a huge risk with their life. Whatever your motivations are, no one wants to see a tragedy. We have already seen children as young as 9 on these boats.

That is one of the reasons I have taken the decision to redeploy two Border Force vessels – known as cutters – which are currently based abroad to the UK. They will be on hand to help patrol the Channel alongside a Border Force cutter and two smaller coastal patrol vessels currently stationed there.

My role is also about protecting the UK border. Patrol boats have a role to play but there is no single solution to this complex issue and it requires action on many fronts. We need to continue to work closely with the National Crime Agency and French counterparts to target the organised crime gangs behind these dangerous attempts and stop boats before they leave French waters – as well as working upstream to prevent migrants making these perilous journeys in the first place.

Yesterday I spoke to my French counterpart Christophe Castaner and we agreed an advanced action plan which includes stepping up patrols and increasing surveillance. We plan to meet in the coming weeks to ensure we are doing all we can to tackle the issue.

Border Force has five cutters and six coastal patrol vessels (CPVs) and their deployment is kept under constant review. Three Coastal Patrol Vessels and one cutter, HMC Vigilant, are currently deployed in the Channel. Two cutters, HMC Valiant and Protector, are in the Mediterranean. HMC Seeker is in Gibraltar while HMC Searcher remains in UK waters. The UK will continue its commitment to the FRONTEX humanitarian mission by retaining a cutter in the Med.

This year 539 migrants have attempted to travel to the UK on small boats. Of these, 434 (around 80%) made their attempts in the last three months of the year (since October 1). Of the 539, 227 (42%) were intercepted by the French before they made it to the UK.