

Press release: Boat skipper convicted over £80 million cocaine cargo

The skipper of a fishing boat has today (Thursday 16 March) been convicted of trying to smuggle more than a tonne of cocaine into the UK.

Michael McDermott, 68, from Waterford in Ireland, was found guilty by a jury at Bristol Crown Court following a 1 week trial.

The National Crime Agency (NCA) and Border Force officers arrested McDermott on 18 August 2016 alongside shipmates David Pleasants, 57, and Gerald Van de Kooij, 27. Two Border Force cutters, the HMC Seeker and HMC Searcher had tracked his vessel the MV Bianca via radar for over 24 hours, acting on intelligence from the NCA that it was carrying drugs.

The Bianca was intercepted as it entered UK territorial waters off the coast of Cornwall, and a joint team of NCA and Border Force officers boarded the vessel, detaining the crew.

The cutters then escorted the vessel into Falmouth where a full search could take place.

Specialist Border Force teams located bales of cocaine hidden under bags of sand and gravel in the boat's fish hold. There were 38 bales in total each weighing between 25 and 30 kilos. It took around two days to remove the drugs from the vessel.

In total the haul weighed 939 kilos. NCA forensic experts found that the cocaine was between 60 and 70 per cent pure. They estimate that if cut to street purity and sold in the UK it would have had a potential value of nearly £84 million.

It was the biggest single seizure of cocaine in the UK in 2016.

Both Pleasants and Gerald Van de Kooij admitted drug importation offences, but McDermott denied the charge, claiming he knew there were drugs on board but had been forced into shipping them. He initially claimed not to know the two men he was arrested with.

McDermott had a previous conviction for drug trafficking, where he had admitted being paid to sail a boat from Spain containing cannabis.

NCA investigators were also able to establish that he had purchased the Bianca in Whitstable, Kent, paying £17,000 in cash just weeks before his arrest, telling the seller that he planned to sail to Spain and use it for diving and chartered angling trips. The bill of sale was also signed by David Pleasants using a false name.

The trial heard how the boat was then taken to Ramsgate for work to be carried out on it. Pleasants was with McDermott while that happened, with the

two men sleeping on the boat. Van de Kooij had flown in from the Netherlands on 12th August, a few days before the trio set off on the Bianca from Ramsgate.

Navigation records show the boat sailed through the English Channel and out into the Atlantic, before turning round and heading back towards Cornwall. NCA investigators believe it was at this turnaround point, south of Ireland, that the Bianca took the cocaine on board from another vessel.

Following McDermott's conviction all three men will be sentenced on Thursday 6 April.

Mark Harding, senior investigating officer from the NCA's border investigation team, said:

This was a huge quantity of cocaine, the biggest single seizure made in the UK in 2016.

Michael McDermott used his specialist skills as a sailor to attempt to evade border controls. We provided solid evidence that led to his conviction and have taken out another means of transport used by organised criminals to bring drugs to Britain.

His was a crucial link in a chain that leads from cocaine manufacturers in South America to drug dealers in the UK. In stopping this consignment we have prevented further criminality by the gangs who bring violence and exploitation to our streets.

Mike Stepney, Director National Operations, Border Force said:

The huge haul of dangerous drugs that Michael McDermott and his crew sought to sneak into the UK had the potential to do untold harm to countless people around the country.

Officers from Border Force and the NCA used sophisticated intelligence and technical expertise to track this vessel and intercept it before its illicit cargo could ever be unloaded.

The prosecution of this crooked captain and his criminal crew underlines once again how our close work with partners like the NCA is successfully keeping communities in the UK safe from a range of threats.

Kate Hurst, CPS Specialist Prosecutor, said:

These men were attempting to import a huge amount of cocaine and prosecutors worked with Border Force and NCA officials from an early stage in order to build the strongest possible case.

Faced with the overwhelming evidence against them, two of the men on the boat pleaded guilty.

Michael McDermott denied his guilt but the prosecution clearly demonstrated how he formed a crucial part of the plan to bring these drugs into the country, resulting in the guilty verdict returned by the jury today.

News story: Defence Secretary confirms 30,000 defence jobs in South West

During the visit to Devon, Sir Michael revealed figures showing the significant contribution Defence makes to the region, with the Ministry of Defence spending billions of pounds with industry and supporting one in 70 roles or 30,000 local jobs.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Creating an economy that works for everyone means investing and supporting jobs across the UK. Backed by a rising defence budget, we spent more than £4 billion with industry in the South West last year to help keep Britain safe.

Our commitment to the future of defence in the south west is enduring, a region that is vital to the Royal Navy and for the many serving personnel that live and work there.

I welcomed the opportunity to review with Peter Heaton-Jones and others how we can work together to ensure that the future use of Chivenor in a decade's time helps create jobs and investment.

While at the base, the Defence Secretary met with personnel from 24 Commando who have recently been engaged in climatic training, including deploying to Belize on exercise and a winter deployment to Norway. He also awarded two Long Service and Good Conduct medals to 3 Commando's Lance Corporal Kenny McBain and Staff Sergeant Daniel Moseley, from the Army's Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in recognition of their hard work and 15 years of exemplary service.

24 Commando Royal Marines will remain in the South West when they relocate from RM Chivenor by 2027 as part of the Better Defence Estate strategy. The MOD is engaging closely with local authorities and other interested parties on the future of the base.

This visit allowed for further discussion with community members to make sure the release of the site will bring the best possible opportunities like jobs, housing and economic benefits to the local area.

[News story: MOD signs £14 million contract for lifesaving medical technology](#)

The Tempus Pro monitors, designed and manufactured by Remote Diagnostic Technologies (RDT), can help facilitate emergency treatment for Royal Navy, British Army, and RAF personnel if they are injured or taken ill on active duty.

The lightweight, robust and portable monitor, which is battery operated, can be used on land, at sea and in the air. It transmits medical data such as blood pressure, pulse and respiratory rate in real time back to medical facilities and treatment teams, giving them a better understanding of a patient's condition ahead of time.

Remote Diagnostic Technologies' Tempus Pro medical monitor. RDT Ltd Copyright.

Minister for Defence Procurement, Harriett Baldwin said:

Our Armed Forces serve with incredible commitment and bravery, and the new Tempus Pro monitor will ensure that they will receive the best possible care and treatment should they be wounded or taken ill on operations.

Backed by our rising defence budget and our £178 billion equipment plan, our investment in these cutting edge medical monitors demonstrates how we are working with our NATO allies to provide lifesaving equipment to our frontline personnel.

This deal, which will sustain over 60 UK jobs, has already seen 444 monitors delivered to the Armed Forces, with plans for around 900 more to be purchased over the next five years. The contract is part of the MOD's Innovation Initiative, aiming to encourage imagination, ingenuity and entrepreneurship in pursuit of maintaining a military advantage in the future.

The Tempus Pro medical monitor in action. RDT Ltd Copyright.

Tempus Pro can be used remotely on medical evacuation vehicles and aircraft,

battalion aid stations, hospital ships and field hospitals. It will help to provide consistent and streamlined medical support, meaning the records of all sick and injured Armed Forces personnel can easily move with them as they progress through different levels of care. The monitors are being purchased through the NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA).

Chief Executive Officer of the MOD's Defence Equipment and Support body, Tony Douglas, said:

This state of the art piece of equipment shows how we are delivering proven, world-leading equipment to our Armed Forces. The Tempus Pro monitor is a step forward in innovation and safety, demonstrating how we are committed to improving the medical care received by those keeping our country safe.

This deal also highlights DE&S' strong, collaborative partnership with industry, benefitting both our Armed Forces and the wider UK economy by sustaining around 60 UK jobs.

[News story: Reimagining railways: innovation funding announced](#)

Up to £9 million innovation funding competition to improve the railway for customers.

In a message to the [Railway Industry Association's](#) Innovation Conference, Rail Minister [Paul Maynard](#) announced up to £9 million to support UK businesses as part of a new innovation competition to develop solutions for national and international railways.

The funding is being made available by the [Department for Transport](#) (DFT) through Innovate UK.

Creating better railways

The competition aims to help deliver the industry's [Rail Technical Strategy](#) and its [Rail Capability Delivery Plan for 2017](#), which outlines the joint industry vision for using technology to create better railways.

It will invite applications on 2 priority areas that:

- create high-value, low-cost railway innovations, which increase the value of rail services to passengers while driving down operational

expense

- improve customer experience through station design and performance

For the travelling public this should mean a more sustainable rail industry that offers better services, better journeys and better value.

Accelerating innovation in rail

Mr Maynard said:

We are delivering the biggest modernisation programme in rail since the Victorian era. But industries like automotive and aerospace spend many times what rail spends on research and development. This has to change. We have got to accelerate innovation in rail. It's what passengers deserve and expect.

This is why we are working with Innovate UK to launch a rail innovation competition offering investment of up to £9m, which will help to deliver the industry's Rail Technical Strategy.

We want participation both from within the rail sector and from organisations with little experience of working in rail. Winning back customer confidence is a big challenge for the industry and successful innovation will play a big role in delivering that.

UK businesses of any size can apply for funding. Each project should include at least one small or medium-sized enterprise (SME).

Competition information

- the competition opens on 20 March 2017, and the deadline for registration is midday on 10 May 2017
- we expect projects to last up to 12 months and to range in size from £150,000 to £1 million
- projects must involve at least one SME, be collaborative and be business-led
- businesses could attract up to 70% of their project costs
- a briefing event will be held on 21 March 2017

[Speech: "We have to take action whenever a weapon of mass destruction](#)

is used.”

Let me begin by welcoming you Sacha to the Council for the first time in your role as Chair of the Committee and thank you for your briefing.

I'd also like to thank Council members for their remarks today. Today you have all shown this Council's unity and determination to prevent biological, chemical and nuclear material falling into the hands of terrorists and other non-state actors.

Sadly, on this Council we know only too well that that is no longer a hypothetical threat. The nightmare scenario has been seen in too many places. In Iraq, where we have seen worrying, persistent reports of terrorists using chemical weapons. In Syria, where the UN mandated investigation has proven that chemical weapons have been used both by Daesh and by the Asad regime. And now in Malaysia, where we were all shocked by reports that VX was used to kill Kim Jong Nam.

As these events prove, proliferation threats do not stand still, they are constantly evolving, and we must remain alert to new trends. We will have to be adaptable and nimble to keep our citizens safe.

Ensuring that states have the means and resources at their disposal to deal with these threats is the foundation of Resolution 1540. It sets out how we can make ourselves more secure; by ensuring that our legislation limits the ability to develop such weapons; by having the right controls in place to safeguard potentially hazardous material and by hardening our borders to stop their spread.

This is collective security. One state's resilience can prevent the spread of a threat to others. But just as one state can help our collective security, so too can one state undermine it.

The current implementation rate of 1540 measures worldwide is 48%. We must continue to work towards full, universal fulfilment of these obligations.

In 2017 we should maintain the momentum and energy from the Comprehensive Review, and ensure that we effectively implement the taskings from Resolution 2325.

We should stay abreast of advances in science and technology that may increase the proliferation risk, but may also present us with opportunities to tackle the threats better. For instance, through advances in cyber, 3D printing and drones.

This Council broke new ground last year by calling on the States to adopt effective national control lists for sensitive materials – a vital step in an effective non-proliferation regime. We should work collaboratively with those who have already developed effective national control lists, and support those who are just starting out.

We should continue to offer assistance and technical support to those who need it to implement 1540 fully. Better matching of requests for assistance to those who require it should follow a more regional approach, as agreed by the Council last year.

But in truth, such preventative measures will count for little if there is continued impunity for those who use biological, chemical or nuclear material as weapons. It isn't enough just to condemn. We have to take action whenever a weapon of mass destruction is used, and we would make sure that there are meaningful consequences for the state actors and non-state actors alike.

Last month, in response to the findings of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, I regret that a minority of Council members blocked a resolution which would have imposed measures responding to atrocities committed in Syria. We must draw on the unity we show on 1540 to find the consensus needed to act against the use of such weapons.

In conclusion, it's clear that the 1540 Committee has a huge task ahead. And Sacha, you have the full support of the United Kingdom in making as much progress as you can.

Thank you.