

# P&O Ferries: new powers to protect maritime workers

Madam Deputy Speaker, last week I stood at this despatch box to address the House on the shameful sacking of 800 seafarers by P&O Ferries.

No British worker should be treated in this way. Devoid of any dignity or respect. And our maritime workers who, with great dedication and sacrifice, supported this country during the pandemic deserved far better than to be dismissed, via a pre-recorded Zoom, in favour of cheaper overseas labour.

In response, we urged P&O Ferries to reconsider. These calls have fallen on deaf ears. Instead, Chief Executive Peter Hebblethwaite, in front of Parliament no less, set out how he deliberately broke the law. And, in an act of breathtaking indifference, suggested he would do the same thing again.

## **Measures being announced**

Madam Deputy Speaker, P&O Ferries' failure to see reason, to recognise the public anger and to do the right thing by their staff has left the government with no choice.

I am, today (30 March 2022), announcing a package of 9 measures that will force them to fundamentally rethink their decision. This will send a clear message to the maritime industry that we will not allow this to happen again. That where new laws are needed, we will create them. Where legal loopholes are cynically exploited, we will close them. And where employment rights are too weak, we will strengthen them.

## **Enforcement**

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me start with the enforcement action we are taking. Far too many irregularities exist between those who work at sea and those who work on land. Even where workers have rights, they are not always enforced.

So the first measure I can announce is that HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) will be dedicating significant resource to check that all UK ferry operators are compliant with the [National Minimum Wage](#) where they should be. No ifs, no buts.

Second, I have asked the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) to review their enforcement policies, checking they are fit for purpose now and into the future.

The House will recall that the MCA is carrying out inspections of P&O's ferries. And so far, 2 ships – the European Causeway and the Pride of Kent – have been detained after failing safety inspections.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I will not compromise the safety of any vessel and P&O

will not be able to rush new crews through training and expect them to sail – this work is ongoing.

Third, we will take action to prevent employers, who have not made reasonable efforts to reach agreement through consultation, from using fire and rehire tactics.

A new statutory code will allow a court, or employment tribunal, to take the manner of dismissal into account and, if an employer fails to comply with the code, impose a 25% uplift to a worker's compensation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have made no secret of my view that P&O Ferries' boss – Peter Hebblethwaite – should resign. He set out to break the law and boasted about it to Parliament.

So, I have written to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Insolvency Service, conveying my firm belief that Peter Hebblethwaite is unfit to lead a British company, and have asked them to consider his disqualification.

The Insolvency Service has the legal powers to pursue complaints where a company has engaged in, and I quote, so-called "sharp practice".

Surely, the whole House agrees that nothing could be sharper than dismissing 800 staff, and breaking the law whilst doing so.

It is, of course, for the Insolvency Service to decide what happens next, but in taking this fourth step I want to ensure that such outrageous behaviour is challenged.

## **Seafarer welfare**

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a hard truth that those working at sea do not enjoy the same benefit as those working on land. Which brings me to the fifth element of our package today. A renewed focus on the training and welfare elements of our flagship maritime strategy.

We are already investing £30 million, through the Maritime Training Fund, to grow our seafarer population, but I will go further, pursuing worldwide agreements at the International Labour Organisation, where we'll push for a common set of principles to support maritime workers including:

- an international minimum wage
- a global framework for maritime training and skills
- tools to support seafarer mental health

## **Attractiveness of a UK flag**

Sixth, we know that P&O Ferries exploited a loophole – they flag their vessels in Cyprus to escape UK laws. So we will take action on this too.

We've, therefore, decided that from next week, our [reforms to Tonnage Tax](#) come into effect, making it easier for maritime businesses to set up in the

UK, with unnecessary red tape removed, as well as provisions no longer relevant now we're outside the EU.

By increasing the attractiveness of the UK flag, and bringing more ships under it and, therefore, protecting more seafarers.

## **Bilateral agreements**

Madam Deputy Speaker, much of maritime is governed by international laws, obligations and treaties. This means that we cannot hope to solve all these problems alone.

So, the seventh plank of our package today is to engage our international partners. Now, this week, I have contacted my counterparts in France, Denmark, the Netherlands, Ireland and Germany to discuss how maritime workers on direct routes between our countries should receive a minimum wage.

I am delighted to say that the response has already been very very positive, particularly with the French Minister for Transport. I will now work quickly with my counterparts to explore the creation of minimum wage corridors between our nations, as we will also be asking unions and operators to agree a common level of seafarer protection on these routes, as well.

## **Legislation**

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have set out how we will step up enforcement. How we will support the workforce in the long term. How we will get more vessels under the British flag. How we are working with international partners to create minimum wage corridors.

But I know the House is expecting legislative changes too. We had originally come to this chamber today to announce changes to the National Minimum Wage Act.

Madam Deputy Speaker, after seeking expert maritime legal advice, it's become clear that this just wouldn't be possible.

The issue is this – maritime law is governed by international conventions that would too easily have overridden any changes. So Madam Deputy Speaker, I will not let that stop us. Seafarers deserve the same wage certainty as onshore workers. Safe in the knowledge that, at a moment's notice, they won't be undercut by cheaper overseas labour. So today, we are providing that certainty.

I can announce to the House – as our eighth measure – our intention to give British ports new statutory powers to refuse access to regular ferry services which do not pay their crew the National Minimum Wage.

We will achieve this by using primary legislation to amend the Harbours Act 1964, and it means that if companies like P&O Ferries want to dock in ports such as Dover, Hull or Liverpool, they will have no choice but to comply with this legislation.

Crucially, it means that P&O Ferries can derive no benefit from the action they have disgracefully taken. They have fired their workers to replace them with those who are paid below minimum wage. As a result of this measure, this cynical attempt will fail.

So my message to P&O Ferries is this: The game is up. Rehire those who want to return. And pay your workers – all of your workers – a decent wage.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the government wants to bring this legislation forward as quickly as possible. But it's important to get it right. We are legally bound to consult with the sector on any changes and unlike P&O, we take consultation seriously. So, legislative change will not be possible overnight.

But to that end, I can announce the ninth, and final, measure we will be taking. Today, I will be writing to all ports in the UK explaining our intention to bring legislation as quickly as possible. But, in the meantime, instructing them not to wait.

I want to see British ports refusing access to ferry companies which don't pay a fair wage as soon as practical.

They will have the full backing of the government and I have instructed the MCA to get behind this action too – and they've indicated that they will.

## **Conclusion**

Madam Deputy Speaker, this issue has united the whole House, indeed the whole country, in anger at those responsible, and in sympathy for those affected.

Now, we are proudly a pro-business government. But not business like this. We will never support those that treat workers with the callousness and disrespect that we've seen. British workers aren't expendable. They are the backbone of this country.

This robust package of measures announced today will give our maritime workers the rights they deserve, whilst destroying the supposed gains P&O Ferries hoped to obtain. And they will send a clear message that if you're using British waters and British ports to ply your trade, then you must accept British laws.

And I commend this statement to the House.

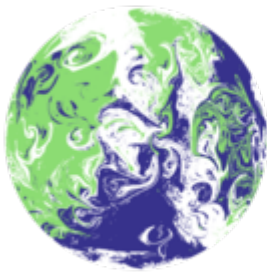
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**[COP President meets Pacific leaders to](#)**

# discuss COP26 and the path to COP27

News story

Summary of the meeting for 'The Road to COP27: Pacific Dialogue with UK COP26 Presidency' on 23 February 2022, where COP President Alok Sharma met with Pacific leaders, ministers and stakeholders to discuss COP26 and the path to COP27.



**COP26  
PRESIDENCY  
UK 2022**  
DELIVERING THE  
GLASGOW CLIMATE PACT

On 23 February 2022, the UK COP26 Presidency ran a regional dialogue for the Pacific governments, negotiators, CROP agencies, private sector, and civil society, to provide a meaningful opportunity for the region to discuss Pacific responses to the outcomes at COP26.

The Dialogue also enabled an inclusive, whole-of-society discussion to identify priority areas for climate action in the Pacific and implementing the Glasgow Climate Pact (GCP) in the lead up to COP27.

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## Russia must stop peddling disinformation about its war against Ukraine: UK statement to the OSCE, 30 March 2022

Thank you Mr Chair. This statement is delivered under the topic raised by Ukraine and I request that this be accurately reflected in the Journal of the Day.

Mr Chair, just over a month ago President Putin launched his unprovoked, premeditated and a barbaric attack on Ukraine. Just over a month ago, the Ukrainian people were living ordinary, peaceful lives. Now, as a result of President Putin's actions, the UNHCR estimates 3.8 million people have fled Ukraine to neighbouring countries and a further 12.7 million are stranded in conflict-affected areas within Ukraine. The humanitarian situation that President Putin has created is truly horrifying.

The indiscriminate destruction of civilian infrastructure and the horrendous amounts of violence unleashed on the Ukrainian people is abhorrent.

For weeks, frustrated Russian military commanders have been attempting to break the Ukrainian peoples' spirit and resolve by subjecting them to a near continual onslaught from: Multi-launch Rocket Systems, ballistic missiles, artillery, cruise missiles, cluster munitions, thermobaric rockets, and unguided air dropped munitions. Maternity wards, schools, homes and other civilian infrastructure have been bombed without any regard for civilian life. Families are being starved out in freezing basement shelters and targeted as they flee. These are not the actions of a Great Power. They are reprehensible and cowardly.

All those carrying out war crimes should know they cannot act with impunity. Indiscriminate attacks against innocent civilians amount to war crimes, for which those who are complicit, must be held accountable.

The once great Russian military has been frustrated and outsmarted by our Ukrainian friends who, against the odds, have snarled up Russia's invading army, inflicting defeat after defeat. Their resistance remains staunch and well-coordinated. The vast majority of Ukrainian territory remains in Ukrainian hands. Ukraine has taken up the fight and shown the world the meaning of bravery and courage.

Mr Chair, the Russian government's attempt to redraw the map of Europe in blood, and conquer an independent and democratic state by force of arms is an attack on the security and freedom of Europe. The United Kingdom, along with many others, repeatedly warned that this would be a massive strategic mistake and would come at a severe cost. In this regard, we continue to support Ukraine, our friends, in their fight for their homeland.

Last week, [Prime Minister Johnson announced that the UK would provide 6000 more defensive missiles to Ukraine](#). This now more than doubles the defensive lethal aid provided to date to a total of more than 10,000 missiles. Additionally, 25 million pounds of financial assistance for the Ukrainian military was also announced.

I would reiterate, all of our support to the democratic sovereign nation of Ukraine is defensive in nature and will help them defend themselves against this Russian war of aggression.

Mr Chair, President Putin badly miscalculated in Ukraine. His Plan A has failed, his ridiculous false pretexts exposed for the world to see, and yet, his government continues to peddle disinformation and censor free speech to

try and cover up his lies.

Those complicit in the Kremlin's unprovoked aggression and those who peddle its blizzard of lies to hide the truth from the Russian people should be ashamed. They have lost their last shred of credibility with the international community. How can they stand in front of the mirror and look at themselves with dignity or self-respect? How can they look at their family and friends with integrity? Their part in the Kremlin's unprovoked, premeditated and barbaric attack on Ukraine has led the Russian people into a quagmire and turned Russia into an international pariah. Shame on them.

We will make the Russian government pay the price of its actions. The UK stands with the Ukrainian people in their fight for their homeland. We will work with our partners – for however long it takes – to ensure that the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the independence of Ukraine is restored.

Thank you. And I ask that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.

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## **Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Ockenden Report Statement**

Mr Speaker, with permission, I'd like to make a statement on the Ockenden Report.

This independent review was set up in 2017 in response to concerns from bereaved families about maternity at Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust.

Its original scope was to cover the cases of 23 families but since it began, sadly, many more families have reported concerns.

Due to this tragically high number of cases and the importance of this work to patient safety early conclusions were published in an initial report in December 2020. We accepted all of the recommendations from this first report and the NHS is now taking them forward.

Today, the second and final Report has been published.

This is one of the largest inquiries relating to a single service in the history of the NHS looking at experiences of almost 1,500 families, from 2000 to 2019. I'd like to update the House on the findings of this report, and then turn to the actions that we are taking as a result.

This report paints a tragic and harrowing picture of repeated failures in

care over two decades which led to unimaginable trauma for so many people.

Rather than moments of joy and happiness for these families their experience of maternity care was one of tragedy and distress and the effects of these failures were felt across families, communities and generations. The cases in this report are stark and deeply upsetting. Of twelve cases where a mother had died the report concludes that in three quarters of those cases the care could have been "significantly improved".

It also examined 44 cases of HIE a brain injury caused by oxygen deprivation. Two thirds of these cases featured "significant and major concerns" in the care provided to the mother. And the report says from almost 500 cases of stillbirth, one in four were found to have major concerns in maternity care which if managed appropriately "might or would" have resulted in a different outcome.

When I met with Donna Ockenden last week she told me about basic oversights at every level of patient care. Including one case where important clinical information was kept on Post-it notes which were then swept into the bin by cleaners with tragic consequences for a newborn baby and her family. In addition, there were repeated cases where the Trust failed to undertake serious incident investigations and where investigations did take place, they didn't follow the standards that would have been expected.

These persistent failings continued as late as 2019 and multiple opportunities to address them were ignored including by the Trust Board who were accountable for these services.

Reviews from external bodies failed to identify the substandard care that was taking place and some of the findings gave false reassurances about maternity services at the Trust.

The CQC only rated maternity services inadequate for safety in 2018 which is unacceptable given the huge deficiencies in care that are outlined in this Report.

The Report also highlights serious issues with the culture within the Trust. For instance, two thirds of staff were surveyed and reported that they had witnessed cases of bullying and some staff members withdrew their co-operation with the Report within weeks of publication The first report already concluded – and I quote –that "there was a culture within the Trust to keep Caesarean rates low because they were perceived as the essence of good maternity care". And today's report adds that – and I quote again –"many women thought any deviation from normality meant a Caesarean section was needed and this was then denied to them by the Trust".

Mr Speaker, it is right that both the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Royal College of Midwives have said recently that they regret their campaign for so-called normal births. It's vital that across maternity services that we focus on safe, personalised care where the voice of the mother is heard throughout.



The Report shows a systemic failure to listen to families affected many of whom who had been doggedly persistent in raising issues over several years. One mother said that she felt like a "lone voice in the wind". Bereaved families told the Report that they were treated in a way that lacked sensitivity and empathy and appallingly, in some cases the Trust blamed these mothers for the trauma that they had been through. In the words of Donna Ockenden, the Trust "failed to investigate, failed to learn and failed to improve".

We entrust the NHS with our care, often when we are at our most vulnerable. In return we expect the highest standards I have seen with my own family the brilliant care that NHS maternity services can offer. But when those standards are not met we must act firmly and the failures of care and compassion that are set out in this Report have absolutely no place in the NHS.

To all the families that have suffered so greatly: I am sorry.

The Report clearly shows that you were failed by a service that was there to help you and your loved ones to bring life into this world. We will make the changes that the Report says are needed, at both a local and national level.

Mr Speaker, I know that Honourable Members and those families who have suffered would want reassurances that the individuals who are responsible for these serious and repeated failures will be held to account.

I'm sure that the House will understand that it is not appropriate for me to name individuals at this stage. However, I'd like to reassure Honourable Members that a number of people who were working at the Trust at the time of the incidents have been suspended or struck off from the professional register and members of senior management have also been removed from their posts. There is also an active police investigation – Operation Lincoln – which is looking at around 600 cases. Given that this is a live investigation .I am sure that Honourable Members will recognise that I'm not able to comment further on that.

Today's report acknowledges that since the initial report was published in 2020, we have taken important steps to improve maternity care. This includes £95 million of maternity services across England to boost the maternity workforce, to fund programmes for training, development and leadership. The second Report makes a series of further recommendations. It contains 66 for the local Trust 15 for the wider NHS and 3 for me as Secretary of State.

The local Trust, NHS England, and the Department of Health and Social Care will be accepting all 84 recommendations. Earlier today, I spoke to the Chief Executive of the Trust, who was not in post during the period examined in the report. I made it clear how seriously I take this Report and the failures that were uncovered and I reinforced that the recommendations must be acted on promptly. But as the Report identifies, there are wider lessons that must also be learnt and it contains a series of actions that should be considered by all Trusts that provide maternity services. I have asked NHS England to write to all of these Trusts, instructing them to assess themselves against

these actions and NHS England will be setting out a renewed delivery plan that reflects these recommendations.

I am also taking forward the specific recommendations that Donna Ockenden has asked me to put in place. The first is the need to further expand the maternity workforce. Just a few days ago, the NHS announced a £127 million funding boost for maternity services across England. This will bolster the maternity workforce even further and it will also fund programmes to strengthen leadership, retention and capital for neonatal maternity care.

Second, we will take forward the recommendation to create a working group independent of the Maternity Transformation Programme with joint leadership from the Royal College of Midwives and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

Finally, Donna Ockenden said that she endorses the proposals that I announced in January to create a Special Health Authority to continue the Maternity Investigation Programme that is currently run by the Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch. Again, we will take her proposals forward and the SHA will start its work from April next year.

I would like to thank Donna Ockenden and her whole team for the forensic and compassionate approach that she has taken throughout this distressing inquiry. This report has given a voice at last to those families who were ignored and so grievously wronged and it provides a valuable blueprint for safety and safe maternity care in this country for years to come.

Finally, Mr Speaker, I would like to pay tribute to the families whose tireless advocacy was instrumental to this Review being set up in the first place. I cannot imagine how difficult it must have been for them to come forward and tell their stories and this Report is testament to the courage and the fortitude that they have shown in the most harrowing of circumstances.

This Report is a devastating account of bedrooms that are empty families that are bereft and loved ones taken before their time. We will act swiftly so that no families have to go through the same pain in the future.

I commend this statement to the House.

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## **Parole reform to keep dangerous prisoners off streets**

Press release

Public protection will be put back at the heart of the parole system to stop the release of dangerous offenders from prison.



- new powers for ministers to refuse release of highest-risk prisoners
- stronger release test to put emphasis back on public protection
- victims able to attend hearings in full – some to be held in public for first time

Justice Secretary Dominic Raab today (30 March 2022) announced a package of landmark reforms designed to restore public confidence in the system, including a tougher Parole Board release test to ensure prisoners who still pose a risk are kept behind bars.

The most dangerous offenders – murderers, rapists, terrorists and those who have caused or allowed the death of a child – will also now face ministerial scrutiny, including a new power to block their release in the interests of public safety. Where the Parole Board cannot confidently say the prisoner is safe to leave prison, they will refer the decision to the Justice Secretary.

Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Dominic Raab MP, said

Through our parole reforms, we will stand up for the rights of victims and make public safety the overriding factor in deciding on parole decisions.

That's why we are changing the criteria for release, putting more people with law enforcement experience on Parole Board panels, and adding a Ministerial check on release of the most serious offenders.

The package of reforms announced today will strengthen the law to ensure that the parole systems puts the emphasis firmly back on public protection. This includes:

- Enshrining in law the expectation that the Parole Board will take a more precautionary approach. The wording in legislation will leave no room for interpretation and make clear that the only priority is whether a prisoner is safe to release

- Greater ministerial scrutiny on the release of the most dangerous offenders, including a new power to block their release in the interests of public safety
- Changing the law to increase the proportion of Parole Board members from policing backgrounds, and ensure they sit on hearings for the most dangerous offenders. Their first-hand experience in dealing with serious offenders and the risk they pose will put a greater focus on public protection in parole hearings. Currently, less than 5 per cent of the Parole Board's membership falls into this category.

The reforms will also restore confidence in its work and put public safety at the heart of every parole decision. It will put victims front and centre of the process and give them a stronger voice. This will include:

- Parole boards required to consider submissions from victims when making release decisions
- Victims will be given the chance to attend hearings as an observer and ask questions. Currently, victims are limited to a statement shared with the Board explaining how the crime impacted on their life
- The Parole Board will trial more detailed decision letters for victims, explaining their thinking more clearly and increasing transparency
- Along with victims, the media and prisoners will be able to apply for a hearing to be held publicly, with the board considering whether it would be in the interests of justice. This follows the case of rapist John Worboys which prompted calls for the greater transparency.

Today's publication of the 'Root and Branch' review delivers on a manifesto pledge to make the system more transparent and improve victims' experience. Offenders subject to life sentences, indeterminate sentences for public protection, extended sentences and certain recall cases are all subject to the parole process, meaning their release must be directed by the Parole Board.

## Notes to editors

- The full [Root and Branch review](#) can be found on GOV.UK
- Currently, parole hearings are conducted by a panel of one to three members who come from a variety of backgrounds, including judges and psychiatrists. The panel considers a wide range of evidence and hears from the professionals working with a prisoner, such as probation officers or prison psychologists, and listens to victims about the impact the crime had on their lives. In order to direct release, the panel must be satisfied that it is no longer necessary for an offender to be in prison in the interest of public protection. In practice this means ensuring that any risk presented by a prisoner can be safely managed in the community.

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