

# Royal Navy strikes £15 million blow to Gulf drugs trade

HMS Montrose, a Royal Navy ship operating as part of the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), has seized over 1 tonne of illicit drugs in the Gulf of Oman worth almost £15 million.

In an operation lasting almost 10 hours, a team from the warship boarded a suspect in international waters off the coast of Oman and seized 663kg of heroin, 87kg of methamphetamine and 291kg of hashish and marijuana.

A Navy team including Royal Marines approached the small vessel on two Rigid Hulled Inflatable Boats before securing and searching the vessel.

The illicit substances were then brought back to HMS Montrose for analysis and destroyed.

This successful operation has prevented a large amount of illicit drugs from potentially reaching the UK and being sold on British streets. Organised criminals, often associated with the funding of terrorism, have also been denied a source of income.

## **Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said:**

The Royal Navy continue to step forward with our partners in the Combined Maritime Forces to stamp out the smuggling of illegal substances.

As a result of this successful bust, our streets are safer and we have choked off a huge source of finance to international organised crime groups.

As a responsible nation with global interests, the UK is committed to playing our part in these international operations targeting the smuggling of illegal substances.

This is the largest Royal Navy drugs bust since [HMS Montrose seized 2.4 tonnes of illicit substances in the Arabian Sea last year](#).

## **Commanding Officer of HMS Montrose. Commander Claire Thompson said:**

Our enduring presence never wanes. Nine rotations into the forward deployed model, HMS Montrose remains as professional and enthusiastic as ever.

Starboard Crew's relentless efforts have resulted in a substantial

seizure of illegal narcotics and I am extremely proud of my team.

HMS Montrose has been deployed to the region since early 2019, actively supporting maritime security operations and multi-national task forces in the Middle East, and protecting the interests of the United Kingdom and its allies.

The warship regularly works alongside international partners which make up the 34-nation coalition CMF, which was led by the Royal New Zealand Navy at the time of the drugs bust. The leadership role has now passed to the Pakistan Navy.

The Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) is a multinational maritime partnership, which exists to counter illicit non-state actors.

**Commodore Adrian Fryer, UK Maritime Component Commander and CMF's Deputy Commander said:**

Working with coalition partners from Combined Maritime Forces, and particularly our Royal New Zealand Navy partners at the helm of Combined Task Force 150, I am delighted with HMS Montrose's successful narcotics seizure.

The Royal Navy's role in the region includes finding and disposing of illicit drugs on the high seas. This disrupts the finance revenues of organised crime and terrorist organisations, and the crew of HMS Montrose and the staff of Combined Maritime Forces should be proud of the work they are doing; it makes a real difference and I look forward to continued success.

**Royal New Zealand Navy Captain Brendon Clark, Combined Task Force (CTF) 150 said:**

This latest interdiction, CTF 150's first of 2022, is a further demonstration in the value of collaboration by CMF assets and follows a record-breaking year for the task force's counter-narcotics operations.

Through perseverance, dedication and professionalism, HMS Montrose has denied criminal and terrorist organizations the ability to use the funds from the sale of these illegal narcotics for illicit activity.

Last year's [Integrated Review](#) and [Defence Commander Paper](#) made clear that the UK is committed to tackling the threat from non-state actors including organised crime groups.

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# Kremlin plan to install pro-Russian leadership in Ukraine exposed

Press release

Foreign Secretary statement on Kremlin plan to install pro-Russian leadership in Ukraine exposed



We have information that indicates the Russian Government is looking to install a pro-Russian leader in Kyiv as it considers whether to invade and occupy Ukraine. The former Ukrainian MP Yevhen Murayev is being considered as a potential candidate.

We have information that the Russian intelligence services maintain links with numerous former Ukrainian politicians including:

- Serhiy Arbutov, First Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine from 2012-2014, and acting Prime Minister in 2014
- Andriy Kluyev, First Deputy Prime Minister from 2010-2012 and Chief of Staff to former Ukrainian President Yanukovich
- Vladimir Sivkovich, former Deputy Head of the Ukrainian National Security and Defence Council (RNBO)
- Mykola Azarov, Prime Minister of Ukraine from 2010-2014

Some of these have contact with Russian intelligence officers currently involved in the planning for an attack on Ukraine.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

The information being released today shines a light on the extent of Russian activity designed to subvert Ukraine, and is an insight into Kremlin thinking.

Russia must de-escalate, end its campaigns of aggression and disinformation, and pursue a path of diplomacy. As the UK and our

partners have said repeatedly, any Russian military incursion into Ukraine would be a massive strategic mistake with severe costs.

The UK's position on Ukraine is also clear. We unequivocally support its sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, including Crimea. Ukraine is an independent, sovereign country.

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## **Richard Meddings CBE confirmed as new Chair of NHS England**

The government has confirmed today that Richard Meddings will be the new Chair of NHS England, following a fair and open competition.

Mr Meddings previously served on HM Treasury's Board and as Chair of TSB Bank, and is a non-executive director at Credit Suisse.

As Chair of NHS England he will be focusing on the health service's recovery from the pandemic and expanding its workforce.

Throughout his career, Mr Meddings has led change and reform at the highest levels, and has a strong record of achievement.

The role of NHS England Chair is appointed by the Health and Social Care Secretary in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Governance for Public Appointments.

Mr Meddings was confirmed as the government's preferred candidate in December. The Secretary of State has taken the final decision following a hearing with the Health and Social Care Committee on 18 January 2022.

It is a four-year role, and Richard Meddings will begin in March 2022. The position carries an annual salary of £63,000, which Mr Meddings intends to donate to charity.

Mr Meddings will replace the current chair, Lord Prior, who has been in post since October 2018.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Sajid Javid, said:

I am delighted to confirm Richard Meddings CBE's appointment as the new Chair of NHS England, I want to thank Lord Prior for his invaluable contribution over the last few years.

Richard brings to the role a wealth of experience in both the public and private sectors, including years of management in the financial services industry.

I look forward to working with him as we support the NHS to recover from COVID-19, tackle the backlog, and back our incredible healthcare staff.

Richard Meddings CBE said:

It is a great honour to have been appointed as Chair of NHS England.

It is clear that there are a number of significant and long running challenges to address, many of which have been made sharper by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, but as I commence the role I am humbled by and pay a huge tribute to the people of the NHS for their heroic work and their continuing commitment.

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## [Foreign Secretary signs deal to boost business](#)

Press release

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has launched a new scheme with the Premier of South Australia, Steven Marshall, to boost UK-Australia industries of the future.



Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has launched a new scheme with the Premier of South Australia, Steven Marshall, to boost UK-Australia industries of the future.

It is the first state level agreement between the UK and Australia, and will deepen ties with South Australia in industries such as space, cyber and green technologies.

South Australia is the home of naval shipbuilding and advanced manufacturing, including BAE Hunter class frigates and for AUKUS submarines.

The agreement, signed by Truss on a four-day visit to Australia, will maximise the benefits such as strategic collaboration on future industries; increase cultural ties; and build on trade and investment opportunities arising from the recently signed free trade agreement between the UK and Australia. The FTA was signed in December 2021 and once ratified it is expected to stimulate new trade worth £10.4bn.

Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss said:

Our ambitious new initiative with South Australia will boost export opportunities and unblock barriers for British and Australian businesses. It will support jobs, create opportunities, boost supply chains and drive economic growth.

Strengthening our relationship with Australia – including through our recently signed FTA – paves the way for UK accession to the CPTPP in 2022.

Notes to Editors:

- The agreement will also further cultural and educational links, including fostering people-to-people links between the UK and South Australia.
- UK companies including Oxford's Deep Planet, plus Mott MacDonald and Laing O'Rourke (headquartered in London) are already making the most of business opportunities in South Australia.
- Likewise Southern Australian companies such as Nova Systems (offices in Bournemouth, Bristol, High Wycombe & Porton Down) and Pickstar (based in London) are well established in the UK.
- South Australia accounts for 5.6% of Australian GDP but recorded the strongest state growth result of 3.9% in 2020-21.
- South Australia has long been renowned for its agricultural sector. The state has ambitious plans to develop its defence manufacturing, space and technology industries to drive future economic growth.
- British and Australian business have long established partnerships in place, driving innovation and growth in key sectors including defence, infrastructure, cyber security, space and technology.

Trade statistics

- In 2020 the UK was Australia's 5th largest trading partner.
- Total trade between the UK and Australia was £14.0bn in 2020.
- In 2020 the UK was the 3rd largest direct investor in Australia and the 2nd largest recipient of Australian foreign direct investment.

- In 2016 exports to Australia supported more than 100,000 jobs in the UK.
- In 2020 15,300 UK businesses, employing 3.4 million people, exported goods to Australia.
- 13,300 UK SMEs already export goods to Australia, representing 87% of all UK goods exporters to Australia in 2020.

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## [Olympic gold medallist and cyclist Chris Boardman to lead government's new active travel body](#)

- Active Travel England, the government's new cycling and walking executive agency launches with Chris Boardman as interim commissioner
- new £5.5 million investment in cycling and walking schemes, including £300,000 top-up to e-cargo bike schemes – £3 million to improve cycling infrastructure around train stations and to explore active travel on prescription

Cyclist Chris Boardman is to become national commissioner of the government's new cycling and walking body, Active Travel England (ATE), which launches today (24 January 2022).

ATE will be responsible for driving up the standards of cycling and walking infrastructure and managing the national active travel budget, awarding funding for projects that meet the new national standards set out in 2020. It will inspect finished schemes and ask for funds to be returned for any that have not been completed as promised or have not started or finished by the stipulated times.

ATE will also begin to inspect, and publish reports on, highway authorities for their performance on active travel, and identify particularly dangerous failings in their highways for cyclists and pedestrians.

As well as approving and inspecting schemes, ATE will help local authorities to train staff in spreading good practice in design, implementation and public engagement. It will be a statutory consultee on major planning applications to ensure that the largest new developments properly cater for pedestrians and cyclists.

Boardman will be closely involved in the full stand-up of ATE, including the recruitment of the chief executive and management team. He has been appointed on an interim basis, while the Department for Transport (DfT) conducts a full and open competition for the permanent commissioner role.

Chris is the country's leading figurehead for active travel and delivered the first phase of Manchester's public transport system known as the Bee Network.

He will now lead the ATE team in its work to raise the standards of cycling and walking infrastructure, in line with the principles set out in [Gear Change: a bold new vision for walking and cycling](#).

The new body will be headquartered in York from summer 2022 and preliminary work is already underway, scrutinising councils' plans for active travel and supporting them to create ambitious schemes that will enable more people to walk, wheel and cycle safely.

The government is today also announcing £5.5 million of new funding for local authorities, train operators and businesses to encourage various active travel schemes, including:

ATE's establishment follows the government's unprecedented commitment of £2 billion for cycling and walking over this Parliament.

Active Travel Minister Trudy Harrison said:

Cycling and walking are not only beneficial for our health and the environment, but can also be great fun and is a brilliant way to connect communities.

This funding is about giving people across the country the opportunity to try different forms of travel, as well as supporting local businesses with the transition to greener transport. I'm very much looking forward to working with our new active travel commissioner to improve standards for everyone.

Active Travel Commissioner for England Chris Boardman said:

The positive effects of high levels of cycling and walking are clearly visible in pockets around the country where people have been given easy and safe alternatives to driving. Perhaps most important of all, though, it makes for better places to live while helping both the NHS and our mission to decarbonise.

The time has come to build on those pockets of best practice and enable the whole nation to travel easily and safely around their neighbourhoods without feeling compelled to rely on cars. I'm honoured to be asked to lead on this and help deliver the ambitious vision laid out in the government's Gear Change strategy and other local transport policies.

This will be a legacy we will be proud to leave for our children and for future generations. It's time to make it a reality – it's



time for a quiet revolution.

This is part of the government's ongoing commitment to create safer streets for people to enjoy cycling and walking, and boost air quality as we build back greener from the pandemic.

More than 30 local authorities have received part of a £2.2 million pot of DfT funding for feasibility studies into creating 'cycling and walking on prescription' schemes.

The government wants active travel embedded into our established system of social subscribing, as a proven method to improve physical and mental health.

The feasibility studies will develop innovative projects linking local active travel, physical activity and health networks to support people to choose to make more short journeys on foot or by cycle. The pilots will be focused in areas where health inequalities are evident or levels of physical activity are low.

Health Minister Maria Caulfield said:

This vital investment in cycling and walking schemes is providing new ways to improve the health and wellbeing of the nation and builds on the rollout of social prescribing across the NHS.

We must do all we can to level up health disparities across the country, meaning everyone, no matter where they are from, can lead healthier, happier lives.

DfT's national e-cargo bike fund, which subsidises the cost of e-cargo delivery bikes for small businesses, will also receive a £300,000 top-up to build on the scheme's success so far, with applications exceeding the funding available.

This will enable businesses across the country to purchase up to 250 more e-cargo bikes to deliver goods in their local area.

This all comes as it has been confirmed that 14 local authorities have successfully secured part of a £1.2 million fund to support the purchase of e-cargo bikes by local businesses, enabling the transition from motor vehicles as we work to decarbonise the entire transport network. The bikes can be used for deliveries and transportation by local businesses or councils themselves.

Finally, train operators will receive part of a £2 million investment for 24 projects to provide more secure cycle parking facilities at 23 train stations across the country, with a further £1 million spent on creating dedicated cycle routes to 5 stations.

This comes as the government takes action on the commitments set out in [Gear change](#) and the [Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail](#) and will both improve both the quality and safety of cycling facilities at stations.