

# 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.

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## **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.

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## [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.

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## **[“Foreign Tourist Arrivals \(FTAs\)” and “Foreign Tourist Arrivals \(FTAs\)” on e-Tourist visa during February 2017](#)**

Ministry of Tourism compiles monthly estimates of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) & FTAs on e- Tourist Visa on the basis of Nationality-wise, Port-wise data received from Bureau of Immigration (BOI).

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## **[This report shows that the Tories are breaking yet another manifesto promise – Angela Rayner](#)**

**Angela Rayner MP, Labour's Shadow Education Secretary**, commenting on an Education Policy Institute (EPI) report into school funding that claims secondary schools could be forced to lose the equivalent of six teachers as a result of severe funding cuts, said:

“Labour supports fairer funding for our schools, but the Government’s formula simply moves already inadequate sums of money around – the overall pot is not being increased.

“Even without the proposed formula, schools are already seeing both real-terms cuts to their spending and rising costs on top. Headteachers are being forced to choose between cutting subjects or cutting the school week.

“Less than two years ago the Tories promised millions of parents that they would protect the money that is spent per pupil on their children’s education. This report shows that it is yet another manifesto promise they are breaking.”