

IN THE MATTER OF THE MANSTON INQUIRY

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE SUBMISSIONS *for 25.09.26 hearing*

Introduction

1. These submissions are made on behalf of the Ministry of Defence (“**MOD**”) ahead of the Manston Inquiry’s preliminary hearing scheduled to take place on 25 September 2026 (“**Preliminary Hearing**”).
2. At present, the MOD does not seek permission to make oral submissions at the Preliminary Hearing.

Issue (a): Whether to seek statements from further individuals / organisations

3. The MOD notes Counsel to the Inquiry’s (“**CTI**”) intention [**CTI Note/11(m)-(p)**] to seek statements from (1) Stuart Brewer, (2) Commodore John Craig, (3) [REDACTED], and (4) the Rt Hon James Heapey.
4. In relation to Commodore Craig and [REDACTED], whilst the MOD has not yet had sight of witness statement requests from the Inquiry for these potential witnesses, nor an outline of the areas the Inquiry wishes them to address, the MOD’s present view is that witness statements from these people is unlikely to materially assist the Inquiry in fulfilling its Terms of Reference, beyond the evidence the Inquiry already has from others, for the reasons mentioned below.
5. As to Commodore Craig:
 - a. Commodore Craig performed the role of Commander Joint Inter-Agency Task Force (JIATF) during early 2022, before Commodore Ingham was appointed to that role from approximately 23 August 2022 onwards.

- b. The period of Commodore Craig's command is addressed in detail in the MOD witness statements of Commodore Ingham, Lt Gen Cave, and Mr Wyatt. Commodore Craig is unlikely to be able to materially add to the evidence already before the Inquiry, i.e. beyond what those others have already provided.
- c. Commodore Craig's period of command ended before the period during which Manston became overwhelmed. Thus, he can only add new evidence in respect of the earlier and less important time period.
- d. The Commodore has now retired from the Royal Navy. Should the Inquiry request a witness statement from him, it would likely take substantially longer to produce a witness statement, as the MOD cannot issue him with employment directions to secure his work on a statement. The MOD is concerned about the risk of delay to the Inquiry's work.

6. As to [REDACTED]:

- a. [REDACTED] performed an administrative support role of Camp Manager (Quartermaster) at Manston. He was relatively junior, and did not have any strategic or operational decision-making function. The MOD presently does not consider that he would be able to materially add to the evidence before the Inquiry beyond Commodore Ingham's corporate statement. [REDACTED] responsibilities were reported to Commodore Ingham.
- b. The MOD has been unable to verify [REDACTED] employment status and his whereabouts are currently unknown. It will very likely take substantially longer to produce a witness statement, as the MOD would need to locate [REDACTED]; and cannot guarantee his availability once located. The MOD is concerned about the risk of delay to the Inquiry's work.

7. The MOD highlights the above to assist the Inquiry in considering whether it is necessary and/or proportionate to obtain witness evidence from Commodore Craig and [REDACTED].

Issue (d): Outstanding disclosure

8. The CTI has noted [CTI Note/30] that only a small number of MOD documents have been disclosed to Inquiry Participants (“IPs”). The MOD has been undertaking significant work to progress the Material Provider Review (“MPR”) workstream.
9. The Inquiry has identified batches of documents which it seeks to disclose to other IPs, with the current total being 1,206 documents.
10. Given the inherently sensitive nature of MOD’s documents, the MOD takes a robust approach to ensuring that material going through MPR is carefully reviewed by the right individual and business units before that material can be shared with IPs. In doing so, MOD needs to liaise with their business units (and sometimes specific individuals) and in some instances other government departments, who may have equities within the document, as to text which should be redacted. In some cases, a number of bodies within MOD have interests in the document, which means the document needs to be shared with different operational business units. Input from those bodies is necessary, as the MOD’s GLD legal team is unable to identify which content is, for example, operationally sensitive. As the Inquiry will appreciate, this is a time-consuming and complex process. As the MOD stated in its correspondence to the ILT dated 25 August 2026:

“Much of MOD’s material is inherently sensitive and relates to operational sensitivities and national security matters. Assessing these records requires careful scrutiny by multiple specialist teams across Defence to identify potential operational, security, personnel, commercial and infrastructure sensitivities. Given the cross-government and cross-Defence nature of the response to the Manston operation, sensitivity ownership is dispersed across several organisations and, in some cases, the original structures established for the operation no longer exist, for example Joint Inter-Agency Task Force. The categories of sensitivities arising from these documents are currently owned by different aspects of the organisation, such as the Army for their personnel, Navy for their capabilities/operational, infrastructure team for the commercial/site details, and security and resilience team for security considerations. Consequently, there is no single authority able to provide comprehensive review across the full document set.

The MOD is making progress. However, the principal challenge remains securing the necessary scrutiny and assurance from Royal Navy subject matter experts. Planned summer leave has reduced availability across key specialist teams, creating a risk that documents cannot receive the level of review required within the current timeframe. MOD has a duty to ensure that operationally sensitive information, capability details and material potentially prejudicial to national security interests are identified and

considered appropriately before disclosure. Releasing material without the necessary expert assurance would create an avoidable risk to Defence and wider national security interests. While the Royal Navy continues to prioritise the review where possible, reduced capacity and competing operational demands mean the remaining work cannot be completed by today, without compromising the quality and robustness of the review process.

Please be assured that MOD remains fully committed to supporting the Inquiry and is making every effort to progress the review at pace. The need for additional time should not be interpreted as a lack of engagement, but rather as a reflection of the complexity of the material and the requirement to obtain appropriate specialist assurance before disclosure.” (emphasis added).

11. Since the above correspondence, the Royal Navy has established a dedicated team to focus on completing its review of MPR material in this Inquiry. It is expected that this will provide the necessary structure, capacity and governance processes for this work. The MOD is confident that the Royal Navy and in turn MOD will now progress with moving forward the disclosure review. The Royal Navy team anticipates being able to deliver comments on the initial tranche of documents by 25 September, following which the MOD legal team will require several days to review and upload responses to the ILT document management system (once that system becomes operational, following the completion of the ILT’s migration to its new document management system).

Issues (f) and (g): Readiness, preparation and dates for hearings

12. The MOD will continue to engage constructively with the Inquiry and will use its best endeavours to comply with the deadlines set by the Inquiry. The MOD expects to make good progress on the current disclosure and will continue to provide regular progress updates. As set out above, the Royal Navy has allocated resourcing to support this work. The MOD will also seek to advance any requests for further witness statements as promptly as reasonably practicable. However, it is presently not able to provide response dates until those requests have been received and the MOD has had an opportunity to discuss the requests with the proposed witnesses. The MOD remains committed to assisting the Inquiry’s work.

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