

Tilley Award 2006

Application form

Please ensure that you have read the guidance before completing this form. By making an application to the awards, entrants are agreeing to abide by the conditions laid out in the Guidance. Please complete the following form in full and within the word limit. Failure to do so could result in disqualification from the competition.

Completed application forms should be emailed to Tricia Perkins; patricia.perkins@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

All entries must be received by noon on Friday 28th April 2006. No entries will be accepted after this time/date. Any queries on the application process should be directed to Tricia Perkins on 0207 035 0262. Any queries regarding other aspects of the awards should be directed to Michael Wilkinson on 0207 035 0247 or Lindsey Poole on 0207 035 0234.

Please tick box to indicate whether the entry should be considered for the main award, the criminal damage award or both;

Main award

Criminal Damage Award

Both Awards

1. Details of application

Title of the project **OPERATION SEAQUEST**

Name of force/agency/CDRP: **Lancashire Constabulary**

Name of one contact person with position/rank (this should be one of the authors):
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Name of endorsing senior representatives(s)
Acting Deputy Chief Constable Mr Adrian Mc Allister

Position and rank of endorsing senior representatives(s)
Acting Deputy Chief Constable – HQ Corporate Services Directorate.

Full address of endorsing senior representatives(s)
Lancashire Constabulary Headquarters, PO Box 77 Hutton, Preston, PR4 5SB

2. Summary of application

In no more than 400 words please use this space to describe your project. Include details of the problem that was addressed, a description of the initiative, the main intervention principles and what they were designed to achieve, the main outcomes of project particularly in relation to the problem, evidence used in designing the programme and how the project is evaluated.

Morecambe Bay is rich with cockle-beds where harvesting is governed by fast moving tides. In February 2004, 23 Chinese nationals farming cockles tragically lost their lives. Cockle-harvesting has since become a multi-million pound industry, with Fisheries scientists predicting Morecambe beds contain millions of £'s worth of cockles, drawing hundreds to the area daily.

During 2004, there were 29-recorded complaints from residents. Historic responses were ad-hoc with government agencies operating in isolation, with conflicts arising over ownership. These factors evidenced the magnitude of the problem, providing scope for further tragedy.

In-depth analysis showed 48 Fisheries permits had been issued to Chinese nationals illegally in the UK, with only 160 permits issued to a workforce exceeding 800. Observational surveys showed 100 un-roadworthy vehicles carrying multiple roof-riding passengers on the sands, with only 11% using life-saving equipment, and no information who was on the beds. Further information indicated 29% fraudulently claiming benefits, and other exchequer offences.

In October 2004, the police devised *Morecambe Bay Action Group (MBAG)*. Primary aims utilised stakeholder-agency skills and knowledge enabling an intelligence-led cohesive approach, developing safe-working practices for cockle-harvesters, encapsulated in Operation SeaQuest, utilising a four-point plan: Awareness - Education - Partnerships - Enforcement.

MBAG's citizen-focused, user friendly approach has seen provision of a comprehensive database, with inter-agency working and detailed vetting procedures resulting in 1200 regulated workers recorded on the revised Fisheries permit scheme, with fraudulent benefit claims reducing by 20% saving £828,000 annually to HM Treasury, with HM Revenue interventions resulting in 220 gangmaster's and cockler's now working legitimately in the formal economy. Revised procedures ensure illegal immigrants no longer work in the industry.

Un-roadworthy vehicle usage has reduced by 84%, with roof-riding eradicated. All workers now carry personal life-saving equipment, with records of those on the sands routinely provided. Lifeboat deployments to cockler's reduced from 34 in 2004 to 1 in 2005, saving RNL £7425, leading to a 93% reduction in complaint letters, to the satisfaction of the local MP and residents.

MBAG have worked with and advised authorities over cockle-harvesting in North, South Wales and Scotland, with the Gangmaster Licensing Authority currently working with MBAG, integrating best-practice elements into proposed Gangmaster Regulations.

Cockle-harvesters have embraced our non-statutory safe working practices, with gangmaster's unreservedly agreeing working with MBAG sanitised them into becoming responsible citizens, generating a wealth of financial savings, most importantly, we have prevented further tragedy; therefore the savings in human emotion terms are priceless.

3. Description of project

Describe the project following the guidance given in no more than 4000 words

SCANNING

The Area

Cockle Harvesting has a long modern history in Morecambe Bay, where even in fair weather; the vast expanse of flat sand is rendered featureless, increasing chances of becoming lost. In February 2004, 23 Chinese nationals farming cockles tragically lost their lives trapped by fast incoming tides. International media attention concerning the tragedy highlighted a multi-million pound industry, with Morecambe having the richest cocklebeds throughout Europe. Sea Fisheries scientists predicted the sands contain cockle seams worth millions of £'s on the open market.

Cockle Harvesting

Cockle Harvesting in Morecambe Bay's inter-tidal estuary is dictated by fast moving tides sweeping through deep and changeable gullies, easily catching the unwary, with harvesters driving over hostile terrain to cockle beds located up to 5 miles from the shoreline. Beds are farmed, just like land, by local families and newcomers. Cockling is a physically demanding, but simple process, firstly, sand is riddled with a wooden tamper, and cockles raked out and placed in bags for transportation via processing plants, sold on to the food industry for around £2.00 a pound. The motivation behind the industry are vast profits, with prices soaring from £200 a ton 4 years ago to £1,300 today, as cocklebeds elsewhere throughout Europe are providing poor stocks.

Government Agency Concerns

48 Fisheries permits had been issued to Chinese nationals illegally in the UK, with only 160 permits issued to a workforce exceeding 800, with only 11% using personal safety equipment and no information available regarding who was on the sands at any time. Further information highlighted 29% of the workforce fraudulently claiming Government benefits. Observational surveys showed an average 100 vehicles carried 400 fishermen daily to the shoreline, with 79% found un-roadworthy, overloaded or carrying multiple roof-riding passengers on the sands. The local council and environment agency had concerns over litter routinely dumped along the shoreline. English Nature had concerns over increased harvesting deterring migratory birds from using the bay as a refuge.

Historic responses were ad-hoc and reactionary based on limited intelligence with agencies operating in isolation, and conflicts arising over ownership of the problem, as a legal definition of the bed of the bay was difficult to obtain.

Public dissatisfaction

During summer 2004, 29 complaints were recorded from residents over numbers of fishermen converging on the area and litter.

ANALYSIS

Data Sources

- Lancashire and Cumbria Constabularies Intelligence
- Department of Environment Fisheries, Rural Affairs
- Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership
- Department for Works and Pensions
- Maritime & Coastguard Agency
- North West Chinese Council
- Health & Safety Executive
- Sea Fisheries Committee
- Lancaster City Council
- Immigration Service
- English Nature

Analysis was broken down into three key areas; Location, Victim, Offender.

Location

Northern Division's Western boundary comprises 35 miles of coastline of Morecambe Bay's inter-tidal estuary extending 5 miles offshore. The sands contain substantial cocklebeds, opened and closed by Sea Fisheries, dependent upon environmental factors such as size and yield of cockles. In 2003/4, abnormally mild winters provided unusually high stocks where beds would normally be closed, affording Morecambe international attention as cockle stocks elsewhere in the UK and Europe had fallen drastically due to failure of spat-falls, (cockle reproduction cycle). Sea Fisheries scientists calculated 10,000 tonnes had been harvested from the Bay over the past two years, projecting the beds still contained millions of £'s worth of harvestable cockles. English Nature had concerns increased harvesting deters migratory birds using the sands as their natural habitat. Cockle beds move with tides, calendar and shifting sands displacing harvesters to different parts of the bay, placing additional demands on government agencies.

Victim

Victims are multi-faceted:

a) Chinese Nationals

Many are illegal immigrants, exploited by gangmaster's, paying up to £20,000 to enter the UK. This money, including accommodation and transport charges being deducted weekly from paltry wages after working long backbreaking shifts.

b) Local residents

Victims are local residents and visitors alike, affecting those closest to the shoreline, confronted by gangs of workers. The shoreline provides anonymity to cocklers, with numerous ways of accessing the sands, raising local concern and placing additional demands trying to regulate activity.

The police conducted door-step surveys revealing complaints from residents and local businesses. It was clear feelings mirrored what research confirmed, that little was being done to address increasing numbers and reckless attitude to personal safety through financial greed.

c) Government Statutory Agencies

In-depth analysis and observational surveys conducted in October 2004 evidenced the magnitude of the problem and potential for further tragedy:

The Sea Fisheries permit scheme contained scant applicant vetting procedures with 48 permits having been fraudulently obtained by Chinese nationals, with only 160 permits issued to a workforce exceeding 800. In October 2004, there were 61 Chinese nationals working illegally on the sands, of concern to immigration officers and other agencies.

Health & Safety (HSE), & Marine Coastguard Agency (MCA) had no information who was on the cockle beds at any given time, also identifying only 11% of the workforce carried lifejackets, GPS and flares whilst on the sands. The Department for Works and Pensions intimated 29% were fraudulently claiming benefits, with HM Treasury losing £23,400 a week, equating to £1,216,800 between April 2003 and 2004. An average 100 vehicles carrying up to 400 cockler's visited the shoreline daily, with 79% found to be un-roadworthy, overloaded, or carrying multiple roof-riding passengers in a dangerous manner. These issues coupled with an extensive litter problem were of concern to the local council, Environment Agency, Police and HSE.

Ad-hoc agency responses had limited impact due to limited intelligence on which to plan or act, with differing opinions leading to agencies operating in isolation. Conflicts arose over ownership of the problem, with agencies legal departments stating the sands were out of their jurisdiction as a legal definition of the bed of the bay was proving difficult to obtain. This situation created barriers between agencies who were pulling in the same direction, but without cohesion.

Offender

Migrant workers may be categorised as both offenders and victims, due to a lack of knowledge of cultural and legal information, inherent fear of government officials, together with a limited command of the English language make them a vulnerable group within society, migrant workers without work-permits or passport's makes them offenders.

Gangmaster's, workers, product buyers and markets for Morecambe Bay produce associate with Scotland and Wales, with up to 400 persons traveling to Morecambe daily continuing unabated. Those who came were from poor socio-economic backgrounds, known to the police and other agencies. As they migrated, they brought a wariness of law enforcement, fostering an avoidance philosophy with little regard for local residents and reckless attitude to safety in pursuit of profit from the rich pickings in Morecambe Bay. (1)

1. Appendix A: Shellfish worker flowchart

Response

Extensive research provided legal clarification following reference to archived material dating back to the Magna Carta, defining the sands as “*rights of way providing the common people of England to collect cockles for personal or commercial benefit*”. The archaic legal position determined an enforcement regime would be unsustainable, and may result in irresolvable confrontation. (2)

Partnership working

The problem was complex and diverse, involving several major factors, including environmental, that could not be dealt with by any single body. The police acted as the catalyst to create the *Morecambe Bay Action Group, (MBAG)*. Primary aims were developing safe working practices for those engaged in cockle harvesting by utilising differing skills and knowledge enabling a cohesive plan of action. Data sharing protocols were agreed prior to the inaugural meeting in November 2004, with the group burying their operational jargon and cultures, learning how to effectively use each’s strengths and weaknesses in achieving the synergies expected of them.

MBAG Stakeholder agencies:

- Lancashire Police
- Immigration Service
- Cumbria Constabulary
- Lancaster Council
- Sea Fisheries Committee
- Health and Safety Executive
- Maritime & Coastguard Agency
- Vehicle Operating Service Agency
- Department for Work and Pensions
- Department of Environment for Fisheries

MBAG Objectives

1. Preservation and safeguarding of life, preventing further tragedy.
2. Implementing non-statutory working practices creating a safer working environment. (3)
3. Intelligence database of persons employed in cockle harvesting.
4. Increase partner-agency conspicuity, providing Community Reassurance.

Stakeholder Agency Individual Objectives.

5. **Sea Fisheries Committee**
Cockle-harvesting local By-Law compliance and revised permit scheme vetting procedures.
6. **Immigration Service**
Permanent removal of illegal immigrants working on the sands.
7. **Police, Vehicle Inspectorate, Health & Safety Executive & Marine Coastguard Agency**
Improve vehicular and personal safety compliance.
8. **Department for Work & Pensions**
Drive workforce benefit fraud down to 9%
9. **Environment Agency**
Managed access points, minimising coastal erosion.
10. **Lancaster Council**
Litter removal.

2. Simon Walsh QC – Bridewell Chambers, London.

3. Government Partners Achieving Change Together (PACT) initiative.

We jointly agreed voluntary compliance through a process of education and advice with enforcement as the ultimate sanction, focusing on primary issues of personal safety and preventing further tragedy. The velvet glove / steel gauntlet approach was encapsulated in Operation SeaQuest, focusing on a high-risk group in a high-risk area at a high-risk time, which determined our key objectives:

- Changing cockler's disregard for personal safety and reluctance to interact with law enforcement agencies.
- Implementing an educational and awareness strategy, proposing non-statutory safe working practices for those engaged in cockle harvesting.

Meetings convened with gangmasters and local residents rounded out the analysis, as well as identifying, and separating the more compliant from the not so. After board-blasting information gathered, MBAG implemented Operation SeaQuest, articulated within the framework of a four-point plan:

- Awareness
- Education
- Partnership
- Enforcement

Awareness

Safety Clinic

This was the cornerstone to our proposals, with several shoreline non-punitive clinics held between November 2004 and Summer 2005, with MBAG officers engaging cocklers, gangmaster's and local residents, polling concerns and proposing solutions encompassing:

- Un-roadworthy vehicles / driving standards
- Personal life-saving equipment usage
- Sea Fisheries permit scheme
- Foreshore muster points
- Illegal immigrants
- Benefit fraud

Established muster point

Analysis determined a workforce muster point should be identified and carefully located to minimise coastal erosion and conflict between residents and visitors. MBAG identified an expanse of foreshore affording safe access. To make this desirable, the council relaxed a local by-law permitting a catering caravan on the sands to serve as a workforce welfare contact point.

Community Engagement

We devised a leaflet raising awareness to the strategy, with a timetable of activity distributed to residents, and shops. MBAG officers regularly attended ward meetings to discuss residents concerns and expectations.

Education

MBAG publicity material

Handouts offered safety guidance regarding suitable vehicles permitted on the sands to minimise personal risk, prevent them becoming stuck and endangering life. Further handouts distributed incrementally encompassed driving standards, carriage of passengers, and life-saving equipment advice, with Chinese and Polish translations embracing an influx of legitimate Eastern European migrant workers.

1000 tide-tables were reprinted, promulgated through MBAG and N.West Chinese Council, with multi-lingual translations containing personal safety advice, sold throughout the area with proceeds donated to the local RNLI hover-craft fund.

Gangmaster's arranged for tutors, teaching basic English literacy to a group of Polish workers, and more recently shoreline Polish speaking interpreters, provided through the Transport and General Workers Union.

Partnerships

Liaison officer

At inception, MBAG comprised 12 full-time officers, nicknamed the '*Cockle Cops*' by the workforce, with a police constable six-month secondment post to co-ordinate MBAG activity. Health & Safety, Department for Works & Pensions and Sea Fisheries quickly followed suit, together with a gangmaster representative working alongside MBAG representing the needs of the workforce.

Catering caravan

The catering proprietor consented to a notice board on the caravan with MBAG literature on prominent view. The cocklers liked the board, proposing their own, which was agreed and used in tandem displaying vehicle and contact details of workers on the sands and tide times. To engender good practice, MBAG mirrored this by displaying their contact details alongside.

Litter

MBAG consulted with gangmasters, resulting in workforce daily litter sweeps, coordinated by the catering proprietor who charged a levy on sales for daily collections by the local council.

English Nature

MBAG consulted English Nature, resulting in closing remote beds used by migratory birds, with details were circulated to gangmasters and closed beds monitored by MBAG, ensuring compliance.

Enforcement

Intelligence database

Collated intelligence was translated into paper records containing personal details and photographs of individuals holding cockle permits, ordered alphabetically into buyers, gang-masters and workers, provided to each MBAG officer as a reference point. Department for Works & Pensions provided analyst support, collating and disseminating multi-agency intelligence via relevant legal gateways.

Sea Fisheries scientists provided weekly predictive analysis, highlighting cockle bed movement, which displaced harvesters to different parts of the Bay, and proved invaluable in maximising MBAG operational capability. In 2005, MBAG devised a newsletter in electronic format, presenting an intelligence snapshot on cockle-bed stock and workforce movement updates, cascaded to government agencies across the region.

MBAG practitioners guide

A practitioners guide was devised containing summaries of offences relevant to each agency, used operationally by MBAG officers working individually, to act as eyes and ears for the group, providing corroborative evidence on intelligence proformas regarding issues beyond their defined remit when there was no multi-agency presence on the sands.

MBAG operations

The intelligence-led approach identified and segregated compliant from non-compliant gangmaster's and workers, resulting in targeted enforcement operations implemented incrementally, encouraging compliance in following areas:

- Use of personal life-saving equipment
- Sea Fisheries permit scheme
- Un-roadworthy vehicles
- Driving standards
- Benefit Fraud
- Immigration

ASSESSMENT

EVALUATION METHOD

- MBAG intelligence
- Joint Liaison Group
- Complainant re-visits
- Stakeholder Agencies
- Gangmaster liaison officer
- Catering caravan proprietor
- Sea Fisheries permit scheme
- Local M.P and ward councilors
- Observational shoreline surveys

MEETING SET OBJECTIVES

1. Partnership Approach.

Cohesive working of Morecambe Bay Action Group took partnership working to new levels with stakeholders developing a culture of shared responsibility, credited by the local M.P. Geraldine Smith with undertaking effective coordinated action dealing with a unique and complex problem. The success is due to the innovative and uninhibited way MBAG work, sharing intelligence, back-office decision making, and intelligence-led interventions in tandem, ensuring cohesive multi-agency capability.

Partner agencies started valuing the intelligence flowing round the group, what was a minor issue to one was frequently of greater interest to another. Officers began slowly working in confidence on their own, becoming adept at routinely passing intelligence by mobile phone to other MBAG officers, resulting in swift and cost-effective shoreline interventions. Having collated gangmaster's mobile numbers, officers also routinely contact them directly, ensuring immediate compliance. Completing the circle, once the workforce knew MBAG were working in unison without being present in numbers they became more compliant to the non-regulatory code of behaviour. Since June 2005, the self-regulating strategy has enabled MBAG to reduce to 8 part-time officers, with all group activity now coordinated by Sea Fisheries.

2. MBAG database.

The MBAG database forms a comprehensive reference regarding Morecambe Bay's cockle industry, providing extensive details of employers, and those employed, with buyers, gang-masters, workers, vehicles and home addresses accurately recorded. The database dovetails the revised fisheries permit scheme ensuring accurate inter-agency vetting and updates as workers were assessed, and newcomers identified. The working mechanisms were undertaken via 3 key stages:

a) Generate and Collate.

Information generated operationally from MBAG officers / permit applicant data was collated by the analyst.

b) Evaluate & Consolidate.

Data was distilled into intelligence and disseminated back to MBAG practitioners for further interventions with identified offenders.

c) Implement & Disseminate.

The net-offset enabled false ID's, wanted persons, benefit claimants, immigrants, tax offenders and non-compliant individuals to be swiftly challenged with cost-effective "velvet glove" interventions ensuring compliance as pre-emptive actions to permit issue. Resultant actions were disseminated back to the analyst, translated into a meaningful form, creating a visual association chart demonstrating association and linkage between gang-masters, workers and product buyers. Intelligence was inputted weekly to the next tier, the Joint Liaison Group, stakeholder agencies and Sea Fisheries for newsletter updates via host electronic media, and the National Crime Intelligence Service, regarding gang-master activity. Further analysis highlighted MBAG's alliance afforded cost-effective intelligence-led working practices, providing a regulated and vetted workforce with compliance to the National Intelligence Model at local-level.

3. Community Reassurance.

Quality of life greatly improved, by replacing resident's fears with reality, letters of complaint reduced from 29 in 2004 by 93% to just 2 in 2005. In 2006, to date, there has only been one private landowner access complaint, since resolved. Re-visits from Neighbourhood Policing officers with 38 residents who complained in our survey, showed all but one were now completely satisfied.

In 2005, the workforce formed their own shellfish association, convening weekly, with pro-active support from MBAG seeing membership recently increase to 40. A recent fund-raising event saw proceeds donated to the local RNLI hovercraft appeal, thereby increasing public confidence, trust of local residents and MBAG officers.

Local residents were involved in evaluation via 1000 leaflets distributed by Neighbourhood Policing officers; with ward councilor's conveying Community responses were positive and supported the MBAG strategy.

MBAG AGENCY INDIVIDUAL OBJECTIVES.

4. Sea Fisheries Committee

The revised Fisheries permit scheme has now benchmarked effective identification of individuals, regulated itinerant pickers, and highlighted visible and invisible economy offences running rife in the industry. MBAG intelligence-led interventions saw improved vetting procedures including applicant photographs on the database. In 2005, the revised scheme was robustly enforced bay-wide, with 632 new applications received in the first month, including 18%, from an element of self-policing from those with permits reporting those without. In January 2006, further improvements saw permits containing multi-lingual MBAG safety literature, emergency contacts and tide-tables. There are currently 1200 workers recorded on the scheme, with revised procedures ensuring illegal immigrants no longer work in the industry.

5. Immigration Service

In February 2005, MBAG officers arrested 21 Chinese immigrants. There are now no Chinese nationals working as cockle harvesters, with immigration officers utilising MBAG intelligence to identify outstanding individuals and their current whereabouts.

6. Police, Health & Safety Executive (HSE) & Marine Coastguard Agency (MCA).

Comparative data before and after implementation show numbers of un-roadworthy vehicles have significantly reduced by 84%, with 31 scrapped, and voluntary remedial action taken before court proceedings were instigated, in all but 4 cases. Multi-riding of quad-bikes and 4x4 vehicle roof-riding were similarly dealt with driving standards greatly improved. Visual surveys undertaken since February 2005 indicate 100% compliance regarding safe carriage of passengers on vehicles systematically inspected and approved for use on the sands.

MCA have seen dramatic improvements in personal life-saving equipment usage, with 98% of the workforce now complying, with gangmaster's ensuring lifejackets; GPS, flares and tide-tables are carried, with records of workers on the sands routinely posted on the catering caravan. The outstanding 2%, who hold a contemptible disregard for authority, have been subject to unyielding targeting, coupled with intelligence from compliant cockler's to prevent them endangering life, resulting in product buyers refusing to deal with non-MBAG accredited gangmasters, one of which has recently ceased trading. In February 2006, compliance checks indicated 99% of the workforce were conforming to personal safety issues.

7. Department for Works & Pensions.

To date, persons claiming benefit whilst holding a fisheries permit have fallen to 9%, 3% below the projected objective. The 20% reduction providing savings of £18,000 a week. Having brought fraudulent claims into check, the loss is down to £388,800, saving an annual £828,000 to HM Treasury. Figures for 2005 are not yet available, interim projections shows figures reducing to less than 6% with recent shoreline interventions extinguishing fraudulent claims completely as newcomers arrive on the sands, resulting in a £1,000,000 projected savings to the exchequer.

8. Environment Agency & Lancaster Council

The catering caravan proved pivotal in eradicating litter, and has evolved to become a community centre, and respite, as mingling with 400+ workers in this hostile environment, often in adverse weather conditions was not ideal.

DIFFUSION OF BENEFITS

1. Cockle beds opened and closed by Sea Fisheries in turn displace harvesters to other UK coastal areas. The demonstrable benefits of MBAG have transcended local boundaries with the group working with and advising authorities in North Wales over Deeside cockle beds, South Wales regarding Colwyn Bay, and Government agencies in Scotland over Solway Firth, who are individually implementing full and abridged versions of the SeaQuest strategy to regulate cockling and workforce safety.
2. In 2005, MBAG identified further exchequer fraud offences running rife in the industry, resulting in links being forged with HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC), who analysed available intelligence, projecting in 2004, a multi-million pound retail turnover within the UK shellfish industry originating from Morecambe's cockle beds. From the projection, key findings showed an estimated ten-million pounds disappearing into the hidden economy in undeclared shoreline cash transactions between gangmaster's and product buyers. In June 2005, HMRC joined MBAG, working with the Local Government Association, eliciting intelligence from housing officers to identify shadow economy gangmaster's from employees living in HMO's (houses in multiple occupancy). Resultant data identified those working in the shadow economy, resulting in an open meeting where 220 gangmaster's and worker's attended, volunteering their intent to legitimately register for tax purposes and enter the formal economy. It is expected a large proportion of the estimated undeclared revenue will be returned to the Treasury by April 2007, following a programme of interviews.
3. Morecambe Bay RNLI hovercraft deployed 69 times between April and September 2004, with 34 attendances to errant cockler's, each call-out costing £225.00. Between October 2004 and March 2005, deployments reduced by 21% to 43, with only 12 to cockler's, resulting in savings of £4,950. The consecutive 12 months to March 2006 showed deployments reducing to 5, with only 1 attendance to cocklers, saving the RNLI a further £2475.
4. Following a six month legal case at Preston Crown Court, the Judge, His Honour Mr Justice Henriques, delivered sentences on three defendants found guilty in connection with the events of February 2004 where 23 Chinese cockle pickers lost their lives. Chinese gangmaster's; Ren, 29, Qing, 21 and Yong, 31 years, collectively received 20 years in custodial sentences for 21 counts of Manslaughter, conspiracy to commit facilitation and conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. The presiding judge ordered they be deported back to China at the end of their sentences.

CONCLUSION

Community satisfaction, and that of the local MP, surpassed expectations, with gangmaster's and product buyers agreeing, unreservedly, that working with, rather than against MBAG sanitised the workforce into becoming more responsible law-abiding citizens, and most importantly prevented further tragedy or life-threatening incident on the sands. Operation SeaQuest has fostered positive relationships between workers and government officers, in turn, these relationships generated many financial savings, however, most importantly, we have prevented further tragedy, therefore the savings in human emotion terms are priceless. These outcomes testify to the impact a citizen-focused approach to problem solving can have on a significant public safety issue.

The most gratifying seal of approval was that expressed by the gangmaster acting as workforce liaison, who stated, "*You've turned this industry around by walking amongst us instead of working against us*". We believe we've won the industry over, evident, in light of the SeaQuest strategy, individuals throughout the shellfish industry are abandoning the mindset of operating in the shadows of the informal economy, supporting evidence of significant culture change emerging within this industry.

Continued analysis highlights anyone without experience can set up as a cockler, with current legislation more concerned with what happens to cockles, than welfare of cockler's. Following Government Office North West liaising with the Junior Fisheries Minister, the Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA), formed to curb exploitative activities of gangmaster's and safe-guard workers interests, recently met MBAG officers, acknowledging the unique nature of the self-regulatory initiative. Consequently, the timetable relating to introduction of statutory offences applicable to the fishing industry being deferred to April 2007 to allow the GLA time to evaluate the SeaQuest strategy, integrating best-practice elements into the proposed Gangmaster Regulations.

APPENDIX A

