

# People Trafficking on Chartered Yachts

Please may we ask that anyone who travels to the continent in their private vessels take steps to guard against the dangers of illegal immigrants secreting themselves on-board and catching a low-risk free ride into the UK.

There have been reports that owners of private craft have been unwittingly acting as mules for drugs and other contraband which has been covertly hidden on their vessel whilst they stay on the continent and then retrieved by a second party once they are safely back at their own marina in the UK.

Recently there has been a rise in the number of private sailing yachts being used for large scale drug smuggling operations. One of the most recent successful seizures was from Yacht Baila last year which was stopped south of the Isle of Wight by a UKBF cutter as its two Polish-born crew attempted to smuggle £90 million worth of cocaine into the Solent (they received 40 years in prison).

Why is this happening?

It is becoming apparent that organised criminal gangs and smuggling outfits have identified the fact that sailing vessels do not fit the traditional profile for a smuggling craft and as such, they believe there is less chance that a member of the public will consider them suspicious and report their activity or that the authorities will consider boarding and searching them.

UKBF have been alerted to a trend in the Mediterranean where known organised crime syndicates are training their associates to become competent sailors and then chartering pleasure vessels (often sail not power) for months at a time to be used to smuggle contraband and people. Reports of organised people trafficking aboard privately chartered pleasure yachts in UK waters are also beginning to come to our attention.

A UKBF cutter recently intercepted a 35ft chartered sailing yacht from Belgium off the coast of Kent which they found to contain two trained mariners and a number of other foreign individuals who were clearly intending to land in the UK illegally. There are strong indications that this activity had been going on for a prolonged period prior to the stop and there is every chance that other vessels are operating in our area conducting the same type of operation. We would ask all of you out on the water to be alert to this trend and look for any similar incidents which raise your suspicion and report them to the police. We accept that groups of foreign speaking people getting off boats in marinas with lots of luggage is not unusual to see but we are always interested in hearing from people about this type of incident.