

Ex police officer sentenced for gross negligence manslaughter of four and failing to discharge a duty under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974

On 23 April 2025, Nerys Lloyd was sentenced at Swansea Crown Court following a guilty plea to causing the deaths of four people on a paddleboarding trip in south-west Wales. HCR's Harry Upshall attended the court to observe the proceedings.

What happened?

On 30 October 2021, Lloyd led a paddleboarding trip of seven participants and two instructors (including Lloyd) on the River Cleddau in Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire ("**River**"). Three participants drowned after going over Haverfordwest Town Weir ("**Weir**") and Paul O'Dwyer, Lloyd's co-instructor, drowned after re-entering the water to try to rescue others.

The Sentence

Mrs Justice Stacey handed down a ten year and six-month custodial sentence to Lloyd for the gross negligence manslaughter of the four paddleboarders and for failing to discharge the duty under sections 3(2) and 33(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

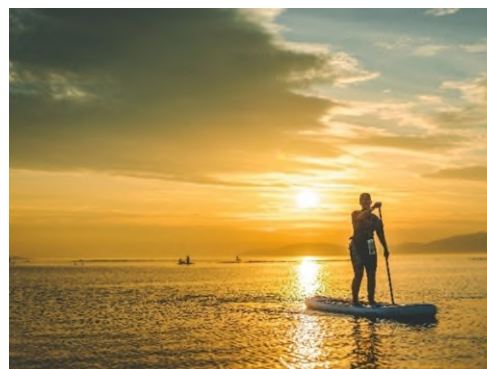
Mrs Justice Stacey said the victims were "*cut off in their prime with so much to live for and look forward to.*"

Lloyd's shortcomings

The Prosecution outlined the facts, extent of harm caused and highlighted the various opportunities Lloyd had to take preventative actions. The Court also heard 15 moving victim statements read by survivors and family of the victims.

O'Dwyer had suggested alternative routes to Lloyd before the trip, to which she responded "*boring*". Lloyd provided accounts to police claiming she had carried out health and safety checks before the trip and taken next of kin information. This was untrue.

Lloyd's counsel submitted there was never a plan to go over the Weir, but Mrs Justice Stacey disagreed. Going down the fish ramp was what Lloyd and O'Dwyer did on their 'recce' on 19 August 2021 and in Lloyd's messages to O'Dwyer beforehand, it was apparent this is what Lloyd wanted to do on 30 October 2021. It was either the plan to go down the fish ramp or there was no plan at all. Either way, it showed Lloyd's blatant disregard for a very high risk of death.



If it had been Lloyd's plan to portage the Weir, she would have surely explained it to the group, or asked O'Dwyer to, to let them know that within just a few minutes of getting into the River they would need to portage their boards past the Weir.

Neither Lloyd or O'Dwyer had undertaken courses to qualify them to instruct SUP activities on rivers with flow, nor in spate or near a weir. The course they had attended covered risk assessment management, health and safety duties and the need for attention to the environment and weather. Lloyd knew the dangers of using ankle leashes on rivers and in flowing water and the need for quick release waist leashes to avoid paddleboarders being dragged underwater. Mrs Justice Stacey commented:

"The ankle leashes attached to the boards of those stuck in the hydraulic spin, which are totally unsuitable for fast-flowing water, made it even harder for them to get free."

Lloyd knew it was low tide and that there would be a significant drop (1.3m on the incident date) over the Weir at a time where there had been very heavy rain, the River was swollen with a high volume of water, and flood warnings were in place.

Lloyd could see from the footbridge at the start of the trip how fast the River was flowing and failed to look at the Weir before starting the trip. Even from the footbridge, it could be heard how tumultuous the water was going over the Weir. Lloyd carried on regardless.

The combination of the wrong leashes being used, no assessment of the experience for those new to the group and the lack of health and safety paperwork, safety briefings and next of kin details (one victim went unidentified overnight on 30 October) exemplified Lloyd's failures which led to an avoidable tragedy.

Lloyd had been trained in risk management as a South Wales police officer licensed to carry firearms and had received rigorous training from the RNLI. She knew what should have been done but failed to do it.



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