

Statement of Peter Faulding in response to the BBC documentary

‘Finding Nicola’

Every drowning is tragic and devastating for families. The very public nature of the sad drowning of Nicola Bulley has been made even more traumatic for her family and friends by being thrust into the public eye, having every aspect of their lives scrutinized, forgetting that there are real people at the heart of this case.

The BBC Documentary ‘Finding Nicola’ which aired on Thursday 3rd October has once again portrayed myself and my team unfairly and I want to set the record straight. It is with regret that I feel the need to release this information to the public, evidence that my search for Nicola Bulley was sadly successful, but was not fully investigated or disclosed to the public.

The Specialist Group International (SGI) Underwater Search Team have been locating and recovering drowning victims for many years, recovering on average 10 victims per year. We have an exemplary record of locating victims quickly, providing relief and dignity to grieving families. We pride ourselves on our professional and empathetic approach and have always worked seamlessly with the police and other partners.

SGI was called upon to assist with the search for Nicola by her partner Paul. We did so free of charge as we had the relevant equipment and expertise and simply wanted to help a family in distress, after many days of Nicola not being found.

My statement that ‘if Nicola was there, I would have found her’ comes from nearly 3 decades of experience. Since 1999, I have pioneered the use of side scan sonar for forensic and underwater search in the UK. I make no apologies for being confident in my and my team’s skills.

I stand by my previous statement outlining our version of events that I located the body of Nicola Bulley at 10.34 on 7th February within 6 minutes. Unfortunately, it is now time to defend myself and my team’s unblemished reputation and stand up for the truth. We have always carried out our role with honesty and integrity and it was never our intention to cause any conflict with the police or the family. However, we feel that it is in the public’s interest to know that my findings have not been thoroughly investigated and at no point has any live side scan sonar data been requested by the police,

the Coroner or the College of Policing despite my many attempts to provide it. Without this very important data, no information to support the images would be available and no conclusions would be possible to make. Yet, unnamed experts made conclusions in the College of Policing Report based on basic PDF images alone.

I welcome any opportunity to have an open and transparent meeting with members of Lancashire Police, their dive team, the College of Policing and the experts that they called upon in the report, to review all the available evidence with media present.

It is important that the truth be fully investigated for the sake of Nicola and her family, for public confidence, for the future of underwater search and for lessons to be learned to prevent this from ever happening again.

Please see my correspondence with the College of Policing in the link below.

Peter Faulding

CEO Specialist Group International.



Dear Dr Raphael,

27th October 2023

I am writing to you in advance of the imminent release of the report by the National College of Policing (NCP) into the conduct of Lancashire Police's handling of the Nicola Bulley case.

I would like to raise a concern directly with you that important and credible evidence which I provided to the police at the scene and as part of this investigation has not been fully scrutinized or followed up. Specifically, this relates to sonar images and live sonar data of a target that I located on 7th February 2023 during my search which I believe to be the body of Nicola Bulley on the bottom of the river. This was deemed negative by the NWUSU, which baffled me as I am never wrong with my sonar readings. Based on the negative finding, although still baffled but with trust in the dive team, I made a public statement saying that I did not think she was in the river. The next day I was refused an opportunity to rescan the same area and a search of the weir area was also refused. Several weeks later, with subsequent scrutiny of the images and data by myself, I now disagree that the target was negative and believe it was in fact positive. Without the opportunity to present my findings at the inquest, I presented the same evidence to your NCP team during the interview. The team were provided with images of the sonar shadows of the target and also saw briefly live data from our side scan sonar computer but this had to be cut short as the interview room at the hotel had to be vacated for the next booking. However, based on the gravity of these revelations, I fully expected that further information would be requested from the NCP investigation team, such as measurements, location, latitude and longitude and viewing of the actual live side scan sonar data with the opportunity for me to explain my findings further. No requests have been received. Subsequent to the interview, I submitted this

evidence to the coroner by recorded delivery, also with no response. At no point have any police agencies ever requested to see the full evidence which I am 100 percent certain is that of the body of Nicola laying on the bottom of the river, approximately 75m from the bench, with GPS fluctuation of +/- 5m plus 1 metre of layback. Therefore, this evidence cannot have been properly considered and will leave your report open to obvious criticism.

With worldwide interest in this case, unprecedented public scrutiny and trust in the police at an already all-time low, reporting this finding accurately will be an opportunity to regain back some public confidence. Having worked with many police services for over 30 years I have nothing but the highest regard for the police and the difficult task that they do. Underwater search in particular is extremely difficult and specialist work. However, I will not let my unblemished reputation be damaged any further by allowing this investigation to inaccurately report on my involvement.

These very important findings answer two of the key outstanding questions to this case 'Where was Nicola?' and 'Why was she not found?' The answers are now clear. For the most part, Nicola was in the non-tidal part of the river approximately 75 m downstream from the bench. She was not found initially by NWUSU by divers or their sonar and then missed once again when they investigated my target. No other targets were located during our search. In my vast experience, we have never recovered a body that has floated after drowning, our data shows that a drowning victim sinks either straight away or drifts a short distance whilst struggling until they drown. There is no exact science for how long it takes a body to decompose and then float to the surface, it can be days or weeks depending on a number of factors, but when they do surface, they move with the flow of the river. In this case over the weir and probably during the night into the tidal section of the River Wyre.

At this point, I do not know what your conclusions are or what will be published in the report. However, for the avoidance of any doubt, I am enclosing further sonar images that were gathered at 16.30 Hrs on Tuesday 7th February 2023. These images clearly show the body of Nicola Bulley still laying in a foetal position on the riverbed. For ease, I have also outlined the body in blue. Furthermore, the target measures 1.61 metres in total length, the same height as Nicola. The best and clearest views can be seen via my sonar imaging data which shows the live imaging. I have offered to show this several times, but even so these attached images are clear enough even for someone with no sonar competence or training to understand.

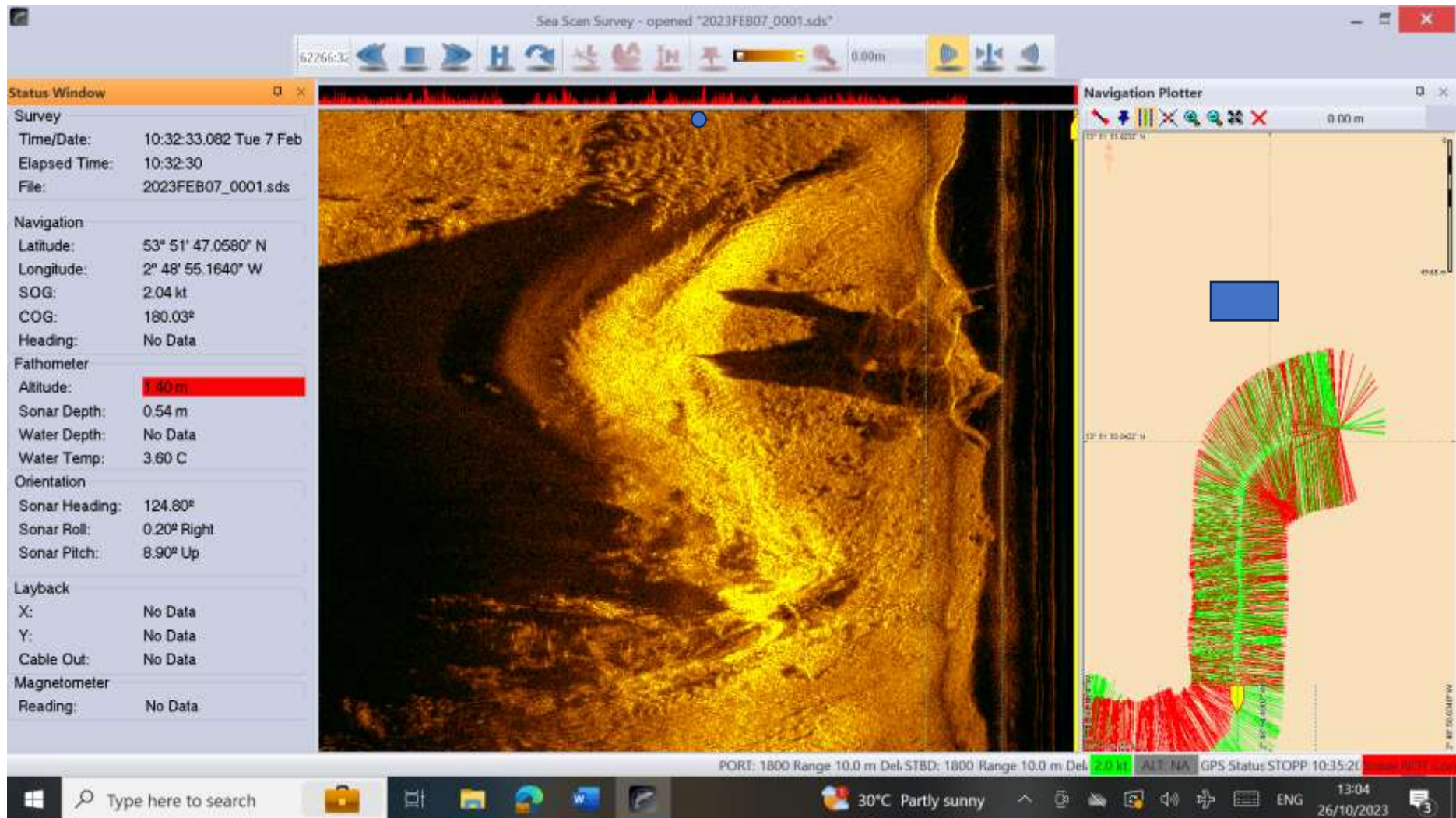
These images and the resulting implications will be disturbing and upsetting for the family and friends of Nicola. It is important for not only the police to see them but for them to be sensitively shared with the family before your report is published and I strongly implore you to consider this.

I am keen to work with you to ensure the report is transparent and accurate, rather than pitching partners against each other very publicly and so, I am asking that you take the time to review the evidence I have provided.

That said, once the report is released, I will be making my own media statement with the information that I have provided to you. I have enormous public support for myself, and my team led by the many families of victims that I have helped over the years and my decades of unblemished work speaks for itself. It is my hope that our positions will be unilateral, the truth will be told and public opinion, confidence and trust will begin to be restored.

Yours sincerely,

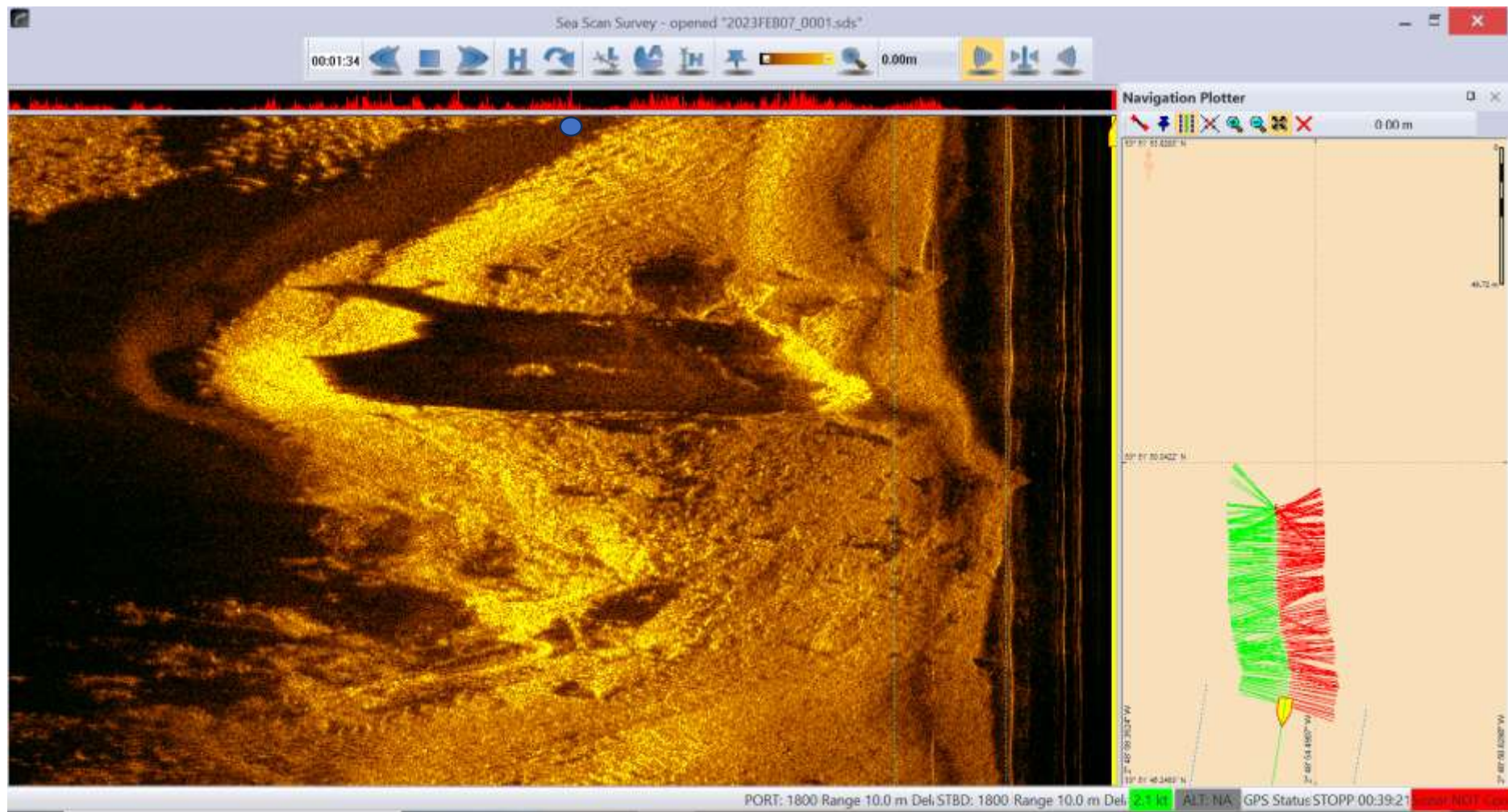
Peter Faulding



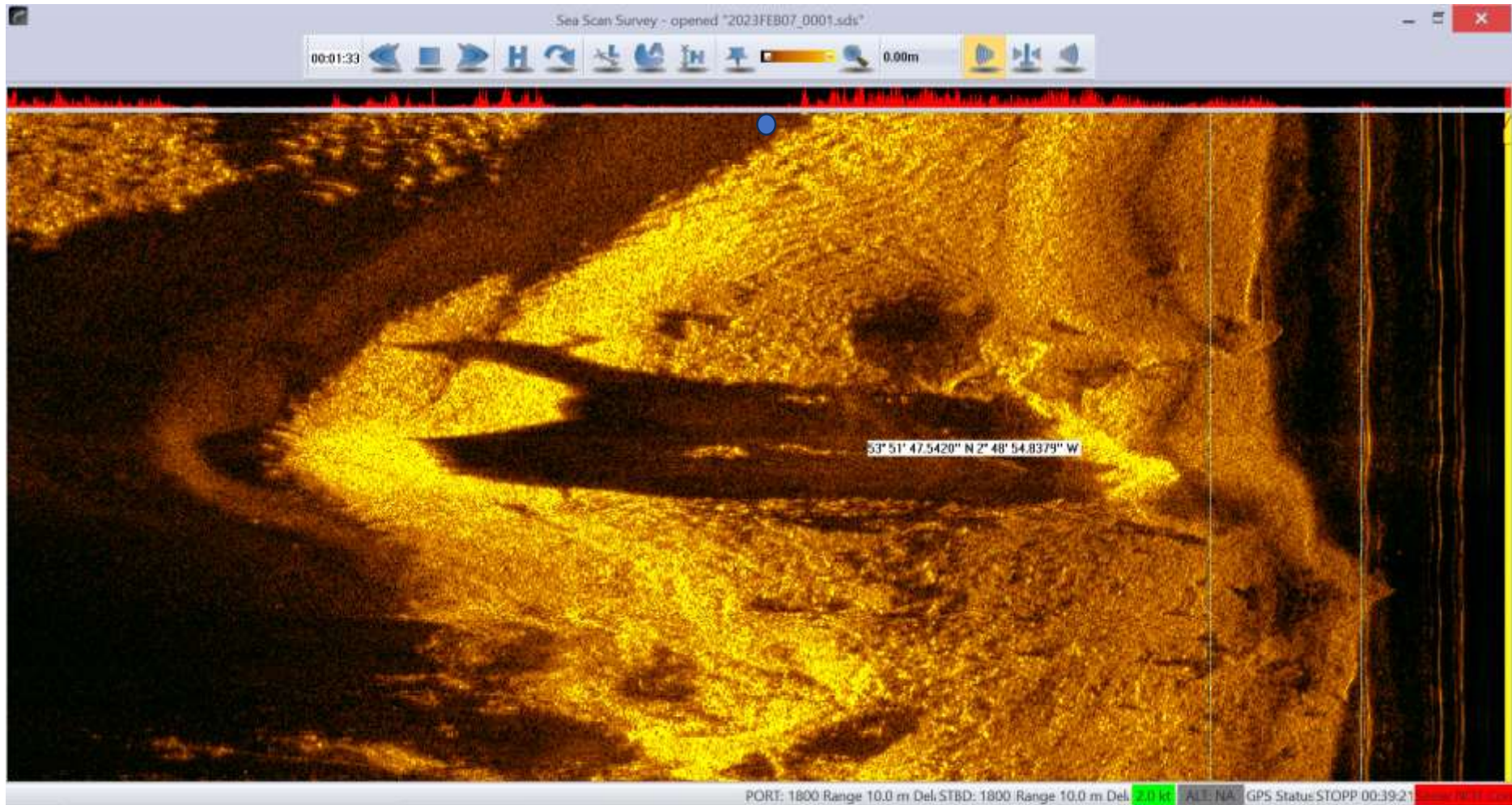
Body located on first sonar search on the 7th February 2023 at 10.34. Plotter window on right shows track of boat. Blue rectangle represents approximate position of bench.



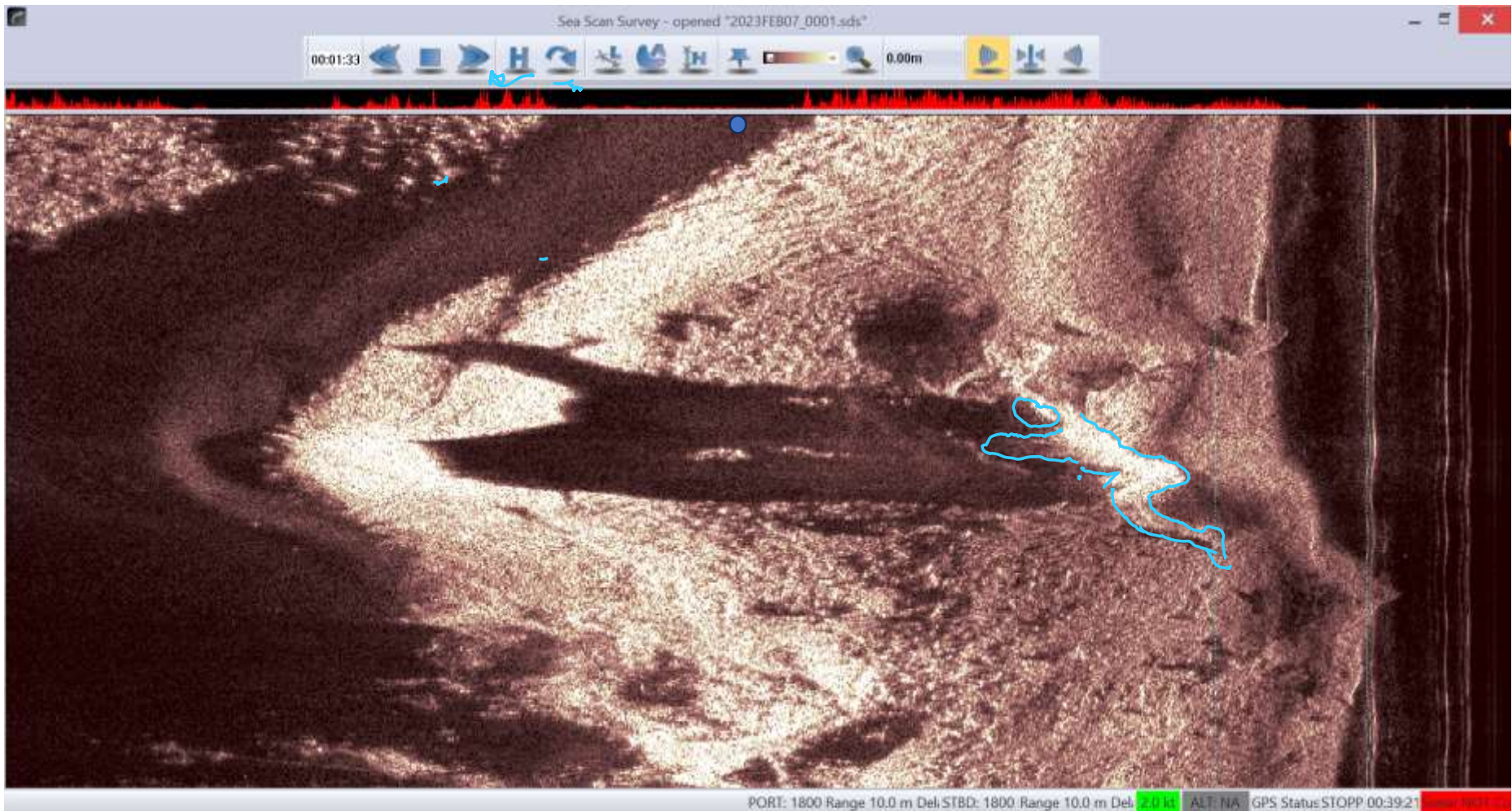
Yellow markers show where body is located 75 metres down from bench. Plus or minus 5 metres for GPS fluctuation and 1 metre layback.



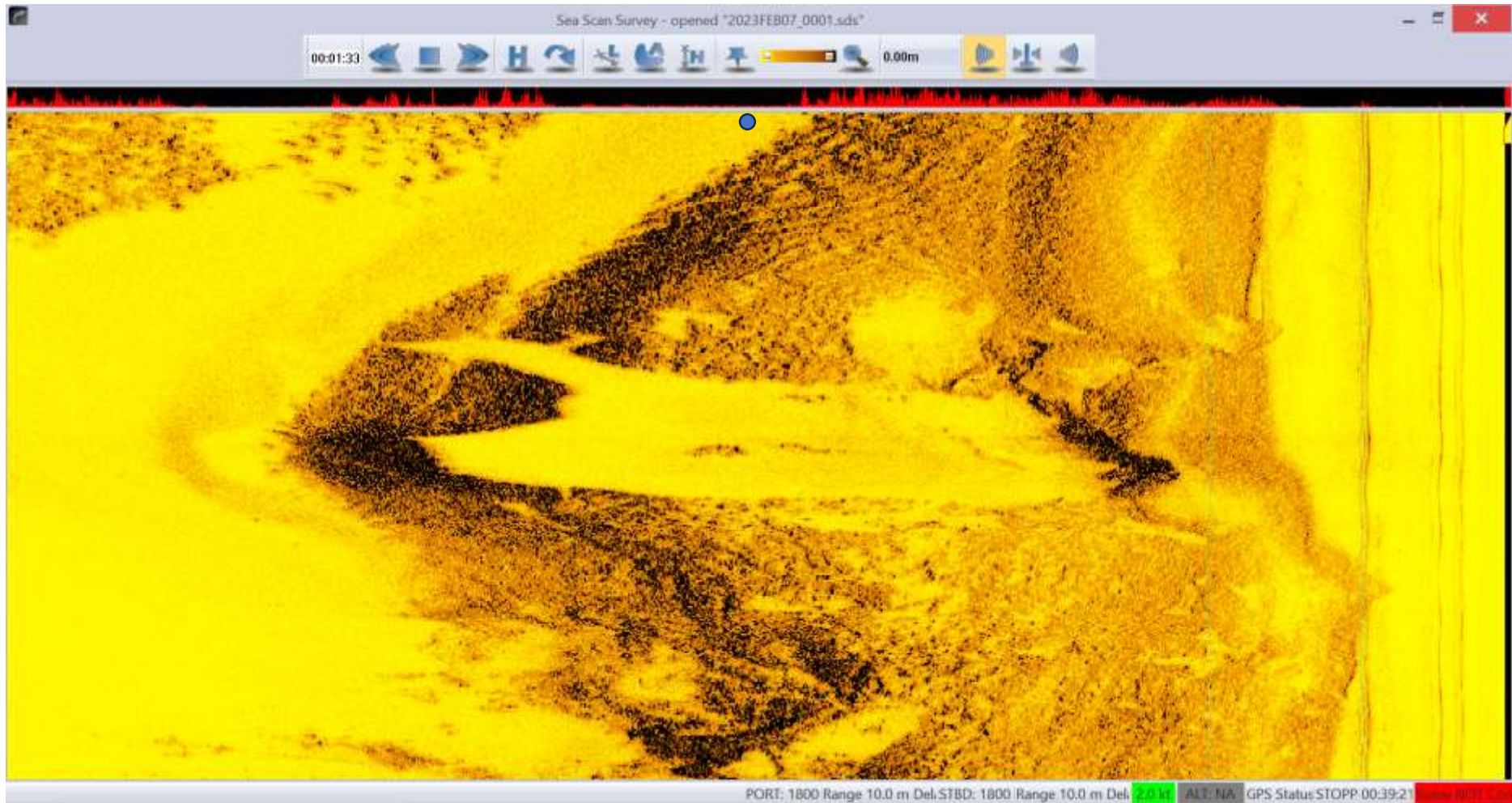
Body imaged at 16.30 on 7th February clearly shows Nicola in foetal position.



Latitude and Longitude Position of Body plus or minus 5 metres for GPS fluctuation plus 1 metre layback of sonar towfish.



Nicola's body outlined in blue.



Sonar software with reversal of shadow. The shadow is now the light area and the body in dark representing a positive target.

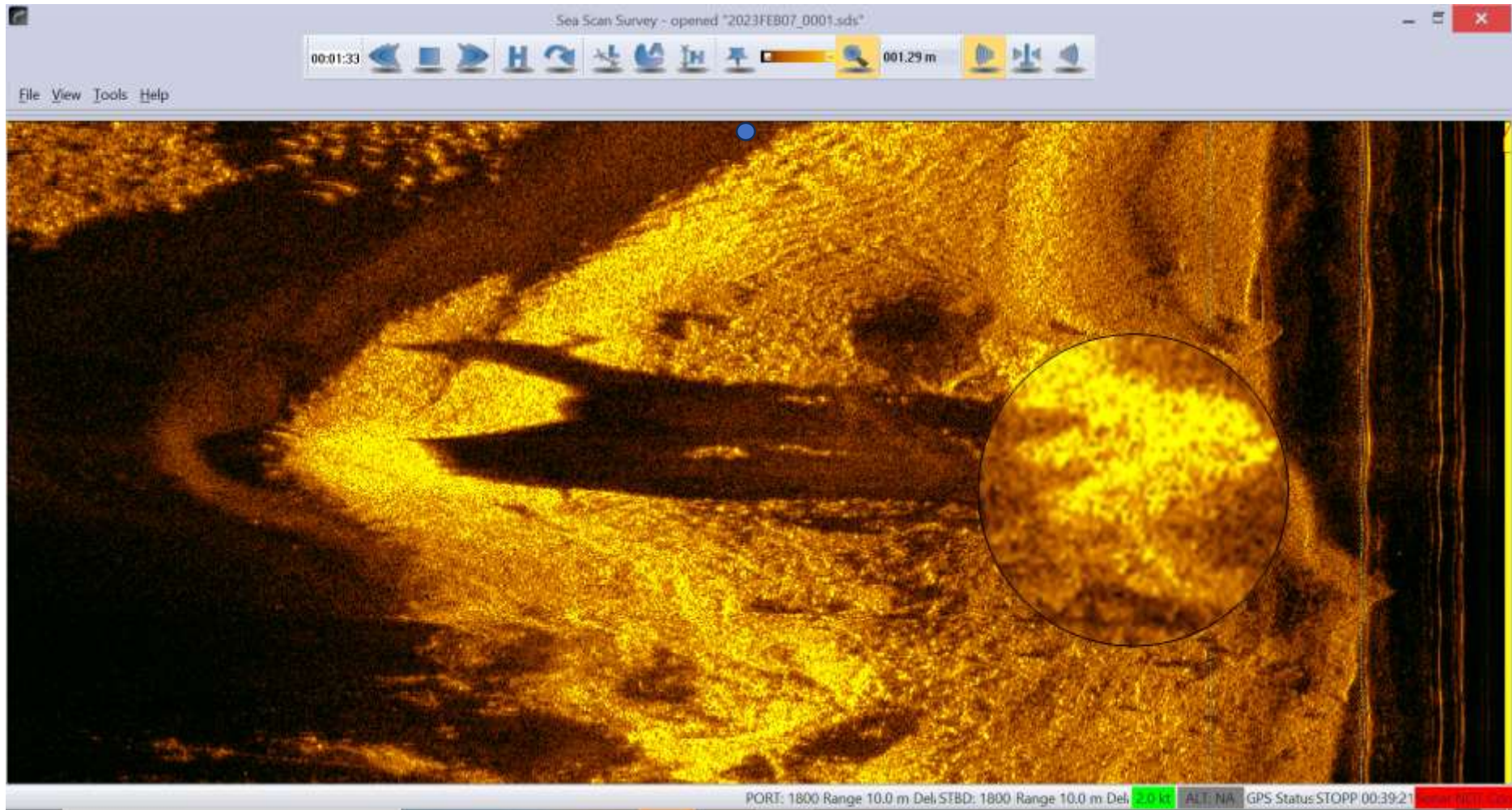


Image shows sonar software magnified image of Nicola's bottom, back with left and right legs bent.



Image taken below the bench at 08.42 on 8th February 2023 by Peter Faulding shows depth of water with no flow. A video was also taken by Peter showing a stick remaining stationary after throwing in at this point without moving for 20 minutes.

via email

02 November 2023

Ref: Fair Notice Review Process – Nicola Bulley Investigation Review

Dear Mr Faulding,

Thank you so much for your involvement in the College of Policing Review of the investigation into the disappearance and finding of Nicola Bulley. Your contribution to the review has been very useful.

You were alerted to the potential for there to be criticism of you in the Review Report in our letter to you on 23 October 2023. As part of that letter you were served with a copy of a non-disclosure agreement. You are receiving this letter on the understanding that you have signed the non-disclosure agreement. You have agreed not to disclose the contents of this letter until the Review Report is published in mid-November.

Criticisms

As mentioned in the letter alerting you to this process, there are two possible types of criticism. Firstly, when the Review Team considers that actions taken by people connected to the investigation were ill-judged.

The second type of criticism is where, in describing events, people other than the Review Team might infer that someone is being criticised. We consider that it is possible that in describing, factually, some events in which you were involved, others might infer this as criticism of you.

In the Report, we will describe your interactions with the media. Some of the statements you made were at odds with the Coroner's verdict. The Review Team evidence suggests that some of your statements were inaccurate and contributed to a lack of confidence in the investigation. This lack of confidence was manifested in mainstream news media but also in social media posts.

This led to unhelpful and uncoordinated intrusion by members of the public into the investigation and the lives of people who live in and around the place of Nicola's disappearance.

The Review Team does not directly criticise your actions but others may infer criticism.

Sonar Images

The Review Team would also like to take this opportunity to update you on the actions taken since you provided the sonar images and how the Team proposes to address the matter in the Report.

The Team is very grateful to you for providing all of the sonar images and for not publicising their existence. Discussion of this matter could have caused Nicola's family and friends further distress.

The Review Team checked with the Search Team at Lancashire Constabulary. They acknowledged that they had received this information from you and undertook a search in the area of the sonar images. They found nothing there. The Review Team also sought advice from government and academic experts. Their views are articulated in different ways and the conclusion of all those views is that the images you provided are of low certainty to be a human body.

In the Review Report we describe information that you provided the Review Team and the actions taken. The Report is unlikely to include any of the images.

The Review Team has met with Nicola's family and has shown them the images. We felt it important to do so to give them the information about the search for Nicola and what we have done to check that the action that was taken was appropriate. As you might imagine, the family were quite upset and we ask that the images are not released to the public. We cannot stop you from disclosing the images but would ask that you respect the feelings of Nicola's family.

Response

This letter is intended to alert you to criticism of you that may be inferred as a result of the publication of the Review Report. You are able to respond to this letter pointing to any inaccuracies that you feel are reflected above. The address for a response is included below. The Review Team may or may not amend the Report in the light of any responses received in relation to the Fair Notice Review Process.

Once again, the Review Team thanks you for your contribution to the Review and hopes that you are satisfied that your contribution in the Report is a fair representation of your actions.

Please email responses back to:



Yours sincerely



Dr Iain Raphael
Nicola Bulley Review Lead
College of Policing