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Rupert Lowe Donates £1,000 After Mistaking Charity Rowers for Migrants

August 8, 2025

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Former Reform UK Member of Parliament (MP) Rupert Lowe has donated £1,000 to a charity rowing crew after mistakenly identifying them as small boat migrants approaching

the British coast.

The incident occurred on Thursday when Lowe posted a photograph on Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) of a vessel off Great Yarmouth, stating he had reported a suspected migrant boat to the authorities. By the following morning, Lowe confirmed it had been a false alarm. The boat belonged to ROW4MND, a team raising money for Motor Neurone Disease (MND) research. The crew, Matthew Parker, Mike Bates, Aaron Kneebone, and Liz Wardley, had been contacted by the coastguard to verify their identity.

Lowe later posted: “Good news. False alarm! Thank goodness.” He pledged £1,000 to support their fundraising efforts, adding: “Keep going, and watch out for any real illegal migrants.”

Speaking about the misunderstanding, Mike Bates, a former Royal Marine and British record-holder for a solo Atlantic rowing crossing, said: “I’ve not been mistaken for a migrant before. The best comment was the one asking where the Royal Navy were when you need them. I’m a former Royal Marine, so the Royal Navy were on the boat.” He noted that while some locals expressed strong concerns, the crew had been rowing parallel to the shore for hours and were not attempting to land.

The ROW4MND team set off from Land’s End on 25 July, intending to circumnavigate America and return to the UK, seeking to raise £57 million for MND research. They have already received more than £107,000 in donations.

Lowe stated he acted on constituent concerns and defended his vigilance regarding illegal migration. While acknowledging the mistake, he maintained that the issue of small boat crossings remained a national concern.

In a statement on social media, the crew addressed Lowe directly: “We’re disappointed in your conduct, and we’re disappointed that you wasted so much of the police and coastguard’s time. However, we forgive you.”

The episode has since drawn attention due to the unusual circumstances of the error and

the significant donation that followed.