

Kian Reme

Kielland

89 questions

Preface

Why this book?

My book "*Kielland – the Battle*" ¹ was published in May 2021, just before the Storting's (Norwegian Parliament's) consideration of the *Office of the National Auditor's* report on the authorities' handling of the Kielland ² disaster. In the period 2017-2019, the *Kielland Network* had collected questions about Kielland from the bereaved and survivors, and we sent these 89 questions to the National Auditor on the same day that they were Commissioned by the Storting.

The National Auditor does not comment on these questions in their report.

When bereaved and survivors ask questions, I find it right to try to answer the questions systematically, where possible. Where I cannot find an answer, I try to point out what can be done to get further in the search for answers.

2

Target group

The bereaved and survivors are the first target group for this book. These are their questions, and they deserve answers. The second target group is everyone who works with various questions related to Kielland – researchers, journalists, trade union representatives and many others who have engaged themselves in the search for answers. The third target group is everyone else who might be interested.

About the questions

Many of the questions are about the causes of the disaster. In the National Auditor's report ³ and in the *Memory Bank* on the Kielland accident, it is documented that a large proportion of those affected have little confidence in the answers the Norwegian authorities have given so far, primarily through the two reports of the Norwegian Commission of Inquiry from 1981 and 1983. Those affected seek answers both on personal and private matters, such as who

¹ *Kampen om Kielland* - An English edition will be published summer 2023, under the title *Kielland – the Battle*

² «Kielland» - the oil rig Alexander L. Kielland which capsized in the North Sea March 27th 1980

³ An English short version: <https://www.riksrevisjonen.no/globalassets/reports/en-2020-2021/alexander-l-kielland-accident.pdf>

spoke to or observed their loved ones before and during the disaster. Some answers to these personal questions have come in meetings between bereaved and survivors, however they also seek answers to the overall questions about causes and responsibility. The 89 questions that are the central focus of this book deal precisely with these overarching themes. Those left behind and survivors want to know what happened, why it happened, and who was responsible for this unimaginable disaster.

I have chosen to adjust the order of the questions, so that questions that touch on the same topic are grouped together as much as possible. The order is therefore different than in our letter to the National Auditor and in my book *"Kielland – the Battle"*. But I have not changed the wording of the questions. Leading questions may still be leading. Misunderstandings and mistakes in the questions are also allowed. But where I find it necessary, I comment on wording, form and facts.

This book will show that questions are still being asked. This is a dynamic process, where one question often leads to new questions. This is how it should be. The 89 questions do not set a finish line. But in the process of finding as many answers as possible, it is necessary and right to take those left behind and survivors seriously, try to answer where possible - and try to show what may be the way forward in the ongoing work to find answers.

I would like to thank Hertervig Publishing House for good collaboration and cooperation, editor Iselin Klepppestø Thorsen and a critical eye from consultant Sigmund Jensen. I thank good friends – Harry Mutch, Halvor Wien and Kjetil Aano - who have helped me with the English language. I thank the Documentation Project and the Norwegian Oil Museum for the good cooperation, as well as the trade union movement and the bereaved and survivors through the Kielland Network.

Table of content

Introduction, background

Chapter 1: The French Report

Chapter 2: The Documentation project

- *from the Kielland Memory Bank*

Chapter 3: Before the accident

Chapter 4: Cracks and landfall

- *from the Memory Bank*

Chapter 5: The Catastrophe

Chapter 6: Commission and a turning attempt

- *from the Memory Bank*

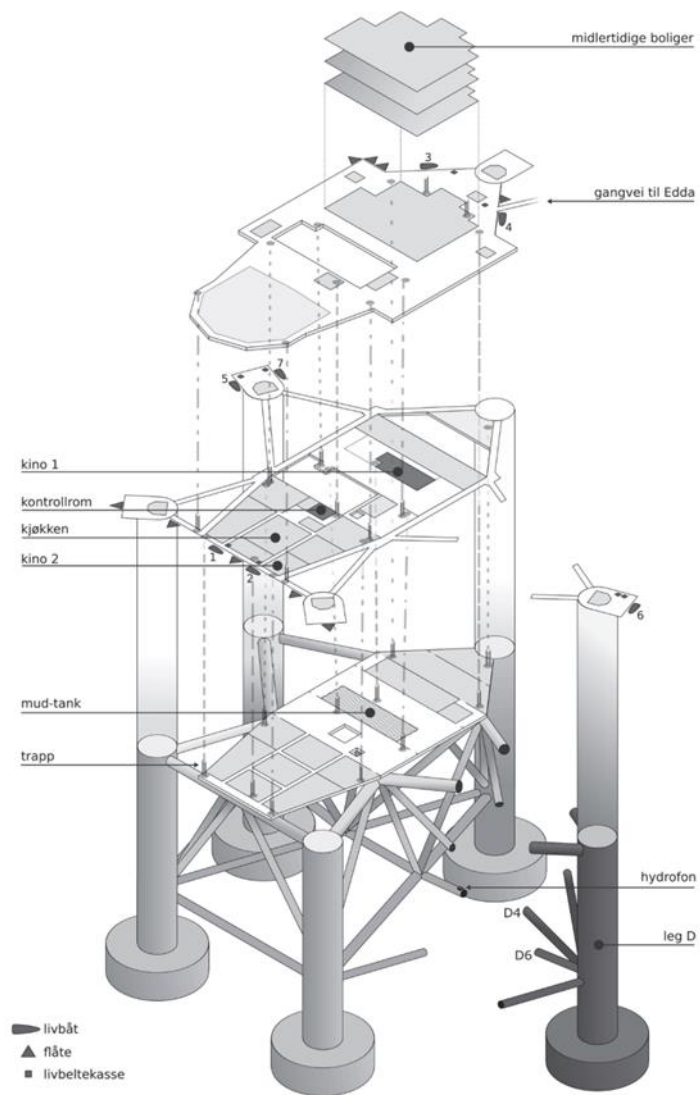
Chapter 7: The turning and a Norwegian settlement

Chapter 8: French settlement

- *from the Memory Bank*

Chapter 9: More questions

Chapter 10: The way forward





Boligplattformen «Alexander L. Kielland» (til høyre) før ulykken. "Alexander L. Kielland" av NTB Scanpix. Gjengitt med tillatelse

Introduction, background

The *Kielland Network* was established in January 2017, and mainly consists of bereaved and survivors of the Kielland disaster in March 1980. In the period after the disaster, bereaved and survivors established the "*Kielland Foundation*", which worked to turn and salvage the rig, find the bodies, and carry out a full investigation of the disaster. The rig was turned around in September 1983, based on technical solutions from the Kielland Foundation, after extensive political pressure against the Willoch (Conservative) government. We achieved a majority in the Storting ⁴ for turning the rig - and against the government's wish to sink it. We demanded that the rig be thoroughly investigated and had a parliamentary majority behind us to dismantle the rig, piece by piece. This would make it possible to scrutinize the rig from top to bottom, to ensure that we got answers to the many questions from bereaved and survivors.

But the government had a different agenda and pushed through an express sinking of the rig, after it was successfully turned in September 1983. The Norwegian Commission of Inquiry ⁵ led by Magistrate Thor Næsheim had already declared before the turning of the rig that the operation was unnecessary - they believed they already had the answer to the cause of the accident. It was due to a welding fault in the D6 bracing and was thus the fault of the French manufacturers. Despite protests both from those left behind and survivors,

⁴ Storting: The Norwegian Parliament

⁵ English short version pages 207-211: <https://media.digitalarkivet.no/view/105511/6>

and from the French Commission of Experts, the rig was sunk already in November 1983. The Norwegian Commission dissolved itself shortly after the turning operation.

And we were left with questions. Many questions. The French Expert Commission presented its report in 1985. The welding fault in the D6 bracing was confirmed, but was not, according to the French, the cause of the accident. Incorrect operation of the rig was the main cause. Thus, we were left with two causal explanations, and even more questions. The Norwegian authorities did not even bother to translate the French report, much less process it. The translation did not come until March 2021. The National Auditor ordered it done, and it was made public at the same time as they presented their own report.

Right up until 1990, the Kielland Foundation worked for new investigations to get more answers. We had to realize that we were getting nowhere and terminated our efforts. This story is described in more detail in my book *"Kielland – the Battle"* and in several other books.

In 2016, Professor Marie Smith-Solbakken and her research team at the University in Stavanger (UiS) presented their first book in the "CRUDE OIL" series. New questions were asked, and several new facts and information came to the table.

Many of us saw the need to reorganize bereaved and survivors, and the Kielland Network (Kielland-nettverket) was founded by Anders Helliksen (survivor), Merete Haslund (daughter of deceased Fredrik Haslund) and me (brother of deceased Rolf Reme) in January 2017.

In May, we invited bereaved, survivors, researchers and other resource persons to a seminar. Here, many questions were added and a search for new answers started. The following year, the Kielland Network organized another seminar where the spotlight was particularly placed on the surviving crew members - the employees of Stavanger Drilling. Most of the 212 on board the Kielland on the disastrous evening were overnight guests. 34 of them were British nationals. But those who knew the rig best were naturally the maritime crew. And now even more questions came to the table.

The board of the Kielland Network contributed with more questions, which in total came up to 52. In 2019, we sent out an appeal to bereaved and survivors and challenged them to submit their questions. After this round, we had now reached 89 questions.

89 questions to the National Auditor

After the Storting's *Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs* (the Control Committee) in 2019 took the time to listen to us, they unanimously decided to ask the *Office of the National Auditor* to look in to the Kielland case. This was an important victory for us.

When the Storting's plenary session in June 2019 formally gave the National Auditor the task, we sent the 89 questions on the same day, together with a strong and unequivocal call to recommend a new supplementary inquiry of the disaster.

The National Auditor has indirectly answered some of the questions but does not even refer to them in the report that was published on March 9th 2021 - nor in the overview of letters and emails they received during their work. Their mission was limited to investigating the Norwegian authorities' handling of Kielland, both before and after the accident.

Although the report does not refer to our questions, the National Auditor's review nevertheless provides some answers. They document many facts that are very relevant in relation to our questions.

Our process of collecting questions has run parallel to three other processes:

- The work of the National Auditor
- The UiS ⁶ researchers' further investigations
- In-depth journalism in *Aftenbladet* ⁷ and the online news E24 - and not least Norwegian TV2's work with the documentary series "*The Kielland Catastrophe*" in six episodes which started in January 2022. ⁸

A fourth process is well under way. The Storting decided in June 2021 to start a *Documentation Project* under the auspices of the Norwegian Oil Museum, in collaboration with the Kielland Network. This project is very important in the search for more answers. As I now will try to answer as many of the 89 questions as possible in this book, many of the answers can at least partly be found in these four processes. At the same time, many of the questions are still unanswered - and here I will point out some possible measures that will be necessary to find answers. Some of the questions will never be answered, since the rig in

⁶ UiS: University in Stavanger

⁷ *Aftenbladet* (Evening Paper), the leading regional newspaper in the Stavanger region

⁸ A version with English subtitles is available on request to the Documentation Project

1983 was sunk to a depth of 700 meters, bracing parts were dumped and remelted and evidence lost.

Together with the Norwegian Oil Museum, these questions and answers will also be given a digital platform, so that both questions and answers can be supplemented and further developed through a dynamic web-based process. In the Documentation Project's mandate, point 2 it is stated:

"... (The Project will) contribute so that relatives, survivors and other affected persons after the Alexander L. Kielland accident are experiencing being seen, heard and taken seriously - and that, as far as possible, they get answers to unanswered questions."

This book is thus a contribution to fulfilling this mandate.

Before I deal with the specific questions, I believe it is useful to have two presentations: the French Expert Commission's report (chapter 1) and the Documentation Project (chapter 2). The 89 questions are then dealt with in chapters 3-8. In chapter 9, I address a new question that has been raised in 2022, before concluding with reflections on the way forward in chapter 10.

9

The central sources for this book are:

- The Norwegian Commission's two reports from 1981 and 1983
- The French Expert Commission's report from 1985, the Norwegian translation from 2021
- The Kielland Foundation's report to the Storting from 1990
- The "CRUDE OIL" books from UiS 2016 and 2017
- Aftenbladet's magazine articles in 2016 and 2017
- The Kielland Network's conference report 2017
- The Kielland Network's report from the Crew Seminar 2018
- The National Auditor's report 2021
- The Documentation Project, including new research at the University of Stavanger (UiS).⁹

⁹ See the reference list for details about these sources

