# Led By Donkeys’ daring renaming of Michelle Mone’s yacht highlights pandemic profiteering scandal



At a recent literary festival in Charleston, the members of Led By Donkeys, Ben Stewart and Oliver Knowles, recounted an audacious act from 2023: the renaming of Michelle Mone’s yacht, Lady M, to “Pandemic Profiteer.” This whimsical endeavour included renting a modest boat under false pretenses for a seaside picnic, an attempt to affix a massive sticker to the luxury yacht, and a frenzied escape from security guards. Originally, their plan had been even bolder: to commandeer the yacht and navigate it back to the UK, delivering it to His Majesty’s Treasury as a symbolic indictment of profiteering during the pandemic. The audience, captivated by this thrilling tale, reflected on the striking imagery of justice the idea invoked—a fantastical dream of accountability in a world marred by exploitation.

The story's roots run deep in the disturbing reality of Mone's involvement with PPE Medpro, a company that profited immensely from the UK government’s procurement during the pandemic. Following widespread scrutiny, Mone acknowledged that she pocketed £28.8 million from contracts awarded to PPE Medpro, much of this amount held in a trust benefiting her and her family. Her husband, Doug Barrowman, infamously stated that they were "always going to benefit" from their privileged position, a sentiment that encapsulates the ethos of opportunism seen throughout this scandal.

In a landscape where accountability often seems elusive, Mone's fall from grace has been striking. Details emerging from the BBC's documentary, **Rise and Fall**, illustrate her current predicament: on leave from the House of Lords, stripped of the Conservative whip, and with £75 million in assets frozen by the National Crime Agency, all pending investigations into the ethical complexities of her actions. Mone has consistently denied any wrongdoing; however, the measures enacted against her symbolize a significant shift in public sentiment regarding pandemic profiteering.

While the legal ramifications of Mone's actions could result in her being compelled to return ill-gotten gains, the worrisome truth remains that the funds are likely to be reallocated to unsatisfactory governmental expenses, such as defence budgets. In contrast, the renaming of her yacht carried a symbolic weight that transcended mere financial restitution. It conveyed a collective message: profiting from a national emergency is unconscionable. This act underscored the need for both governance grounded in competence and a business community that prioritises decency.

Led By Donkeys has consistently used provocative art and actions to foster awareness and resilience against societal despair. Their poignant installations—like the heart-wrenching display of 11,000 children’s outfits on Bournemouth beach—serve as visceral reminders of crises far more grave than government neglect. Such actions encapsulate not only a response to individual misdeeds but a broader condemnation of systemic failures that allow such injustices to flourish unchallenged.

At the end of Stewart and Knowles's talk, the standing ovation they received was not merely a gesture of approval but a collective stand against negligence and avarice. It marked a moment where individuals came together, in full recognition of their shared responsibility to confront the injustices that permeate society, echoing a timeless call for accountability in times of crisis.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/26/led-by-donkeys-wanted-to-confiscate-michelle-mones-yacht-but-settled-for-renaming-it-it-was-still-a-coup), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/26/led-by-donkeys-wanted-to-confiscate-michelle-mones-yacht-but-settled-for-renaming-it-it-was-still-a-coup)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/26/led-by-donkeys-wanted-to-confiscate-michelle-mones-yacht-but-settled-for-renaming-it-it-was-still-a-coup), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/17/how-the-michelle-mone-scandal-unfolded-200m-of-ppe-contracts-denials-and-a-government-lawsuit), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-67736860)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/98d3cdf0-f2bc-4038-9d6e-1e2b5c75f38a), [[6]](https://news.sky.com/story/baroness-mone-admits-she-stands-to-benefit-from-ppe-contract-13032463), [[7]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/politics/michelle-mone-assets-frozen-nca-inquiry-medpro-b2485520.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/26/led-by-donkeys-wanted-to-confiscate-michelle-mones-yacht-but-settled-for-renaming-it-it-was-still-a-coup), [[6]](https://news.sky.com/story/baroness-mone-admits-she-stands-to-benefit-from-ppe-contract-13032463)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/26/led-by-donkeys-wanted-to-confiscate-michelle-mones-yacht-but-settled-for-renaming-it-it-was-still-a-coup), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/17/how-the-michelle-mone-scandal-unfolded-200m-of-ppe-contracts-denials-and-a-government-lawsuit)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/26/led-by-donkeys-wanted-to-confiscate-michelle-mones-yacht-but-settled-for-renaming-it-it-was-still-a-coup> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/26/led-by-donkeys-wanted-to-confiscate-michelle-mones-yacht-but-settled-for-renaming-it-it-was-still-a-coup> - In May 2025, Led By Donkeys activists Ben Stewart and Oliver Knowles recounted their 2023 act of renaming Michelle Mone's yacht, Lady M, to 'Pandemic Profiteer'. Initially, they planned to seize the yacht and sail it to the UK to deliver it to His Majesty’s Treasury, symbolising a stand against profiteering during the pandemic. Despite Mone's initial denials, she later admitted to benefiting from £28.8 million in profits from PPE Medpro, held in a trust for her and her children. The article highlights the activists' role in challenging such profiteering.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/98d3cdf0-f2bc-4038-9d6e-1e2b5c75f38a> - In June 2024, a 46-year-old man was arrested in Barnet, north London, in connection with £200 million worth of UK government contracts awarded to PPE Medpro during the Covid-19 pandemic. The National Crime Agency detained him on suspicion of conspiracy to commit fraud and attempting to pervert the course of justice. PPE Medpro, owned by a consortium led by Doug Barrowman, husband of Conservative peer Baroness Michelle Mone, faced controversy over the suitability of the equipment supplied. Mone admitted to profiting from the government’s Covid VIP lane, with £28.8 million held in a trust benefiting her and her children. Both Mone and Barrowman have denied any wrongdoing. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/98d3cdf0-f2bc-4038-9d6e-1e2b5c75f38a?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/17/how-the-michelle-mone-scandal-unfolded-200m-of-ppe-contracts-denials-and-a-government-lawsuit> - This article outlines the timeline of the Michelle Mone scandal, detailing the awarding of £200 million in PPE contracts to PPE Medpro, a company linked to Mone and her husband, Doug Barrowman. It covers the initial denials of involvement, the revelation of connections through the government’s 'VIP lane', and the subsequent legal actions, including a lawsuit by the Department of Health for breach of contract over defective PPE supplies. The piece also discusses the National Crime Agency's investigation into suspected criminal offences related to the procurement of PPE contracts by PPE Medpro. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/17/how-the-michelle-mone-scandal-unfolded-200m-of-ppe-contracts-denials-and-a-government-lawsuit?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-67736860> - In December 2023, Baroness Michelle Mone admitted to lying about her connections to PPE Medpro, a company awarded significant government contracts during the pandemic. She acknowledged benefiting from £60 million in profits from the deal, held in trusts for her and her children. Mone expressed regret for her earlier denials and claimed she and her husband, Doug Barrowman, were being made 'scapegoats' in a larger scandal involving government spending during the pandemic. Both have denied any wrongdoing. ([bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-67736860?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://news.sky.com/story/baroness-mone-admits-she-stands-to-benefit-from-ppe-contract-13032463> - In December 2023, Baroness Michelle Mone admitted she stands to benefit from a contract between the government and PPE firm Medpro. The Conservative peer and Ultimo bra tycoon had previously denied her links to the firm, which was awarded huge contracts during the pandemic and is being investigated by the National Crime Agency (NCA). PPE Medpro was awarded government contracts worth more than £200m to supply personal protective equipment after she recommended it to ministers. ([news.sky.com](https://news.sky.com/story/baroness-mone-admits-she-stands-to-benefit-from-ppe-contract-13032463?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/politics/michelle-mone-assets-frozen-nca-inquiry-medpro-b2485520.html> - In January 2024, assets linked to Baroness Michelle Mone and her husband, Doug Barrowman, totalling about £75 million, were frozen as part of a National Crime Agency (NCA) investigation into allegations of fraud related to PPE Medpro. The company, owned by a consortium led by Barrowman, was awarded £200 million in government contracts during the Covid-19 pandemic. The government later sued the company, claiming PPE worth £122 million was defective. Both Mone and Barrowman have denied any wrongdoing. ([the-independent.com](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/politics/michelle-mone-assets-frozen-nca-inquiry-medpro-b2485520.html?utm_source=openai))