



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SERVING SEAFARERS WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SSWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 25TH MARCH 2020

PRESENT:	Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
	Revd Ijeoma Ajibade (IA)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
	Mr Neil Atkinson (NA)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
	Capt. Andrew Cassels (AC)	MNWB
	Valerie Coleman (VC)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
	Cdre D Dickens (DD)	Fishermen's Mission (FM)
	Mr Roger Harris (RH)	Int. Seafarers' Welfare Assistance Network (ISWAN)
	Mr Graham Hockley (GH)	MCG
	Ms Deborah Layde (DL)	Seafarers UK (SfUK)
	Mr John Lowry (JL)	Seamen's Christian Friend Society (SCFS)
	Miss Victoria Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
	Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
	Mrs Catherine Spencer (CS)	Seafarers UK (SfUK)
	Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
	Ms Lysanne Wilson (LW)	Seafarers' Hospital Society (SHS)
	Revd Andrew Wright (AW)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)

The meeting opened at 11.00am. The Chairman explained that the purpose of the group was to share problems, experiences, best practice and avoid unnecessary duplication during the COVID-19 crisis. There would be no reporting of apologies as membership was voluntary during the crisis. Members provided updates on their respective organisations as follows:

RH, ISWAN – Weekly meetings being attended by all the maritime organisations; ICS, ITF, ICMA, the Missions and UK CoS re. seafarers welfare. Issues include seafarers leaving vessels, crew changes internationally, countries and ports in lockdown and stranded seafarers. Meetings between ILO, IMO, WHO re. how seafarers can be supported, being recognised as key workers and how they can move between countries. Most seafarers' centres around the world closing, many facing potential financial crisis. Today's ITF Seafarers Trust meeting to looking at emergency financial support. Video aimed at how seafarers can manage mental health launched and will be circulated after the meeting. Please see youtu.be/rB_Nyk0LRSo for the link to the video on You Tube.

TS, UK CoS – ICS preparing to send letter to the IMO, with ILO and WHO included, asking for all seafarers worldwide to be treated as key workers, facilitate their travel, ensure supply lines are kept moving and asking for flexibility on expired certificates. When agreed, the letter will be circulated to the WG. UK Shipping Minister sent letter on Monday to ILO, IMO and WHO (now on social media). UK CoS welcomed the letter and hope other countries follow the example. UK CoS working with ICS to resolve problems with crew changes in Singapore and Hong Kong. Concerns raised re. job retention scheme announced last week, whether majority of seafarers who are employed by offshore employers can benefit from this. The CoS, Nautilus and RMT preparing joint letter calling on government for seafarers to benefit from the scheme to preserve their jobs and protect their income. Advice being taken from DoF as to who the letter should be sent to. ETF, social partner in Europe which covers fishing sector, jointly campaigning with Europeche to get recognition for difficulties that fishing sector is currently facing. TG thanked members on behalf of CoS for all that they are doing for seafarers. Members to contact TSpringett@ukchamberofshipping.com and cc. the Chairman if they need any help from the CoS.

NA, MCA – All international and domestic survey inspection work suspended by UK government. System in place to certify ships to allow them to carry on trading either carried out by recognised organisation or MCA issuing certificate based on self-declaration by the owner. Amendments have been issued to cover STCW and ship certifications. MCA's view that seafarers should be paid until they are repatriated as per MLC.

AW, MtS – Beginning of week offering 60% of service to ports, this figure reduced now due to new national regulations coming in internationally. Very focused on ensuring service provided is safe and does not pose any risk of transmission to seafarers. Trying to maintain some sort of service where possible such as gangway visitations. With regard to letter from UK Shipping Minister, there remains range of questions as to how seafarers can be supported at this time.

IA, MtS – Limited ship visiting being carried out and only on request. Social distancing being maintained on gangway visitations which include dropping off phone cards and other personal items, and leaving newspapers on gangways. In Humber, a bucket lowered to exchange SIM card and payment. Religious staff and charities serving on the front line fall into category of key workers. Service will continue as long as they can although restrictions in UK ports are increasing. Some staff being diverted to assist with NHS deliveries, using MtS vehicles. More serious restrictions in Europe than the UK – total lock down in Netherlands, France and Cyprus. Staff outside of Europe delivering gift boxes to gangways. Looking at developing app with ICMA to extend digital chaplaincy.

FM, DD – UK fish markets closing. In Italy, Spain and France consumers not eating or buying fish. Chinese have stopped buying crab and lobster causing instant impact on smaller operators. ILO not recognising fishermen as seafarers, unclear whether fishermen are essential workers or not. Serious immediate welfare needs. Those still fishing will be struggling soon. Mental health issues include stress, depression and anxiety over loss of business. Confusion over what government's offers mean for fishermen and what other UK initiatives in place might deliver. Many of the government's measures seem to be missing fishing. Issue of Universal Credit and rules not being applied consistently. Clarity is needed. FM staff mostly working from home and centres are closed. Looking at outside, motorway style washing machines for the fishermen. Posters being used to tell fishermen how to apply for help.

SCFS, JL – SCFS primary concern is seafarers' mental health and welfare and the Ministry. Chaplains using ipads to contact seafarers. Looking to provide coverage in 12 ports in Australia. SCFS approached by local businessman who owns an isolated island which could be used in some capacity.

MS, CR – Contacted by seafarers regarding suspension of courses. All main colleges suspended or closed. Expect to be impacted by knock-on effect when they re-open. For longer term courses at Warsash, impact includes issue of accommodation and students returning home. Impact of cancelled GCSE and A Level summer exams although distance learning is available. Exams with the MCA all suspended. Waiting to see what support will be needed.

SHS, LW – Dreadnought suspended all referrals and routine operations. In line with official guidance, trustees to suspend all face to face physio appointments from today. Telephone service still available by Skype or Zoom. Promoting Big White Wall to help with issue of mental health and wellbeing. Big White Wall referrals to go via SHS website to access free service. Face to face web cam counselling service is available. Main focus on grants, huge increase in number and amounts in past six months, increased slightly in last few weeks and expecting massive influx very soon. Working with MtS, FM and Shipwrecked Mariners Society to organise their response. Clarity needed on what seafarers can and can't apply for. Criteria put in place that seafarers would have to apply for UC before they would offer a grant. Three month mortgage delay helpful. Trying to support SAIL who will have new person starting soon -

not easy carrying out inductions online. SHS ready, willing and able to help and doing whatever it can to respond and support seafarers.

SfUK, CS & DL – Many maritime charity organisations will require additional help over next few months. Discussing emergency fund with trustees and request that delivery organisations stay in touch with DL and the grants team. Discussing emergency appeal for seafarers, to support delivery organisations and any specific response needed. Working on Seafarers Awareness Week and how to retweak this campaign to include COVID-19. Acutely aware of challenges faced by fishers and their need for welfare. Asked members to share information on fishers changing to deliver fish by post. Opportunities to change cultural behaviour in the UK and encourage people to eat British fish, and support fishers across the UK. Increased support for SAIL under discussion. Letter sent to MMO emphasising that key people to contact in this crisis are FM and SAIL. Statement issued on 13th March that SfUK is keen to be very flexible and supportive to delivery partners. Example given of organisation whose grant has been repurposed to use for cash flow. Also looking at emergency and preventative support. Podcast circulated via social media every Friday giving ten minute update on the crisis.

TH, VM – Board meeting held yesterday, funds set aside for emergency grants over this period, reacting as quickly as possible. Grants committee will go ahead on 1st April with 'needs' reprioritised. If any delivery partners need assistance they should get in touch.

MCG, GH & VC – VC & GH present to see what role MCG might have re. coordination as MCG has no funds of its own. Can offer help and advice where appropriate. Let us know if we can help with co-ordination between grant making organisations. MCG videoconference to be held on 6th or 7th April to discuss issues grant funders experiencing at the moment. Good opportunity for major grant funders to have discussion to ensure most appropriate response. Watching brief.

Closing Remark - Members to forward any links, extra information and note amendments to Celia celia@mnwb.org.uk Meeting format to remain flexible. Members content to continue meeting on a weekly basis. Apologies for any unintended inaccuracies.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 1st April 2020 at 11:00