



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SSWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 1ST April 2020

PRESENT:	Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
	Revd Ijeoma Ajibade (IA)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
	Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
	Mr Neil Atkinson (NA)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
	Ms Mary Barber (MB)	Fishermen's Mission (FM)
	Mr Alex Campbell (AC)	Queen Victoria Seamen's Rest (QVSR)/Tilbury SC
	Valerie Coleman (VC)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
	Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
	Cdre D Dickens (DD)	Fishermen's Mission (FM)
	Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
	Mr Roger Harris (RH)	Int. Seafarers' Welfare Assistance Network (ISWAN)
	Mr Graham Hockley (GH)	MCG
	Mr Mick Howarth (MH)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
	Fr John Lavers (JLSM)	Stella Maris (SM)
	Mr John Lowry (JL)	Seamen's Christian Friend Society (SCFS)
	Mr Ken McLean (KM)	IMarEst Guild of Benevolence (IMarEst)
	Miss Victoria Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
	Mr Justin Osmond (JO)	Shipwrecked Mariners' Society (SMS)
	Mrs C Rankin (CR)	The Watch Ashore (WA)
	Capt John Sail (JS)	Merchant Navy Association (MNA)
	Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
	Mrs Deanne Thomas (DT)	Sailors' Children's Society (SCS)
	Mrs Sandra Welch (SW)	Sailors' Society (SS)
	Ms Lysanne Wilson (LW)	Seafarers' Hospital Society (SHS)

The meeting opened at 11.00am. The Chairman explained that due to overlap between the COVID-19 SSWG and COVID-19 OSFWG held the previous week it had been decided to combine the two groups. The new working group would provide a valuable two-way communications route between government, industry, maritime charities and local Port Welfare Committees around the UK. It was agreed that useful links and notes from the meetings would be posted on the MNWB COVID-19 Maritime Resources web page <https://www.mnwb.org/maritime-updates> Members provided COVID-19 specific updates on their respective organisations as follows:

JC, DfT - Gov. speaking with all public health authorities UK wide and will talk to N. Ireland re situation raised by DD on migrant workers to see if changes can be implemented. Job retention scheme is top priority – heard from Treasury yesterday and awaiting further advice. Advised Treasury that shipping companies having to make fast decisions and need advice now. P&O Ferries brought in measures to ensure social distancing is respected. Port health authority treat seafarers as family unit, therefore in theory, workplace canteen should not be closed or be an issue – trying to sort problem out. Lots of emergency legislation being processed but there will be gaps. Port workers and seafarers are key workers and should be next in line for testing and PPE after front line health staff.

TS, UK CoS – Attended ICoS/ITF meeting yesterday, awaiting responses on discussions with IMO, ILO and WHO on facilitating seafarers' travel and protection of their rights. TS involved in draft IMO circular to be issued to all IMO member countries to relax restrictions on travel for seafarers, not quarantining after repatriation unless necessary. TS representing CoS and ECSA

(European Community Shipowners' Association), making encouraging headway with European Commission in ensuring seafarers and all involved in maritime community recognise seafarers as key personnel. ECSA preparing a document detailing restrictions on travel from different EU member states. Two issues specific to the UK are job retention scheme incl. furlough of employees and whether seafarers can benefit from that system. CoS, Nautilus and RMT have sent joint letter to Chancellor and Shipping Minister to ask for clarification. Also, MN ships not included in business closure regulations, leading to questions over food being served in canteens in UK waters. Keen to work with port health and promote co-operation.

NA, MCA – Requirements for drivers to leave their vehicles on vehicle decks being relaxed during the crisis to facilitate trade across the Channel. Positive moves for seafarer repatriation crew changes and shore leave.

RH, ISWAN – Receiving more than double usual number of calls on helpline. Produced FAQs with input from number of organisations incl. Nautilus: <https://www.seafarerswelfare.org/news/2020/seafarers-frequently-asked-questions-covid-19> Video aimed at how seafarers can manage their mental health <https://www.seafarerswelfare.org/news/2020/managing-your-mental-health-during-the-covid-19-pandemic> received over 4,000 views on You Tube and 26,000 on Facebook. Report of around 100 Indian cadets stranded in the UK, trying to find out how they are being supported, what their conditions are and what they might need. Members offered RH help with this situation.

IA, MtS – MtS continue to visit ships, mostly by request, except in Milford Haven, Felixstowe, Antwerp and Dunkirk. Rotterdam Chaplain featured in article: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/apr/01/one-seafarer-almost-cried-the-last-chaplain-visiting-quarantined-boats> Humber and N. Tees Centre Manager covering Port of Seaham as Chaplain based there has suffered stroke. All centres closed, staff centre managers getting items that seafarers need online. In Southampton, visiting ships and meeting crew at safe distance in terminals. Internationally, working with ICMA to provide digital resources. Chaplains around the world will be accessible through ICMA website, going live in couple of weeks.

DD & MB, FM – 2 issues having fundamental impact on migrant workers: N. Ireland taking strict line, with migrant workers on UK boats being confined to their boats, skippers living ashore being asked to shop for them. Also, 50 fishermen potentially victims of abuse, case currently being investigated by Procurator Fiscal/Police, Scotland. On leave to remain but not entitled to benefits and unable to work. TS recommended FM write letter to Department for Work and Pensions. Approach to helping fishing communities evolving as crisis develops. Industry and fishermen reacting to crisis differently to normal. Fishermen seem to better understand the need to try state system to see if they qualify for benefits before looking for other areas of self-help. Trying to facilitate pointing them in direction of other jobs – agriculture, supermarkets, security. Fishing industry looking for new markets to get UK consumers to buy. In one 90 mile stretch of UK coastline, FM have spent or almonised £15k in 2 weeks, if this situation goes on for 6 months (which could be starting point of real need), £360K would be needed just for one part of the UK. In addition to £5K (grateful to SHS and SMS) and another £2,200 from own emergency aid fund, which is another £50K or £60K in six months' time. Have drawn down on two thirds of cash reserves and now talking about going to reserves as early as next week. In terms of reserves, members agreed the 'rainy day' is here and the crisis will be expensive for all concerned. Expecting real impact of crisis to become apparent in next few weeks.

MF & JL, SM – In Campbeltown, Ghanian fishermen being denied access to public facilities. A reminder not to forget fishermen at this time. Asked JC to remind local authorities that there are fishermen living onboard at this time and their welfare should not be forgotten. **Action: JC.** SM not carrying out ship visiting, exercising duty of care to Chaplains and volunteers, issuing PPE to Chaplains for delivery of welfare packages to ships on case by case basis, and working in conjunction with port authorities around the country. Keeping welfare of seafarers at heart, responding to their calls on case by case basis. Working closely with cruise ships in Southampton to facilitate communications for seafarers and their families. Crew onboard some ships have coronavirus, working with cruise companies to facilitate communications with those ships.

SW, SS – Port activities suspended worldwide, Chaplains available for emergency contact, virtually or to provide practical assistance. 24/7 and unmanned centres remain open, seafarers can access wifi from there. Seafarers can contact manager in Southampton for emergency help. 24/7 helplines available for seafarers to contact Chaplains in their own language. Facebook page set up to support seafarers: https://www.facebook.com/groups/CoronavirusSeafarerSupport/?source_id=456911724347731 Podcasts are available to download from the Coronavirus page to help seafarers deal with mental health issues: <https://www.sailors-society.org/coronavirus> Sir Gabriel Wood's Mariners Home, Scotland in lockdown, family visits over Skype, couple of staff in vulnerable category placed on leave. Good supply of PPE. Otherwise home is running well.

JL, SCFS – Chaplains making contact with seafarers using iPads, Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Team. Repatriation issue from Japan, trying to help young seafarer with mental health issues to return home. Vital that users understand that PPE items themselves become a serious risk if not handled in the correct manner, especially the handling and fitting of masks. Good PPE only effective if adequate training provided. Link below refers to UK Gov advice for health workers. Dedicated video would be of great benefit to seafarer support workers: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-use-for-aerosol-generating-procedures>.

JO, SMS – Emerging demand likely to be from working people and standing ready to respond. Agreed with DD to provide bulk grant to be used in these emergency situations. When individuals or regional teams start to become overwhelmed by pace of applications put on them they can make their own grants rather than being referred to SMS. Collective fear is that our system could easily become overwhelmed and come to a grinding halt. COVID-19 emergency grants system not in place quite yet but being addressed as a matter of urgency. Deemed appropriate for others to put funding behind these initiatives. FM and those in similar circumstances will ultimately bear brunt of responding to this crisis and they need to be armed to respond appropriately so we are all not found wanting when we come out the other side of crisis. We need a system to address non-UK nationals in need. All also need to accept that we don't know how much support we will need and how bad it is going to get. Until we do know we can start funds flowing, put mechanisms in place to allow us to react as we need and keep reviewing as we go forward.

LW, SHS – Only slight increase in grant applications but this is considered calm before the storm. Free fast track physio appointments available by telephone or video chat. Dreadnought suspended all referrals and routine operations. Big White Wall available for all families of seafarers and retired seafarers, referrals **must** go via SHS website to access **free**

service. Supporting SAIL who are receiving many calls, mostly for a quick check on available benefits.

AC, QVSR/TSC – Tilbury Seafarers Centre - Seafarers not allowed off ships to buy basic toiletries, we are being asked to buy these essentials for them. Seafarers should be able to communicate with families, working with port authorities on communication for seafarers. Difficulty on the ground is understanding of seafarers' needs and empathy from key staff within the port. Grateful for kind offer of help from Port of London Authority, CE and Ops Mgr have provided basic supplies that will go out to the seafarers this week. QVSR – Concerned about elderly population, 24 are aged over 70, over 60 are aged 60+. Working with public health who are providing resources in theory but reality is that PPE not coming through at the moment but hopefully will arrive very soon. QVSR can offer emergency need for accommodation for seafarers or key workers in these circumstances. Currently have Filipino resident who was injured onboard ship.

DA, NI – Working very closely with UK CoS to lobby on behalf of seafarers. Receiving lots of enquiries from seafarers, repatriation is huge issue, number of companies suspended crew changes. Circular gone out from IMO and letter from Shipping Minister which may help to facilitate crew changes. Issue of every new person coming onboard being potentially infected. Lots of discussion on testing, home testing kits not reliable. Hoping to get seafarers tested before they join ship, therefore reducing risk of infecting others onboard. Seeing large number of redundancies, changes to sick pay policies. Unclear whether majority of seafarers are eligible for job retention scheme. Apparent that many won't be eligible for support as some may not have kept up to date with voluntary NI contributions. Members pleased to note that ITF Seafarers' Trust have pledged £1 million to support seafarers and maintain welfare services hit by COVID-19. <https://www.seafarerstrust.org/press-release-itf-seafarers-trust-covid-19-welfare-fund/>

KM, IMarEst – Calm before the storm and pleased to be involved in order to support engineers. Members requested to contact IMarEst with regards referrals/ideas for help.

MH, NWF – Closed Mariners' Park cafes, home care staff delivering meals to residents, doing more shopping for residents than normal but not charging for this service. Supporting residents who have received shielding letter advising them to stay indoors for 12 weeks. Received supplies of PPE, prepared if we have a COVID-19 case but don't at the moment. 11 staff absent from care home and domiciliary care service. Following gov. regulations on not moving home has had an impact on residents moving to Mariners' Park. Caseworkers all working from home contacting cases online. Some serving seafarers contacting NWF with issues of not getting to ships or losing jobs.

CR, WA – Care Ashore – 3 vulnerable staff now working from home, very small staff to manage 40 vulnerable people. Have some PPE, awaiting further supply. People being sick and self-isolating has caused problems. Overnight cover problematic, agency staff very expensive. Can offer emergency accommodation and did so recently for fisherman. Shopping for residents, have small shop and can offer goods at a discount. Have tried to increase calls for Seafarers' Link. Silver Line looking to increase fortnightly calls to weekly. CR keen to set up calls between the care homes to help tackle isolation and loneliness among elderly.

DT, SCS – Continuing to work with PC World, sourced 96 home computers in last 10 days, helping families access free school meals with vouchers. Supporting many single parents

who have lost jobs as cleaners, hairdressers, nail technicians, helping them access Universal Credit. New families coming through on fishing side – thanked DD and FM team. Supporting families living on breadline in fishing industry with pilot scheme 3 x £200 grant, although not sustainable as an ongoing service. Facebook extremely useful for sharing ideas, getting kids talking to one another, competitions etc. Asked by RN to submit cash flows, identifying any gaps, as will be limited on fundraising opportunities, events over next couple of years. Could this be facilitated via the MCG? Some will need more cash than others at different points, some sort of loan facility would help. DT to put proposition in writing for VC for MCG meeting on Monday. **Action: DT**

JS, MNA – Branch Clusters of up to 5 members set up to provide support and in regular contact with one another. Gratefully received additional support through membership of Confederation of Naval Association. National Council working on additional support for those over 80 or with significant health issues. Article advising members on COVID-19 in MNA 'Full Ahead' magazine.

VM, TH – Grants committee to be held this afternoon, funds have been set aside for emergency grants. Any delivery partners needing assistance requested to get in touch.

VC, SfUK – SfUK actively talking to Defra on improving availability of charity services within the fishing community. SfUK been in contact with many of the major funders, very keen to see degree of co-ordination in emergency responses and available funding, to be discussed at Monday's MCG meeting. Funders need to have brave responses to tackle crisis. SfUK working closely with Fishmongers who will also attend MCG meeting.

GH, MCG – Updates useful for Monday's MCG meeting, will be discussing co-ordinating funds going out to frontline charities and how we can collect more funds to then be put back out. Agenda will be sent out by the weekend.

PT, MNWB - MNWB can offer BSC training courses on mental health and working from home, if required. Members considered UK port representation to attend future meetings. **Action: PT/TS**

See link below for Zoom Pro charity discount:

<https://charitydigital.org.uk/products/products/zoom-meetings-pro-plan-bundle-1-year-subscription-access-to-discounted-rates>

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. Members agreed that meeting notes could be centrally displayed on the MNWB website.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 8th April 2020 at 11:00