



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 1st JULY 2020

PRESENT: Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
Mr Ben Bailey (BB)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
Mr Alex Campbell (ACL)	Queen Victoria's Seamen's Rest (QVSR)/Tilbury SC
Capt. Andrew Cassels (AC)	MNWB Chairman
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Mr Roger Harris (RH)	Int. Seafarers' Welfare Assistance Network (ISWAN)
Mr Graham Hockley (GH)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr Adrian Hodgson (AH)	MNWB Trustee (Observer)
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)
Capt. Justin Osmond (JO)	Shipwrecked Mariners' Society (SMS)
Mr Andrew Pitcher (AP)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)
Mrs Christine Rankin (CR)	The Watch Ashore (WA)
Ms Laura Simons (LS)	MCG Comms Consultant
Mrs Catherine Spencer (CS)	Seafarers UK (SfUK)
Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Mr Christian Turner (CT)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Ms Sara Walsh (SW)	British Ports Association (BPA)

The meeting opened at 11.00am. The Chairman reminded members that the working group provided a useful two-way communications route between government, industry, maritime charities and local Port Welfare Committees around the UK. 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:

TS, UK CoS – Crew change ministerial summit to take place next Thursday. Notification received indicates this will be chaired by the Maritime Minister. UK CoS and ICS are pushing for the level to be raised up, due to concerns over whether any outcomes will influence the people it needs to, which are Home Affairs Ministers and Health Ministers, in the various countries that need to act to ensure that crew changes can be facilitated. Working on this and hoping for positive outcomes. Crew change taskforce meeting taking place today instead of yesterday, TS will be reporting on efforts in Europe to encourage EU member states to issue visa waivers in order to deal with the avalanche of applications expected over the next few months. There is a backlog of approx. 40,000 seafarers per month from the Philippines, some may already possess multi-entry visas but it is estimated that a quarter/third do not. Some arrangements therefore do need to be made as it is very difficult for them to obtain visas in their own countries. European member states' missions are either still not open or are operating at limited capacity and therefore unable to process the number of applications required. Taking into account other major labour supply nations that are visa nationals - India, Indonesia, Russian Federation - and it becomes clear that missions overseas are going to be overwhelmed. Visas at entry points to the Schengen area is not the answer, capacity issues are severely restricting the numbers that can be processed. Crew managers in the labour supply states are concerned that there is no guarantee that a crew

member on a flight to Europe would be provided with a visa and admitted. This could result in an expensive flight back home with neither the chance to work nor relieve a crew member who may have been on a ship beyond their contracted period. In the UK there have been discussions involving the MCA and the trade unions for guidance to UK ships on what happens when seafarers are kept onboard for longer than their contracted periods. A notice was published last night, whereby if it can be identified that where UK seafarers are currently stranded, unable to get off their ships and go home, then the government is, in principle, willing to assist if the necessary information is provided. The Chamber intends to ask for similar information from all ships in Chamber membership who have UK national stranded overseas. Anecdotal reports that have come to the Chamber's employment committee indicate that, in general, UK seafarers are able to get off their ships and return home whereas other countries have put restrictions in place on allowing their own nationals home. Still some issues with quarantine. Despite the joint Chamber/Nautilus letter that has been made available to seafarers, some are still being stopped by Border Force officials and told that they have completed the online contact form incorrectly and must self-isolate for 14 days. This information is entirely wrong and TS has raised the issue again with DfT to try to get it corrected. The Chamber is to host a webinar on the 21st July, 10.30am - 12 noon, focusing on seafarers' mental health particularly in the context of the pandemic. WG members will be welcome to participate. TS will send further details to the Chairman. TS stated that, regrettably, redundancies in the sector could have major implications for the welfare needs of seafarers who are struggling.

DA, NI – Will be consulting with members to try to get accurate figures on the number of UK seafarers stranded, as requested by the DfT. Will be issuing a survey to members, hope to get some good information from this and have a clearer idea on the number of UK seafarers affected. Large number of members are in touch on a regular basis regarding seafarers being incorrectly told they need to quarantine for 14 days on arrival in to the UK. Have asked for clarification on this and awaiting a response. Further guidance needs to be issued to Border Force.

JC, DfT – Have inundated Border Force with lots of requests which they are working through, some of which will be relevant to the cases raised regarding Gibraltar. Working with Border Force to further facilitate seafarer movement in the UK and regarding the discrepancies at certain entry points where Border Force officials are stating wrongful advice. Asked the Chamber and the Unions to keep notifying DfT about these cases which are raised individually with Border Force. Repatriation plans are in place for a large number of seafarers onboard CMV ships in Tilbury Hoping that in seven days 300-400 seafarers will be repatriated and next steps will be considered thereafter. Invites have gone out to overseas Ministers and International Associations for next Thursday's summit. The Secretary of State and No. 10 have expressed an interest in this. Major redundancies in the ferry sectors are concerning, Stena and P&O finishing their consultation periods. DFDS have announced 650 redundancies, expecting some to be on their UK services, possibly some shoreside losses. Trying to get further details on this. Although the numbers do not match those in the aviation sector, in percentage terms the numbers are probably quite similar.

ACL, QVSR/TSC – 360 Indian crew are travelling home at present, 340 Indonesian crew will be disembarking on Friday and travelling home. ITF continuing to work within Tilbury Port assisting cruise ship crew. Crew were asked to sign powers of attorney to help them secure their wages although they were only happy to sign once the Captain was not present. QVSR are taking top ups and provisions on board and have sent 80 packages for female crew onto Vasco/Magellan/Columbus/Astor and Astoria. The seafarers were very thankful for this. Have helped a further seven active seafarers with accommodation at QVSR who are awaiting repatriation to their own countries. Global Shipping (CMV) have agreed to shore leave for the cruise ship crews but there are still questions to be answered such as whether the ships require a quarantine period for crew that leave the ship for essential shopping and whether the numbers permitted to leave (currently set at 12 by Port Health) can be increased. JC has asked Public Health England to look at Port Health London's guidance and will revert back to ACL. JC has been advised today that shore leave is being permitted but will seek clarification on this.

RH, ISWAN – Situation in India and the Philippines has eased a little but there are still problems getting seafarers in and out. In India there are only charter flights available, no international flights. Companies are chartering flights to get seafarers in and out. In India there was a report of a cadet who committed suicide due to concerns over future job security. Still a high number of cases on Seafarer Help, over 800 cases so far this month, last month recorded the highest number. Working on a joint statement with ICMA about crew changes which will go out this week. Launched a social media campaign on encouraging social interaction onboard with the support of the ICS and ITF. Project funded by the MCA started earlier this year encouraging social interaction onboard. Superyacht crew are facing many similar problems to seafarers on merchant vessels, will be meeting this afternoon to consider what further work can be done in this area.

AP, SaSo – Furloughed staff in Invergordon and Dundee resuming ship visiting today. More ship visiting starting in South Africa today where there has been a lifting of restrictions. In India, the lockdown has been extended to 31st July, so work with families in the communities has been curtailed. The Chennai mobile medical unit used by seafarers and their families has still been suspended. In Singapore and the Philippines ship visiting is still not allowed and community projects are still suspended. In Indonesia, the Jakarta medical clinic used by seafarers and their families is still not operational due to the restrictions in place.

BB, MtS – Gangway ship visiting continues where possible with social distancing. Working to reopen centres in the UK, hopefully in early August. Thanked TH for their recent donation for PPE. Continuing to support a handful of Indian national students still in the UK, many of whom have decided to stay here as colleges are re-opening and there is a chance they can take their exams. Extended 'Chat to a Chaplain' service for a further 12 months, many issues coming through particularly on financial insecurity and whether or not people will be able to find a job. Transportation work in Manila continues, this was suspended for a short period as unfortunately one of the seafarers who was transported tested positive for Covid, so all of the team had to go into quarantine but, with no reported cases, the work has now restarted. Feeding programme in South India also continues, feeding approx. 1,000 seafarers' families facing food shortages.

CS, SfUK – Continue to receive grant applications, grants meeting will take place tomorrow. Working towards publishing new strategy. Emergency fund launched at the beginning of the Covid crisis has had a good response. SAW (Seafarers Awareness Week) taking place next week, thanked members who are engaging with this.

CR, WA – Furloughed staff at Care Ashore will return to work this week, one of whom was shielding. Residents and beneficiaries are allowed out as of today, some are keen to go out whilst others remain very cautious and reluctant to do so. Thanked SfUK for funding Seafarers Link calls that are really appreciated by participants who provide strong support to each other. Care Ashore is looking for a second chef, would be grateful if GH could advise Mark Carden in the hope that the position could be filled by a seafarer.

GH, MCG – MCG approached by Mark Carden, RMT, regarding redundancies in the ferry sector, in particular those working in catering. Asked what the maritime charities might be able to do to assist people to retrain within the maritime industry. A very productive Zoom meeting was held yesterday involving SfUK, MNWB and TH, a number of possibilities and leads were discussed on this matter. Lt Cdr David Carter, RN MN Liaison Officer, referred to the possibility of employment for MN seafarers in the catering branches within the RN.

LS – Will be issuing a press release on Tuesday or Wednesday next week announcing the publication of the training standard for mental health awareness training for seafarers. This will be linked in with SAW. Will be looking to get the message out through all partners and stakeholders and the press release will be circulated to members of the WG. Will also be supporting MNWB in publicising the relaunched Seafarer Support towards the end of SAW.

JO, SMS – Given our role in providing financial support to people in fairly desperate situations, the trustees have decided to set up a dedicated fund for Covid-19 in the knowledge of what is likely to hit in the coming months. £1 million has been set aside out of the charity's investments in order to

respond effectively to the expected level of financial need. Similarly to many other charities who are also dependant on their investments for income, after careful consideration, it was decided to do more than previously planned to reflect the extreme need expected to come out of the crisis. Will be issuing a formal press release on Monday, the first day of SAW, which will hopefully add to the story of demonstrating the desperate situation facing seafarers around the UK and spreading the word that we are here to help when people are struggling financially.

KM, IMarEst – Delighted to be able to assist with the situation at Tilbury and hoping to be able to help others.

MF, SM – Chaplains are stepping up their activities in the UK as lockdown restrictions are gradually eased. Involved in the CMV matter, particularly in Bristol with the Marco Polo. A large proportion of the crew are likely to be repatriated in the next 24 hours. Have also encountered persistent problems onboard the Vaga fleet of vessels, one has been in contact complaining of non-payment of wages. Have liaised with the MCA Aberdeen marine office on that particular matter and they have contacted the Flag State.

SW, BPA - Encouraged members to get in touch with BPA if any issues arise that they can assist with or should be aware of.

VM, TH – Have awarded more emergency grants and have come to the end of the initial amount of funding set aside. The Board will be discussing the longer term strategy at their meeting next month.

Post-meeting update from David Dickens, The Fishermen's Mission:

Fairly steady in fishing at the moment, but very grateful for MCA's statement on Tuesday encouraging The Fishermen's Mission and fishermen to get in touch if there are repatriation issues for migrant workers. Living conditions for extended periods of remain onboard are becoming an issue – more to follow.

The Chairman reminded members that future WG meetings will be held fortnightly to coincide with the ICS/ITF meetings so that the international information can be filtered down to national level. The next fortnightly ICS/ITF meeting will take place on 14th July, therefore, the next Covid-19 meeting will take place the following day on **Wednesday 15th July 2020 at 11:00**.

Closing Remark - Members to forward any links, extra information and note amendments to Celia celia@mnwb.org.uk Meeting format to remain flexible. Apologies for any unintended inaccuracies. Members agreed that meeting notes could be centrally displayed on the MNWB website.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 15th July 2020 at 11:00