



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 1ST SEPTEMBER 2021

PRESENT: Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Mr Alex Campbell (AC)	Queen Victoria Seamen's Rest (QVSR)/Tilbury SC
Capt Andrew Cassels (AC)	MNWB Chairman
Ms Lynette Crossley (LC)	Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA)
Cdre David Dickens (DD)	The Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Mr Ben Gibbons (BG)	MCG
Mr Simon Graine (SG)	Int'l Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN)
Mr David Hammond (DH)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
Mr Mick Howarth (MH)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
Mr Martin Illingworth (MI)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
Ms Barbara Kidd (BK)	Sailors' Society (SS)
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Mr Andrew Lord (AL)	Alabaré (ALA)
Miss Victoria Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
Mrs Catherine Spencer	The Seafarers' Charity (TSC)
Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Ms Cath Stamper (CS)	Care Ashore (CA)
Ms Melanie White (MW)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)

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:

MW, UK CoS – Working with Ruth Campbell to find answers around the certification for seafarers' vaccinations. As it stands, foreign seafarers in the UK receive a slip of card stating first and second dose. They are eligible to receive the vaccination without registering with a GP or without an NHS number but are unable to access the Covid pass app or letter which allows a digital documentation of that vaccination to be approved. The current response from Government is that there is not much appetite to create a route via that NHS pass, but potentially a letter may be created similar to that which is formulated for military personnel who have had vaccinations overseas to enable proof of vaccination. Now the only proof of vaccination a seafarer has is at worst a small card and at best an additional, unregistered supporting letter. The issue has been raised with the ICS. Their viewpoint and that of IMHA (The International Maritime Health Association) is that the card received is certification and not registration. In the UK registration is logged into the NIMS database. Whether this is accessible to be shown at the border is another question as the letter cannot be accessed. Will continue to pursue this issue. This week, WHO has issued their digital documentation guidance on Covid-19 vaccinations and vaccination status. The WHO stipulates that if there is paper documentation proof, there needs to be a health certificate identifier which links to a digital record. As it stands, the UK doesn't adhere to this and this is an international not just a national situation. Additionally, there has been talk at the ICS vaccination taskforce meeting about data regarding vaccinated seafarers who have then been infected with Covid after being double vaccinated. Members who are aware of any cases such as this are encouraged to pass details on to MW. Denmark have confirmed this week that they will vaccinate seafarers visiting Danish ports and airports with the Johnson & Johnson single dose

vaccine. Belgium and Netherlands have also extended this to any seafarer regardless of nationality. MW reiterated the importance of seafarers keeping their slip with their yellow book to ensure as much evidential paperwork as possible to facilitate travel. Suggested approaching the NHS trust that vaccinated those seafarers to ask them to issue a letter.

CS, TSC – Pleased to report that The Seafarers International Relief Fund (SIRF) has received over \$1.15 million, which has allowed TSC to fund welfare providers to carry out emergency humanitarian work in India and stated a project was about to start in the Philippines. This money was allocated as soon as it came in, as intended, so there is no more money in the pot. The fund will continue to exist until the next disaster occurs where humanitarian aid is needed for seafarers. Considering how to best help the seafarers concerned in Kiribati in terms of grants and advocacy. Members noted TSC's Anchor Fund for UK seafarers.

SG, ISWAN – Continuing to receive a high rate of calls per month on Seafarer Help, approx. 500 calls per month, with questions regarding vaccination availability and validity of vaccinations, financial problems through not getting employment opportunities and subsequent issues for them and their families.

GL, MCA – MIN was published and includes a section on shore leave. There continue to be issues with shore leave, especially with cruise ships. A lot of work being done with different companies to try and facilitate an agreement as to what is allowed and reiterating what is allowed. Seafarers' contract extensions – aware of one company with approx. 37 seafarers onboard their ships who are over contract, this is being managed with the operator and will soon be resolved. To date over 400 seafarers have been successfully repatriated after working over their contract length, that have been declared. Seeing an increase in seafarers taking up the vaccine, continuing to deal with queries on merchant vessels. Members encouraged to contact GL with any issues.

ACL, QVSR/TSC – Great deal of frustration on the ground in terms of the vaccination and the ability for seafarers to provide proof of this when they leave the UK. This is an international issue but is frustrating when dealing with seafarers on a day to day basis. Nearly 2,500 seafarers have been vaccinated at Tilbury at the pop up centres and on ships. Locally the teams have bought in to the vaccination programme, they volunteer from the local NHS and look forward to visiting the port. There has been a correlation in the usage of the centre and seafarers being vaccinated. In the last 7 days approx. 100 seafarers have used Tilbury seafarers' centre. Hoping this correlation continues and the centre will be used more and more by seafarers as they are able to get off ships.

BG, MCG – Redundancy & retraining fund is continuing until the end of the year, up to £500 is available to help seafarers retrain, maintain their certification, or for those who have been redundant or experienced loss of contract as a result of the pandemic. Anticipating this will increase later in the year, encouraged members to spread the word on the fund. Further to the recent presentation by Professor Daniel King, Nottingham Trent University, the MCG survey is being launched on 13th September for the UK maritime welfare charity sector research to find out what research they would like to see the MCG commission, what challenges are being faced due to Covid and what the next 12 months may hold for the sector.

BK, SS – Almost finished giving out Covid kits in India, thanked TSC for their ongoing support. Welfare grants are continuing to go out, projects are ongoing under the restrictions within their locality, ship visiting is being managed in localities according to restrictions.

CR, MS – The Redundancy & Retraining bursary to help unemployed seafarers ended in May and has been extended to the end of the year. Following a rather quiet June/July, applications picked up in August. Seafarers are being helped with their training, the majority of help is going towards STCW refreshers. The MCA extended the validity of certificates which expired over Covid and now a lot of seafarers are trying to refresh these as restrictions have lifted. Redundancies are expected with P&O once furlough finishes at the end of September. Expecting

an upturn in applications from now until the end of the year. MS will be promoting their Coming Ashore programme at London International Shipping Week along with Nautilus' Sea to City programme.

CS, CA – CA continues to be Covid free. A three day rock & blues music festival will be held on the estate to celebrate MN Day, starting on Friday. There will be a stall to celebrate the MN and working alongside SSAFA to promote the work of CA. Asking every attendee to provide a negative Covid test or proof of vaccination to protect the vulnerable residents.

DH, HRAS – Introduced MI as the new Head of Operations, the organisation and staff numbers are expanding. The hijacking of the Gulf Sky off the UAE was featured on the BBC news site: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-56950323> Regarding Kiribati, HRAS is working with the ICS and other stakeholders, focusing on seafarers and their families. In discussions with the IMO about transparency of reporting. Wesfarmers in Australia - has 27 companies all of which move goods by sea - have issued a modern slavery statement. HRAS has assisted them with updating their head charter party agreement which affects every charter party contract for protection of seafarers' human and labour rights across the group.

DD, FM – On vaccination certification for foreign fishers, most of the 1,500 UK migrant crew have received vaccinations via local arrangements with NHS trusts who have provided some level of certification: all have NHS letters showing proof of being double jabbed. (will keep MW informed on this). Covid related welfare demand is much reduced, this is also reflected at SMS and SCS. The majority of FM mini-centres are open with a limited offer and infection rates are being closely monitored. Still issues with getting home and joining from abroad. Covid/Brexit crew shortages are now generating concerns about the manpower supply chains because skippers and owners are getting desperate for crew. A particular focus in NI and Scotland now on the manpower supply chains from Ghana. Working closely with ITF on a difficult case in Ireland.

LC, MPHA – Still working towards getting a good vaccination system in place, hoping to be able to offer vaccinations along the Western end of the ship canal. No incidents of seafarers coming in with Covid. For the two cases dealt with previously, there is a very slick operation in place with the local CCG for this. Main concerns are certification and verification of vaccinations.

MF, SM – Supporting seafarers to secure vaccinations, encountered some obstacles in the Bristol area where the local health authority was not helpful in facilitating vaccinations for seafarers. Asked members to get in touch if they are able to help in this area. Preparing for London International Shipping Week w/c 13th September, a number of welfare charities will be participating in a seminar on Meeting the Needs of Seafarers in a Digital Age. Members are welcome to join the seminar: <https://www2.inmarsat.com/lisw-2021-crew-welfare>

MH, NWF – After 12 months of no Covid cases at the Care Home or at Mariners' Park there is now one case in the Trinity House hub extra care housing scheme. The gentleman contracted Covid on a cruise around the UK and is now in hospital despite being double jabbed. The government will be enacting legislation for all staff working in care homes to be fully vaccinated by 11th November or they will be at risk of losing their job. It will be illegal for them to enter the care home after that date if they are not vaccinated. Eight staff members are currently unvaccinated; they will need to have received their first jab by 16th September and second jab by 11th November. These individuals are being supported to come to a vaccination decision. With the relaxation of Covid rules normal services have restarted at Mariners' Park. A memorial service will be held at Mariners' Park on MN Day. Two new caseworkers have been appointed; one in the Tyne and Wear area and another covering Cardiff and South Wales. MH welcomed the opportunity of new caseworkers joining local PWCs to tap into the local maritime network.

VM, TH – A small amount of Covid funding is still available. Encouraged members to get in touch if there are needs. Business as usual.

AL, ALA – Concern over a few Covid cases amongst staff members. Looking at planning for the future and getting our social enterprises back up and running. One of these is a field kitchen where pizzas, tea & coffee are sold at festivals. Please let AL know of any opportunities for this. Reviewing the charity's property portfolio; supported housing is delivered in properties which are leased. Looking at how to modernise and update the accommodation stock and how to have better financial arrangements with those other charities. On the lookout for new property in S.W. England. Experiencing high turnover of staff in our care services, people are rethinking their futures after Covid and moving on. Recruiting new staff now as a result of this issue.

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.

DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS: Monday 4th October 2021 at 11:00 and Monday 1st November at 11:00.

DRAFT