



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

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

PRESENT: Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Revd Ijeoma Ajibade (IA)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
Ms Sharon Coveney (SC)	MNWB
Cdre David Dickens (DD)	The Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Miss Victoria Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
Capt. Justin Osmond (JO)	Shipwrecked Mariners' Society (SMS)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
Mrs Catherine Spencer (CS)	The Seafarers' Charity (TSC)
Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Ms Cath Stamper (CS)	Care Ashore (CA)
Mrs Deanne Thomas (DT)	Sailors' Children's Society (SCS)
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:

TS, UK CoS – Key concern is the issue of proof of vaccination and vaccinations being recognised internationally. There are reports of seafarers who have been vaccinated in the UK, but DHSC has not provided them with the same certification as given to UK residents. The papers received are then not recognised when seafarers travel to other countries. As a consequence seafarers may be tempted to be vaccinated several times in order to receive documentation that can be recognised. No research has been done to prove whether this is safe or what level of protection this approach might offer. Proof of vaccination status is a key issue and is a problem internationally. In his role with the European Community Shipowners' Association, TS has taken this up with the European Commission to try to co-ordinate them and show what is possible. In the Netherlands, visiting seafarers who have been vaccinated are given a QR code in order to facilitate travel, join a ship and be repatriated. In other matters, there was a US presidential proclamation a week ago, regarding non-US citizens travelling to the US. There are exceptions to those requirements for seafarers, but this only applies to those arriving by air. Crew arriving by ship will not be subject to the requirements set out in this new presidential proclamation. The UK government is apparently preparing to recognise vaccines administered in another dozen or so countries, this is not confirmed yet. As of last Friday, the UK NHS Covid pass is officially recognised in the European Union. Non-seafarers travelling to the UK can now get a rapid antigen test, instead of a PCR test. As of today, there are no more countries on the UK red list although countries can still be added again if there are any variants of concern. Some seafarers have not been able to benefit from these exemptions due to some Border Force officials not being properly briefed. At last week's ICS Welfare and Strategy group, it was reported that seafarers' centres, not just in the UK, have put into place anti-infection procedures and protocols although there are concerns that there have not been as many visits from seafarers, partly due to company policy restricting shore leave. TS has suggested to Chamber members that companies who are nervous about allowing shore leave or whose crew may themselves be nervous, can contact organisations operating seafarer centres with a view to allowing visits to those centres and facilitating shore

leave. TS would be interested in hearing feedback on this matter in due course. IA reported that companies that are nervous about allowing shore leave can speak to centre managers who can accommodate visits for particular ships, by allocating designated areas within a centre. Visits to the Grangemouth centre are back to normal, so footfall seems to depend on the ports and/or companies involved. PT reported that the long-term survival of certain centres could be an issue, especially for those that didn't benefit from a port levy. IA reported that more work needs to be done within individual ports. Port Talbot have decided to open the centre unstaffed for visiting seafarers and will monitor how this goes. IA stressed that where seafarers are not visiting centres in other ports, MtS is still visiting ships. However, there is no respite for those seafarers who are not allowed off ships. MF reported that the situation with the ongoing pandemic and the cumulative denial of shore leave exerts a significant pressure on the mental wellbeing of seafarers. Whilst understanding the difficulties faced by ships, ports and Masters, wherever possible, shore leave should be granted as it is so critical to seafarers' overall wellbeing. TS agreed and reminded members there was a lot to be considered; the importance of keeping ships Covid free, some seafarers are still nervous of going ashore, and charterers' requirements. Ultimately this was a commercial decision and the Chamber had taken action to encourage dialogue. GL reported that there are different reasons for shore leave being blocked, whether port, company or crew. Important to understand what the blockers are and whether they are reasonable or not. Encouraged members to also let the MCA know if they are aware of specific cases.

DA, NI – Concurs with TS on the issue of documentation for proof of vaccination. No research has been done regarding multiple doses of vaccines. Receiving complaints from seafarers denied shore leave mostly due to company policy. There are some policies requiring a minimum level of vaccination of crew onboard a ship. Shore leave should be allowed as a legal requirement. Some companies have implemented policies to make the vaccine mandatory for all of their seafarers. NI's position is to encourage seafarers to get vaccinated but this should not be mandatory. Only a small number have reportedly declined the vaccine. Some members do not want to work with those who are not vaccinated and some do not want to go ashore. NI is working on tackling misinformation regarding the effectiveness of the vaccine in order to educate seafarers when required. Vaccine passes is another issue for some members, not in England. In the Netherlands, a vaccine passport is required to enter bars and restaurants. In Rotterdam a vaccine passport is required to enter a seafarer centre but may not be to enter the shop next door. No countries are on the red list from today although the Scottish website is still contradictory in places, which could cause confusion going forward for seafarers arriving in Scotland. There is also potential for confusion due to strange differentiation between seafarers working on cruise ships and those not working on cruise ships, in guidance for England and Scotland.

MW, UK CoS – There is an increase in frustration over proof of certification. DHSC seem to be closing the door on the issue, there is still a call for them to be looking at a number of identified NHS centres having special dispensation to issue specific certification to seafarers as part of an overall overseas travel/passport documentation review. The stamp that has been used in Tilbury has been positive for seafarers returning to the Philippines, there have been calls for more official documentation from the NHS in the form of a formal letter. Will keep pushing on this. From the ICS taskforce, there is a report of a statement, currently in French, stating that the Johnson & Johnson vaccine may no longer be a single dose vaccine as a booster may be needed. Will be keeping a close eye on this. Seafarers are referred to in WHO guidance as needing to be prioritised for vaccination, this may soon be promulgated in the form of a one page explainer, and can perhaps be used by companies to myth bust. The Chairman added that the 'port visitor' software was being slowly rolled out and that the software enabled information on vaccinations to be added. This information was connected to the ICMA and NAMMA websites and vice versa.

GL, MCA – The MCA is continuing to conduct survey inspections, being Covid vigilant and going onboard ships; there will be more on this subject matter due to all countries being removed from the red list. Still dealing with a number of Covid related issues, such as crew certification and training issues. Nationally there have been numerous MLC issues over the past month, including a few detentions. Most have been rectified. There continue to be issues with seafarers'

agreements. As of the end of last week 33 seafarers were still onboard UK ships and over their contract, 9 of which MCA would not agree to. In total 491 extensions had been approved and repatriations facilitated. The MCA had recently conducted another concentrated campaign on UK fishing vessels which had resulted in a significant number of detentions. A lot of the deficiencies had been ILO188 related and all were being followed up accordingly.

SC reported that MNWB were working with FM on a user-friendly guide to C188 which would hopefully be published by the end of the year.

CR, MS – 91 applications had been received for the Covid-19 Redundancy & Retraining bursary. September had been slow for applications but had picked up in October. In total, 75 bursaries had been approved, one was pending. £34K had been awarded in grants and the award was scheduled to end in December. Laura Simons was working hard to promote the bursary aimed at unemployed seafarers, to help renew certification and training. Each bursary had a maximum of £500 and was open to UK seafarers. There had been a low take up from female seafarers and ratings. Lots of officers had applied, most applicants were looking to transfer to new sectors, eg. from fishing or cruise sectors, to the offshore sector or wind farms. Members were encouraged to refer seafarers in need to the fund.

CS, CA – A lot of elderly residents were refusing the flu jab due to being 'all vaccinated out'. Trying to find out more on this as flu is expected to be a problem this winter. Thanks to funding from ITF a Business Development Manager had been recruited. The post was solely to develop the estate and ensure the charity had sustainable funding into the future. In discussion with the residents as to whether to rebrand CA as the name includes 'Care' and CA is not a Care Home, therefore, does not fully represent CA. This will be resident led and the estate may then be properly split from the charity, with two websites.

CS, TSC – Last of the grants or impact team meetings for the year have been held. There used to be three per year, but there have been nine including the Covid-19 and SIRF fund. TSC is now inviting grant awards for next year. The team has been busy dealing with many charities who have been awarded grants as well as working with new partners, looking for new ideas to support seafarers. TSC is very interested in better understanding of deaths and suicides at sea. Interested to hear members' reports of seafarers being denied shore leave and concerned how this affects their mental health. Befrienders Worldwide, supported by TSC, is a Samaritan type service for seafarers. TSC has also supported Safer Waves this year who provide additional support for seafarers at sea.

DD, FM – Reported on the recent suicide of an Eastern European fisherman who was a resident in N. Ireland and a possible link to Covid stresses. A 73 year old single handed fisherman whose boat was found had sadly committed suicide, this was also thought to be linked to Covid related financial issues. In recent discussions with Peterhead Port authority, the Chief Executive of the port was particularly concerned about mental health amongst the fishing communities of Peterhead. This is worrying as some of the wealthiest and most successful fishermen are based in Peterhead. More enquiries have been received regarding help with utilities but not additional claims for cash yet. Studying very closely the government's household support fund launched today. Three FM staff have Covid. A lateral flow test regime has been implemented for all staff to test every two days and every day for those who are planning 'face to face' visits with clients. DD reported that there had been an issue for MN seafarers with vaccination certificates issued in Scotland not being recognised in England and vice versa. For fishermen, FM staff had been working on bespoke solutions with NHS contacts particularly in Aberdeenshire to make sure that certificates were transferrable. DD offered to find out more and report back to members.

DT, SCS – There had been an increase in applications ahead of half term, but quieter last week. There had been an increase in mental health and safeguarding concerns, although statutory services were stepping in. All home visits were back in place. All fishing cases, still none from MN.

JO, SMS – Steady for a number of weeks with a trickle of Covid related business coming through.

MF, SM – Centenary year has come to an end but the Centenary Emergency Fund will be a lasting legacy from the centenary year. This will be used to support mainly foreign seafarers and fishers with short term emergency financial needs. Chaplains and visitors are undertaking their work in something resembling normal circumstances. Also experiencing staff being diagnosed with Covid.

IA, MtS – Ship visiting is continuing from the gangway and the quayside. Seafarers are coming off ships in Grangemouth but not elsewhere. This may be because the Grangemouth centre is in the port which could instil confidence in the shipping companies involved. The South Tees' team is working with the Stella Maris ship visitors. The team are making up parcels of clothing and welfare packs and the Stella Maris ship visitors are ship visiting and delivering the parcels. The South Tees' drivers will start doing supermarket runs under the direction of the Chairman. There is currently very little demand from seafarers to come to the Centre. The South Shields centre remains closed.

VM, TH – The last grants round for this financial year will be held in January. Closing date for applications is 3rd December.

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: Wednesday 1st December at 11:00.