



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

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

PRESENT:	Robert Courts MP (RC)	Minister for Aviation, Maritime & Security
	Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
	Revd Ijeoma Ajibade (IA)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
	Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
	Mr Alexander Campbell (ACL)	QVSR/Tilbury Seafarers' Centre (TSC)
	Mrs Ruth Campbell (RCL)	Tilbury Seafarers' Centre (TSC)
	Capt Andrew Cassels (AC)	MNWB Chairman
	Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
	Ms Sharon Coveney (SC)	MNWB
	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)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
	Mr Simon Grainge (SG)	Int'l Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN)
	Capt Ian Hodge	Merchant Navy Association (MNA)
	Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
	Mr Andrew Lord (AL)	Alabaré (ALA)
	Miss Victoria Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
	Capt. Justin Osmond (JO)	Shipwrecked Mariners' Society (SMS)
	Mr Stuart Rivers (SR)	MNWB
	Ms Laura Simons (LS)	MCG Consultant
	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)

The meeting opened at 11.00am. The Chairman welcomed RC to the meeting. RC thanked members for the opportunity to speak at the WG which he had previously attended at the start of the year. He thanked members representing charities, shipowners, unions, port owners and port authorities for their outstanding and exemplary work looking after the welfare of seafarers, fishers and their dependants throughout the challenging pandemic. He also passed on his gratitude to MNWB trustees and staff and thanked the Chairman, wishing him a long and happy retirement. RC thanked JC for his ongoing support to members and was pleased that the pivotal link between DfT, MCA and the maritime welfare charities was working so well. RC was proud of the work of the maritime welfare charities during Covid, from setting aside millions to help combat the effects of Covid to the front-line support provided by ship welfare visitors and the support given to families in need of assistance. He was also delighted that MNWB had been formally designated the UK's National Seafarers' Welfare Board in May. He had been delighted to visit Mariners' Park in June of this year and was looking forward to visiting Tilbury in due course. He thanked QVSR for their incredible work supporting seafarers, particularly at the start of the pandemic. RC was proud that UK ports were not closed to cruise vessels and praised the co-ordinated effort of repatriating 16,000 seafarers. RC congratulated ACL for the award of his OBE by Princess Anne. He also thanked RCL for her determination in working with the local NHS team to vaccinate visiting seafarers. He applauded the maritime sector across the UK for their critical work at local, national and international level. These had also been extraordinarily tough times for care homes and accommodation providers whose work had been magnified by the pandemic. He added that the country was now far more aware of the important work carried out by the maritime sector. RC thanked the UK CoS for helping to keep trade alive during the pandemic and the Unions for representing seafarers. RC also thanked everyone for the ongoing strong relationship between government and the maritime welfare charities. The MiFi project was cited as a great example of

the work carried out together and RC hoped there would be other projects in the future, either financial or practical, to support the sector.

RC joined members in congratulating SR and warmly welcomed him to his new role as CEO at MNWB. SR introduced himself to members and looked forward to meeting them all in person in due course. SR had been supporting MNWB as a consultant over the past 18 months. Prior to this, he had provided front-line welfare delivery in his role as Chief Executive at Sailors' Society.

The Minister stressed the government was committed to helping to provide the social framework to support seafarers, fishers and their families.

TS, UK CoS – There had been a lot of concern from companies following the announcement of mandatory PCR testing. TS understands that exemptions for seafarers coming into England would still apply, that pre arrival testing was not required for seafarers, and PCR testing on arrival and the requirement to self-isolate was not applicable to seafarers. In Scotland, seafarers returning home for a period of leave were not treated differently from other members of the population and may be forced to self-isolate pending the outcome of a PCR test. On confirmation of vaccination status, there was still an issue with visiting seafarers getting jobs in the UK and not being provided with the same bar code as the rest of the UK population for proof of vaccination status. There were reports of cases of Filipino seafarers who had returned home and authorities did not accept the letters stating that they had received their vaccination in the UK. This was not just a UK problem but is a problem in many other countries. TS had attended meetings with the European Commission to agree a solution in Europe and would greatly appreciate anything that the UK could do to alleviate the problem. There appeared to be two different interpretations of being “fully vaccinated” for arrival in the UK. If someone received their vaccinations outside the UK and were contacted by NHS Test and Trace, they would not be exempt from having to self-isolate. Somebody who had received both their jabs in the UK is exempted from self-isolation. This is massively disruptive to shipping companies bringing their crew in and prolongs tours of duty for crew who are hoping to be repatriated. There has been correspondence between the CoS and DfT on this matter and TS has been advised that a resolution is expected in the coming weeks. It would be helpful for member companies if a resolution could be brought forward.

JC, DfT – There have not been any changes in requirements for seafarers in England. Seafarers continue to be exempt from a day 2 test and self-isolation but they are required to do a NHS LFT on day 2. If they test positive they are required to self-isolate and book a day 2 PCR test. Continuing to work closely with DHSC due to the wider response to Omicron there may be pressures on seafarers and transport workers. If measures do change DfT will continue working with DHSC to keep disruptions to a minimum going forward. The Minister is meeting with the Health Minister next week to discuss a number of issues regarding seafarers and vaccinations. He will be looking at the issue of self-isolation requirements for seafarers who have been vaccinated outside the UK and the certification issue which has been going on for a long time. The NHS app provides access to the full NHS suite and this is the reason for reluctance to give access to seafarers who may not have NHS numbers. Need to find a solution to this quickly. If members know of seafarers who have a paper certificate or other form of certification denied, please let DfT know so that they can feed this back to DHSC and increase the pressure on them to find a permanent solution. **Action: All**

GL, MCA – The MCA is continuing to conduct surveys and inspections on a full range of merchant and fishing vessels with slight changes on vessels visited according to the changes with Covid. It has been a relatively quiet month for MLC issues on UK and foreign vessels. Nationally, there are still a number of seafarers on UK ships who are over their contract; 20 to date who have required approval for extensions to their seafarer's agreement. 13 of these have been over 12 months and 5 have been denied recently. MCA is working to repatriate those affected. Members who know of seafarers who are stuck onboard after their contract should raise this with the MCA. There have been concentrated campaigns on UK fishing vessels; a lot of the findings relate to fishers' working agreements and ILO issues. Looking at ways to improve this to support fishers

and the industry. TS & GL agreed to discuss those cases denied contract extensions out of meeting. **Action: GL & TS**

DA, NI – Ongoing issues include the denial of shore leave and the issue of those seafarers who do not wish to be vaccinated and how they are dealt with. Keeping a close eye on travel restrictions and hoping that any new restrictions introduced are not incorrectly enforced at the border either in the UK or Scotland. In Scotland, their incorrect interpretation of MLC means that seafarers are required to self-isolate and that those coming from red list countries may be required to self-isolate in hotels. This is of huge concern to NI and it is of utmost importance that seafarers remain exempt from these requirements. DA can foresee Scotland becoming an issue as an incorrect interpretation is being used of the MLC itself and the UK implementing regulations of the MLC. This will need to be addressed. JC reported that Scotland were adamant that this was a public health issue and that they were making a correct interpretation. DfT will raise the issue again if needed.

ACL & RCL, QVSR/Tilbury SC – Continuing to work very closely with the guidance and criteria to keep everyone safe in terms of Covid risk at the accommodation. The seafarers' centre is surprisingly busy with visiting seafarers mostly due to the vaccination programme being carried out at Tilbury and on the Thames. Seafarers who have had the Johnson & Johnson vaccine are now being given the Pfizer booster.

AL, ALA – Business as usual in providing supported housing for adults of working age. Concerned about mental health following the government's announcement of the new Covid variant. AL will provide details of the mental health support line to be circulated to members. AL visited Newport, South Wales last week and met with the Mission to Seafarers, the first time he had engaged with them.

BG, MCG – The MCG's Redundancy & Retraining fund continues. The fund has helped 75 seafarers with the cost of retraining to stay in the industry and will continue until the end of the year. Discussions are being held to consider whether there is a need for the fund to extend into the New Year. Members were encouraged to publicise the fund across their comms channels: <https://www.maritimecharitiesgroup.org/en/news/news/maritime-charities-continue-to-offer-retraining-funding/>

MCG was contacted by BBC World Service who are putting together a programme about MN seafarers and how they have been affected by the pandemic. Grateful to the work of LS and to members who have spoken with LS to help with the programme. LS will circulate the finished interview to members. The MCG conference is scheduled for 5th & 6th September 2022 and members were encouraged to share and publicise this: <https://www.maritimecharitiesgroup.org/en/news/news/mcg-conference-5th--6th-september-2022---save-the-date/>

CS, CA – Despite functions taking place at CA and social clubs being open to the public, residents and staff are still Covid free.

CS, TSC – The new website <https://www.theseafarerscharity.org/> was launched earlier this month, completing the rebranding process. Making good progress on the strategy 'Thrive' which was launched earlier this year. Good progress across all areas and good work with fishers is being carried out. An APPG was held yesterday, which went very well. All of the funds have been spent from the additional £2 million which was launched to support organisations through the impact of Covid and £2 million from TSC's main grant has also been spent this year. The majority of the money from the SIFR fund has been spent, only £40K remains. CS will be discussing this further at a stakeholders meeting tomorrow. CS thanked the Chairman for setting up this WG so quickly at the start of the pandemic which has enabled members to communicate so effectively on a monthly basis.

DD, FM – Relief in the fishing communities that there had not been any accidents at sea as a result of Storm Arwen. DD was sad to announce that Mike Sanderson, a former Mission man

who had retired a year ago, had died of Covid 10 days ago. His death had had a great impact on FM colleagues. A case of abuse of a UK crew man had gone to court and the skipper-owner had been fined £66K and £9.5K in costs. Keeping a close watch on food and fuel inflation. Working closely with SMS and SCS to try to understand the various devolved authorities' additional funding for winter. Anticipating a greater need if the cold weather continues into winter. Investigating boosters for migrant crew, particularly in Scotland and N. Ireland and continuing to focus on mental health issues. FM has also been conducting a series of interviews for the BBC World Service, for a 'Life At Sea' series for fishermen internationally.

DT, SCS – Running at 60% of cases as SCS would normally at this time of year. A quiet Christmas so far, expecting it to hit at some point but not sure when. A caravan was badly damaged due to Storm Arwen. Food hampers will be going out in the week up to Christmas.

IH, MNA – IH has taken over from Capt. Malcolm Mathison as Chairman of the MNA. MNA continuing to open up as much as possible and holding branch meetings. Starting to work on the details for holding a full ceremony on MN Day next year at Tower Hill.

IA, MtS – Chaplains and ship visitors are continuing to visit ships. There was a report this morning that one volunteer had experienced difficulties being allowed to access the gangway as the seafarers were nervous about the new variant. There are some aspects of MtS's work in parts of the world eg Latin America and South Africa where the ship visitors are unable to board ships and are having to negotiate locally. Globally and in the UK, MtS is trying to get involved in local vaccination programmes.

JO, SMS – Busy at the moment, with routine welfare assistance. Plenty of demand is coming forward.

LC, MPHA – The difficulties around the certification of vaccinations has been really disappointing. Thanked RC for her support on this. MPHA has been offering vaccinations although there are concerns from seafarers that not being able to get certificate verification will cause too many problems to make it worthwhile. MPHA is encouraging seafarers to get vaccinated. Around 50,000 seafarers come through the port of Liverpool each year, so it would be helpful if the NHS could be provided with statistics such as this to underline the importance of vaccination certification for seafarers.

MF, SM – Thanked the Chairman for all his support to both him and his colleagues during his time at MNWB. Ship visiting continues as normal and SM is gearing up to distribute Christmas presents thanks to the generosity of supporters and Parishes throughout the UK. Looking forward to Christmas present distribution this year as it was not possible last year.

SG, ISWAN – Internationally, SeafarerHelp is continuing to receive double the rate of calls as pre-Covid. There has been an increasing number of requests from seafarers for financial support and a significant increase in the number of seafarers expressing suicidal thoughts. ISWAN has just launched a hardship fund in the Philippines, receiving numerous enquiries.

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

AC, MNWB Chairman – AC thanked members for their kind words and appreciation for the Chairman who had done an outstanding job at the Board over the past 20 years. The Chairman has helped to push MNWB forward during the past four years in his role as Chief Executive. AC congratulated the Chairman for recognising the need to connect the maritime welfare charities through to government by forming this WG. He warmly welcomed SR who he believed would be able to continue to take MNWB forward.

Post meeting update from Chris Rankin, Watch Ashore - All continues well at Seafarers Link and Watch Ashore. Age UK is working to recruit more members.

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 12th January at 11:00.

DRAFT