



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 2ND MARCH 2022

PRESENT: Mr Stuart Rivers (Chair)	MNWB
Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
Mr Richard Ballantyne (RB)	British Ports Association (BPA)
Ms Mary Barber (MB)	The Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Mrs Ruth Campbell (RCL)	Tilbury Seafarers' Centre (Tilbury SC)
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Mr Ben Gibbons (BG)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Ms Hannah Gilbert (HG)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Mr Kian Goodsell (KG)	The Seafarers' Charity (TSC)
Capt Ian Hodge	Merchant Navy Association (MNA)
Mr Tom Holmer (TH)	MNWB
Mr Martyn Illingworth (MI)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
Ms Barbara Kidd (BK)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Mrs Deanne Thomas (DT)	Sailors' Children's Society (SCS)

The meeting opened at 11.00am. The Chair reported that Lynette Crossley, Manchester Port Health was looking for somebody to do a presentation on the welfare issues likely to be encountered by Ukrainian and Russian seafarers caused by the current political/war situation and what could be done to help seafarers coming into ports. This would be for the 24th March CIEH Coffee and Catchup, Port Health meeting at 11.00am. **Post meeting note:** Ben Bailey, MtS, has confirmed that he would be pleased to assist with this.

Actions from the previous meeting – RC has sent details on vaccination certification used at Tilbury to the Chair. SR met with the Durban PWC last week who reported on a physical and digital vaccination certification system currently used for seafarers in South Africa. Members noted BK's request at the previous meeting for feedback from members on their response to helping seafarers to the situation in Ukraine – the situation had escalated considerably since then. IH thanked MNWB and SAIL for sending materials to be shared at the Fleetwood seminar he would be attending on 26th May. Members noted that all actions were completed and provided COVID-19 updates on their respective organisations as follows:

JC, DfT – JC reported on the letter from the Secretary of State outlining regulations which came into force at 3pm yesterday. The letter stated that no Russian registered vessel or vessel owned by Russian interest or with connection to Russia would be allowed into UK ports. The government would help ports to identify such vessels. If the vessel was in an emergency, it would be permitted access to the port. JC was working to establish whether an emergency would include a seafarer onboard needing urgent medical care; the guidance sent out to ports was not clear on this point. There were not currently restrictions on access to shore leave for Russian seafarers working on vessels not sanctioned, unless they had been identified as a 'designated person' although this was unlikely for a seafarer. The situation could change and this was a multi-departmental policy which had been made in conjunction with DfT, MoD, FCDO, Home Office and other governmental departments. The following link could be helpful as a first point of information although it is not the Q&A that has gone out separately: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/russia-sanctions-guidance/russia-sanctions-guidance> JC also confirmed that sanctions extended to fishing vessels and superyachts. Welfare – Important to recognise that Russian and Ukrainian seafarers' knowledge of the conflict could be biased, particularly if they are getting information

from controlled social media. When coming ashore and seeing local news reports, this could be the first time that these seafarers were aware of the extent of the situation occurring in Ukraine. TS reported that the regulations published yesterday did not make clear what the situation would be for ships with a Russian Master/officers but no links otherwise to Russia. It was important that JC had clarified that Russian crew members were not affected unless they were a “designated person”.

RB, BPA – The FAQs in the guidance referred to by JC had only been sent to Port Security Officers and unfortunately could not be shared. Those who were not security cleared would not have access to the FAQs. RB reported that in certain ports the Marine Department, Security Officers and Harbour Masters worked very closely. RB asked what the exact mechanism for alerting ports was to avoid mistakes being made. JC would check if the guidance could be shared to a wider audience. DfT’s understanding was that the MCA would notify the ports about Russian vessels rather than the ports having to make these decisions themselves. **Action: JC**

TS reported that under the current legislation a maritime pilot instructed to go onboard and bring a ship in to port could be committing an offence and asked if the guidance issued or to be issued addressed this. JC reported that he would check on this. **Action: JC**

Vaccination certification - JC reported that DfT had potentially reached an agreement with DHSC that seafarers would be able to access a temporary NHS number. DHSC was still looking into how this could work in practice given the potential numbers of requests that would be made. Hoping this would be the first step to getting the full Covid pass. The only area of concern is that the time the vaccine was given is one of the pieces of information required. Port welfare workers would have booked a period of time with the local NHS team for seafarers to be vaccinated. LFTs – A number of workers would require access to LFTs going forward and this had probably not been considered in the proposal to charge for LFTs in the future. Talks with the relevant departments was ongoing.

RC reported that those who vaccinated seafarers at Tilbury had said there were not any temporary NHS numbers. She reported that the NHS used two systems to record vaccinations and was concerned that the system used at Tilbury might not give seafarers access to a temporary NHS number. JC reported that DHSC had advised that a temporary NHS number was generated every time a person who was not registered was vaccinated but that he would check on this. **Action: JC**

TS, UK CoS – TS introduced HG who had joined a month ago. Chamber members had raised issues that some Ukrainian crew onboard ships wanted to go home, some did not and none wanted to have their salaries paid into their Ukrainian bank account. They were all very concerned and wanted to keep in contact with family. With Ukraine now under Martial law, no males aged 18-60 were allowed to leave the country. Any seafarers who were able to make it back home would not be able to leave again and their potential replacements would not be allowed to leave. Companies would need to manage this situation and some crew members may need to be accommodated ashore. TS had asked Chamber members, and asked WG members, whether they had experienced any difficulties in providing accommodation for Ukrainian seafarers who were due voyage leave ashore in the UK. Visa rules for these seafarers spending time ashore should not be an impediment to this but encouraged members to contact the Chamber if any problems were being encountered. Good news from JC on the progress with the Covid pass. Work was continuing with ECSA on other countries; anecdotally, visiting seafarers to the Netherlands, Belgium and Greece could obtain QR codes on their Covid passes. With regard to the ban on Russian ships, TS emphasised that ports needed to be given assistance to avoid self-incrimination. From discussions internationally, there were no reported problems onboard ships with a mix of Russian and Ukrainian crew. This could be due to the shortage of information transmitted to ships.

DT, SCS – Still not seeing anybody coming forward on the MN family side. On the FF side, still seeing fishing impacted; families do not have savings to get them through winter. Still issuing

some Covid support for some fishing families. Also providing support in the NW, where fishing on the Clyde has closed.

DA, NI – Continuing to liaise with Treasury to seek a resolution on the SED issue. Countries, especially around Europe, are relaxing restrictions around Covid passes which is helping seafarers to get ashore. Just coming out of a two-year period where it has been very difficult for crew changes to take place and there are now concerns of how sanctions against Russian ships will affect shore leave for seafarers onboard those ships. Important that the guidance from government is very clear for ports on which ships are allowed in and which aren't. Agreements were reached last week between WOAC (Warlike Operations Area Committee) and IBF to ensure that seafarers in specific areas around Ukraine have certain protections in place and are allowed to leave ships if they want to.

MF, SM – SM has been supporting Ukrainian and Russian seafarers onboard ships travelling into the UK. Reminded members not to forget Russian seafarers, many of whom were deeply embarrassed by what was happening in Ukraine. MF reported on a moving case of a Ukrainian seafarer in the NE who had suffered a severe back injury. He had been admitted to hospital for a number of weeks; his home in Ukraine had been destroyed and his wife and child had to flee. MF thanked SM colleagues for providing support including free data SIMs to Ukrainian seafarers so that they could communicate with family and friends back home.

RB, BPA – On Covid restrictions, the ports are subject to the regime set by each of the devolved administrations around the UK. Seeing a different approach from the different nations which is somewhat confusing for a national association to get to grips with; the Living with Covid plan announced by the UK government and a similar plan announced by the Scottish government, the Welsh and N. Irish slightly behind on this. Employers at ports are now less bound by statutory sick pay rules and isolation rules are changing. Absences at ports are lower than would normally be expected this time of year and non-operation staff are working 3-5 days a week in the office. On the Russian situation, the ports have been in various discussions with DfT over the last couple of days. Since the Secretary of State circulated the letter discussed on Monday, DfT has clarified that restrictions did not apply to crew and Masters as there were not currently sanctions against general Russian citizens but just oligarchs. There were also currently questions about cargo. For example, a vessel which was not under a Russian flag or Russian owned but had collected goods from Russia and brought them into the UK, would be allowed into port. About 38% of the diesel consumed in the UK, this year, to date had originated from Russia. There would be economic consequences of banning cargos. There were not any sanctions on physical trade just yet but this could change.

BG, MCG - The MCG Redundancy & Retraining Fund is open until the end of the month and likely to close thereafter. The number of applications had been reducing month on month which was a good indication that the employment sector was currently buoyant for seafarers. MCG was in the early stages of looking at updating their analysis of seafarer demographics in the UK.

BK, SaSo – The Covid care kits in the Philippines were hampered by Typhoon Odette but restarted in February. During the coming month, a further 1,000 kits will be distributed. Seeing a drop in Covid cases in the Philippines. The Port Chaplains are continuing to ship visit; they can't get onboard every ship but ship visiting is returning to some sort of normal. There are continued requests for shopping to be brought to ships. The Chaplains are more aware of Ukrainian and Russian seafarers coming into their ports and are making themselves available to visit them, many of whom are very anxious. Seeing a rise in welfare grant applications from Ukrainians and Russians as well as the usual Covid grant applications. SaSo has five Chaplains in Ukraine; two in the SE and SW. Two remain where they are, one has exited and got over the border, another two are in the mid West and are not allowed to leave the country due to the ruling by the authorities on men aged 18-60. They are trying to find other ways of supporting their communities; working within their churches and looking after displaced families. SaSo is trying to support them in any way they can, particularly financially.

RC, Tilbury SC – Supporting Russian seafarers, some are quite disgusted by the actions of their country in the current situation. Tilbury SC is providing a safe space for both Ukrainian and Russian crew to be able to access Wi-Fi and chat to their families. Good response from ships owners and crewing agents who are requesting data SIMs and phone top ups for Ukrainian crew. The ports are good at alerting Tilbury SC to vessels with Ukrainian and Russian crew onboard so that their welfare and emotional state can be checked on. Seeing a big increase in Covid cases onboard ships. RC asked who would administer the scheme if the Covid passports were to go ahead. JC reported that in theory the individual should ask for their temporary NHS number. However, a number of those who have already been vaccinated would no longer be in the UK. DHSC are looking at this and what the cost implications would be. A block allocation of temporary NHS numbers was being considered in order to get passes out to those who have already been vaccinated in the UK. RC stated that it would be useful if JC could confirm what the process was and asked for confirmation that both systems allowed access to a temporary NHS number.

Action: JC

GL, MCA – On regulations for Russian vessels, GL reported that the Joint Maritime Security Centre along with DfT would liaise with the ports, not the MCA. A 'designated person' on the government website for the UK sanctions list can be confusing for the maritime sector. Under the International Safety Management code, the 'Designated Person Ashore' has nothing to do with the 'designated persons' on the sanctions list. Government is monitoring all ships with Russian connections that are already in port and dry dock. The MCA is continuing to conduct surveys and inspections on UK and foreign fishing and merchant vessels. Continuing also with the concentrated inspection campaigns on fishing vessels. Port state control inspections on foreign ships has been relatively smooth in the last month; there have been a couple of detentions. Still dealing with a relatively small number of seafarers onboard UK vessels over their contract. The common reporting form, launched a couple of months ago has been welcomed by welfare organisations, looking into extending this to cover the Maritime Labour Convention and ILO 188, specifically for fishing. There has been a complaint received through this system which has been forwarded to the relevant marine office and actioned. Considering what type of feedback is appropriate for these forms.

IH, MNA – The MNA is continuing with arrangements for the Falklands 40 and the MN Day Remembrance Day service in Trinity Gardens. All the branches are getting back to normal and meeting face to face.

MB, FM – Navigating the various differences in the guidelines amongst the devolved authorities. Still getting requests for vaccination certificates in Scotland, these are being processed between FM staff and SeaFit advisers. A further booster clinic is in the works in N. Ireland. Welfare – A lack of resilience amongst the fishing community and a recent period of prolonged bad weather has put people into difficulties as they have not built back up financial resilience since Covid. The closure on the Clyde and the issue with the shellfish on the NE Coast of England has meant little to no fishing in those areas. There is a general concern about the complete lifting of restrictions amongst elderly clients.

CR, MS – The Redundancy & Retraining bursary has received fewer applications in recent weeks and is winding down. Hopefully there is now less need. Business as usual.

KG, TSC – Upcoming grants committee meets tomorrow. 17 grant applications requesting a total of £905K has been received. Applications for the next round should be submitted before the end of April. TSC is awarding £5K for governance and diversity grants. Recent changes have been made to GDPR and a separate ED&I policy has been implemented in line with the recent changes to the government's Equality Act. The Maritime UK charter has been signed and TSC has attended the Pride in Maritime network which had a specific focus on LGBTQ+ people throughout the sector. TSC has also commissioned a piece of research by the Seafarers International

Research Centre which is explicitly looking at women onboard cargo vessels. Members with direct information or knowledge on this topic are encouraged to contact KG, Deborah Layde or Tina Barnes. TSC has also supported the UK Women in Fisheries network whose inaugural event will be held on 8th March. Members can sign up to this on their website <https://www.women-fisheries.com/>

MI, HRAS - The House of Lords UNCLOS report came out this week which investigated human rights at sea as well as other issues. The recommendations from the committee make really interesting reading: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/9005/documents/159002/default/> Linked to this, HRAS launched the Geneva Declaration this week for public consultation; members' input would be very welcome: www.humanrightsatsea.org/GDHRAS HRAS is starting to advocate for the declaration to be adopted by states and is seeing some really good engagement. HRAS is keen to see guidance be as effective as possible for UK ports regarding Russian vessels so that we don't inadvertently see any human rights abuses.

Closing Remark – Following last month's WG, The Chairman asked whether members had considered whether the current frequency and format of the WG was correct. TS suggested that the WG revert to fortnightly whilst the Ukraine crisis was taking place as the situation was fast moving and WG members had a lot of helpful information worth sharing. Members voted to meet fortnightly. The Chair reported that consideration would be given to changing the name of the WG as the focus was now broader than Covid.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 23rd March at 11:00.