



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SSWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 2 JUNE 2021

PRESENT: Mr Peter Tomlin (Chair)	MNWB
Mrs Ruth Campbell (RC)	Queen Victoria Seamen's Rest (QVSR)
Ms Sharon Coveney (SC)	MNWB
Ms Lynette Crossley (LC)	Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA)
Mr Paul Gaffney (PG)	Defence Medical Welfare Services (DMWS)
Mr David Hammond (DH)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
Ms Sharon Head (SH)	Stella Maris (SM)
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Mr Andrew Lord (AL)	Alabaré
Miss Victoria Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
Mr Justin Osmond (JO)	Shipwrecked Mariners' Society (SMS)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society and Sea Cadets (MSSC)
Mrs Deborah Layde (DL)	The Seafarers' Charity (TSC)
Ms Laura Simons (LS)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
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)
Mr Steven Thomson (ST)	Seamen's Christian Friend Society (SCFS)
Mrs Sara Walsh (SW)	British Ports Association (BPA)
Ms Melanie White (MW)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)

The meeting opened at 11.00am. The Chair welcomed two new members to the working group: Andrew Lord of Alabaré and Paul Gaffney of Defence Medical Welfare Services. He 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/MW, UK CoS – they have continued to push for visiting seafarers to be vaccinated. So far this seems to have worked on a local basis but not nationally. Some seafarers have received vaccines, and this is good news. The current advice is that as most vaccines are double dose, there is an issue as to the extent of the benefit to seafarers compared to a single dose. There is no clarity on this issue and it needs careful management. Most overseas nationals who have been vaccinated are at least getting some protection. Some UK seafarers returning to the UK are facing problems arising from Border Force not being properly briefed, saying that they are not a 'bona fide seafarer', and assessing them on whether or not they are essential for the running of the ship. Scotland have a different regime of border control. Under current policy, seafarers returning for a month of leave are not exempt from the self-isolation requirement. They can self-isolate at home unless they are coming from a red list country, but they do need to buy test kits at their own expense. The cost is £170 for the two tests, whereas tests elsewhere in UK are provided free of charge. The application of this is not uniform around Scotland. CoS will take this up with the Scottish government.

MW – the UK has recognised the Johnson and Johnson vaccine, due to strong advocacy for a single dose vaccination. There are issues with this vaccine in some other countries, e.g. Denmark, which had stocks and then decided to withdraw it. Within the UK there is no certainty of supply even if it is now approved. UK CoS has been meeting with the MCA on the classification of being 'fully vaccinated' as some seafarers get their first dose in one country (which may not be a UK

approved vaccine) and second dose in UK. As it stands in the green book this would be classed as fully vaccinated, regardless of the type of vaccine given. The MCA have also provided clarification on non-UK national seafarers being vaccinated in the UK via the guidance below:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-migrant-health-guide>

Guidance is coming from ICS that seafarers need to be vaccinated with WHO approved vaccines, but it is recognised that the most important aspect is that seafarers get the details of what vaccinations they have received and keep those to hand for any subsequent doses. There is no centralised certification. ICS have requested data collection on vaccination of seafarers and would like to hear of any developments to be able to record where the bottlenecks are and improve the rate of vaccination of seafarers.

TS – as of today the WHO has approved Sinopharm, Sinovac and Coronavac (Chinese developed vaccines).

GL, MCA – since the last meeting the MGN guidance note on access to shore-based facilities has been published:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mgn-486mf-amendment-2-access-to-shore-based-welfare-facilities>

and MIN 632 on shipowners liability on quarantine costs. There will be more coming on shore-leave in due course. Inspections and surveys on ships continue. As restrictions lift there has been an increasing number of requests, for example: visits to dentists and concerns over extensions to contracts. Please let MCA know of any issues which may arise.

LC, MPHA – Working with Peel Ports, local health authorities and the cable handlers at the Manchester Ship Canal, each ship passing through has been given lateral flow kits for the seafarers on board. They also want to start offering vaccinations to seafarers and are working to get this in place with the health authorities but could do with some input from the CoS to see how best to do this. The backing from Peel Ports has been a huge help. They are also communicating with John Wilson at Liverpool Seafarers' Centre, he is interested in getting the message out to seafarers on the availability of testing kits and vaccinations.

SW, BPA – Pleased to see cruises restarting. They are interested in hearing from others in the meeting on how they are managing testing of seafarers, how to deal with the results of positive tests on board ship, and on the issue of vaccinations for seafarers.

AL, Alabaré – AL explained that Alabaré is an organisation which provides care and support for adults of working age and has 350 bedspaces of supported accommodation, with around 1,600 people using their services each year. Their clients are veterans and homeless, and there is more information about the referrals process on their website. Alabaré also work to improve mental health, providing community and telephone-based support services. Of their 260 staff, 80 percent have been vaccinated. **LS** suggested contacting SHS, and **SH** recommended Dentaid, as charities which might be able to help their beneficiaries.

CR, MSSC – CR explained the continuation of the Redundancy Fund which provides support through bursaries to seafarers who have lost their jobs during the pandemic. This six-month project ended in April, but has now been extended to the end of 2021. The results of the six-month grant have shown: 60 applications received, 48 accepted and 12 rejected; £22,548 awarded in total, with the maximum single award being £500. Approximately equal numbers of seafarers who have lost their contract and those who have been made redundant have applied; the highest number of claims has come from the offshore sector. Applicants come from a wide range of ages; but only one woman has applied (from the cruise sector) thus far. Many applicants needed funding to refresh their STCW basic certificates, and by the end of April, 14% had secured a job. They are meeting with the MCG to see how to best to use the balance of £17k.

PT pointed out that MNWB, Trinity House and the Slater Fund consider their project funding as preventative welfare support, to keep people employed during the pandemic. **LS** said she was responsible for the communications for the fund and is looking to reach groups which have not been well represented so far, particularly from the ferry sector.

CS, CA – CS reported that the guest rooms and campsite are now fully open so seafarers and their families can come and have a break there, subsidised if necessary. They have a fishing lake and 260 acres of land. Both residents and staff remain Covid free, and all but one staff member have been vaccinated. They are also starting collaboration with the Men's Sheds Association to work with residents teaching business skills and sharing the skills which already exist among the residents.

DH, HRAS – HRAS have now issued a report following a 12-month investigation into the deaths of fisheries enforcement officers. He is pleased to see the launch of UN Voluntary Guidelines to protect seafarers' rights during the pandemic and hopes that the corporates take this on board and engage with it. On 8 June (World Oceans Day) HRAS is taking part in a webinar on justice for fishers and hoping a tribunal for arbitration can improve the situation. On 1 July in New Zealand the proposed change to the Maritime Transport Act should be enacted to provide a maritime levy for support of the seafarers' welfare centres. HRAS are recruiting a full-time staff member – details on their website.

DT, SCS – Numbers of applications are stable at the moment. SCS have hardly any MN cases coming in, and the number of people seeking support working in fishing is reducing as they are starting fishing again. There is still the issue of family break-up within the fishing community. DT asked if the MNWB would consider putting on a course to give updated training on dealing with bereavement? They have been speaking to 'Cruse' to see if they can do a workshop for all their staff. **PT** agreed to look at this, and at online courses also. **DL** recommended the services of Relate (free of charge to seafarers and fishers) for the issues of family break-up.

DL, TSC – TSC are continuing to raise the issue of suicide at sea and will be meeting AMSA on 9 June to discuss the ILO proposal to have a register of deaths at sea. DL updated on the Maritime Anchor Fund – if people know of any working age seafarers in need due to job loss, please access this fund through contacting SAIL or Seafarer Support. TSC have been working with ICS on the Seafarers' International Relief Fund: so far USD 717,000 has been raised from shipping companies in five weeks for the benefit of Indian seafarers and their families. SIRF have made grants to the Sailors Society for distribution of Covid kits to seafarers in Indian ports, and two other grants to Stella Maris for 10 oxygenators and post-Covid care in India for 10 families, and to Mission to Seafarers for a feeding programme for seafarers and their families in Tuticorin. Some of the core costs of these grants are being covered by TSC to make sure that 100 percent of SIRF funds go to seafarers. The next meeting to look at grant proposals is in mid-June, when the fund may expand its reach to the Philippines. They are also working on a programme for vaccinations of Indian seafarers, in partnership with unions and others.

JO, SMS – SMS are providing financial support to seafarers on low incomes; both through one-off grants and regular continuing grants. They provide help with living expenses while seafarers are coming off their job, but this has now dried up in recent weeks and very few Covid-related living expense grants have been awarded. Moving forward there is much more concern about debt, as many seafarers have not worked for a large portion of last year. At the moment, however, it is relatively quiet.

LS, MCG - The MCG Mental Health and Wellbeing Awareness Training Standard was launched in summer 2020. LS is continuing to raise the profile of the standard to show what good training looks like. Last week, Lysanne Wilson was speaking on behalf of the MCG during a global conference on seafarers' mental health at Imarest. The quarterly meetings of the MCG include on the agenda: caseworking, future collaboration on research projects, a new website, and a conference in autumn 2021. The MCG health subgroup continue to meet.

PG, DMWS – PG explained that DMWS provided extensive non-clinical welfare support in a medical setting. Embedded in numerous hospitals around the country, they are there when people have a medical situation or crisis and help with non-clinical support for patients and families for anyone in hospital. Their beneficiaries include Merchant Navy personnel, and their training arm is providing Mental Health First Aid courses.

RC, QVSR – All is well at QVSR with the residents and staff remaining Covid-free. With regard to ship visiting at Tilbury, about 15% of crew are taking shore leave but the majority are encouraged to stay on board by the captain and employer. RC has been working with John Cousley to get vaccinations for seafarers regularly calling in Tilbury.

SH, SM – SH explained she was standing in for Martin Foley who was ill, and best wishes were sent for a speedy recovery.

VM, TH - VM was pleased to extend the bursary fund; and reminded the group that TH has still a small amount of Covid funding available.

SC, MNWB – Informed the group about MNWB training. Firstly, to look at a specific bereavement course; secondly that MNWB has made available the iHasco one-year contract for e-learning courses to all constituents or active PWC members. They can take any of the 130 courses on the platform. SM, CA, MTS, NWF, SCFS have already set up administrators on the platform, and over 300 course certificates have been issued. An impressive update over a short period of time. If anyone has questions or wants to access courses please contact Helen van Gass, Welfare and Training Officer at MNWB, on helen@mnwb.org.uk or 02380 337799, or 07395244885.

Closing Remark – The Chair thanked members for attending, and asked that any links, extra information and note amendments regarding this meeting be sent to Tom Holmer tom@mnwb.org.uk Apologies for any unintended inaccuracies.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 7 July 2021 at 11:00

Further information sent outside the meeting:

John Cousley, DfT – was aware of the vaccinating of seafarers in Cornwall and in Tilbury. As previously reported seafarers are entitled to be vaccinated in line with the JVCI requirements. The public health message is that everyone in the UK should be vaccinated. The UK provides Covid vaccines, treatment and diagnosis free of charge to all overseas visitors and migrants. This applies to all persons regardless of whether they are in the UK legally or illegally. The main issue is that seafarers and other persons working in the UK but at sea/offshore are not explicitly referenced in the guidance given to health professionals and we believe this has led to many health professionals unsure as to whether they can or cannot be vaccinated. His department has continued dialogue with DHSC who agree seafarers are eligible and is proposing that clear messaging from the centre to the regional and local health teams is needed. He will be picking this up again with them next week. He added that DHSC officials have been very helpful. He is hopeful that now we have some local teams putting in specific vaccination programmes, and clear messaging from the centre, this will lead to more/all local NHS teams working with the port health authorities and setting up facilities to vaccinate eligible seafarers in their respective areas.

Steve Trowsdale, ITF – reported that there is no further movement on the UK inspectorate positions, and that if the group have any specific questions for the ITF he is happy to receive them and report back to the group members via email.