



## MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

### NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 2<sup>nd</sup> DECEMBER 2020

<b>PRESENT:</b> Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
Ms Sara Baade (SB)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)
Ms Tina Barnes (TB)	Seafarers UK (SfUK)
Mr Alex Campbell (ACL)	QVSR/Tilbury SC
Capt Andrew Cassels (AC)	MNWB Chairman
Valerie Coleman (VC)	Seafarers UK (SfUK) Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Cdre David Dickens (DD)	The Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Mr Roger Harris (RH)	ISWAN
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Mr John Lowry (JL)	Seamen's Christian Friend Society (SCFS)
Miss Victoria Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
Capt. Justin Osmond (JO)	Shipwrecked Mariners' Society (SMS)
Capt. David Parsons	Merchant Navy Association (MNA)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
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)
Mrs Sandra Welch (SW)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)

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** – The imminent rollout of vaccines is a key development and as of today it has been agreed, along with Nautilus and RMT, to write jointly to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care requesting that seafarers be included in any priority groups for the vaccine. This is based on their status as key workers and that they are at an increased risk of infection due to the nature of their work. Companies have put in place procedures to manage this, such as isolating seafarers in hotels before joining a vessel, which is expensive, and not permitting shore leave. Also, vaccines will need to be transported by ships in large quantities. The UN General Assembly has approved a resolution which calls on all countries to designate seafarers as key workers. The Chamber has held discussions with the MCA for the MCA to draw up guidance for shipping companies on managing the long-term effects of Covid on seafarers' welfare which could supplement the seafarers' wellbeing guide published by the MCA earlier this year. The Chamber and the Unions yesterday agreed on a further set of guidance for the industry on promoting good mental wellbeing, to include practical steps for employers to consider and examples of how companies have dealt with cases. This should encourage companies to treat mental health problems in the same way as other health and safety hazards in order to eliminate or alleviate mental health problems. This is a positive step and it is hoped that the guidance can be published in the early part of the New Year.

**JC, DfT** – The Department is piggybacking on the Nautilus 'Crew change for Christmas' campaign, and working on other measures regarding the current seafarer crisis. Measures being looked at

include rapid testing for seafarers who transit or transfer via the UK, to facilitate movement for them elsewhere in the world, ideally the test would be done prior to catching a flight so that it is recent. The Department is working with Home Office to get further concessions on transit and transfer requirements in the UK. This could include recognising all 185 documents which would ideally be a permanent change if an agreement can be reached, rather than just 185 documents issued by States that are previously ratified 108. Also looking into measures for those who have expired documents e.g. passports or visas, due to the amount of time they have spent onboard vessels during the pandemic. Internationally, the Department is looking to set up ministerial bilateral discussions with key states where there are still issues. Whilst this would include the maritime ministers in those states, the Department is looking to include the Interior and Health ministers on those calls to try to reach an agreed government position on those states. The Department is working with DHSC on the prioritisation for vaccinations. The priority will be for care workers and NHS staff, then potentially the over 80s. The next brackets are still being considered, whether it be the age bands most at risk or other key workers. After this, the next band of key workers could be social workers followed by a prioritisation of other key workers. The UN General Assembly resolution, although not legally binding, is a great outcome and a huge statement. A couple of states abstained from voting. States will need to act on this going forward. On the ILO side, a similar resolution is expected to be adopted by the governing body. We think that references should be explicit that it is to member states that have ratified and not to others. It is the most powerful statement that we could get from the UN at the moment. Representing the whole of the ILO it will be a powerful statement if it is approved. There is expected to be a delayed peak from today and a third Covid peak is expected mid-late January following the five days of freedom over Christmas. The vaccination programme will hopefully have started by then. Hopefully, 2021 will be a more positive year.

**DA, NI** – Nautilus has launched the ‘Crew Change for Christmas’ campaign to raise awareness that some seafarers are approaching their second Christmas at sea and 400,000 seafarers are still at sea. Nautilus has launched a petition encouraging seafarers to write or tweet their local MPs and are running a survey to understand how seafarers are being affected at this time, which will be published to further raise awareness. DA encouraged members to visit the Nautilus website or Twitter pages, to sign the petition and share on their social media accounts. Nautilus has signed a joint letter to the Ministers regarding the vaccine and will be meeting with the Shipping Minister tomorrow to raise issues which were being addressed by his predecessor. Nautilus also wrote to the Minister regarding funding for cadets whose sea time has been delayed and who may run out of funding. The MCA had already agreed to extend the funding by six months and flexibility has been requested to continue funding for a further six months. This looks likely to be a small victory for cadets who are stuck at home or at sea.

**GL, MCA** – The marine offices are continuing with survey and inspection activities, also dealing with a range of welfare and Covid-related issues. MCA are also dealing with issues mentioned by TS and JC.

**RH, ISWAN** – The issue of charterers’ ‘no crew changes’ clauses was raised at the recent ICS/ITF meeting (TS advised that ICS was trying to find a resolution). Seafarer Help is still getting double the number of calls normally received, with issues around financial hardship, slightly fewer calls around repatriation and more calls relating to the psychological and physical stress of being onboard for long periods. Yacht Crew Help <https://www.yachtcrewhelp.org/> has been launched to support superyacht crew. As part of the international ‘Seafarers delivering Christmas’ campaign ISWAN has launched a festive countdown calendar aimed at seafarers <https://www.seafarers-festive-countdown.com/>. Next week, ISWAN will be launching a mental health international ships’ guide aimed at shipping companies.

**ACL, QVSR/TSC** – TSC had delivered 600 Christmas presents to seafarers by 1<sup>st</sup> December and are aiming to deliver 2,000 overall. Cruise ships in Tilbury have mostly left and a number have

gone to scrap. Ruth has an interesting video on how this process happens if members are interested to know more. Continuing to support seafarers arriving in to port. The centre is reopening today and will be open 24 hours a day to seafarers.

**CR, MS** – The Redundancy and Retraining bursary fund was launched in the first week of November and received lots of publicity thanks to the unions and maritime charities. 20 applications have been received to date. Five bursaries have been awarded so far and two declined. The others are still being assessed with further information being requested. It is going well and the demand is there. Further information can be found at: <https://www.marine-society.org/redundancy-fund>

**CS, CA** – CS was welcomed and introduced as the new CEO of Care Ashore. CS has a background in charity, housing and homelessness. With minimal experience of seafarers, she has enjoyed hearing seafaring stories from the CA residents. CA has been through some turbulent times and CS looks forward to a calmer, more settled period at the home going forward.

**DD, FM** – It has been a busy time supporting four boats with cases of Covid on the East coast, Shetland, Whitby and Bridlington. Sadly, FM has been dealing with three fatalities, a cockler in South Wales and two crew members from the Brixham boat, 'Joanna C'. FM assisted MF and his team with a case of five migrant crew who were suspected to be victims of modern slavery. This has exposed a poor understanding of the modern slavery act by local authorities. As a result of the second lockdown, markets have downturned and there has been an uptick in Covid related demand for welfare support which is expected to increase as Christmas gets closer. There are also a lot of repeat grants. Crew are now increasingly affected whereas the initial focus had been on skippers and owners.

**DP, MNA** – Sadly Bill Anderson, Chairman of the Liverpool branch has died, from Covid-19. He was involved with seafarers at ITF, NUS and RMT level for many years. Some members have reported to be sick but this is tragically the first death reported recently. John Sail has now retired as Chairman and from the Council due to other business commitments and will be replaced by a new Chairman, Malcolm Mathison.

**DT, SCS** – The Covid-19 scheme extension has been offered out to fishing, nearly all fishing families have taken this up and will be provided with support until March next year. Thanks to TH and SfUK for their support on this. There has been a large influx in fishing families who have split up over the last couple of months, so lots of single parents are approaching SCS via FM to join the standard support scheme. Also seeing fishing families approaching SCS with poor mental health, predominantly on the Dad's side, so two parent families are being supported on the standard scheme. Normally the charity supports 440 children, as of this morning this figure is up to 708, around 80% of that increase is from the fishing sector. Concerns over the tie-up scheme in N. Ireland, there are reports of delays in government grants coming through. Only one MN case of a family with two children. Two hundred slow cookers have gone out to families in the last month, thanks to TH for their support. For Christmas, food parcels are going out to families supported by SCS including chocolate for the children.

**JL, SCFS** – The Chaplains in the Philippines are reporting on seafarers being repatriated although there are reports of seafarers returning to sea after only 30 days at home. Thanks to ISWAN for their support in the Philippines.

**JO, SMS** – Beginning to see a 'stream' as opposed to a 'flood' in the first lockdown of Covid related applications, which are being supported. Anticipating for this to continue over the Christmas period. About to engage on a revisit to those who have remained on Universal Credit and are struggling during this period with a view to providing additional support payments to these people. Very little MN demand coming through. Hoping that announcements of additional support available for the MN will have an impact.

**MF, SM** – SM has been involved in a case of suspected modern day slavery on the South coast which demonstrated a poor understanding and application of the law around modern slavery. Would like to see a change to the legislation for individuals who are in the NRM to be able to work because that is why these individuals have come to the UK in the first place. The Chaplains are delivering Christmas gifts. Seafarers' sense of isolation and loneliness seems to be more acute at this time of year when they are away from home. We must not forget the families at this time of year. SM has a lot of contact with families in the Philippines and this is a time of great uncertainty. Sea Sunday will be taking place for SM on 20<sup>th</sup> December because the Catholic Bishop postponed it from July. It will therefore coincide with the 'Seafarers delivering Christmas' campaign being co-ordinated by the International Chamber of Shipping. SM is looking forward to getting support from the Catholic Churches for the Sea Sunday campaign.

**SW, SHS** – Seeing a substantial increase in seafarers accessing mental health and wellbeing provisions through 'Togetherall'. Normally up to 10 people would access the service on a month by month basis. In October there were 50 new users. People are aware that they need assistance but it is concerning that so many people are suffering with poor mental health. There is expected to be a lot of research carried out into the effect of Covid-19 on seafarers. Mental health will be an area where seafarers are hugely affected and on their lifestyles. The second lockdown has not affected too many of SHS's services, a lot has been learnt from the first lockdown and SHS has been able to continue to provide face to face physio treatments and dental services. SHS is also part of the 'Seafarers delivering Christmas' campaign and members are encouraged to support and promote this as much as possible to show that we all appreciate what seafarers do for us.

**SB, SaSo** – Returning to ship visiting across Asia, South America, Africa and Europe, but not Singapore. Sometimes ship visiting is done up to the ramp. Seeing increasing demands for support from the communities. The medical, schooling and seafarer pupil projects are still suspended but trying to ensure that the Chaplaincy and outreach programme is still reaching out to the families as much as possible. The crisis response helpline now has an average of 130 calls per month. Specific mental health awareness training has been set up in response to the pandemic to be delivered mainly in the Philippines and Indonesia, over 600 people have been trained on this in the last month.

**SC, MNWB** – The Seafarer Support website was relaunched in August with a new interactive web platform to help seafarers and their families from the MN, FF and RN access the correct support at the time of need. This week the Board began a social media campaign to promote the service through its own online channels, through partnership organisations and the referring agencies. 140 constituent charities, promoted through the website, have been asked to promote the service through their own social media channels and website. This support is very much appreciated. Since the last WG the Board has promoted its mental health awareness course to constituent charities and Port Welfare Committees. This is an online trainer led Zoom course which uses the MNTB and MCG standard protocols as a best practice guide. The course is aimed at Chaplains and port visitors who provide direct support for seafarers. The four courses for December are fully booked and there is a waiting list of 22 for early 2021. PT and SC thanked TH for providing seed funding for Seafarer Support.

**TB, SfUK** – Trustees have agreed that up to £200K of the £2 million Covid-19 emergency fund can be earmarked for working age, UK MN people who have been impacted by Covid. That fund is now known as the UK Maritime Anchor Fund and further information can be found on the website <https://www.seafarers.uk/news/seafarers-uk-has-launched-the-uk-maritime-anchor-fund/> This has gone live today. The fund can be accessed by a phone call or email to SAIL. SW at SHS and JO at SMS will help distribute the funding. SfUK is also working with Seafarer Support, Maritime UK, UK CoS and the trade unions to promote and raise awareness of the fund. The fund is a package of support which also includes the potential for referrals to 'Relate', another funded service which SfUK provides to seafarers, and raises awareness of accessing 'Togetherall' through SHS. The 'Fishing Without a Safety Net' report has had a brilliant response and one of the recommendations in the report was a credit union to help people budget and access affordable

credit. The Board of Directors of a credit union has agreed to provide access to fishers and MN to the credit union. SfUK is hopeful that by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 there will be a credit union offer for all seafarers in the UK.

**VC, MCG** – The Redundancy and Retraining fund has been a huge success in terms of the number of people making contact. A catch-up meeting is scheduled in a couple of weeks and there is hopefully the prospect of more funding. The MCG Health sub group is focusing on what a cross-sector health strategy might look like post Covid-19. Thanked CofS and MNTB for their useful webinar on the MCG and MNTB mental health training standard. PT thanked VC for all her work over the years and wished her a long, healthy and happy retirement.

**VM, TH** – TH has been delighted to support the Redundancy and Retraining fund and to see how quickly it has been effective. TH remains open for applications for emergency funding due to Covid-19. The committee for routine grants will sit in February, with applications closing on the 20<sup>th</sup> January.

**Post-meeting update from Revd Ijeoma Ajibade, MtS as follows:** We are still ship visiting in all ports using PPE and visiting on the gangway or quayside. A few of our centres are open but this really depends on the local regulations. Three of our centres are in tier 3 areas and they will not be reopening when the lockdown is lifted. The MiFi units are proving to be very helpful. We are preparing Christmas gifts for seafarers and we will have a pre-recorded on-line carol service which people can view from the 9th of December.

**Post-meeting update from Chris Rankin regarding Seafarers Link as follows:** Covid is affecting our retired seafarers enormously. In my Seafarers Link call today 3.12.20 it was very obvious that they are all suffering from isolation and separation. In isolation they are unable to create a bubble. They have limited close family, different tier restrictions, and their established contacts with friends to share a pint are now physically limited. In addition to their vulnerability of age they are isolated and deprived by government restrictions to just simply enjoy their singular lifestyle. This potentially must create psychological elements to upset their state of mind. My longstanding connection with Seafarers Link has given me an appreciation of what these calls provide to my group/recipients. The present management has advised that the system will close from noon Christmas Eve until noon New Year's Eve which leaves my group with 3 weeks with no calls! I am unable to comment on what may now be the situation between other facilitators and their groups. So I would ask the question 'how can we give those elements of all continuing Seafarers Link participants some connectivity during these emotional dates in their solitary environment?'

**Closing Remark** - Members to forward any links, extra information and note amendments to Celia [celia@mnwb.org.uk](mailto:celia@mnwb.org.uk) Meeting format to remain flexible. Apologies for any unintended inaccuracies. Members agreed that meeting notes could be centrally displayed on the MNWB website.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2020 at 11:00** *(please also note the Maritime Minister is planning to attend this meeting for the first 30 minutes)*