



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 3RD FEBRUARY 2021

PRESENT: Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Revd Ijeoma Ajibade (IA)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
Ms Sara Baade (SB)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)
Mr Alex Campbell (ACL)	QVSR/Tilbury SC
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 Ben Gibbons (BG)	Seafarers UK (SfUK) Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr David Hammond (DH)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
Mr Roger Harris (RH)	ISWAN
Mr Graham Hockley (GH)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr Mick Howarth (MH)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Ms Deborah Layde (DL)	Seafarers UK (SfUK)
Ms Hazel Lewis (HL)	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)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
Ms Laura Simons (LS)	MCG Comms Consultant
Mrs Catherine Spencer	Seafarers UK (SfUK)
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)	Seafarers Hospital Society
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 & MW, UK CoS –The vaccine rollout is one of two main areas of concern for seafarers' welfare in the UK and elsewhere. The CoS and the Unions have written a letter to the Department of Health and Social Care calling for seafarers to be recognised as a priority group due to the importance of their work, the increased risks they face with travelling for work purposes and the timeline between two doses. The Chamber has liaised with the DfT so that they can lobby the Department for Health and Social Care, the Chamber has done this already and is awaiting a response. Internationally, other ship owners associations across Europe are carrying out similar lobbying efforts. Slovenia is prioritising seafarers, probably because the number of seafarers there is very small. Discussions are taking place with a view to preparing a ICS/ECSA letter to be sent to Health ministries in many more countries, to call for prioritisation for seafarers for vaccination and the creation of vaccination hubs to try to overcome the difficulty of managing the timeline between the two doses. On quarantining, the government has published a list of red countries and Home Office is currently taking a view that there are no quarantine exemptions to this. Seafarers returning to the UK from these countries are to be quarantined in hotels and not permitted to leave until after ten days. The

test and release programme does not apply in these cases. The Chamber has written a joint letter with Nautilus to the government asking for seafarer exemptions to be kept in place. The consequences for seafarers' welfare and the functioning of supply chains will be very serious unless this is changed. Yesterday the Scottish First Minister announced mandatory quarantining for all arrivals into Scotland without exception. The Chamber would prefer a co-ordinated approach across the UK but will clearly have to do some serious lobbying to protect the welfare of seafarers coming in and out of the UK and highlight the detrimental effects this will have on supply chains if this is applied strictly. MW – The Chamber will soon be publishing mental health practical guidelines for shipping companies on how they can improve mental wellbeing onboard. Welcomed members to engage with their thoughts on this. Hoping to organise an event to launch this in March.

JC, DfT – The big issues are quarantining, testing and access to the UK. Have been able to keep seafarers exempt from all the requirements except for the red list. The only exemptions from the red list countries are hauliers coming from Portugal, also UK and Irish nationals have their own exemptions. Work is ongoing to try to get exemptions put back in place for seafarers, making the argument that if the number of red list countries expands, which could potentially have serious consequences for freight coming into the UK by sea. Seafarers on the red list are allowed to leave the vessel, up to the end of the gangway, to undertake technical and essential inspections of the vessel. Once out of a red list country for more than ten days they can have access to shore leave. DfT is making the case for them. The government's focus on vaccinations is getting the first 'wave' of vulnerable people vaccinated by 15th February, working on whether the second wave carries on going down the age band or whether key workers can be prioritised within that. The DfT's focus on this is seafarers and other essential transport workers. There are a lot of questions that the DfT is trying to answer on numbers and, amongst other factors, how essential these workers are. Expecting to have a clearer position on hotel quarantining by next week and how this will impact seafarers. There seems to be a lot of confusion amongst officials at entry points on how seafarers should be treated. On 22nd February the government will publish its road map 'out of lockdown' which should cover key workers. To push the case forward for seafarers, any lobbying amongst members would be helpful. Government departments needing the most convincing would be the Home Office, Cabinet Office and Department for Health and social Care. PT asked JC to pass on his thanks to the Maritime Minister who had attended the last meeting.

ACL, QVSR/TSC – Trying to meet the needs of seafarers as much as possible but they are still reluctant to come off ships. The MiFi units have been a lifeline and are being used on ships to the max. Seafarers are also asking for alcohol which is a little difficult to manage. QVSR – A mass vaccination programme was undertaken on Saturday with PHE. Residents and staff have received the Covid vaccine and are feeling safer.

CR, MS – The bursary award is going through peaks and troughs and is currently at a 'peak' thanks to recent promotional activity. CR presented data analysis (*attached with cover email*) relating to the Covid-19 Redundancy and Retraining Bursary. Additional funding has been received from TH and the Slater Fund, which is managed by Nautilus. CR encouraged members to let seafarers know that this funding is available. A couple of seafarers have already secured jobs as a result of the project. LS noted that the majority of recipients of the grant were in the 2nd/3rd Officer category and encouraged members who had connections with ratings to promote the message.

CS, CA – CS had now been in post for two and a half months and thanked members who had given up their time for her on 1-1s and for updating her on the many services in the sector. CA is moving forward with action planning, there is a lot of work to be done with a particular focus on the standard of accommodation provided. There has not been a single Covid case at CA, most of the residents have been vaccinated and the staff will all be vaccinated next week.

CS, SfUK – The maritime quiz was very well attended, has received good feedback and expecting to repeat this again soon. Thanked MNWB for promoting this widely. SfUK launched the Anchor Fund in December, thanked RMT and Nautilus for giving this a big push, any help on further promotion would be grateful received. On Thursday, DL and the Impact team will be hosting a webinar on strategy and how the grants team and impact team will work moving forward. Expecting

to continue working with everybody as usual and looking at new ways of working proactively. Contact CS and DL for more information on this. In line with other changes at SfUK, SAW (Seafarers Awareness Week) will no longer continue as unfortunately the event is expensive to run and there was not a fundraising 'ask' attached to it. A letter on this will follow. SfUK will continue to advocate and campaign but with a more focused approach. If another organisation would like to continue to run SAW, SfUK would be happy to hand this over and to continue to participate with this.

DD, FM – Fishing continues to be chaotic, lots of anger around. Main issues are problems with exporting fresh product to Europe and Covid is knocking back markets a long way. Can no longer export certain amounts of our shellfish to Europe which will impact on a lot of mussels, scallops and other shellfish. Seeing an uptick in applications in casework as expected. On Covid vaccinations, FM have been approached by a number of health commissioning bodies and public health groups inviting them to become vaccination 'champions' to encourage fishing communities and others to engage with the vaccination plan. As part of this, FM is trying to encourage some of the local groups, e.g. rough sleepers and fishers who don't tend to keep medical appointments, to use the mobile vaccination facilities used in care homes. The Scottish government has this morning announced another £7.7 million of support to the industry, part of that offer is a £300K fund which FM can access to make welfare financial assistance grants to active fishermen and their families in Scotland. FM will have a discussion with SMS, SHS and SCS on how to manage this.

DH, HRAS – From an international perspective there is concern over the MT Sea Princess case off the UAE, involving a suspected suicide by hanging. This raises more concerns over the crew change crisis, seafarers staying onboard for long periods of time and questions on accountability. Thanked co-ordination and engagement of ISWAN India, MtS in Dubai and India, and SaSo. HRAS only engage when directly approached by seafarers. The decision was taken internally and with trustee approval to provide public reporting but HRAS did not share the very distressing images for this case. MtS is arranging access onboard the vessel, grateful for this and to the UAE authorities. HRAS remains concerned about the lack of unity on the key worker status issue at the IMO with flag states. Publicly supporting the Neptune Declaration of seafarer wellbeing and crew change and hope to see flag and state support. Pleased to have had an exceptionally strong international response for trustee roles, five new trustees will be announced in Q2. In the Portsmouth area, the NHS is seeking support from veterans to assist as vaccinators. Members are encouraged to contact DH for further information. Further information on the reporting of the MT Sea Princess suspected suicide case from a family perspective can be found at: <https://www.humanrightsatsea.org/2021/02/01/family-plea-for-investigation-and-accountability-into-sons-death-on-mt-sea-princess/>

DT, SCS – Applications are still coming in, mainly from the North on the fishing side. These are not easing up but not seeing the huge tsunami anticipated. By the beginning of April, some of the families supported with interim help will have been supported for one year, including approx. 150 children. This will need to be discussed further with partners FM, SMS and SHS. SCS is now 200 years old and will begin anniversary celebrations in April.

GH & LS, MCG – MCG is going through a period of transition, BG has succeeded Val Coleman who will now be looked after by Nautilus as opposed to SfUK. Thanked both organisations for this and thanked MS for their work on the Bursary. Will continue to promote work on mental health. First meeting will take place next week, caseworking will be considered amongst other topics. LS – Bursary fund will be key activity for MCG on communications side, looking at how to further promote the message to ratings. Encouraged members to get in touch with ideas on how to promote this including through channels within their own organisations. Before Christmas, a questionnaire was sent out to those who have purchased the mental health and wellbeing training standard for feedback and to recruit future ambassadors. At the next meeting plans will be made for the next twelve months and considering what other communications priorities should be focused on. The last year has been good for MCG, the sector should be congratulated for collaborating effectively during the pandemic.

GL & HL, MCA – MCA is involved in discussions with JC regarding various aspects that the DfT is leading on: seafarers' exemption for travel, concerns over quarantine and vaccinations. MCA is also involved in discussions on seafarers' access to shore leave during Covid. The MCA has issued a new amendment to a Covid-19 extension for seafarers' employment agreement, which is guidance for shipping companies with seafarers onboard who want to stay longer than their contracted period. Nationally, the MCA is continuing with surveys and inspections on UK ships and fishing vessels, and on foreign ships when there is a specific report on crew health and welfare. If unable to carry out normal processes for seafarers' or ship certifications, the MCA is continuing with the now established system of alternative measures to ensure that things continue to move forward in the UK and for UK seafarers overseas. PT thanked the MCA for their proactive contribution to the PWCs around the country. HL introduced herself as the MCA's Seafarer Safety and Human Element Policy Manager. Her work covers seafarers' health and safety, regulations and guidance, and human element issues, including seafarer wellbeing. HL has been working on a marine information note on understanding the longer-term wellbeing impacts of the pandemic on seafarers, aimed at shipowners and operators. This covers stresses as a result of the pandemic and crew change crisis including reduced shore leave, isolation and Covid related health concerns. It includes ways to support seafarers and links to resources. This draws heavily on the MCA's Wellbeing at Sea guides for organisations: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/min-635-m-wellbeing-at-sea-publications/min-635-m-wellbeing-at-sea-publications> Members who would be interested in reviewing the guidance or think there is any way the Human Element team can support their work on seafarer wellbeing can email hazel.lewis@mcga.gov.uk Members are encouraged to promote the guidance due to be published in the next few weeks. Work is being carried out with the fishing safety team to see if there is a need for similar guidance for fishers.

JL, SCFS – Five new trustees have joined. Access is restricted in many ports, the ports do accept that the work is important but the main resistance is coming from ships' Captains.

JO, SMS – Routine business continues as normal. Seeing a distinct upturn in Covid related grants coming through, including some debt related applications which were expected to pick up. Expecting to see a 'long spring' for Covid related support and likely to see an increasing demand moving forward.

MH, NWF – Two members of staff have tested positive in the care home. All residents are well, all were recently tested and all results were negative. One resident in TH hub tested positive, all other residents in the building were tested, all were negative. Most of the staff have now been vaccinated although five members of staff have refused to be vaccinated. A new recruiting standard has been introduced so that new employees must be prepared to be vaccinated in order to secure a job. A national care forum is taking a test case to court to see if it is possible to insist staff are vaccinated providing there is no medical reason to exclude them, to maximise protection for care home residents and staff. Will soon receive over £8K from the Covid rapid testing fund to carry out rapid flow testing for care home staff. Wirral will also be providing financial support to supported housing schemes and extra care housing schemes. Results are now in for last years' caseworker service: supported 440 people, only slightly down from the previous year. This is pleasing as there was a lack of promotion of the service due to the lockdowns. Financial impact on the service has seen an increase from just over £800K to just over £1 million in grants to seafarers. Wirral has announced a free counselling service for care home and home care staff who are feeling anxious at this time.

RH, ISWAN – Concerns over the number of abandoned vessels with seafarers onboard, there have reportedly been over 20 since the beginning of the year. Working with ITF, ICS, MtS and others to support seafarers and ensure they are reported to the IMO/ILO database. Yacht Crew Help, <https://www.yachtcrewhelp.org/> launched before Christmas and aimed at superyacht crew is starting to receive calls on the helpline.

SW, SHS – Steady increase in Covid and debt related requests for support. The Anchor Fund has received a small number of applicants. Members are encouraged to spread the message on this to seafarers in need, Facebook is an effective channel for reaching seafarers. Seen an increase in take up for the physio service. Dreadnought priority service is on hold due to Covid although referrals

are being put on a waiting list. Would also suggest seeking care locally though the NHS which may be quicker. SHS will be celebrating its bicentenary this year which will coincide with a new website and new logo and a video which gives an insight into SHS.

SB, SaSo – Chaplains are now active around the world apart from the Myanmar team with visits being made at least up to the gangway. The Chaplaincy team in Singapore have had all their vaccines as part of a push in Singapore to prioritise seafarers.

VM, TH – Continuing to award emergency funding. Last grants committee for this financial year will be next week, will then be looking at more routine applications from the end of March for the new financial year.

SC, MNWB - The MiFi partnership programme jointly funded by MNWB, DfT and Seafarers UK continues to provide communication for seafarers during the pandemic. Maritime welfare charities that have MiFi devices are encouraged to complete a survey to help the Board evaluate the project before the 8th February deadline. The Board has developed a new bespoke seafarers' mental health and wellbeing 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. Four courses were held in December and three in January, the feedback has been very positive. Constituent members who have suggestions on new training initiatives are encouraged to contact Helen van Gass, Training Manager: helen@mnwb.org.uk MNWB's Council of Management have recently approved the Board's 2021 strategic objectives and members are encouraged to view these on the MNWB website <https://www.mnwb.org/about-us>

MF, SM – The Chaplains continue to work to the best of their ability, despite lockdown.

IA, MtS - Continuing to ship visit on the gangway and shop for seafarers who cannot get off their ships.

Closing Remark - 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 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. Members agreed that meeting notes could be centrally displayed on the MNWB website.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 3rd March 2021 at 11:00