



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

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

PRESENT: Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Ms Lynette Crossley (LC)	Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA)
Cdre David Dickens (DD)	The Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Mr Ben Gibbons (BG)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr David Hammond (DH)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
Mr Roger Harris (RH)	ISWAN
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Fr. John Lavers (JL)	Stella Maris (SM)
Mr John Lowry (JL)	Seamen's Christian Friend Society (SCFS)
Mr Ken McLean (KM)	IMarEst Guild of Benevolence (IMarEst)
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)
Mrs Deanne Thomas (DT)	Sailors' Children's Society (SCS)

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:

DA, NI - The launch event for the joint Chamber/maritime Unions' practical guidance for the UK shipping industry on seafarer mental wellbeing is taking place on 23rd March and is open to all: <https://www.ukchamberofshipping.com/events/23-march-2021-mental-health-practical-guidelines-launch-webinar/> MIN656 was published today by the MCA, and was worked on jointly by the MCA, Unions and Chamber of Shipping. This is guidance to shipping companies on managing effects of the pandemic. NI yesterday received a detailed response from the Treasury regarding Seafarers Earnings Deduction (SED) which can be summarised as a firm 'No'. This is a complicated process, NI will be working with specialist organisations to produce guidance on this for seafarers. In their response, Treasury pointed out that the eligibility period can be extended and tax claimed back for previous years. Nevertheless, large tax bills could cause significant issues for many seafarers. It has also been confirmed that there are no exemptions for seafarers travelling back from 'red list' countries and that they will be required to quarantine in hotels on arrival into the UK. This could only exacerbate the crew change crisis due to hotel costs in the UK to be paid by shipping companies. Different countries have different rules on testing for seafarers joining ships, some require lateral flow tests or PCRs, and there are reports of difficulties for seafarers required to book a test at short notice. NI have requested that DfT allow seafarers to obtain tests at hauliers sites, waiting to hear back on this.

JC, DfT – Not expecting anything maritime related to be announced in the Budget. Expect news on tonnage tax to be included in a package of announcements from Treasury following the Budget. Maritime UK launched the mental health pledge yesterday which the Minister has also signed. Vaccinations will continue according to age and health priorities, no priority is to be given to key workers, which includes seafarers. Discussions are being held with DHSC regarding

seafarers who are abroad and are unable to get back to the UK to be vaccinated, due to their employment and continued crew transfer difficulties. All companies with over 50 employees are now being provided with testing kits and the general advice is for testing to be carried out twice a week. A number of ports have shown interest in working with DHSC on the workplace testing programme. Restarting the cruise sector is another issue being worked on and is subject to requirements from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, this should hopefully see some seafarers being re-employed. DHSC has confirmed that anybody resident in the UK is eligible for a vaccination and this would include seafarers laid up on vessels in the UK.

DA asked for guidance for seafarers who are away or on a short period of leave regarding the recommended time window for the second vaccination dose. JC advised that HSC would consider fast-tracking as there was a justifiable reason why seafarers may not meet the normal vaccination period. JC will check with HSC again to see if this can be made into a policy orientated announcement. JC will also check to see if seafarers can use hauliers testing sites.

DD questioned whether migrant workers on transit visas working on UK fishing vessels would be eligible for UK vaccinations at no cost or whether they would need to pay. JC advised that this would be determined by whether they were considered to be resident in the UK or working in UK waters on a UK registered vessel but that he would seek further clarity from DHSC.

GL, MCA – MIN656 has been issued: [MIN 656 \(M\): Understanding the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on seafarer wellbeing - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/min-656-understanding-the-long-term-impacts-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-seafarer-wellbeing) The press release can also be viewed at: <https://www.ukshipregister.co.uk/news/new-guidance-as-the-uk-leads-the-way-in-seafarer-welfare/> This is guidance looking at the long-term wellbeing effects of Covid and is published alongside the Mental Health in Maritime Pledge, which was organised by Maritime UK through the Mental Health in Maritime network. The Shipping Minister and Brian Johnson, MCA Chief Executive, are both signatories of this. The document highlights the long-term stresses of Covid on seafarers, provides guidance and resources available. The guidance will help ship owners and operators going forward. SEA extensions beyond an acceptable length of time must be reported to the Flag state. There are currently 10 live cases for UK seafarers being worked on for this, more are expected in the next month due to the timing of those who joined ships last year.

RH, ISWAN – Vaccinations remains a big issue, in lots of countries priorities are age related and seafarers are lower down the priority list for vaccinations. In the Philippines, vaccinations have only just started and seafarers are around Group 8. Only around 1 in 100 Filipinos can be vaccinated at the moment. A lot of work is currently going on at a high level on myth busting the vaccine. The IMO, WHO, ICS and ITF are working on a social media campaign and leaflets. The biggest question for seafarers is how and when they can be vaccinated. Continuing to receive a high number of calls on the helpline regarding ship abandonments around the world. ISWAN is working with other welfare organisations, ITF and shipowners to support seafarers involved in these cases. Also continuing to receive calls from seafarers in mental distress and financial difficulties.

BG/LS, MCG – The Redundancy & Retraining bursary has had over 40 successful applications to date, just under half the bursary has been spent. Started with over £40K in the fund and just over £20K is left. More applications have been received from officers than ratings, work is ongoing to raise the profile of the fund amongst ratings. A couple of beneficiaries have agreed to be case studies to help with the publicity.

CR, MS – Initial applications to the Redundancy & Retraining bursary were from officers, more recently ratings have been applying, so word is getting around. Reasons for applying have been equally due to redundancy and loss of contract. Applicants' interest is mostly equal between upskilling a maritime qualification and STCW refreshers, for example to enter the offshore or wind farms sectors. There has been a very low take up from those in the ferry sector but lots of take up from those in the offshore, deep sea and cruise sectors. A push is needed from the Unions for the ferry sector.

CS, SfUK – Annual grant award meeting is on 11th March, this is probably SfUK's biggest ever grants meeting for this time of year. £1.1 million of grants to be decided on at the meeting. SfUK will be rebranding on 15th March, a new name and logo will be revealed on this date. This should address challenges experienced with the current name. There will be a press release that day and members' support on their social media channels would be greatly appreciated. Costs for the rebranding have been kept very low and a large amount of the work has been carried out in-house. The strategy will be launched on the same day. The webinar which took place at the beginning of February briefed beneficiary organisations and stakeholders on how SfUK will be moving forward. Please contact CS, DL or TB if you would like a copy of the recording of the webinar. The Anchor Fund has seen a lot of activity in January.

DD, FM – The long anticipated second surge has arrived with a focus on general living expenses and, increasingly, debts. Every species of fish now needing a special arrangement with the EU to export is causing continued anger and chaos. Since the last meeting there has sadly been another two deaths at sea, bringing the total to seven since November; and another life changing injury bringing this total to five.

DT, SCS – Applications from fishing families continues to increase on a daily basis. Still no applications from the MN. Mental health is very poor across the families, lots of referrals are being made to children's services due to concerns for the welfare of children whose parents are struggling with their mental health. Discussing with DD the potential extension in April for support to FF families, mostly Northern based, who are currently receiving the Covid financial support.

JL, SM – All Chaplains and almost 100 volunteers are being retrained with a greater emphasis on mental health issues. SM is working with ISWAN on this. The next module will be on suicide prevention, an uptick has been noted on suicides and attempted suicides during the lockdown. The Centenary support fund kicked off in the last couple of weeks and applications are being received from seafarers and particularly from fishers. The chaplains are continuing to visit ships, maintaining social distancing and adhering to government guidelines.

JL, SCFS – Chaplains are visiting ships and crew where they can. Where there are access issues meetings are made on the quayside, some are not getting into ports at all. Largely reliant on what ships' Captains are comfortable with. SCFS has some new trustees, several with a RN background.

JO, SMS – FM, SCS, SHS and SMS are working very closely on Covid related grants. Since the beginning of the campaign, around £400K has gone directly to fishers and their families. The latest rates of activity show that we are above 50% of demand of the peak of the April lockdown, this is predominantly related to general living expenses, more debt is creeping in, and we expect that debt to climb steadily. Continuing to provide high levels of support. These figures do not include separate activity for the Maritime Anchor Fund direct to MN people or the Scottish government fund being paid to fishermen in Scotland.

KM, IMarEst – One of the cadets being mentored sat his OOW Class 4 Oral last week and passed. The time period was two weeks from booking the oral to passing the exam. Congrats to the MCA for this smooth process.

DH, HRAS – Ongoing investigation with a German ship management firm, regarding an alleged threat to life made to a Panamanian cadet on a Panamanian vessel which docked at Tilbury. Thanked Alex Campbell and his team and MtS for acting so quickly on this from a welfare perspective. HRAS due to be issuing short briefing notes on stowaways and abandoned vessels and other topics, which are being reviewed by a number of international law firms. Delighted to announce that Lord Teverson will be HRAS's first patron.

GL stated that, in general terms, under powers of port state control, MCA can approach the other ship's flag state in incidents such as the one reported above.

LC, MPHA – All staff at MPHA have been vaccinated as front line health workers. MPHA has NHS testing kits and officers will carry out tests before boarding vessels. Continuing to carry out proper inspections for sanitation and take water samples. Noted an increase in certificates from unauthorised ports, MPHA have recently issued two replacement certificates which were from West African ports. An Association of Port Health Authorities coffee morning will soon begin and MPHA will be promoting their approach. LC has been asked to write a piece for the Association of Port Health Authorities handbook to be published later in the year and would be grateful if members could provide any links to training or resources on mental health. Resources would be for port health officers, agencies or anybody who comes into contact with ships crews and where they might access help.

VM, TH – Last grants round for this financial year was held in mid February, now looking at applications for the first round of the next financial year in April. Closing date for applications is 29th March.

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 gave their consent for a social media phot and agreed that meeting notes could be centrally displayed on the MNWB website.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 7th April 2021 at 11:00