



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 3rd JUNE 2020

PRESENT: Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
Mr Neil Atkinson (NA)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Mr Ben Bailey (BB)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
Mr Alex Campbell (ACL)	Queen Victoria's Seamen's Rest (QVSR)/Tilbury SC
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Ms Lynette Crossley (LC)	Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA)
Cdre David Dickens (DD)	Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Ms Fearn Griffin (FG)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Mr David Hammond (DH)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
Mr Roger Harris (RH)	Int. Seafarers' Welfare Assistance Network (ISWAN)
Mr Graham Hockley (GH)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
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. David Parsons (DP)	Merchant Navy Association (MNA)
Mr Andrew Pitcher (AP)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)
Mrs Christine Rankin (CR)	The Watch Ashore (WA)
Ms Laura Simons (LS)	MCG Comms Consultant
Mr Mark Simmonds (MS)	British Ports Association (BPA)
Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Mrs Deanne Thomas (DT)	Sailors' Children's Society (SCS)
Mr Christian Turner (CT)	Chamber of Shipping (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:

JC, DfT – Trying to return to business as usual as much as possible. Quarantine requirements still due to start on the 8th June. Not yet seen the SI, due later today. A lot of lobbying from both the aviation and maritime industry. Home Office are still working through the many issues on quarantine. Exemption granted for seafarers and a number of other key workers is not expected to change. Port states and flag state working to reach an agreement on how ferries will be affected with regard to social distancing onboard, who provides PPE, advice to passengers when they come into the UK or another state etc. At the moment the intention is for a review every three weeks. Crew changes still a big issue. Currently at about 80-85% compliant with requirements for ICS/IMO protocols. There are similar protocols for the aviation industry so a lot could be joined up. Hoping to make a statement of intent if not fully signed up to the protocols before the 15th June when the next crew changes are due to take place. India have changed their standard operating protocols again which has caused a lot of issues for companies working to get Indian nationals back home. Aviation carriers are also having to make changes to ensure that they comply with

these new protocols. The cruise sector has been required to change air carrier operator in order to comply. Singapore has made some concessions, will allow crew changes or seafarers to transit if their contract is not extended. A lot of issues in the Philippines, concerns of rumours of incidents of bribery amongst local officials to enable seafarers to get off vessels and to the airport. An issue was raised about bonds on the cruise vessels in the UK which is still being discussed with HMRC. This was raising some concern amongst the charities.

TS, CoS – Continuing difficulties in Asia to change crew, especially foreign nationals in China, South Korea, Singapore. Some of these countries are imposing 14 day quarantine on all foreign nationals on arrival. Singapore government is concerned that if restrictions are relaxed they will be inundated with ships and seafarers wanting to change crew. In the Philippines there are flights for Filipino seafarers to return home but these are being limited to 600 people per day causing a backlog. Seafarers returning to the Philippines are being given antigen tests for Covid-19 on arrival and are required to self-isolate if they test positive. Quarantine requirements are to self-isolate for 14 days on arrival into the UK and to complete the online Public Health Locator Form. Categories of people exempt from this is very small, and includes diplomatic personnel. It does apply to seafarers and workers on offshore installations. The form is due to be available on the Gov.uk website tomorrow. People will be strongly encouraged to complete this form before they arrive in the UK. Border Force will carry out spot checks and people can face a fine of up to £100 if they refuse to complete the form or can be deported if they do not have UK residency. Workers on ferries going to and from the UK will only need to fill in the form if they are leaving the vessel and passing a Border Force check point. Pushing for an alternative means of providing Border Force with the information that they would need for seafarers such as providing a copy of the crew list for each vessel. For exemption from quarantine, the definition of seafarers being used is anyone working on ships but does not include Masters and pilots who have their own exemptions. Charterers personnel on offshore vessels who might not always be considered as seafarers will be included. To confirm seamen status to Border Force officials a letter with joining instructions for the ship will need to be shown or a discharge book or seafarer's identity document under the ILO conventions. The exemption from quarantine applies to seafarers coming to the UK to join a ship or coming ashore to be repatriated. For workers on offshore installations the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) have issued a template letter and accompanying letter asking people to state what their occupation is and to justify their journey. This is still being worked on with BEIS. The issue on crew change in Milford Haven, discussed last week, appears to have been resolved. Crew changes around Europe are becoming easier, more flights and transport links are being re-established. 15th June deadline approaching that applies to contracts that fall under the International Bargaining Forum. Visas are a big issue in Europe. Home Affairs departments of European member states are not keen to waive visa requirements. A videoconference of European Home Affairs ministers taking place tomorrow, hoping to come to some arrangements whereby standard requirements can be waived in the short term whilst the backlog of seafarers needing to come to Europe who don't have the documentation that is normally required is cleared. Seafarer well-being guides are available from the Stationery Office www.tsoshop.co.uk

PT noted that an estimated that 150,000-200,000 seafarers are waiting to be crew changed and that around 12,000 UK seafarers are due to be replaced in the near future. The real financial problems may surface when these people return home.

DA, NI – Very busy with Covid-19 related enquiries from members. Considering how to operate in the 'new normal' as measures begin to ease. Concerns that the Public Health Locator Form could be a barrier to shore leave. Questioned what timescale government are looking at to start up the inspection programme again in order to get seafarers back onboard. Concerns were expressed regarding renewing of contracts and shore leave. *JC responded that seafarers should be entitled to shore leave and that no changes were expected on this unless local restrictions were in place. JC will check on the Public Health Locator Form with regard to shore leave. Action: JC*

NA, MCA – In the process of producing Marine information notes for international and domestic fleets on how to return to surveying and inspecting ships. Inability to travel around the world is a problem, will be relying on classification surveyors to carry out survey work. No news yet on port state control inspections, for the UK this will be governed by the Paris MoU. Would expect the survey work to come first and routine port state control inspections second although if MLC necessitated a visit to a ship then this would most likely take place. Getting fishing vessels back to sea again will be a priority as a large number of fishing vessels require surveys and fishermen need to return to work. Seafarers leaving ships will need to carry an identity document or discharge book although a paper discharge should suffice for those who do not have a discharge book, such as workers on offshore supply vessels. MIN 612 being revised as three-month short term certificates are currently being issued. Any return to operation on domestic vessels is dependent on local guidance such as within N. Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Currently monitoring some ships in Tilbury albeit not had any complaints from the ships directly. Repatriation remains an emerging issue worldwide.

AC, QVSR/TSC – Communication is top priority. Delighted that Inmarsat have now supplied TSC with satellite phones that are free for crew on ships to use to contact families. Inmarsat will be pleased to supply other locations with satellite phones. Please contact Alex for further information alexcampbell@qvsr.org.uk Crew on ships at Tilbury are concerned that port staff and pilots are not wearing PPE which makes the crew feel somewhat at risk. It is not unusual for staff to come across crew who have been at sea for fifteen months and are awaiting crew changes. Last week crew were expected to come off ships in Tilbury but nobody has, even though the lockdown has been relaxed. Thanked JC for his help with HMRC on the bond issue as many seafarers have been requesting cigarettes. PLA has produced a short film entitled 'Thanking Seafarers' and features some of the work carried out at the Port of Tilbury: <https://youtu.be/LFp50C1HcBc>
TS raised the point yesterday on a call with PHE that if pilots observe the two metre social distancing rule on ships, proper hygiene procedures are carried out and the European Guidance document drawn up by ECSA, ETF trade unions and European Maritime Pilots Association on the use of PPE is being observed then any risk of infection is being minimised to the greatest extent possible. If pilots are refusing to wear PPE then it would be helpful to know more detail on this.

AP, SS – Big disparity between the Far East and the rest of the world. Ship visiting has resumed in Russia and gangway visits being carried out in South Africa. In Singapore there has been a loosening of restrictions which will be reviewed at the end of June, but ship visiting is still not allowed and has been classified as a non-essential activity by the port authority. In the Philippines, the modified enhanced community quarantine enforced to the 31st May has been downgraded to a general quarantine. SS Chaplain who does not live in Manila is not allowed in except for 'valid reasons' which appear to be subject to interpretation by those who man the check points.

BB, MtS – Continue to do gangway ship visiting in many ports around the world and this has restarted in South, East and West Africa. In the UK, centres are thinking about what needs to be done in order to safely re-open. The guidance that the Mission created is now with ICMA and is being moved towards an ICMA-wide document. Waiting for the ICMA trustees to sign off on this so that it can be made widely available. In the UK a few Indian seafarers are still awaiting repatriation, continuing to work with them, ensuring they have enough food vouchers and paying for their accommodation/rent. Grateful to Seafarers Emergency Fund for making these funds available.

CR, WA – Beneficiaries are well and staff are content. Decided to continue the lockdown for another two weeks. Residents have been allowed to mix together. Enjoyed a BBQ and quiz at the weekend with some joining by Zoom. The team at MP have been in contact to set up a quiz between the two care homes. One member of staff will return to work at the beginning of July and another staff member with underlying conditions is working from home. No reported cases of Covid-19.

DD, FM – From an industry perspective there are green shoots with a lot of boats trying to get out but prices are poor and there is now a potential for oversupply. Thanked Julie Carlton, MCA as there is now recognition that the fishing industry knows very little about the rules and regulations for seafarers stranded in the UK. Julie is speaking to the industry but it would be helpful if JC, the Unions or NA could recommend a route in for the industry to join the repatriation queue. Seeing reduced demand for general living expenses linked to people accessing UC and getting back to sea. Still predicting a surge in July-Sept based primarily on debt. Grateful to SfUK for striking up a contract with Relate as relationships are becoming an issue. Have now failed with four bids (two in Scotland, two in England) for government funding support for charities – too big to qualify. Trustees have had to clear another £250K out of reserves to support business continuity and emergency response and the most challenging part of the programme has not yet been reached.

DP, MNA – John Sail has temporarily stood down as Chairman of the MNA. Malcolm Mathison, Vice Chairman has taken over John's role. MN people are very stoic so there is not much evidence of demand from them at this time. There have been a couple of requests for fishermen, passed on to FM. The branches are continuing to meet on Zoom on a regular basis. Encouraged anybody who finds somebody who needs help to contact Helen van Gass, Welfare and Training Officer at MNWB helen@mnwb.org.uk

DT, SCS – Last 5/6 days have been calmer, F/F applications for assistance have slowed down. Spoke to families on Friday, only 10% are sending children back to school this week. Trustees have just authorised further assistance of £10 per week per child extension to get each of those families through to the summer school holidays. First payments of Covid extension to fishing families have started to go out this week, this was another three-month extension on temporary support. Grateful to TH, SfUK and MNWB for their recent help with funding. Have this week applied to the government fund for funding to cover cancelled fundraising events. Still not seeing any MN cases.

GH, MCG – Charities are reporting very little requirement from the MN. Main grant making charities have allocated specific monies to different sectors, they are nearly all spent up on fishing fleets and are reallocating their proportions. On Monday's meeting had a useful discussion about what is happening next, looking at impact on charities' incomes from a lack of fundraising events and from investments. For care homes, a move towards local authorities requiring a living wage as opposed to a minimum wage being paid. Trying to pull

together a meeting of financial trustees/heads of finance to compare notes and look forward together. Collaboration front is going well, good sharing of fundraising initiatives and looking to support Seafarer Support when it launches. **LS** – Held first virtual meeting for the communication leads within MCG member organisations last Friday. Have picked up on the message from the WG that potential MN beneficiaries are not being reached. Have come up with a draft generic message to use across the board, along the lines of “Tell your crew, tell your colleagues, tell your mates – do it now before it’s too late”. This is about help being available and where to get it. This is something that individual organisations could label in their own way, whether that is to channel people to Seafarer Support or individual charities. Feedback on this would be very welcome. Another meeting scheduled for Friday to consider how to move forward. The message is simple, clear and actionable and word of mouth is the most effective way of getting messages out to this group. Will be working with MNWB to support the relaunch of Seafarer Support and will also consider how to link into the crew change date of 15th June.

JL, SCFS – When port access is made available to ships, Captains often refuse visits as they are fearful that Covid-19 could be brought onto the ships. Most of the Chaplains in the Philippines are locked into the residential areas that they live in as it is not possible to get out unless individuals have a very valid reason.

KM, IMarEst – Most members are MN beneficiaries, therefore very little to report but we are ready for them as and when. Interested to hear about the message being developed by LS and looking forward to the relaunch of Seafarer Support. In Scotland the fishing industry is getting back to normal, creel fishing boats are heading back out. Supermarkets in the UK are not selling fish or lamb. Encouraged members to buy fish, herring season has now started.

LC, MPHA – Carrying on with ship sanitation certificates, starting to visit ships again using any PPE that is deemed necessary. Taking water supplies as part of ship sanitation inspection and some vessels had certificates which were out of date. Our risk assessments and protocols for getting onboard have been circulated by the Association of Port Health Authorities and have been very well received. Received an email from Indonesia wanting to follow up on how to carry out the risk assessments. Will continue trying to expand on what we do in the safest possible way as no more guidance has been issued. The wearing of PPE is very reassuring for the crew and we are being welcomed onboard to carry out the inspections and water sampling.

RH, ISWAN – Still receiving a high number of calls, many around financial hardship. Seafarers are facing a bleak future, those in the Philippines and India do not have the social security safety net that we have here in the UK. Have been helping to get Indian seafarers home from around the world. Have been involved in helping 164 seafarers and their families return home from the UK. Contacted by the British Legion in Chile regarding an 80 year old former seafarer who had a stroke whilst on business in Chile, and have been working with NWF and the British Embassy to help bring him home. Produced two new resources – a poster on psychological first aid which will be distributed later this week, aiming to get these onboard cruise ships where seafarers may be having issues with their mental wellbeing. About to launch a two hour online training on coping with stress during the pandemic, aimed at shore side staff and seafarers.

VM, TH – Continuing to award emergency grants and have a small amount left in the original amount set aside. The Board are looking at what our forward strategy will be on that and what funding can be released. Will update once have more information.

Apologies received from SfUK and reminder to members as follows:

£2m C19 EF guidelines can be found on the website under ‘Helping you’ on the grant funding pages:

<https://www.seafarers.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Seafarers-UK-COVID19-Emergency-Fund-Guidelines-for-applicants.pdf>

A reminder also that Seafarers Awareness Week is at the beginning of July in support of seafarers as key workers.

Closing Remark - Members to forward any links, extra information and note amendments to Celia celia@mnwb.org.uk Meeting format to remain flexible. Members content to continue meeting on a weekly basis. Apologies for any unintended inaccuracies. Members agreed that meeting notes could be centrally displayed on the MNWB website.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 10th June 2020 at 11:00

DRAFT