



## MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

### NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SSWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 4<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2021

<b>PRESENT:</b> Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
Mrs Ruth Campbell (RC)	Queen Victoria Seamen's Rest (QVSR)/Tilbury SC
Ms Lynette Crossley (LC)	Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA)
Cdre David Dickens (DD)	The Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Mr Simon Graine (SG)	Int'l Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN)
Mr Tom Holmer (TH)	MNWB PWC Manager
Mr Mick Howarth (MH)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Ms Anne McLaren (AM)	Stella Maris (SM)
Ms Elizabeth Mavropolou (EM)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
Miss Victoria Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
Mrs Christine Rankin (CR)	The Watch Ashore (WA)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
Ms Laura Simons (LS)	MCG Consultant
Mrs Catherine Spencer	The Seafarers' Charity (TSC)
Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Ms Sara Walsh (SW)	British Ports Association (BPA)
Mrs Sandra Welch (SW)	Seafarers Hospital Society (SHS)
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:

**DA, NI** – Continuing issues on access to vaccines for seafarers. NI and the UK CoS have written jointly to the Secretary of State for Health asking for further clarification on this and clarification on eligibility for non-UK seafarers calling into UK ports. Still getting reports of seafarers being denied shore leave, either as a blanket policy or in certain ports. Working with the MCA to update guidance on this, which remains open to interpretation. A lot of seafarers getting in touch with NI to ask whether they can be required to have a vaccine by their employer. NI's position is that seafarers should be encouraged to receive the vaccine and should be given relevant guidance by their employer. There isn't any guidance for those who choose not to have the vaccine which is causing some concern. NI are back in the office and hoping to move towards returning to travelling.

**GL, MCA** – MIN 632 will be published this week and will include some information on shore leave. SEAs - The number of people requesting extensions to their contract has increased. MCA is working on cases for 64 seafarers on UK flagged ships who have worked over their contracts. 375 seafarers have been successfully repatriated after working over their contract. MCA continues to support the vaccination programme. Continuing with surveys and inspections of UK and foreign flagged vessels; a variety of issues have been successfully dealt with. Surveyors are working as normal as much as they can although there are restrictions on access to certain vessels depending on where those vessels have been, and surveyors are still not travelling overseas. If there is a real need to board a particular ship, even if it has recently been in a red list country, then this is dealt with on a case-by-case basis. For shore leave specific cases, members were encouraged to contact their local MCA marine office or email [mlc@mcga.gov.uk](mailto:mlc@mcga.gov.uk)

A UK seafarer or a seafarer in the UK can contact MCA and their case will be followed up or dealt with on a one to one basis.

**TS, UK CoS** – Reported on a company that had Indian seafarers who wanted to transit the UK and go on to Uruguay. They were refused boarding on the basis of reports that some Indian 'seafarers' were coming to the UK and seeking asylum. This was given as justification for preventing these bona fide Indian seafarers from boarding their flight to join a ship in Montevideo. There was also a problem with some crew arriving from the Philippines to join a ferry who were forced to go into managed quarantine on arrival at Heathrow. The company was told that Border Force had taken advice from DHSC and that if the crew been joining a cruise ship they would have been allowed to proceed. One of the companies concerned asked if the Chamber could write a letter for the seafarers to show to Border Force. TS would be willing to update and reissue the existing joint UK CofS/NI letter. This has been reported to the Chamber's contact at Border Force and to John Cousley. It was reported in the trade press that the Chamber and NI had written jointly to the Secretary of State asking for this advice to be published. Still waiting for the official statement from government on their policy.

**MW, UK CoS** – There have been a number of queries in the last week regarding seafarers' vaccination certification. A vaccination slip is received detailing first and second doses, batch number, vaccine type and the person's name. However, whilst being able to access the vaccine, foreign nationals are unable to receive a digital pass without an NHS number. NHS has advised that they can issue letters to confirm vaccinations although the seafarers would require a British postcode. Spoke to RC recently to find out if a letter could be issued by the local health authority which had vaccinated seafarers in Tilbury. The Chamber will be taking this to the International Chamber vaccination task force to ensure that vaccinations of Indian/Filipino seafarers can be recognised at the border. Aware that there needs to be one recognised system. Received a call from a seafarer exiting a vessel in Grimsby, asking whether crew on their vessel could be vaccinated. They were pointed in the direction of the migrant guidance and advised to contact the local health authority and local vaccination centres.

AM advised that in Grimsby she was dealing with a local PHA on the Humber. On the North side the local PHA was sending details of walk-in vaccination centres to the agent. SM was working with them to promote this. The process was different in Grimsby but advised MW to direct the vessel to SM colleagues who would be able to contact the local health authority there. AM advised that the one dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine was perhaps more suitable for seafarers.

MW reported that if a seafarer had the first dose outside of the UK and the second dose in the UK, then according to the PHE's 'Green Book', NHS recognised this as a full dose of inoculation. For British nationals, the second dose could be logged with their GP on their return, the NHS app would be updated and they would then be able to access the QR code. For non-UK seafarers there was no digital way of formulating that passcode.

RC reported that her understanding was that one dose of Pfizer was more effective than the single dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Some international seafarers at Tilbury had received one dose in another country and the NHS had been recording both vaccinations on the one card. Certification has been a problem waiting for the QR code although in the short term they had been able to print documents from the NHS system. The address for the Tilbury seafarers' centre was being used for the required UK address.

The Chairman added that reports received at PWC meetings on vaccination programmes would be passed on to members and to ICMA/NAMMA.

**SG, ISWAN** – Still receiving a higher volume of calls than normal on Seafarer Help. A good proportion of these concerned access to vaccinations and international seafarers bound for UK ports asking what the opportunities for vaccinations were. Still co-ordinating vaccinations for Indian seafarers in India.

**AM, SM** – Continuing to operate under SM's current Covid-19 standard operating procedures for ship visiting and don't intend to loosen these restrictions for the foreseeable future in order to maintain the safety of Chaplains, ship visitors and the people they visit. Opening of SM centres is still under review. Sea Sunday took place on 11<sup>th</sup> July in various parishes in England. Liaising

with local port health authorities in different regions on raising awareness of availability of vaccines for seafarers. For shore leave there have been instances where agents have decided whether seafarers can leave their ship or not. SM have contacted the MCA who have told the agents that this approach could contravene MLC. This is an ongoing problem that needs to be addressed. Encouraged members to visit SM's website for further information on what they are doing regionally and within the UK.

**CR, MS** – Funding is still available from the Redundancy & Retraining Fund which has been extended until the end of December. This can benefit seafarers who are out of work, looking to refresh their STCW or upskill in order to find work. Members were encouraged to spread the message. The fund is open to UK seafarers only. Applications have slowed down over the past few months with 5 new applications being made, bringing the total up to 52. Anticipating peaks and troughs in applications over the next few months. The dip in applications is likely due to employment in the cruise and ferry sectors not being a problem currently. Information on the Thomas Gray Silver Medal has been circulated to members and more information on this can be on the [Marine Society Website](#).

**CR, WA** – Grateful for help received from GL and TH regarding the issue with the French fisherman reported on at the last WG. All is well at Care Ashore, the staff and residents are maintaining a positive attitude. There have been problems with Seafarers Link since it moved to Age UK. The groups concerned are continuing to self-isolate and rely on the calls which are not working well at the moment. There are concerns that the funding might disappear, but the groups are very keen for the calls to continue. There do seem to be technical problems with the calls. WA Seafarers Link phone calls are working very well.

**DD, FM** – Thanked CR for her help with the French fisherman as reported. Seafit programme - nearly all migrant crew fishing in the UK have had their first job with the second job underway. Aware of a few Ghanaians arriving to fish and then disappearing into the UK mainland. There seems to be a focus on a particular agent in Ghana but the picture is unclear. Special Branch have been informed. There are some crew shortages now showing in fishing. FM is easing back into the office, with hybrid working from 16<sup>th</sup> August, hoping to open centres shortly after with rec. space only. Treading carefully with home visits to older folk except in emergencies. There was a lot of demand in N. Ireland for laundry facilities, outside washing machines are being trialled. There has been a fall-off in Covid welfare demand for financial assistance but fisheries policy reviews are causing angst in the industry with the environment seeming to trump fisheries and fishing livelihood. Last week a call was taken from a young Scottish fisherman who was being abused at sea. Working with excellent co-operation by the MCA, the fisherman was rescued. He had had no food or water for eight days and was covered in bed bugs. The boat was detained and the young fisherman is now safe back home in Scotland. Three migrant crew had been removed from the same boat, complaining of being physically and verbally abused. Their cases are still live with the MCA and Border Force.

**EM, HRAS** – Continuing work on advocacy at international and UK level. Had secured open access for an article in the Ocean Yearbook, a prominent academic article in ocean governance. Professor Steven Haines wrote about the developing narrative of HRAS and it is hoped that this narrative is now within academic and policy debate. The article can be downloaded for free from the Yearbook website. The Chairman congratulated HRAS on the work with the NZ Seafarers' Welfare Board.

**CS, SC** – The SIRC fund has now reached over \$1 million thanks to a lot of work within the maritime industry, fundraising across the charities and thanks also to Keziah Cunningham, Development Director at TSC. A donation of almost \$200K was made a few weeks ago. A grant has been awarded to SM and approx. £225K is left in the fund and a decision has been made to open up applications from other areas. The SIRC fund was initially focused on India but it is now recognised that there are acute needs elsewhere due to Covid. The SIRC fund is to be used for emergencies and disasters and could be reignited for a third wave or other national disasters.

The SC still welcomes applications to the UK Maritime Anchor Fund from any UK Merchant Navy (working age) who are experiencing difficulties as a result of COVID. SAIL is the first point of call for the UK Maritime Anchor Fund.

**LS, MCG** – Redundancy & Retraining Fund – In July there was a major push on the bursary with different stakeholders including RMT, MNTB, MCA and Women in Maritime using their channels to promote the message. Also contacted employment agencies and training agencies on MCA's approved list and had a good response. Northern Marine advised that although this was a good initiative, the timing was not right for them as the cruise and ferry industry was booming in the UK at the moment; a lot of national cruise companies in the UK sector were wanting British seafarers on their ships. They also advised that once the international cruises recommenced the fund would be more in demand as British seafarers will be let go. The need is therefore not high now but is not expected to go away. At the last meeting, BG reported on the Nottingham Trent University barometer survey. The launch date is now 13<sup>th</sup> September. The monthly survey is being conducted through NCVO across the charitable sector on the impact of Covid on charities and their beneficiaries. The survey would include questions tailored to the maritime welfare sector. Thanked members for their input and MNWB for helping to promote this. The MCG met mid-June and the decision was taken to postpone the conference until 2022. A series of monthly seminars on topical issues will start in September.

**LC, MPHA** – Recently helped to organise vaccinations for crew members from two ships, with the help of the local clinical commissioning group and public health. Some questions were asked about recording and certifications and how this would be recognised internationally. Would appreciate advice on what to advise seafarers who are offered vaccinations. Spoke to personnel department of Arklow Shipping in Rotterdam who reported that the Dutch equivalent of CoS had organised a vaccination procedure with the Dutch government for Dutch flag ships to be vaccinated when they enter Dutch ports.

DA reported that this Dutch programme was available to all seafarers not only Dutch:

<https://www.kvnr.nl/en/vaccination/start>

**MH, NWF** – All residents at the care home and on the park are free of Covid, no cases have been reported for nearly 12 months. In the last few weeks a number of staff have been pinged but no staff have tested positive. Staff are tested prior to every shift and regular testing of residents continues. Visiting is continuing, subject to visitors testing negative on lateral flow tests. Once restrictions ease in Scotland from next Monday, the Glasgow based caseworker will restart home visits.

**RC, TSC** – Chaplains continuing to visit ships, wearing masks and not entering accommodation areas unless necessary. Supporting two ships with Covid positive crew onboard. More and more ships are arriving fully vaccinated. Vaccinations are taking place in the seafarers' centre and onboard ships. Over 1,000 seafarers have been vaccinated in Tilbury. There are still issues over double vaccinated seafarers not being permitted shore leave. There is a need to provide some basic information about seafarers to local vaccination centres; one centre refused to let seafarers in who had not quarantined. Some ports around the country have provided information on vaccination centres to ships agents so crew may be going to the centres by themselves. Seafarers can be vaccinated after 21 days, there is a loophole on this for work purposes. Members were encouraged to contact RC to share their experiences. RC added that the ICMA database might not always be completely accurate and asked for this to be considered when passing the link on to seafarers. (The Chairman would relay this to Jason in a conversation this afternoon).

TS reported that UK CoS had drawn up a statement with the MCA and the trade unions on shore leave and the factors that need to be taken into account if shore leave is allowed. Aware of the right under the MLC to shore leave for the benefit of the health and wellbeing of seafarers, but this should be balanced against the risk to the operation of the ship. Many seafarers prefer to stay onboard and some crew are not happy for other crew members to go ashore due to the risk of contracting Covid. Shipping companies want to encourage crew to get vaccinated but this

cannot be mandated. Permitting shore leave as an incentive to get double vaccinated could cause problems of discrimination on the part of the shipping company. A sensible compromise has been reached in the statement that has been agreed by the Chamber, the unions and MCA and will be reviewed as time progresses. The Chamber regrets the toll not taking shore leave is taking on the physical and mental wellbeing of seafarers but the risks have to be balanced. A seafarer has an entitlement to shore leave and the shipowner has a duty to provide this under MLC. This wish should be granted if it is of benefit to the seafarer's health and wellbeing. If it is potentially putting themselves and fellow crew members at risk then there is a case for not allowing it. The seafarer can make a complaint to port state authorities as they are entitled to under MLC. Would be helpful to get an idea from various seafarers' centres around the country of protocols they have put in place that could give shipowners and seafarers some confidence that there are controls in place at the shore side facilities. Please contact TS on this so that he can advise Chamber members and help to facilitate shore leave. TS added that sometimes seafarers and shipowners from other countries will be constrained by advice from their own governments about going ashore in the UK.

DA – NI's position is that as a default, shore leave should be allowed. Circumstances including restrictions in another country would however need to be considered.

**SW, SHS** – Returning to normal grant giving patterns, a small number of Covid related grants coming in. 330 grants have been awarded in total this year; just under £120K. Anchor Fund – 30 grants have been awarded this year, at a value of just over £20K. Members were asked to encourage people to apply for this grant. Members were invited to attend focus groups on seafarer health to be held in the first week of September. Further information to be circulated in due course, please contact SW for further information.

**SW, BPA** – Ports were added to the key worker list during the 'pingdemic', and can now apply to the DfT for exemption. Initially, there were a lot of absences but back to normal now. Cruise restart is now throughout the UK including Scotland. International restart in England is now possible, starting mid-August.

**MNWB** – Thanked SM who have submitted their grant application to replace their vehicles as part of the joint TSC, ITF Seafarers' Trust, MNWB & Trinity House VRP programme. The Chairman announced his retirement from the Board at the end of the year. The Board is also currently advertising for a Communications & Media Officer.

**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.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021 at 11:00**