



## MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

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

<b>PRESENT:</b> Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Revd Ijeoma Ajibade (IA)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
Ms Sara Baade (SB)	Sailors' Society (SS)
Mr Richard Ballantyne (RB)	British Ports Association (BPA)
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Ms Sharon Coveney (SC)	MNWB
Cdre David Dickens (DD)	The Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Mr David Hammond (DH)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
Mr Mick Howarth (MH)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Miss Victoria Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
Capt. Justin Osmond (JO)	Shipwrecked Mariners' Society (SMS)
Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Mrs Deanne Thomas (DT)	Sailors' Children's Society (SCS)
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:

**JC, DfT** – Ministers are currently involved with the Conservative Party Conference. However, main focus is on certification of vaccination for seafarers. Most seafarers do not have an NHS number and cannot access a Covid pass or paper certificate. They therefore do not have proof of vaccination from the UK when travelling globally. If a seafarer received their first vaccination in Scotland for example and the second in England they would be unable to get a Covid pass due to the two databases not talking to each other. DfT will be talking to NHSX, the team leading the IT side, tomorrow, to try to find a solution to this. The WHO is looking into the Yellow Card but there is not much interest from the UK on this. JC will be following up on DHSC on why this is. Furlough has stopped; trying to collect anecdotal evidence on how this is affecting seafarers and others working in the maritime sector, so that this can be fed back to HMT. Please let JC know of any data, either anecdotal or expected changes. The end of travel categories is not expected to have much impact on seafarers, as they should have been exempt from this, but is a step in the right direction. JC shared the following link on the seven principles which will have direct/indirect relevance to the maritime workforce: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/transport-secretary-agrees-high-level-principles-with-q7-leaders-to-support-international-and-transatlantic-travel>

**TS, UK CoS** – On the issue of shore leave, the Chamber has received anecdotal evidence that seafarers on cruise ships in Southampton were able to take shore leave in the last fortnight; this is a major step forward and it is hoped the situation is starting to resolve itself. End of the furlough scheme – when the scheme was introduced, the majority of companies that put crew members on furlough were ferry companies. As ferries have gradually resumed operation, the scheme was coming to an end in any case. Will be asking the question at a meeting with members next week if there are signs of there being large scale redundancies for British seafarers. A worryingly large

number of crew on UK registered ships are overdue repatriation and this is indicative of a problem in other parts of the world where travel restrictions are preventing crew from leaving ships.

**MW, UK CoS** – The IMHA (International Maritime Health Association) interim position paper on mixed vaccine doses has been circulated to members. This came out of a meeting between the international associations and WHO, after exploring whether or not they would be recommending mixed doses, due to some seafarers across the globe having multiple doses of various vaccines. Currently WHO only recognises AstraZeneca followed by an mRNA vaccine such as Pfizer or Moderna. The paper showed practical examples of seafarers receiving a variety of doses and guidance on what could be recommended. MW encouraged members to read the paper. The paper also mentions certification and a recommended list of items covered in certification. It was raised that not everybody would have details on the name and title of person administering the vaccine so it has been made known that this is something that 'should' be on the paper, but not a 'must'. Members to contact MW if they had concerns over this list so that these can be fed back. Anecdotally, Scotland has a work around for covering foreign seafarers that have been vaccinated in Scotland but there are anecdotal reports this is not working. Work is ongoing on how that system can produce information for the seafarers to have certification. Across Europe, there are 43 countries that the EU Commission now recognises for equivalence for the EU digitalisation scheme. Hopefully more countries will be recognised to help facilitate travel. Working alongside the DfT and others to ensure that those vaccinated in the UK are getting the necessary information on this. The barrier to getting the vaccination is no longer a major concern, however, proving you have had it remains problematic.

**VM, TH** – The Covid-19 Redundancy & Retraining bursary has been extended to the end of the year. The funders – MNWB, TH, NI and the Slater Fund – have committed the additional funds in anticipation of an uplift in requirements. Members were encouraged to spread the word on the fund especially as furlough ended last week. The fund was originally set up to help the ferry sector but this sector has had one of the lowest uptakes.

**GL, MCA** – Survey inspection activities are continuing within the Covid guidelines. Oral exams are still being carried out online, but the MCA is starting to go back to external offices for course approval and audits. Following the change in the travel traffic light system, the MCA can go onboard more ships as it now includes amber list countries. The MCA is still not travelling overseas. On seafarer contract extensions, currently 55 crew members are onboard over the length of their contracts. To date, 431 seafarers have been successfully repatriated after contract extensions, mainly from the US and some from the Far East, due to travel restrictions. MCA were aware of shore leave issues in the cruise industry, but not been made aware of other significant shore leave concerns. The cruise industry is now opening up to allow more crew shore leave. Members were encouraged to contact the MCA if they heard of any issues regarding prevention of shore leave. Tom Holmer, MNWB PWC Manager, reported that at a recent PWC meeting the Port Chaplain in Invergordon had reported that on 14<sup>th</sup> September, out of 22 cruise ships, only 2 had permitted seafarers to come ashore. GL explained that it was hoped that the issues in the cruise industry were now being resolved following discussions with various companies but advised members to contact the MCA if they are aware of these issues continuing.

**RB, BPA** – The Chairman was pleased to welcome RB to the WG and introduced him as a new MNWB trustee. RB reported that the BPA was the national ports association and represented over 400 ports, piers and harbours around the UK. BPA had also recently acquired some of the bigger ports. Seeing a bit of an increase in non-Covid related absences at ports, mostly seasonal flu/colds. Furlough had been taken up but less so in the recent months. Keeping an eye on this but the ports industry was not overly concerned about the end of furlough. International travel is being watched closely at ports and the new arrangements are broadly welcomed by the sector. Interested to see if the new vaccine passport scheme introduced by the Scottish government will have any impact on ports and operators. It is expected the Welsh government will introduce a similar scheme. The Chairman reported that MNWB was collecting all Covid related information on ports from the ICMA and NAMMA websites and this work should be completed by the end of the week. Members would be updated accordingly.

**DD, FM** – Most migrant crew working in UK fishing have now been double vaccinated, just sweeping up the last few. Trying to get certification has been time consuming. Working with local NHS trusts in Scotland to create bespoke certificates although it is uncertain if these have any validity for international travel. It would be helpful to receive any clarity on this matter. Most centres are open, but no wet facilities (showers or washing machines) are being offered. Caseworking – routine level of welfare demand but FM, SCS and SMS share concerns that there is a debt spectre on the horizon. General concerns that there are no students at the Whitby Fishermen's training school most likely due to careers advisors not working during lockdown. Too many jobs and too few workers in UK fishing.

**DH, HRAS** – Maritime levy campaign is gathering speed, more detail and key deliveries will be highlighted on the website. Current NZ ministerial engagement and a pending update. In Australia, over 20 engagements with parliamentarians on both sides of the political divide, with AMSA and the Australian Seafarers' Welfare Council and lead opposition ministers in waiting. Waiting on a Seafarer Welfare Board update from New Zealand with the aim of issuing an update report on 1<sup>st</sup> July. Geneva declaration in final drafting and review stage, has gone through an international legal review. The soft launch will be at the end of October and the hard launch in Q1 of 2022 in Geneva. The Kiribati report alongside MtS Brisbane is out. Working with ICS, ITF Seafarers' Trust, ICMA and TSC on this. It also included an excellent engagement with Maersk. [https://www.humanrightsatsea.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/HRAS\\_Kiribati\\_Seafarer\\_Futures\\_Case\\_Study\\_September\\_2021-SP-LOCKED.pdf](https://www.humanrightsatsea.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/HRAS_Kiribati_Seafarer_Futures_Case_Study_September_2021-SP-LOCKED.pdf) Martin Illingworth has joined as the new Head of Operations and two more staff members will soon be recruited.

**DT, SCS** – Number of applications for support are fairly flat but expecting a tsunami of need to hit in the winter. Home visits are back in place and going well. Staff have returned to the office. 200 year anniversary this year, currently going through a review of support; reviewing families supported now and in the past, caseworkers, trustees and staff. Looking at the support going into next year to take into account post-Covid impact.

**SC, MNWB** – MNWB will soon be carrying out a Seafarers Support targeted outreach campaign, mailing leaflets and posters to a range of different non-maritime organisations including housing offices, doctor's surgeries, local churches and homeless teams to spread the word. MNWB will update members on pilot project outcomes.

**MF, SM** – SM's work returning to normality. SM is active in ports across the UK supporting seafarers and fishers. Today is SM's 101<sup>st</sup> birthday and marks the end of the centenary year. Although the world congress could not take place, SM has been able to work in close partnership with partners in delivering support to seafarers and fishers on the front-line. It is hoped that this will be a lasting legacy of the centenary year.

**MH, NWF** – A lot of time has been taken up with the vaccine issue for care home staff. Back in July, nine staff were still not double jabbed. An absolute deadline of 11<sup>th</sup> November was announced for all staff to be double vaccinated or it would be illegal for them to enter a care home and work. It has taken a lot of work to persuade the last group who were reticent but there has been success outcomes. However, one nurse is still refusing to be vaccinated and her contract will have to be terminated in line with the new legislation. This is an ongoing issue although only one out of 60 staff members has refused the vaccine. Last week, residents and staff were issued with their booster vaccinations and the care home residents were given their flu vaccine. Received confirmation that the local authority will continue to provide funding for care homes to assist with regular testing of staff, residents and visitors. Every three months, the home is receiving approx. £8-9K to help fund testing and infection control, and this will go on until the end of March. Some staff self-isolated in the last couple of months, usually due to partners or children testing positive rather than the staff themselves. Sadly, the resident reported on at last month's meeting, who had contracted Covid on a cruise around the UK, has died. He was the first resident living on the Park to have been lost due to Covid.

**IA, MtS** – MtS continuing to visit seafarers at the gangway, not going onboard ships. All centres are now open apart from South Tees, which is staffed entirely by volunteers. Around 50% of volunteers have not returned to work due to concerns over Covid although it is hoped they will come back once confidence returns. Small numbers of seafarers are visiting the centres and the centre in Grangemouth is back to pre-Covid levels. Generally, seafarers are not coming off ships but they are giving shopping requests to ship welfare visitors. Different staff around the country are involved in the vaccine effort, this depends on the centre and the relationships they have built locally with the NHS.

**SB, SaSo** – SaSo has returned to ship visiting and supporting as much as possible. Emergency welfare grants are coming to an end. The ship visiting app used by 28 other maritime charities in the sector records what ship visitors see when they go onboard ships. The app can now record if there has been Covid onboard a ship. SaSo has handed out around 5,000 Covid care kits in India and the project is now launching in the Philippines. Nearly 25,000 people in the seafaring community in India have benefitted from the Covid care kits, with the help of SIRF (The Seafarers' International Relief Fund). SaSo is working on an internal policy for the vaccination of Chaplains who carry out ship visiting about expectations on being vaccinated; legal advice is being sought on this. Although they are not healthcare workers, ship visitors are being strongly encouraged to get vaccinated in order to protect beneficiaries and themselves. A couple of the Chaplains are against vaccination for personal reasons. MH reported he was willing to share some of NWF's policies and procedures. In terms of legislation, from 11<sup>th</sup> November, care home workers who were not double jabbed or who had proven medical exemption would be unable to work. He added that there was a lot of information available to reassure people who were anxious about the vaccine. NWF would insist on vaccinations for all new appointments at the care home or other parts of the business. SB reported that different information on vaccinations was provided overseas and that many SaSo Chaplains who did not want the vaccine were based overseas. MF reported that SM was taking legal advice on the matter and was reluctant to force people to get vaccinated. This was not a big problem yet but it would need to be factored in to their employment policy. He suggested it could be helpful to consult with Jason Zuidema on this in order to provide a unified ICMA position. From a ship owners' perspective, MW shared the following legal liabilities document which was currently under review: <https://www.ics-shipping.org/publication/coronavirus-covid-19-legal-liability-and-insurance-issues-arising-from-vaccination-of-seafarers/> She added that clauses were being put in to new seafarers' contracts, similar to the requirements for Yellow Fever. There was a call to make this a generic clause rather than Covid specific to capture future concerns of pandemics. This was for new, not current contracts. IA reported that MtS placed an emphasis on testing for Chaplains and staff in centres. Those working in seafarer centres were expected to wear masks and take lateral flow tests twice weekly. The ICMA code continued to be followed with regard to PPE, cleaning regimes and visits being carried out from the gangway. JO reported that there was no straightforward legal position on this and that there was a stronger legal case to make people test before going to their place of work than to be vaccinated. Members were encouraged to share information on this ongoing discussion. **Action: All**

**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 MEETINGS: Monday 1<sup>st</sup> November at 11:00.**