



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 4th NOVEMBER 2020

PRESENT: Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Ms Sara Baade (SB)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)
Mr Darrell Bate (DB)	Marine Society (MS)
Ms Elizabeth Bentley (EB)	Sailors' Children's Society (SCS)
Mrs Ruth Campbell (RCL)	Tilbury SC
Capt Andrew Cassels (AC)	MNWB Chairman
Valerie Coleman (VC)	Seafarers UK (SfUK) Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Ms Lynnette Crossley (LC)	Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA)
Cdre David Dickens (DD)	The Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Mr Mick Howarth (MH)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	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)
Mr Andrew Pitcher (AP)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)
Mrs Christine Rankin (CR)	The Watch Ashore (WA)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
Ms Laura Simons (LS)	MCG Comms Consultant
Mrs Catherine Spencer (CS)	Seafarers UK (SfUK)
Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
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 – The national lockdown taking place from tonight shouldn't change the position for seafarers or other key workers who should have the same rights as previously, including being exempt from quarantine unless they have tested positive for Covid. Ports and vessels will carry on operating as normal. Visas (work permits and frontier worker scheme etc) are becoming a huge concern for the sector. From 1st January, new requirements will come in which will affect EU and non EU seafarers, there are many questions from industry regarding visas which DfT is trying to clear with Home Office. Another area of focus is on skills. There have been approx. 2,000 redundancies in the sector with potentially vacancies in the offshore renewables but a different set of skills would be required. Unsure if there is a skills shortage in the rest of the sector. Members to let JC know if they are aware of vacancies. Want to ensure that people who have lost jobs or are looking to change roles are offered the opportunities and that skills are kept within the maritime sector. There have been a few cases of stowaways onboard vessels coming in to the UK. UK Visas and Border Force generally deal with this although there are concerns over the situation seafarers are being put in. Two cases have been dealt with fully and the stowaways given asylum, and there have been a couple of other cases where potentially the Master or flag state haven't followed the FAL convention guidelines, which has caused difficulties. Participated in a meeting yesterday with the Maritime Minister and PT, which was very positive. The Minister was very grateful for all the

work the maritime charities are doing for seafarers and recognises the huge amount of work and the value of this work. He is keen that we continue to support the sector as much as possible.

Post Meeting Note: The Maritime Minister has stated he would like to join our meeting between 11:00 – 11:30 on 6th January 2021

TS, UK CoS – ICS briefing meetings regarding crew changes are continuing weekly. The strategy group and welfare group have merged and will meet fortnightly from next Thursday. Crew change situation is still very variable, for example in South Africa things are opening up, in Asia it changes from week to week. In China, the national government appears keen to facilitate crew changes but in practice this is being blocked by local laws. The situation in Australia is becoming difficult, Queensland is the only state permitting crew changes, direct flights in and out of Brisbane are needed there. The UK has sought clarification from the Welsh government that they continue to consider seafarers as key workers and facilitate their travel to and from ships, which does appear to have been accepted. With regard to stowaways, there was a very concerning case yesterday of a Dutch registered ship coming into Southampton from Spain. Border Force issued a refusal letter, the stowaways temporarily escaped and were then recaptured. This has given rise to a lot of long term concerns over the crew welfare aspect and the disruption to the ship owners' business. The Chamber is concerned about the attitudes that may be faced from Border Force with regards to stowaways and possibly to persons in distress recovered from the sea by merchant vessels whilst on their way to UK ports. Inflammatory rhetoric from senior politicians could trickle down to people on the frontline such as Border Force who could make things difficult for ships and seafarers which would be a major concern. Discussions may be needed to head off any further difficulties which may arise. The Chamber is happy to work with government, trade unions and the maritime charities on this.

JC stated that DfT would be advising the Maritime Minister on next steps UK shipping will be taking with regards to crew changes. Asked TS and members to keep him updated on the issues in overseas states as the Minister is prepared to talk to ministers in those states if this may be helpful but if more practical solutions are needed then the Minister can be advised accordingly.

TS reported that he had been asked by the MCA to send a circular to members asking for details of any UK crew or crew on UK registered ships who have been kept onboard for longer than their contracts or longer than 11 months. Generally hearing back from members that there were problems early on in lockdown for their UK personnel but these had mostly been resolved. Some will be operating in parts of the world where it is still difficult. Information from the ICS meetings will be relevant and any influence that the Minister can exert would be most welcome.

TS received a report from one member whose three crew members had tested positive for Covid. The ship went into port in the Netherlands, one Polish crew member who had tested positive was admitted into port and allowed to go home and the other two who were Filipino were not. The two Filipinos had to be isolated onboard. The Chamber contacted the Philippine Consul to try to find representation on their behalf. This was another shocking case regarding the welfare of seafarers.

GL, MCA – MCA has not heard feedback about UK seafarers (as referred to by TS). There have been a couple of cases in the Falkland Islands, to do with logistics, which have been dealt with by the Falkland Islands government in co-operation with the MCA. Not aware of any serious cases aside from those at the start of the pandemic. Regarding seafarers' SEAs, UK seafarers appear to be complaint although some are doing longer periods than they are used to. For foreign SEAs, MCA is monitoring via Port State Control although nothing significant recently. MCA is continuing surveys and inspections, building up to the full spectrum of activities whilst working within the Covid restrictions. Nationally, marine offices and headquarters are dealing with a significant number of 'people' issues relating to certifications and documentations. Travel and access to statutory training is very difficult and impossible in some countries. MCA is being as pragmatic as possible in these situations to find solutions. The UK has been an important place for crew changes and is one of the few countries where crew changes have been relatively easy. A good number of bulk carriers have

been able to do 50% or more crew changes, which they have been unable to do in other countries. This has a knock on effect as to who can go onboard whilst the carrier is in the UK.

CS, SfUK – Approx. £1.3 million of the £2 million Covid-19 emergency fund has now been spent. Some of this money will be used for the hardship fund which will be accessed through SAIL - more detail on this will follow. This will be another way for seafarers facing redundancy to access help. Conversations have been held regarding SfUK's grants priorities over the next four years. In the past SfUK has funded a huge amount of money on education and training in the welfare sector. The new strategy will concentrate on welfare and safety over the next four years. SfUK will not be funding retraining or redundancy over this period but will remain very interested in this area. The new strategy will be published in the New Year. SfUK's advocacy work has been growing in recent months and there was a very good response to the fishing webinar held earlier this month on the Creating the Safety Net report, which is innovative work on making the lives of fishers more secure, understanding the financial difficulties they face and how that leads on to relationship and mental health issues. Until we can cure some of those financial issues for fishers, some of whom are in very insecure positions with very little access to help, it will be difficult to cure some of those other problems. Making good progress in this area and working closely with Defra. CS had an exciting conversation this week with AMSA and ISWAN regarding their proposal for Death at Sea, which will be going to the ILO. During SAW, SfUK called for much better recording of deaths at sea and a clearer understanding of the events leading to suicide in order to build solutions to deal with this issue. AMSA, in Australia, are working with their government on this issue. SfUK will be encouraging social partners in the UK to support this issue in order to have a better understanding of the real scale of deaths at sea.

LC, MPHA – Will continue to deliver sanitation certificates and take water samples where requested and will be carrying out these services as carefully and safely as possible.

SB & AP, SaSo – The group gave a warm welcome to SB, who introduced herself as the new CEO at SaSo. SB looking forward to working with the maritime charities. AP – Carrying out ship visiting in all ports except Singapore, where cases are low, but ship visiting is still not allowed there. The helplines are still operational, the number of cases is slowing down are becoming more serious, such as seafarers who have been onboard for long periods of time. In the UK, Immingham is closed, Portbury may be closed although this is to be confirmed. Hoping to keep the Southampton centre open during lockdown as it is helping with crew changes and is a convenient place for seafarers to be dropped off and picked up. Tilbury Chaplain, Frans Sahetapy, will be moving back to Southampton where he was formerly Port Chaplain, to help with the work in the port.

CR & DB, MSSC – Redundancy & Retraining Covid bursary fund launched on Monday: Thanked members for sharing information on social media. Seafarers on short term contracts will not be excluded from the fund as they may be out of work as a direct result of the pandemic. Encouraged members to share the link to the dedicated web page: <https://www.marine-society.org/redundancy-fund> . MSSC will not turn away seafarers who are considering coming ashore due to the pandemic to encourage them to remain in the maritime sector. Seafarers can also look to the MSSC 'Coming Ashore' programme for support in finding jobs ashore. The criteria for the fund is for seafarers who are no longer working and need help with training in order to find a job. They can be offered information and guidance. Seafarers can claim up to £500 to help with training and to cover travel and accommodation expenses to get to a course. MSSC has also launched Navigation@Sea to add to the Learn@Sea courses.

PT added that there is a section for Redundancy and Retraining on the Seafarer Support website <https://merchantnavy.zendesk.com/hc/en-gb/categories/360002709459-COVID-19-Redundancy-Training-Employment->.

CR, WA – Care Ashore will be going into lockdown, following the same, previously adopted procedure. Hoping to do activities with the beneficiaries and with other care homes as seafarers can be a little too self-reliant and need to socialise. Cath Stamper, new CEO, joins in ten days and will attend the next WG. Another three trustees will soon be joining.

DD, FM – In addition to the second wave of Covid-19, the situation in fishing has been exacerbated by the uncertainties around the end of the transition period for Brexit and the paperwork and licensing involved for those who export to Europe. This has all added to the pressures as have the recent storms. Seeing spikes in South East and South West Scotland, spreading up to Fife and into the Western Isles. Market prices are falling, share catch fishermen are being laid off so we are expecting to hear from them soon. The extension of various government support programmes might help flatten the spike. The MiFi units have been very well received, particularly amongst crew who have been quarantined on board, thanked DfT, MNWB and Seafarers UK for this. “There is a Storm Coming” campaign is currently underway to encourage fishers and their families to get in touch with FM before the debt mountain becomes too big. There is also a hint of a slight dulling of willingness to support charities that are helping those affected by Covid-19 in the seafaring sector, but nothing concrete to report on this thus far.

EB, SCS – Will be extending emergency Covid-19 scheme for another six months for fishers and MN families who would not normally meet the eligibility criteria. SCS Staff are still working from home, expecting an increase in workload once lockdown begins.

JL, SCFS – Work is going on where access is permitted although the Chaplains are frustrated at not being able to go onboard ships as they used to. In the Philippines, access to ports and access for seafarers is difficult. Have asked for a report to understand exactly what is happening on a global scale.

VC & LS, MCG – Thanked MSSC for their work on the redundancy & retraining fund, thanked TH and MNWB for investing in this key need and thanked JC for reinforcing the message on this challenging subject. The fund is the result of a series of conversations across industry and the maritime charities sector and the need to do something constructive about the impending and actual redundancies within the sector. A group including union representatives, industry representatives and charity representatives has been meeting since July looking for leads into an alternative source of employment for seafarers and how to better share intelligence in the current crisis. Happy to share the minutes of those meetings with those who are interested. Very interested in keeping skills within the maritime sector. MCG are meeting on a monthly basis and will be starting a health sub group to inform the thinking of major grant funders who are part of the MCG. The first meeting will take place on 23rd or 25th November, to bring together MCG members and those who are outside of the immediate maritime charity welfare sector e.g. P&I Clubs and academics. This will inform how MCG members invest their funds in the future.

LS – Advised everyone that the bursary fund had been launched on Monday and press release was released yesterday. Encouraged members to put the word out, especially those on the front line who have contact with merchant seafarers.

JO, SMS – Back into a steady trickle of Covid related cases coming through, remaining close to the FM teams and others on the ground, all of whom are reporting that pressure is building as a result of various different issues. Still anticipating a significant demand going forward although the new furlough arrangements may delay this for some people.

MF, SM – Chaplains are as active as the local ports will allow, have seen something of a return to normality over recent weeks, although will see what impact the new lockdown will have. Another survey has been undertaken with help from colleagues in the Philippines, looking at the needs of Filipino seafarers and their families. The results are being collated and will be shared with members in due course. The financial needs are paramount, more so than other needs, such as psychological needs. SM very concerned about the financial challenges ahead. Happy to share outcome of discussions regarding the opening or closing of the Felixstowe centre during lockdown.

MH, NWF – Home visits in Merseyside and Glasgow were paused due to local conditions and local visits in Hull, Portsmouth and Southampton areas have now ceased. Hoping not to see a falling off of welfare requests as witnessed in the first lockdown. Busy this week making sure all the residents are aware of the new guidelines. Many of the communal facilities at MP were already closed due to

Tier 3 status in Merseyside but now the gym and hair salon have also been closed. A number of residents at MP who were originally shielding are no longer happy to go out shopping. Therefore MP has restarted shopping and prescription collections. All residents and staff in the care home are well and weekly testing is taking place. The big issue of the organisation of visiting relatives remains; currently unsure if there will be new policy/restrictions.

RC, TSC – The cruise ships that have been laid up in Tilbury since March are still berthed there and are now under new ownership. Crew onboard are hoping for some certainty regarding sailing to new ports but are awaiting clearance from the MCA as three ships are still detained. Seafarers' mental health and wellbeing is still a real concern, we have noticed an increase in anxiety and depression amongst crew. The centre at Tilbury will remain open during the lockdown period and will operate as an emergency seafarers' hub. Lessons learned since the last lockdown will better prepare TSC to meet seafarers' welfare needs during next lockdown. The centre staff will not be furloughed this time and will instead provide support to the ship visitors. 2,000 Christmas presents are wrapped and ready to be distributed to ships. Permitted to board ships within DP World and Tilbury as long as the crew and Captain are happy with this.

VM, TH – Pleased that the redundancy and retraining fund has been launched so quickly. Looking forward to hearing from MSSC about the applications coming through. Funds are still available for emergency Covid grants and members are encouraged to get in touch if they need assistance.

PT, MNWB – The Board has created a Zoom Mental Health awareness course, which adheres to the new training standards/protocols, will soon be available.

Post Meeting Note: Milford Haven With the support of all the terminal operators, the Port of Milford Haven Port Welfare Committee has created a special Covid19 leaflet for visiting seafarers to ensure that those unable (for operational reasons) or unwilling to proceed ashore to maintain the ship 'bubble' can communicate with the port and all the relevant welfare organisations.

Members voted in favour of Covid-19 WG meetings being held on a monthly basis but agreed to increase this to fortnightly if required.

Closing Remark - 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 2nd December 2020 at 11:00 *(please also note the Maritime Minister is planning to attend the first meeting in the new year)*