



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 5TH MAY 2021

PRESENT: Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Revd Ijeoma Ajibade (IA)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Mr David Hammond (DH)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
Mr Roger Harris (RH)	Int'l Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN)
Ms Sharon Head (SH)	Stella Maris (SM)
Mr Mick Howarth (MH)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Fr. John Lavers (JL)	Stella Maris (SM)
Miss Victoria Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
Mrs Christine Rankin (CR)	The Watch Ashore (WA)
Mrs Catherine Spencer	The Seafarers' Charity (TSC)
Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Ms Cath Stamper (CS)	Care Ashore (CA)
Mrs Deanne Thomas (DT)	Sailors' Children's Society (SCS)
Mr Steve Trowsdale (ST)	ITF
Mrs Sandra Welch (SW)	Seafarers Hospital Society
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 recent special tripartite committee took place in Geneva and resulted in two resolutions; one regarding seafarer vaccinations and one regarding the implementation of the MLC. The social partners were aligned on almost every point although governments were not as aligned. TS and others worked hard on the draft resolutions and discussions continued on what had already been agreed. There were also agreements on positions on several conventions, recommendations and protocols, and those decisions are expected to go to the governing body later this year. More recently, the Covid situation in India is a huge concern and has had some impact on seafarers trying to enter the UK, particularly for Cruise Restart. Two Indian seafarers have reportedly tested positive in Torquay and are now isolating. The local MP, Kevin Foster, who is the immigration Minister, and local councillors believe there is a loophole in the legislation which allows those working in non-navigational seafarer roles to travel freely and they do not agree this should be allowed. The Minister is looking into this and will be responding to Kevin Foster directly. Another issue which Home Office is being asked to clarify, is that according to the Beijing embassy (who are handling applications for Filipino seafarers), priority visa application processes are being temporarily suspended for those from red list countries, which could potentially have a huge impact on Cruise Restart. Those seafarers will have to go through the normal application process and the cruise companies will also put those seafarers into isolation when they arrive in the UK. Saga were looking to spend approx. £150K+ just on getting visas prioritised and were following the agreed protocols. DfT is working to rectify this issue and JC will update the WG accordingly. DfT is in talks with DHSC about the vaccination of seafarers and a few ideas are being worked through on this. One idea being explored is a global hub although a number of legal loopholes would need to be agreed due to the export of vaccinations. Gibraltar is a preferred hub. Seafarers coming into the UK should be able to access the vaccine although

there may be some issues with logistics of getting the vaccine to some ports and what percentage that would be of the UK vaccination programme.

TS/MW, UK CoS – Two resolutions were worked on at the ILO special tripartite committee. The key focus on one jointly submitted by the shipowners and seafarers' group was for governments to recognise and establish the principle of the MLC. Although ILO Resolutions are not legally binding, the view was taken that putting out a statement of ambition from the tripartite structure of the ILO was worthwhile. During that week, restrictions were starting to be imposed on Indian seafarers transiting through Singapore, Hong Kong and the UAE. Robust statements were made by the shipowners and seafarers' group on this subject matter. The new testing regime is currently having a serious impact on ferries. Seafarers arriving on ferries in the UK, where they are considered to be recurrent travellers, must take NHS lateral flow tests. Getting supplies of these tests to ferries in a timely manner is logistically challenging. There are further concerns over testing with regards to Cruise Restart, it is not clear whether somebody arriving on a cruise ship and not due to leave the vessel would need to be tested. JC agreed to check for an update on this issue. MW stated that reports have been received that seafarers in the UK have been able to get the vaccine when not within the demographic of age by requesting superfluous vaccines at the end of the day at GPs and pharmacies. There is a view from the ICS vaccination taskforce that the Johnson & Johnson vaccine could be beneficial for seafarers as it is a single dose vaccine although it is not available in the UK. Members noted that a small number of seafarers' centres in the USA were offering vaccines to international seafarers and that the Belgian government has agreed to prioritise seafarers for vaccination.

JC responded that testing is required for all seafarers coming into the UK on days 2, 5 & 8, regardless of whether they are staying on the vessel or going ashore. The DfT is working with DHSC and DHE on whether seafarers remaining onboard can be exempt from this requirement. The DfT is also aware of the issue of trying to get the testing kits to the ferry operators and is working to expedite this so that these can be delivered in a timely manner.

ST, ITF – ITF has been asked to partner the welfare centres in Galveston, Seattle and San Francisco to deliver the single dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine to seafarers. There are vacancies for more ITF Inspectors in the UK, working alongside the two current ITF Inspectors namely: Tommy Molloy and Liam Wilson that cover the whole of the UK. ITF are in a WG with maritime affiliates to look at the employment of Inspectors going forward. The ITF has varying employment conditions around the world and are looking to get it right in the UK before recruiting. The ITF, working through its affiliated Unions, estimates recruiting more ITF Inspectors to expand its cover of ports around the UK possibly by the third or fourth quarter. There will probably be Inspectors in Southampton, Scotland and potentially in the South West, which is being worked on at the moment.

GL, MCA – The MCA is working towards restarting cruises. There are a lot of complexities around this and the MCA will be involved to ensure they are ready to restart. Surveys and inspection, including the port state control and inspection of foreign vessels are ongoing around the country by MCA surveyors. There are a number of Covid and MLC related issues being raised and dealt with and one official complaint relating to quarantine costs, which the MCA are currently pursuing.

CS, TSC – TSC received a call from the ICS early last week to discuss a joint fund to respond to the current dire situation in India. Following a series of conversations it was agreed to establish a Seafarers' International Relief Fund recognising the pandemic challenges being faced in India and other countries. This is the first time the maritime charities sector has come together to do joint fundraising and this is very well supported by ICS and others in the shipping industry. Donations are being encouraged from around the world. TSC will receive the donations and will work with its existing grants committee to distribute this money as quickly as possible. There will also be an advisory panel made up of other charities and stakeholders. This is an evolving situation and the launch of the fund has been promoted on social media and in the press. Details on applying for grants will soon be available. This is a joint effort with a wide variety of other maritime charities. TSC has also recently provided grants for Relate, Safer Waves - for anyone

experiencing sexual harassment/assault and Befrienders Worldwide - to provide a service for people feeling suicidal and desperate.

CS, CA – Work is continuing on internal processes at CA. Some work has begun on the demographics of the resident group as data does not appear to have previously been collected. This should provide some interesting statistics that could be linked in with other accommodation providers to see whether the needs of former seafarers are being met and to ensure that the strategy going forward is as correct as it can be.

CR, WA – The WA and Seafarers' Link groups are continuing to benefit from weekly calls.

DH, HRAS – Congratulated TSC on the news of the Seafarers' International Relief Fund. On 1st July, the NZ government will update its maritime transport act so that the maritime levy is also allocated to all seafarers' centres. HRAS has been supporting the seafarers' welfare committee in NZ and directly engaging with NZ's Minister of Transport. Pleased to see that the collaborative effort has changed the law in at least one state and other states are being worked on at the moment. HRAS is currently collaborating with six international law firms and over 28 Partners for an independent review and publication on abandonment, for educational and awareness purposes. HRAS will shortly be issuing a publication on cadet physical & mental wellbeing and safety & security. HRAS are also working on a number of cases of stateless vessels. Thanked members for increased engagement and collaboration on social justice issues.

RH, ISWAN – Continuing to receive a high number of calls on Seafarer Help. RH participated in a call yesterday comprising of various organisations in India including ship owners, ship managers, crewing agents, welfare organisations and unions. The current desperate situation in India was emphasised. There are attempts in India to set up hubs to vaccinate seafarers in Mumbai but there has been a shortage of the vaccine. RH will be leaving ISWAN at the end of May and a new CEO has been appointed. PT and members thanked RH for his outstanding contribution to seafarers' welfare over the years.

DT, SCS – On fishing, the impact on Friday of the quotas non-negotiation going through is causing concern. The fishing trawler 'Kirkella' in Hull will likely be moored up for the season and this is directly impacting on around 100 jobs. SCS has increased the Covid extension support for fishing families and is working closely with FM. This support will carry on into June and SCS will also provide some school uniforms to children in August. There has been an increase in fishing families separating resulting in single parents with children living in poverty needing assistance. SCS is also seeing an increase in cancer cases coming forward in the last 3-4 weeks. Only one MN case reported and 700 children are currently being supported.

JL, SM – SM has increased its ship visiting operation since the volunteers and those that were on furlough have been able to return. Volunteers have been able to return with confidence due to lateral flow testing. Ships are also gaining confidence in beginning to welcome back ship visitors and Chaplains aboard various vessels. Across the country, different ports and ships have different restrictions in place for Chaplains. The Chairman confirmed that port levies are distributed locally within the port for the benefit of seafarers.

IA, MtS – MtS is focusing on reopening its centres. Belfast reopened yesterday and Fawley has been open all of this year. Other centres are carrying out risk assessments and it is hoped that all the centres will be open by the end of June. Protocols will be in place for volunteers to be tested and to do temperature checks before they enter the centres. Ship visiting continues on the gangway, the arrangement with ICMA will be reviewed and the safety of ship visiting will be reviewed again. A MtS Chaplain in Belgium who was due to retire in June sadly died following a serious illness. IA is continuing with a piece of work on women seafarers which will hopefully be published in September. The Chairman encouraged members to view a short video from the Durban PWC which shared the significant need that seafarers have for welfare support and the

importance of seafarers' welfare port levies that make that support possible:
<https://vimeo.com/544967095>

MH, NWF – Mariners' Park residents and staff continue to be well and regular testing is still being carried out on staff, residents and visitors to the care home. The grants supporting some of the costs associated with this have come to an end. A new tranche has been announced by the government but unfortunately the care home does not meet the required definition of a small business. It would be frustrating if the care home missed out on this grant as it is still facing significant costs associated with the pandemic. The new out of care home visiting guidance came into operation yesterday at extremely short notice. Looking forward to being able to restart indoor activities for residents on the 17th May across MP and to indoor visits for families and friends, of up to six people. The caseworker service will also be able to recommence home visits.

SW, SHS – Steady stream of grant applications is still coming through. In the first quarter SHS gave out around 160 grants to the value of £90K. 50 of these were Covid related and 20 were awarded from the Maritime Anchor Fund. Some requests for assistance are coming from the MN. SW encouraged members to spread the word to MN seafarers in their networks that this grant is available to them. Lots of requests for assistance are coming from the fishing community.

SC, MNWB – The Board continues to work in partnership to promote the positive impact the MiFi project has on seafarers' welfare. The team will soon be working on the final report as the partnership project moves into the last three months. The report will include an evaluation of the project and will provide recommendations for consideration of an ongoing project. The current project is due to conclude at the end of July. A short survey will be sent out to capture feedback on the effectiveness of the programme.

VM, TH – The last round of grant applications has taken place, TH will next be looking at applications at the end of the year. A small amount of Covid funding is still available. The Redundancy & Retraining bursary was due to finish at the end of April but will now be extended until the end of the year, with a further review in June as to whether more funding will be needed. The main view is that a number of seafarers, particularly from the ferry sector, are still on furlough so the need may not become more apparent until September. Just over half of the £40K has been spent.

Closing Remark – Members joined the Chairman in wishing RH a long and healthy retirement. 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.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 2nd June 2021 at 11:00