



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 6th JANUARY 2021

PRESENT: Robert Courts MP (RC)	Minister for Aviation, Maritime & Security
Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Revd Ijeoma Ajibade (IA)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
Mr John Attenborough (JA)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
Ms Sara Baade (SB)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)
Mr Alex Campbell (ACL)	QVSR/Tilbury SC
Capt Andrew Cassels (AC)	MNWB Chairman
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Mr Miles Cowley (MC)	SAIL
Ms Jane Davies (JD)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
Cdre David Dickens (DD)	The Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Mr Ben Gibbons (BG)	Seafarers UK (SfUK) Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr David Hammond (DH)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
Mr Roger Harris (RH)	ISWAN
Mr Graham Hockley (GH)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr Adrian Hodgson (AH)	Chamber of Shipping
Mr Mick Howarth (MH)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Ms Deborah Layde (DL)	Seafarers UK (SfUK)
Mr Ken McLean (KL)	IMarEst Guild of Benevolence (IMarEst)
Miss Victoria Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
Capt. David Parsons	Merchant Navy Association (MNA)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
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
Ms Sara Walsh (SW)	British Ports Association (BPA)
Mrs Sandra Welch (SW)	Seafarers Hospital Society
Ms Melanie White (MW)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Ms Marta Williams (MW)	Department for Transport (DfT)

The meeting opened at 11.00am. The Chairman welcomed RC to the meeting. RC thanked members for the opportunity to speak at the WG. As Maritime minister, RC has been struck by the culture of support and care giving in the seafarer and fishers community which he described as warm spirited and eager to help. He has also been struck by the plight of crew members all over the world who have been affected by measures taken to tackle Covid, with many working beyond their contracts. Great efforts have been required to try to resolve this. Diplomatic successes are to be welcomed and words need to match the actions. With the right international pressure from government and in alliance with maritime partners RC was certain that we will see an industry that will thrive with a workforce whose physical and mental wellbeing isn't put at risk by the strictures of the way we have to work at the moment. The work carried out by MNWB and its Constituent members is an incredible achievement and a real testament to collaborative working. RC is certain that without the great efforts made by members, this crisis both in this country and further afield would have taken a far greater toll on the seafarer and fisher population. The work we do at local

and international level is critical, whether that be supporting those considering careers in maritime, those in the sector but in need of help, those who have retired from the sector, and families left behind of a loved one lost at sea. That support could be in the form of a bursary, a roof over their heads or somebody there for them. Grants given by Working Group members are a lifeline to so many. As important are forums such as this WG and the PWCs, where issues can be raised, discussed and solutions sought by government, social partners and third sector. Seafarers and their families all over the globe live better lives thanks to the generosity of members. On their behalf, RC thanked members for all the work they have done that has brought relief to those whose situations must have at times felt bleak and lonely. Domestically, the funding of MiFi units is a great example of the good that can be achieved when working together. He thanked members for all their tireless efforts supporting seafarers, fishers and their families as they continued to navigate through these difficult times. Work done by members is hugely recognised and appreciated. If ever there was a time for any sector to pull together and work closely with government, it is now. Proud of all the UK maritime sector has done and the way they have chosen to lead from the front on this matter, working together to benefit seafarers and fishers. He requested members pass on his very best wishes and regards to all their colleagues not in attendance. Extremely challenging times, the future is uncertain but an end is in sight. There is hope with the ability to test en masse and with the rollout of the new vaccines, we can now see the beginning to an end to the suffering that has befallen fishers and seafarers all over the world as a result of this pandemic. Assured members he was absolutely committed to the UK's continued leadership on seafarer and fisher welfare both in resolving the crew change crisis and in the years to come and in other issues that may arise. Tradition of seafaring in the UK is a long and proud tradition of charitable support both of which should be celebrated.

RC was honoured to announce the joint recipients of the MNWB 'Annual Award for Services to Seafarers' Welfare'. He congratulated JD and thanked her for her dedicated work as the Registered Manager for both the Mariners' Park Care Home and its Home Care Service, Nautilus Care, which had received sector recognition. RC continued that JD had demonstrated complete dedication to the cause, creating and maintaining the highest standards for retired mariners and dependants in her care as well as unparalleled support for her staff, particularly when faced with the unprecedented challenges of Covid-19.

JD was overwhelmed by the award and stated that praise was not often received for working in social care. It had been a hard year for all those working in social and health care sector and it was lovely to be recognised.

RC congratulated JA, Mission to Seafarers Port Chaplain from the busy Port of Southampton who was recognised for his outstanding work in making a positive difference to the lives of seafarers from all over the world, not just for now but over the past twenty six years. JA's ongoing compassion and outstanding support of seafarers was also recognised by the sector and was clearly seen in his response to seafarers' welfare throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. JA continues to be a source of practical and emotional support for many seafarers who were and still are unable to return home due to the crew change crisis. RC thanked JA on behalf of the industry for all the work he does for seafarers.

JA was honoured, humbled and overwhelmed by the award and praised his colleagues, the volunteers and team around him. JA stated that he did his work out of love for the welfare of seafarers.

Members congratulated the award recipients and the meeting continued with members providing Covid-19 specific updates on their respective organisations as follows:

JC, DfT – JC thanked RC for his warm words for the charity sector which was greatly appreciated by all. The transition from the EU was complete and had moved onto international requirements. Not aware of any current problems that this was causing the seafarer community. Not expecting any changes for seafarers to be caused by the new lockdown as seafarers are under international laws and should still have similar rights to shore leave, particularly exercise. Would like to know about issues regarding access to seafarer welfare purposes. In March there were difficulties with

welfare sectors having access to vessels due to Covid restrictions and it would be helpful for DfT to know if this is happening again with the new lockdown in force. Would also like to know if there are issues with seafarers being able to access shore leave and able to exercise. There might be restrictions locally and but that should be directed by the local port health authorities. There shouldn't be a blanket ban on seafarers being able to access shore leave. DfT working behind the scenes on vaccinations and testing.

TS, UK CoS – On behalf of the Chamber, thanked government for showing leadership throughout the pandemic. Was grateful to RC's predecessor, Kelly Tolhurst who had sent a letter to the Secretary General of UN organisations, pledging to keep the UK open for crew changes and for shore leave, coupled with the Ministerial level summit which took place and the declaration which arose out of that. The UK could be held as an example to other countries in terms of continued facilitation of crew changes and shore leave. The Chamber is very willing to assist and support in its efforts in any way they can. Regarding the consequences of our departure from the EU it was good to see that the trading corporation agreement included the social security protocols that continued the current position for those UK seafarers working on ships registered under EEA flags and vice versa, this simplifies things for employers and ensures the preservation of social security rights. Concerns for holders of UK CoCs working on ships registered under EEA flags regarding recognition of new or renewed certificates, had hoped this could have been avoided but now relying on other EU member states making requests to the Commission in accordance with the directive on the subject that sets out procedures for third country recognition. That directive states that the decision needs to be taken within 24 months, if it could be fast-tracked the Chamber would welcome that and is willing to help on this. The Chamber has written to the maritime administrations of the top 4 EU flags where UK CoC holders are employed; Cyprus, Denmark, Malta and the Netherlands. At least two of those are making requests to the Commission and will be in a position to continue accepting new and renewed UK certificates. Also concerned to have just heard from a member that BA check in staff initially refused to let seafarers board a plane and only relented after being strongly challenged with letters from the company and references to legislation. Hope that issues like this are rectified quickly.

JC stated that before 31st December, the DfT had written to the 8 or 9 major European flag states that employ UK seafarers and had an agreement with all of them that they would write to the Commission, to the State that they wanted to continue to recognise our certificates. Following up with them, Malta has written on 1st January.

MW, UK CoS – The UK CoS is working with the DfT to collate information to reinforce the prioritisation of seafarers for vaccination and shoreside staff who are imperative to the continued running of shipping services. Also involved in an international task force with the International Chamber of Shipping, looking at all the details for vaccination and what certification might look like although it is still early days. Also keen to ensure that seafarers who have not received the vaccine are not discriminated on that basis and continue the work that has been made so far in keeping seafarers supported and their movement facilitated globally.

DA, NI – Thanked the Minister for the government's role in alleviating the crew change crisis. Regarding the seafarer CoC issue, DA heard this morning that 4 countries have informed the MCA that they have issued their letter which enables them to recognise UK CoCs under the directive on recognition of third countries. Would like official confirmation and be able to publicise this so that seafarers and companies that employ our seafarers can have certainty on this matter. Nautilus ran a crew change Christmas campaign, a number of peers and serving MPs lent their support, the petition had nearly 2,000 signatures and many wrote to their MPs urging them to support the campaign. The new strain has led to new restrictions and some members were affected by border closures before Christmas. The Philippines have introduced stricter measures and preventing crew changes for seafarers who have visited certain countries including the UK. Before Christmas, ILO issued a legal opinion stating that the MLC is not just to be complied with when convenient and shore leave was picked up in this clarification. There are still a number of companies that have issued blanket shore leave bans.

ST, ITF – ST introduced himself as the Inspector Co-ordinator for the ITF, with operational responsibility for 140 people in 60+ countries around the world that make up the ITF inspectorate. Team of 8 full time staff within the ITF dealing with seafarer cases. Number of inspections of vessels around the world is down, around 8,000 inspections have been dealt with. Of these, \$38 million in seafarers' unpaid wages have been recovered. There has been a huge increase in the number of requests from seafarers, close to 15,000 since the start of the pandemic. Repatriation is the biggest problem and a significant increase in abandoned vessels has been reported, some shipowners are using the pandemic as an excuse to abandon seafarers. ITF have spent more than £200K on repatriating seafarers. A ship in Beirut has been abandoned for more than a year and ITF has serviced it with food, fuel and water three times because nobody will take responsibility for it, and have been able to get some of the crew off. ITF have had successes in the UK and a number of other countries, and have assisted in the repatriation of around 10,000 seafarers. ST had seen evidence of Charterers putting in no crew change clauses and ITF were against this and would be bringing this to the international forum soon.

GL, MCA – 9 seafarers reported on UK flag ships staying beyond their 11 months, this number was 316 since March/April. Worked hard with DfT and other partners to try to facilitate crew changes, MCA is pushing legal obligations under MLC to maintain key worker status. Crew movement has been quite successful in the UK but will see how things move forward with the new variant. There have been a number of welfare issues, which have been dealt with to satisfactory conclusions. MCA is cutting back on port state control inspections because of the new variant and is concentrating on the domestic fleet.

RH, ISWAN – Large number of cases in December, around 400 calls made to Seafarer Help compared to 200 a year ago. Issues include repatriation and seafarers facing financial difficulties. Launched Yacht Crew Help in November, aimed at superyacht crew, have received approx. 30 cases on the helpline. Before Christmas, ISWAN launched the Mentally Healthy ships guide, hoping for this to be distributed widely within the industry, this is a guide for ship management companies to implementing mental health policies. Yesterday launched the Social Interaction Matters research report funded by the MCA which is relevant as crew are staying a lot longer onboard. Hoping for this to receive coverage in the maritime press.

SW, BPA – Asked members to let BPA know of any issues with ports not allowing shore leave. Issues include absenteeism of roles such as pilots who have either tested positive or having to self-isolate. In contact with ferry ports this week regarding Brexit, the number of drivers crossing the Channel is currently low but expecting this to pick up in the next couple of days.

AC, QVSR/TSC – Have unfortunately had to furlough centre staff again due to the lockdown. On a positive note, TSC were able to distribute over 2,500 Christmas presents to seafarers which were well received. Continuing to offer essential services.

BG, MCG – BG looking forward to beginning his new role at MCG next week and looking forward to working with members during this challenging time. Encouraged to hear the spirit of collaboration in the sector, looking forward to provide support to the seafaring community and understand what the needs are currently and in the future.

CR, MS – MS launched the Covid-19 Redundancy and Retraining bursary in November. The maximum award is £500 to help seafarers who have been made redundant, lost a contract or unable to find work, to do a course or training that will help them back into employment. Applications slowed over Christmas and there have not been any new applications since the break. Encouraged members, particularly the Unions, to promote the fund: <https://www.marine-society.org/redundancy-fund> Pleased to hear before Christmas that Trinity House had donated an extra £10K to the fund and the Slater Memorial fund, managed by Nautilus, had also donated an extra £10K. The pot is now £40K for bursaries available to seafarers. Received good news today that one recipient had completed a course and secured a job. This individual had heard about the fund through SAIL, so thanked SAIL for this. Others have also completed courses. The Coming Ashore programme will help seafarers in the transition of looking for maritime roles shoreside. Extra funding for this project

has been secured from ITF Seafarers' Trust. The Learn@Sea courses are also aimed at helping seafarers to secure work.

CS, CA – CA is in lockdown. One staff member, the Bar Manager, has been furloughed. Two vacancies are available at CA. There have been no cases so far since the start of the pandemic, thanks to the staff being vigilant.

DD, FM – Growing confusion over crew changes with fishermen particularly over pre-flight and arrival testing requirements and how to go about getting tested. Boats without crew unable to fish, particularly in Northern Ireland. Grateful to MNWB for the MiFi initiative, which was much appreciated over Christmas by a number of migrant crew. Also very grateful for funding from ICMA and local communities to provide treats for those stuck onboard over Christmas. An incident at sea since the last meeting involving a Second World War ordnance exploding under a fishing boat leaving three men with life changing injuries who FM are supporting. The fishing industry is angry about the Brexit deal. With the latest lockdown, markets are already starting to turn down so can expect needs to go up.

DH, HRAS – On international side, focus has been on several detailed investigations into owners and flag states for abuses towards crew, particularly blacklisting and masters, two pending international reports on that. Also, one multi-state investigation in the Middle East. Continuing to develop the international ad hoc tribunal for victims of abuse at sea alongside the International Chamber of Commerce and the international law firm Shearman & Sterling. Have been doing lots of work in the Commonwealth sector raising the issue of safety and security of fisheries observers.

DP, MNA – The MNA has sadly lost two members to Covid. Bill Anderson in Liverpool died very suddenly and another member is seriously ill in hospital.

DT, SCS – Last year, SCS exited at approx. 720 children versus the normal rate of 450, an increase of nearly 60%. 51 children from MN families coming through for assistance, combined fishing and MN together making up half of SCS's work. Thanked TH for their help with Christmas food parcels, each family received a food box for Christmas day and Boxing day and a chocolate box for the children. Pushing families to access free school meals allowances since schools closed yesterday and have ramped up emotional and practical support for families. The weeks ahead will be tough for families living in high rise flats with no outside space. On the fishing side, Covid grants have been extended to the end of March, thanked TH and SfUK. Grateful to MNWB for funding for computers for families who don't have a computer at home for the children to use. The SCS team is in good spirits after a well-deserved Christmas break.

DL, SfUK – Last year SfUK tripled the amount of grants committee meetings and almost doubled the amount of grants given out. In addition to the £2 million normal grant fund SfUK gave over £1.5 million from Covid fund. This covered PPE, additional help for food and IT equipment, MiFi units jointly with MNWB and DfT, funded programmes in India and Africa, gave support in the Philippines, and a huge amount of support to seafarers' centres with PPE, staff wages and loss of income. There is still £432K left in the Covid fund, there are 5 grant applications at the moment, encouraged members to contact SfUK for help. The Anchor Fund was launched on 1st December. Save the date: Wednesday 4th February 10.00-11.00 for maritime welfare charities that are looking for welfare and Covid support in 2021. An Eventbrite invitation will be coming out shortly.

GH, MCG – Thanks to TH, Nautilus Slater Fund and MNWB for their contributions to the Retraining fund. The MCG is paying MS's costs, this is a successful joint and collaborative venture. Highlighted the MCG's training standard on mental health and wellbeing and thanked MNWB for using this and to the MCA for supporting this. Welcomed BG who will be replacing Val Coleman and helping to take the MCG forward as a group. The MCG members have put together over £6 million in grants to support Covid funding.

KM, IMarEST – Congratulated all those who work ‘at the sharp end’ supporting seafarers’ welfare. A public subscription by the Daily Chronicle founded the charity in 1912 after the sinking of the Titanic and it is a legacy of this that the IMarEst now distributes.

MF, SM – Thanked JC at DfT, MCA and UK CoS for their input at the WG which is very helpful. Chaplains continued to be very busy over the Christmas period in the UK and overseas. Thanked ITF Seafarers’ Trust for their financial assistance with Christmas presents for seafarers which was greatly appreciated. Today is the Feast of the Epiphany, which is Christmas for seafarers from Eastern Europe so SM are continuing to distribute Christmas presents.

MH, NWF – MH was delighted that JD, a dedicated member of the Nautilus team, had received the Award. Ups and downs at MP due to the changes in tiers, Christmas arrangements and then full lockdown. The gym, hair salon, café and activity rooms are all now closed. All care home residents and staff have been vaccinated. Started face to face visits at the care home prior to Christmas using lateral flow tests, now back to ‘pod’ visits at the care home. Home care staff are now tested weekly, care home staff tested twice weekly and residents monthly. Caseworkers are continuing to work from home using telephone and videoconferencing.

SW, SHS – In terms of Covid response, 200 grants have been allocated to help seafarers, the equivalent to just over £120K. Priority is to keep seafarers fit whilst at sea. Endeavouring to continue the Dreadnought and physio services and the Seafit programme. Last year SHS provided about 1,000 free physio sessions to seafarers and those sessions will continue safely in a face to face environment. Dreadnought – all priority and elective surgery is on hold and people will be put on a waiting list. Urgent cases should seek care locally through the NHS. SHS will be celebrating their bicentennial year during 2021.

IA, MtS – MtS is delighted that JA has received the Award. Continuing to visit ships across the UK and at other ports on the gangway or at the quayside and using PPE. In Port Talbot having difficulties accessing ships and seafarers are not being allowed off their ships. MtS Chaplain there will have discussions with the port on this. Continuing to support seafarers, doing lots of shopping for those who are afraid to come off their ship. All centres are now closed again except for Fowey thanks to an MNWB grant that allowed the centre to be adapted to a 24 hour space. There are also two MiFi units at Fowey that the seafarers are reliant on, grateful to MNWB, SfUK & DfT for this initiative.

SC, MNWB – Seafarer Support launched a social media campaign at the end of December to actively promote its signposting service. 140 constituent charities, promoted through the website, have been asked to advertise the service through their own social media channels and website. The number of visitors to the site has almost doubled since the start of the campaign. Welfare cases continue to be supported via phone and email, over 220 cases were referred last year and over £134K has been generated for clients. MNWB grants - the CE and Chairman can approve capital grants up to £5K, and major grants over £5k that can include ‘start up’ costs can now be approved at Council meetings throughout the year. The emergency fund for abandoned seafarers is used to provide recreational support to crew on ships, the criteria has been extended to support seafarers affected by the pandemic. The MiFi partnership programme jointly funded by MNWB, DfT and Seafarers UK continues to provide communication for seafarers during the pandemic. This winter’s PWC meetings will be held remotely. Lack of shore leave and access to welfare visits continue to be dominant themes. The Board has developed a new bespoke seafarers mental health and wellbeing awareness course to constituent charities and Port Welfare Committees. This is an online trainer led Zoom course which uses the MNTB and MCG standard protocols as a best practice guide. The course is aimed at Chaplains and port visitors who provide direct support for seafarers. The uptake for the course has been excellent with 4 courses held at the end of December. There is already a waiting list of over 22 people for courses to be held in early 2021.

VM, TH – TH still has some Covid-19 funding available and encouraged members to get in touch if needing help. Delighted to have been able to give additional funding to the Bursary fund and to hear that this is being used successfully.

Closing Remark - 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 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 3rd February 2021 at 11:00

DRAFT