



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 6th May 2020

PRESENT: Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Revd Ijeoma Ajibade (IA)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
Mr Alex Campbell (ACL)	Queen Victoria Seamen's Rest (QVSR)/Tilbury SC
Capt. Andrew Cassels (AC)	Chairman, MNWB
Valerie Coleman (VC)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Ms Lynette Crossley (LC)	Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA)
Cdre David Dickens (DD)	Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Mr David Hammond (DH)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
Mr Roger Harris (RH)	Int. Seafarers' Welfare Assistance Network (ISWAN)
Mr Mick Howarth (MH)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
Mr Ken McLean (KM)	IMarEst Guild of Benevolence (IMarEst)
Miss Victoria Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
Mr Justin Osmond (JO)	Shipwrecked Mariners' Society (SMS)
Mr Andrew Pitcher (AP)	Sailors' Society (SS)
Mr Darren Procter (DP)	RMT
Mrs Christine Rankin (CR)	The Watch Ashore (WA)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
Capt John Sail (JS)	Merchant Navy Association (MNA)
Ms Laura Simons (LS)	MCG Comms Consultant
Mrs Catherine Spencer (CS)	Seafarers UK (SfUK)
Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Mrs Deanne Thomas (DT)	Sailors' Children's Society (SCS)
Mr Christian Turner (CT)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Ms Lysanne Wilson (LW)	Seafarers' Hospital Society (SHS)

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:

The Chairman apologised for an inaccuracy regarding SAIL in last week's meeting notes. An update received from Miles Cowley on 4th May 2020 re. SAIL is as follows:

"SAIL continues to give debt and budgeting advice. However most creditors are accepting requests for a 3 month payment holiday, so the importance of debt advice at the moment is substantially reduced. Usually around a third of our advice is debt/budgeting. Now I'd guess it's 10%. As lockdown is eased and government assistance ends I anticipate debt/budgeting work may well be over 50% of what we do. SAIL has hired a full time debt adviser - Phil - who started on 27th April. Tomorrow SAIL will interview for 2 more full time generalist advisers."

TS, CoS – ICS crew change working group and welfare group met yesterday – series of protocols being drafted which are aimed at shipping companies and governments at national and local levels with the aim of re-establishing transport links and facilitating crew movements.

Protocols have been signed off and are expected to become an IMO circular letter to be issued to all governments. Hopeful that countries will be encouraged to re-establish links to ensure that seafarers are able to travel to and from ships with minimal risk of contracting infection. The UK CoS will be issuing a letter to the Shipping Minister to encourage the UK to adopt these protocols. Reports of crew changes being re-established in Europe, bit by bit, especially in Eastern Europe. Not certain whether this is the result of joint ship owner and seafarer organisations lobbying of transport ministers along with the work of the European Commission but this has certainly had some effect. If and when Filipino seafarers are able to get in and out of the Philippines, it is still unclear whether they will be able to get the relevant visas needed to enter Europe. Schedule of flights will begin tomorrow to repatriate stranded Indians, unclear how many seafarers this may include. Would be useful to know the number of Indian seafarer students stranded here that were recently discussed. Concerns over media reports of 14 day quarantine for persons returning to the UK on flights and whether this applies to seafarers. Would like to have discussions with DfT and other parts of government on how this affects crew changes and whether alternative arrangements could be implemented for seafarers. DA and DP to contact TS if they hear of companies who are members of the CoS and failing to take up the furlough scheme. Joint letter from the CoS, NI and RMT sent to the Chancellor and Maritime Minister to try to ensure that seafarers who fall outside of job retention scheme and are unable to benefit from the self-employed income support scheme are not left without support. Discussions on testing for seafarers are still ongoing with regard to when to test and the sorts of tests available. Contact: TSpringett@ukchamberofshipping.com

DA, NI – NI have had input into protocols regarding crew changes. Main issue is lack of clarity on seafarer eligibility for government support scheme, some companies are not well informed on the guidance – issue here on communication with shipping companies. Have had reports on companies issuing notices that they will be making redundancies as they do not believe they are eligible for the furlough scheme although NI believes they are. Clarification needed on furlough and self-employed scheme. Increased enquiries from members on a range of issues. Otherwise, business as usual.

DP, RMT – Concerns regarding impact on the ferry sector, not expecting passenger capacities to return for another 2-5 years. Biggest impact is on onboard service members, also seeing redundancies within the offshore sector due to impact of price of oil and Covid-19. Turbulent times, trying to keep as many UK seafarers employed as possible including transfer of skills to other areas of the maritime sector. Concerns over the way the industry has reacted from H&S point of view. When pubs were closed and social distancing introduced, this guidance did not initially extend to vessels and bars remained open on ferries. Once restrictions begin to be lifted there must be a balance with H&S and this is an area that has been highlighted to the MCA. Role of H&S representatives onboard must be considered going forward. Needs to be joined up thinking, support and vigilance for the offshore industry with regard to non-payment of wages.

JC, DfT – Indian government has asked consulars and high commissions to record number of Indian nationals overseas who are trying to get back to India. On Sunday a short form was issued to record details including name and circumstances and on Monday it was announced that several flights would be going to India, at charge and prioritising individuals most at risk. India has agreed to a mandatory 14 day quarantine on arrival in India either in a hospital or local facility, also at charge. Not expecting the flights to benefit many seafarers due to limited availability. Carnival looking at using their vessels to repatriate seafarers to India, could accommodate 1,400 seafarers although this remains uncertain as an option. Call with PHE yesterday, the recently distributed FAQs may be updated and revised version will be shared with members once complete. Regarding the use of face masks, 'science' still advises hand washing as the most important way to protect yourself from infection. Letters from RMT, CoS and NI regarding furlough scheme have today been received by ministers, hoping for new guidance from Treasury as a result. The issues of closing borders and mandatory quarantine on arrival into the UK are still being discussed although it has been enforced that seafarers and offshore workers should be excluded from any such requirements.

RH, ISWAN – Continuing to receive high number of calls on SeafarerHelp, main issues are repatriation and concerns over visitors coming aboard vessels. Increased number of calls regarding financial hardship. ISWAN have hardship fund in operation in the Philippines where individual seafarers can apply for up to \$500, received over 1300 applications in 4 days. Hoping to increase the fund which is financed by Western Union. One flight a day from London to India with 250 seats, still the issue of seafarers being able to get home from places such as Mumbai or Delhi. Have encouraged Indian seafarer students in the UK, previously discussed, to register with the High Commission. Contacted today by a shipping company about an Indian seafarer who signed off in Gibraltar, only flight from Gibraltar is to the UK, trying to help him to apply for a visa so that he can be repatriated from the UK.

ACL, QVSR/TSC – QVSR – Resident tested negative for Covid-19 on Monday, a week later he died having then tested positive. Raises questions over testing. TSC – A sixth cruise ship has come into Tilbury with approx. 500 crew onboard. British crew are allowed ashore, remaining crew still onboard. Over 1,000 crew currently in Tilbury, issue of trying to allow seafarers to observe Ramadan. Christian mission societies doing their best to ensure noodles are made available for those crew members. Delighted that SaSo have resumed their Chaplains within the port.

AP, SaSo – Returning services to UK ports where able and permitted, some Chaplains are restricted due to age and health concerns. Ship visiting not allowed in many countries, often not even quayside. Requests for support and welfare grants for basic food and medicine continue to come in. Received more than double the number of welfare grant applications than usual. Requests from the Philippines already surpassing the number received during all of last year. Assisted a group of seafarers unable to work after Manila went into lockdown, paid for their rent and food costs after they were left stranded. 10 helplines in total, 60% calls from Indian seafarers and the rest from Filipinos, biggest concerns are job security and anxiety. Some seafarers with psychological problems after fellow crew members have tested positive. There are language barriers with helping some of those seafarers. Proactively making calls to vessels SaSo has partnerships with. Singapore lockdown will continue until 1st June with some activities allowed from 12th May although unclear if ship visiting can resume then. Ship visiting generally restricted in India. Overseas programmes have been suspended.

IA, MtS – Limited ship visiting across the UK and Europe, particularly by request through the agent. Various restrictions in other parts of the world. Digital Chaplaincy gaining popularity with seafarers. MtS Regional Directors and senior management team are scenario planning, looking to the future, what work might look like and whether seafarer centres will be allowed to open. One Chaplain tested positive and remains at home. BB leading on welfare support for the Indian seafarers previously discussed.

CS, SfUK – Working on how best to spend £2 million fund. Seafarers' Awareness Week scheduled for 6th-12th July, good opportunity to highlight the challenges faced by seafarers in the past and during Covid-19. Would welcome case studies from members. Question as to whether the sector is capturing all the need and whether there are big areas of need that are unknown and whether there are new ways of working that should be considered to support people. Encouraged by approaches by for example, MtS approach to Digital Chaplaincy. Contact: catherine.spencer@seafarers.uk

CR, WA – All remain safe at Care Ashore, extra agency staff have been brought in to support the staff. Some PPE has been issued but delivery is expensive. Have set up a small group for wives to talk to each other. Frequency of Seafarers Link increased to once a week for half an hour, important as feedback is that loneliness increases in the evenings. One member tested positive in Truro, another may also have tested positive. Support is needed for the elderly.

CR, MS – Business as usual, supporting learners. Slight increase in enquiries from seafarers interested in taking up new qualifications or degrees. MCA considering holding oral exams for engineers online and remote exams to enable seafarers to achieve their CoCs. MCA will also consider those who already have their NoE. Have sent out guidance to FM to enable port staff to give out free access to Learn@Sea for basic Maths and English.

DD, FM – Thanked SHS, SMS, SCS and RMNEF for their great collaboration and for support from TH and SfUK. Demand increasing still, focus remains on general living expenses. Thanked Paul Atkins, MCA Surveyor in Aberdeen for his help with four Ghanaians who had illegal contracts, were not being paid and had no prospect of repatriation. They have now been paid thanks to Paul. Thanked Sharon and Ben Bailey at MtS for their help with MN seafarers at Nautical College in Fleetwood who had fallen between the cracks. Many migrant issues still not resolved on immigration status or access to state support, this was raised at length at the APPG on fishing yesterday where the focus was entirely on the industry, not people. Issues are repeat support as individual's situations remain unchanged. In 2019, 72% English boats under 10m did not make enough money to cover their fixed costs in the Jan-April 2020 period. Fish from Europe arriving in English markets are undercutting the price that marketeers are willing to pay for English fish. Many smaller fishing harbour authorities struggling, issues with H&S in harbours. Real need is the long term. Looking into 'No Isolation' video phone boxes.

DH, HRAS – Ship management firms making contact to showcase how they are now conducting business in a positive manner. Tracking global response within maritime and aviation. Detailed Covid-19 crew advice was available in Hong Kong in December 2019. Tracking 'chatter' for calls for owners and managers to provide mandatory quarantining facilities around the world including quality medical facilities. Concerns over non-payment once signed off and having to go into quarantine, returning to families and infecting them if they haven't been quarantined, and increasing reports on social exclusion. Also concerns about medical facilities onboard if there is an infection onboard. Concerns from crew over blacklisting and losing their jobs. All welfare enquiries received are redirected towards relevant organisations. Thanked ISWAN for their recent assistance.

DT, SCS – Have taken on 2 years' worth of fishing families in 5 weeks. Considering an extension for support for fishing families, the need hasn't gone. Only one new MN family has come forward for assistance. There is a definite gap in the route through to assistance, possible driven by the SSAFA office being closed and people struggling to get hold of them. Would appreciate it if there is anything that can be done to highlight assistance for MN families. Fishing - taking on 3-4 new cases every day, sometimes more. Need to look at funding in the longer term, genuine need is there, small amounts of cash for food and electricity. Longer term impact – will be looking at the impact of poverty on families and children. Anticipating divorce spike which falls into entry criteria for support for seafarers' families.

JS, MNA – One member has sadly died after developing Covid-19. Many members will be putting on their blazers and going outside their homes this Friday for VE75. Continue to maintain phone contact and email with members. Bristol branch has modified their newsletter to focus on today's issues and to include quizzes. 3 weeks remain to submit nominations for the MN Medal. Perhaps meritorious service can be recognised for seafarers maintaining supplies of food, fuel, medicines etc and for raising awareness of their significant and critical role in the wellbeing of the nation at this time.

JC advised that the MN Medal is still under consideration for this year and that the deadline for nominations may be extended. JC will advise once plans are confirmed. Action: JC.

JO, SMS – Thanked all those working on the ground and interfacing with the people being helped for their hard work. Already passed double the number of grant applications that would normally be awarded and now approaching triple this number. These statistics don't include the 'normal' work in terms of providing mobility aids, white goods and funeral grants etc where numbers are significantly depleted. Very little coming through from MN, very heavily weighted towards the fishing community. Those areas will come to light as restrictions are eased, further

adding to the financial burden. Increased financial support in the longer term will feed through to other areas than just debt.

KM, IMarEst – The WG meetings are beneficial to learn from others. Compared the current situation to completing first mile of 26 mile marathon.

LW, SHS – Received more applications in April than all of Q2 last year, spend is up by two thirds. Concerns over very few MN applications received, normal business for white/brown goods has almost dried up. Real concerns are for a few months' time, expecting to struggle to maintain this level of spend and then deal with the huge amount of debts being built up. One of the reasons for success with supporting fishermen is thanks to the partnership with the excellent staff on the ground with FM, SMS, SCS and RMNEF.

DP noted that a number of speakers reported that not many applications were coming through from MN seafarers. Important that members work together on this. Please contact DP to continue this discussion: d.procter@rmt.org.uk

MH, NWF – Bread and butter work from older mariners isn't happening at the moment. Concern that there will be an increase in demand down the line. Sadly lost a resident a week last Monday but since then the care home has been confirmed as Covid free. In the wider park, one resident is unwell and awaiting test results. Three home care staff have been absent, all tested positive but two are now back at work and one recovering but expected back shortly.

VM, TH – An increase in individual requests which TH are unable to help with but have signposted these enquiries. Board meeting next week, will be looking at any extra provisions that can be made.

VC, MCG – LS working with the MCG and the broader sector to identify how the message of support can be put across and to increase awareness, eligibility and availability of support for MN seafarers. LS will be bringing together a group to look at issues to be focused on. Working on better communications, had success with sector messages in the House of Lords debate last week with the help of Seafarers UK and Lord Mountevans. Looking for opportunities to bring that co-ordinated welfare message together. MCG meeting every fortnight, sharing intelligence between members to get a better picture of need and matching this against available resources. Long term planning implications – ensuring that the maritime charity welfare sector is in a fit state post Covid-19 to meet the need out there. Seafarers' accommodation to be added to the agenda for the next meeting – have information from NWF as to how they have been affected. Would be useful to have information on financial implications of Covid-19 from QVSR and Care Ashore also.

Contact: valerie.coleman@seafarers.uk and laurasimons@lms2.demon.co.uk

LS, MCG – Pleased with the work achieved for the House of Lords debate and thanked members for their contribution. Concerned to hear about issues with take up by MN seafarers and will be in touch with DP on this.

LC, MPHA - Short on PPE supplies, working out the best ways to renew SSECs and water samples.

MNWB - Seafarer Support referral website to be launched in next 3 weeks. Members will be advised as soon as this is live.

Post meeting note received from John Lowry, SCFS:

SCFS chaplains are continuing to provide support to seafarers using virtual meetings. One chaplain has been supplying requested goods directly to the shipping agent who has been able to deliver them to the vessel, maintaining social distancing.

Members expressed their condolences for all the reported Covid-19 related deaths.

Closing Remark - Members to forward any links, extra information and note amendments to Celia celia@mnwb.org.uk Meeting format to remain flexible. Members content to continue meeting on a weekly basis. Apologies for any unintended inaccuracies. Members agreed that meeting notes could be centrally displayed on the MNWB website.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 13th May 2020 at 11:00

DRAFT