



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 7TH APRIL 2021

PRESENT: Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
Mr Alexander Campbell (ACL)	Queen Victoria Seamen's Rest (QVSR)/Tilbury SC
Capt. Andrew Cassels (AC)	MNWB Chairman
Ms Lynette Crossley (LC)	Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA)
Cdre David Dickens (DD)	The Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Ms Louise Hopwood (LH)	Sailors' Children's Society (SCS)
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Ms Elizabeth Mavropoulou (EM)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
Miss Victoria Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
Capt. Justin Osmond (JO)	Shipwrecked Mariners' Society (SMS)
Mrs Christine Rankin (CR)	The Watch Ashore (WA)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
Mrs Catherine Spencer	The Seafarers' Charity (TSC)
Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Ms Cath Stamper (CS)	Care Ashore (CA)
Mr Steven Thompson (ST)	Seamen's Christian Friend Society (SCFS)
Mrs Sandra Welch (SW)	Seafarers Hospital Society

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:

TS, UK CoS – Two main issues for the CoS at the moment, which are quarantining in Scotland and lateral flow testing of all seafarers. Seafarers were exempt from quarantining requirements when this was first introduced last year. After the announcement of the 'red list' countries there was a brief period where there were no exemptions for seafarers although there is now an exemption for England, Wales and N. Ireland. The Philippines has been added to the 'red list' this week. The CoS is putting out advice to its members to ensure that any Filipino seafarers travelling to the UK to join ships are in possession of valid documentation so they are not wrongfully transported to hotel managed quarantine. In Scotland the regulations are near identical to the rest of the UK but the interpretation is very different. Seafarers who live in Scotland are being put into managed quarantine irrespective of where they have travelled from, the only exceptions are if they are arriving to join a ship or if they are being repatriated if their employment with a shipowner is ceasing. This definition of repatriation is causing a concern and is not consistent with the CoS understanding of the situation. The CoS has held discussions with the trade unions and the MCA who are all in the same mind: when a seafarer returns to their home country, having been onboard a vessel and they are having contractual leave time, that is a repatriation. The shipowner is required to cover the cost of this, or financial security must be in place to ensure the costs are met. The CoS is receiving reports of seafarers who are presenting documents from their employers to indicate that their employment is terminated and are still being required to enter managed hotel quarantine. Many Scottish seafarers working in operations supporting the oil & gas sector are having to go into rigorous control measures before travelling to join their ships, especially if operating off of places such as Angola or South America. A further 10 days self-isolating in a hotel is proving too much for some to bear and companies are reporting that some seafarers have resigned. Hopes of making progress with Scottish government on this

are unlikely because elections for Scottish Parliament are due next month and the government is in purdah. The CoS's lobbying efforts will be focused on members of Scottish Parliament when this resumes and hopes that a common sense approach can be adopted to bring Scotland into line with the rest of the UK. The CoS has challenged the Scottish government to present a risk assessment to show that seafarers returning for a month at home after a month onboard at sea represents a high risk of bringing strains of Covid into Scotland. A requirement was introduced yesterday for all seafarers spending more than 48 hours in England to take a lateral flow test on the 2nd, 5th and 8th day following their arrival. The CoS is concerned for the impact on ferry operations because the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) is taking the view that even when a ferry is turning around straight away and sailing, the crew should still be tested. Contradictory advice on this is given in the DHSC toolkit. The CoS is making urgent representations to the DfT to get their support for a further approach to the DHSC because the impact of this requirement on ferry operations and crew has not been thought through. There is a lack of understanding of just how busy ferry crews during port turn round times when alongside. CoS members are generally supportive of the principle of lateral flow tests and the CoS has encouraged members to register for workplace testing so that they can get supplies of test kits for their crew members. The sanction for any breach of regulations falls on seafarers; they can be fined, or if they refuse to submit to testing they can be put into self-isolation. Consistency of these new regulations with the UK's international obligations to facilitate seafarer movement and to allow for shore leave is questionable at the moment and the CoS is doing what it can to ensure the facilitation of seafarer movement. The CoS has enjoyed good co-operation with the trade unions throughout, campaigning on these matters jointly and will continue to do so as appropriate. TS noted CS's report on AMSA's work to try and get a resolution put forward in the ILO for better recording of suicide statistics and emphasised that the CoS were very proactive in the promotion of mental health and wellbeing. Last week CoS, NI and RMT issued practical guidance for the shipping industry on improving seafarer mental wellbeing. TS and CS agreed to further discuss the topic out of meeting.

DA, NI – DA reiterated the difficult situation reported in Scotland, the lack of consistency, the frequently changing advice and the sanctions falling on the individual seafarer. The new testing requirements were introduced yesterday and the traffic light system may yet bring more changes. The changing rules are extremely difficult for seafarers to keep on top of especially when they are on ship and often without internet access. A meeting was held yesterday with some members, DA has pointed out the difficulty of a 12 week gap between vaccine appointments which is expected to raise more issues as the age groups come down and more seafarers are required to be vaccinated. A lack of consistency has been reported on how different GPs and different health authorities are dealing with the overall situation. John Cousley is following up with DHSC on this as clarity is needed for seafarers. As we come out of lockdown, the prevention of shore leave for seafarers is expected to become more of an issue over the following weeks and months. DA has proposed that MCA issue guidance to clarify the situation moving forward.

GL, MCA – The situation in Scotland is significant and the MCA is working on this issue. As the UK opens up the issue of shore leave will be monitored. The MCA will be resuming routine port state control inspections of foreign ships from 26th April as these are presently only being carried out if there is a safety issue.

DD queried the status of people working on the water in aquaculture, whether they would be classified as seafarers, as this was currently a grey area for the maritime charity sector. GL agree to investigate the definition for this unique sub sector and confirm with DD out of meeting.

ACL, QVSR/TSC – All QVSR staff and residents have been offered both vaccines although only around 50% of staff have taken the vaccine. Waiting to see what employment law determines on this due to the community being put at risk. For active seafarers, it is unclear what training, if any, is being given to show Captains and crew how to conduct lateral flow tests. These seafarers are anxious about fines and their employment status as they are confused about the changing processes. The Chaplain at Tilbury is being asked by the Captain to go onboard and demonstrate how to do these tests correctly. The team at Tilbury is helping nervous crew where they can.

CR, MS – Continuing to receive applications to the Covid Redundancy & Retraining bursary which is making steady progress. In total, 57 applications have been received and 45 bursaries awarded, amounting to just over £21K. The pot holds a total of £40K. The scheme will be reviewed at the end of the first 6 months, at the end of April, as to whether it is extended. There was concern that there had not been much take up from ratings or the ferry sector. Most applications had been received from deep sea vessel workers and the offshore sector, closely followed by the cruise sector. More officers than ratings have applied for the bursary although more ratings had since applied following a marketing push by Laura Simons of MCG. The 'Coming Ashore' programme continues although seafarers are reportedly choosing to remain at sea. Many seafarers are updating their STCW basic certificates and many are taking up courses to upskill to the next level of certification.

CS, CA – All residents and most staff will be fully vaccinated very soon. Some seafarers have quarantined at CA for ten days between jobs which has been a better option for them than the enforced hotel quarantine, which is going well.

CR, WA – Seafarers Link has moved across to Age UK and automated, which should also be cheaper. The beneficiaries are enjoying increasing numbers of Zoom calls every week since the pandemic began and are all supporting each other.

EM, HRAS – Recently expanded to 9 non-advisory Board members, with cross-disciplinary expertise that will add value to the work of HRAS. For awareness and advocacy, continuing with forthcoming publications on abandonment, stowaways, stateless vessels and a case study on supporting cadets at sea.

CS, TSC – TSC is not a delivery charity but gives grants to the sector. Recently launched new strategy, will continue working with the maritime charities and looking for new ideas and new ways of supporting the sector. Recently awarded a grant to 'Safer Waves', an online service for anybody who has or is suffering from sexual harassment, in conjunction with a rape crisis centre that provides online support. This is a new service that will be available for seafarers. TSC has also recently awarded a grant to 'Befrienders Worldwide', who are similar to the Samaritans, and useful for seafarers to know about if they are feeling vulnerable. A press release on the two service providers discussed will soon be promoted on social media and the temporary website. TSC also encourages its partners and ship visitors to promote these services. Regarding AMSA's work in putting forward a resolution to the ILO, it would be easier to understand what services to provide to the sector if the number of suicides and deaths at sea were known as this has been poorly recorded in some parts of the world.

DD, FM – There was a nasty accident off the Isle of Muck over the weekend, resulting in life threatening injuries and the man is unfortunately still in an induced coma. On Sunday a 49 year old fisherman sadly committed suicide on the Isle of Skye. This has been the busiest period in Scotland during DD's time with FM. In the last 7-10 days £150K has been drawn from the Scottish government facility. A lot of urgent financial support is being required. From discussions with SMS and SHS, the picture is patchier elsewhere in the UK but there are still pockets of need. The Netflix documentary 'Seaspiracy' has attracted mixed reviews in the fishing sector.

JO, SMS – Starting to see a tail off in grant requests, it has been quieter for a couple of weeks.

LH, SCS – Fishing families are continuing to apply for a 3 month extension to the Covid financial support scheme which will include a school uniform grant. An estimated 240 children will be supported by this scheme. Working alongside FM on those extensions. No applications for support have been received from the MN but a steady trickle of fishing families continues to apply for the main support scheme. Thanked MNWB for providing further funding which has enabled SCS to continue providing home computers to MN/FF families. SCS will be celebrating its 200th year on 19th April, Deanne will be sending out Zoom invites via the Covid WG to invite members to 'raise a glass' celebration.

LC, MPHA – Continuing to carry out certification and sampling where appropriate. Started to email information on mental health support services and handing out hard copies, fliers and laminated copies on ships boarded to widely circulate this information. Crew can therefore find contacts worldwide who can help them with mental health issues.

ST, SCFS – ST has been Chairman of SCFS for the last year and is based in Dundonald where SCFS HQ is located. A number of new trustees have been appointed, the Board is now up to 9 people, from 4 people just 9 months ago. New trustees are in Liverpool, Portsmouth, Monaghan (Southern Ireland) and existing trustees are in Cork and Belfast. A seafarers' hardship fund is being rolled out through the Port Chaplains, to help those needing a small amount of financial support during the pandemic. The amount will be reviewed this year and hopefully improved next year.

VM, TH – The next round of grants will take place in a couple of weeks and is currently the only one scheduled for this calendar year. There has been a reduction in the grants budget and routine applications will not be considered until January. There is still a small amount of funding set aside for Covid. Members were encouraged to get in touch if they wish to discuss this.

PT, MNWB – Concerned for the future of seafarers' centres, many are currently closed and some may not recover which could have a long term effect on the welfare of seafarers coming ashore. TSC, TK Foundation and ITF Seafarers' Trust have been working closely together to try to keep the centres around the world solvent in order to reopen when lockdowns ease. MNWB is looking at the issue closely and will work to help the UK seafarers' centres going forward.

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.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 5th May 2021 at 11:00