



## MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

### NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 7<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2021

<b>PRESENT:</b> Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Mrs Ruth Campbell (RC)	Queen Victoria Seamen's Rest (QVSR)/Tilbury SC
Mr Alexander Campbell (AC)	Queen Victoria Seamen's Rest (QVSR)/Tilbury SC
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Ms Lynette Crossley (LC)	Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA)
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Mr Ben Gibbons (BG)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr Simon Graine (SG)	Int'l Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN)
Mr Tom Holmer (TH)	MNWB PWC Manager
Mr Mick Howarth (MH)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
Mr Daniel King (DK)	Lead Researcher on 'Respond, Recover, Reset' project
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Mr Andrew Lord (AL)	Alabaré (AB)
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)
Ms Laura Simons (LS)	MCG Consultant
Mrs Catherine Spencer	The Seafarers' Charity (TSC)
Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Mrs Deanne Thomas (DT)	Sailors' Children's Society (SCS)
Mr Steve Trowsdale (ST)	ITF
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:

DK introduced himself as Professor of Organisation Studies at Nottingham Trent University. DK is working on a series of investigations on the impact of Covid on the voluntary community and social enterprise sectors, running a monthly barometer experience and conducting interviews. DK is running a pilot with the MNWB over the next 6 months to understand what is happening in the maritime sector and how Covid has impacted different types of organisations. This bespoke survey is monthly and would include maritime related questions in order to carry out a comparison between the maritime welfare charities and the national picture. For further information, please contact BG at [manager@maritimecharitiesgroup.org](mailto:manager@maritimecharitiesgroup.org) The link to the 10 minute survey is as follows: <http://cpwop.org.uk/what-we-do/projects-and-publications/covid-19-vcse-organisation-responses/> Further information would be sent out over the next few days and members were encouraged to promote the survey to their networks.

**JC, DfT** – This week is Maritime Safety Week. The Minister is travelling around the country and recently visited Mariners' Park. Still no central guidance on vaccines to regional teams, advising them to contact NHS Customer Contact Centre to confirm if there are questions over vaccinations. Reports of good examples of local port health authorities, operators and NHS teams working together to vaccinate seafarers, and other reports of not so much support available. Working with DHSC and SCVO on international vaccines, considering setting up an international hub, potentially Gibraltar or vaccinating seafarers in transit through the UK or Gibraltar. There are also

discussions on how fishermen can be better supported at this time. JC was pleased to announce that funding has been approved for MiFi units.

**TH, MNWB** – Reports that seafarers are receiving vaccinations in Tilbury, Fowey and Falmouth. Approx. 100 MN seafarers have been vaccinated in Falmouth and approx. 250 in Tilbury. Reports from PWCs are that issues are very localised. Another 13 ports are reportedly trying to get vaccinations up and running for MN seafarers. Thanks to FM and Seafit, it appears that fishers have been very active in getting vaccinated. FM and Scotland and the South West have reportedly got all their constituents vaccinated regardless of nationality. TS suggested that NHS central be contacted to provide advice.

**TS, UK CoS** – Norwegian government asking for vaccination batch number as well as proof of vaccination. This will be having an impact on Scottish seafarers/oil rig workers and their employers as Scotland do not have batch numbers on their vaccination cards. This information needs to be retrieved by a freedom of information request. TH requested JC take this up with DHSC. Regarding possible relaxation of visa requirements for offsigning seafarers coming back into the UK, to be able to prove repatriations flights, TS is consulting on this internationally and with members, and Mark Dickinson suggested writing a joint CoS/NI letter. Hoped to have as much information as possible on this by then end of the week.

**MW, UK CoS** – The UK CoS is working to assist ICMA in populating a global list to outline where in the UK seafarers are being successfully vaccinated <https://icma.as/vaccines/> Currently aware of Liverpool, Southampton and Hull vaccinating seafarers. Any information from members would be greatly appreciated. Hopefully, we can consolidate a clearer national view of how and where vaccinations have been possible until the NHS guidance has been shared. Members were asked to share information by contacting [mwhite@ukchamberofshipping.com](mailto:mwhite@ukchamberofshipping.com)

**ST, ITF** – No news on replacement ITF Inspectors in the UK. Working closely with NAMMA and the seafarer welfare centres in the US to roll out a vaccination programme. More than 20,000 seafarers have been vaccinated already. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine has been used and is about to be rolled out in Canada. For double dose vaccines, there is the issue that a seafarer could have one vaccination, then be at sea for a long period of time and unable to pick up a second shot. Being denied shore leave would also make this problematic. Suggested a number of one shot Johnson & Johnson vaccines be allocated to seafarers in the UK.

**JC** – Discussions have been held with DHSC about the Johnson & Johnson vaccine although this is not expected to be available in the UK until towards the end of the year. Supply numbers for this are not yet known. As Pfizer and Astra Zeneca belong to the same family and are the most commonly used globally, this will hopefully be helpful for seafarers in getting their second shot. Recognising shore leave internationally was a significantly issue being worked on by the DfT.

**MW** – The UK CoS has had a discussion with the MCA as to whether foreign seafarers who had received a first dose vaccination in their home country, that was not necessarily WHO approved, then a second dose of either Pfizer or Astra Zeneca, whether this would be classed as a full course of vaccination. As per the Public Health England Green Book, it was confirmed that this would be considered a complete inoculation.

**GL, MCA** – Current crew health & welfare issues include shore leave within the cruise industry and other sectors, being dealt with on a case by case basis. In the process of amending MIN 632 which provides guidance and interpretation on crew shore leave. Awaiting final wording on this from tripartite partners. MCA is boarding various UK and foreign vessels around the UK but hindered by Covid restrictions. Recently carried out a fishing vessel focused campaign in Scotland & SW England.

**SG, ISWAN** – Seafarer Help has received double the number of calls as pre-pandemic. Nature of calls are less about health & repatriation and more about accessing vaccinations. Receiving a lot of requests for maritime mental health awareness training which is delivered remotely. The team in India has launched a vaccination drive and seafarers have received their first dose through private hospitals. ISWAN has compiled a list on locations and guidance for second doses

and this is being shared with seafarers. Seafarers waiting to go overseas are being prioritised. In the Philippines, the vaccination of seafarers is ongoing, this is at no cost and the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is being administered.

**AC, QVSR/Tilbury SC** – Consideration being given to the step down in restrictions from 19<sup>th</sup> July, Ben Bailey looking into this. As seafarers are still mostly unvaccinated, it seems sensible to maintain PPE protocols to keep seafarers and staff safe, for ship visiting and in centres. A co-ordinated approach is being looked at. A staff member with a seafarer cousin in the Philippines is having difficulty getting onto ships as he has had the Chinese vaccine. RC - Pop up clinics don't tend to work due to ships' changing schedules. Have built up a good partnership with the local vaccination centre. Appointments can be arranged the day before, which is working well. Only helping seafarers to arrange these appointments if it is confirmed they will return within 12 weeks. Seafarers are very excited to receive their vaccine. Reported that seafarers do not need an NHS number to be eligible for a vaccination but a NHS number is needed to make a booking online. Encouraged members to share information on vaccinating seafarers. By the end of today, a total of 250 seafarers will have received their vaccines at Tilbury. Regarding confusion on lateral flow tests, MW advised that vessels operating within UK territorial waters and not visiting international ports do not require seafarers to take lateral flow test on days 2, 5 & 8 but vessels exiting UK waters to a foreign national port then returning into the UK are required to do so. Regarding a ship in Tilbury with Covid positive cases onboard, JC reported that PHE advice is generally to isolate on board although it is recognised this is not always the best for the individual or rest of the crew. The local health teams should be able to arrange approved accommodation if needed.

**AL, AB** – Continuing to provide supported housing for over 300 vulnerable adults of working age each day. Considering how to interpret the government's recent announcement regarding 19<sup>th</sup> July and which rules to relax. Will most likely continue to use face masks and signing in books but no decision made yet.

**BG, MCG** – Thanked DK for his work on the study of the issues facing the maritime welfare sector. The next MCG quarterly meeting is being held next Wednesday, members encouraged to contact BG for ideas on questions to be raised as this will help produce useful information for the sector as a whole. Thanked MNWB, TH and Nautilus Slater Fund for extending the Redundancy & Retraining Fund <https://www.marine-society.org/redundancy-fund> Just under 50 awards have been made. Hoping to attract more applications from ferry crew, ratings and female seafarers. Thanked the MS for administering the scheme. Would be grateful for members to help with a push on publicising the scheme. LS – Work has started targeting women ferry crew and ratings. Will be publicising in RMT News next month and in the next issue of Flash. Focusing on trying to use third parties as a channel to reach seafarers.

**CR, MS** – Redundancy & Retraining Fund has been extended until the end of the year. Recent publicity stated that the fund would come to an end at the end of April so the applications have slowed down. The message that it has been extended needs to be reshared. Recent applications have been received from ratings, 2 bursaries were awarded for a STCW refresh and medical upskilling. 37% of those who have been awarded bursaries have now found employment.

**CS, TSC** – Enjoyed working this year with ICS colleagues on the Seafarers' International Relief Fund, almost 900,000 USD raised to try to alleviate the acute hardships experienced by seafarers in India. UK Maritime Anchor Fund is still available for British MN or UK Navy needing assistance. TSC has a partnership with Relate, providing free relationship counselling. Working to ensure that crew welfare and crew repatriation issues are dealt with consistently around the UK by government bodies. Working hard to make advocacy and research better. Encouraged members to contact TSC with ideas on funding.

**IA, MtS** – MtS will continue with the current protocols being used for ship visiting and in the centres. We will continue using masks, visiting on the gangway, screens in vehicles etc.

**DT, SCS** – Caravans are open and busy. 9 caravans throughout the UK being used by seafarers' children who have been stuck in high rise flats during lockdowns. Applications for assistance are low, and are usually low this time of year. Encouraged members to let SCS know if they come across families needing assistance. Returning to the office on 19<sup>th</sup> July and starting visiting families again. This year is SCS's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Launched 'Together for 200' campaign. On 24<sup>th</sup> July at 10am, DT will be abseiling down the Spinnaker Tower in Portsmouth. Further information is available on the website.

**JO, SMS** – Fairly quiet on the Covid front, starting to push out into debt related issues and exploring new ways of tackling those who have significant debt.

**MF, SM** – No current plans to change Covid standard operating procedures. Chaplains and ship visitors are working with some normality visiting vessels around the UK. Recent 'run in' with a Scotland based fishing company in the SW who appear to be operating with some impunity. Sea Sunday is this week, more is being done digitally on this as Churches are partially closed. Visit the website or social media to find out more.

**MH, NWF** – All residents and staff at Mariners' Park are Covid free, however, a number of staff are self-isolating causing staffing issues. Unclear on what the changes to rules may be from 19<sup>th</sup> July. Although there will be a further relaxation on care home visits it is clear that these will not return to normal as some sort of testing regime will continue to be in place. The government has announced mandatory vaccinations for care home staff and NWF is supportive of this. Caseworkers are back to doing home visits, 2 new caseworkers have recently been appointed in Cardiff and in Tyne & Wear. Robert Courts MP recently visited which was very much appreciated and enjoyed. Returning to the office full-time on 19<sup>th</sup> July.

**VM, TH** – Board meeting will be held next week, next round of grants will be looked at.

**CR, WA** – Seafarers Link and Watch Ashore calls are continuing. Since Age UK took over, the numbers have been diminishing with no new members, causing concern that the service may be discontinued. Reported on a French seafarer who suffered a heart attack and was airlifted off a fishing vessel near Plymouth. He has been unable to return home to France since being discharged from hospital as he does not have his identity card. CR has been talking with the French consulate to try to assist. CR advised to talk to SAIL.

**LC, MPHA** – Trying to do their best under difficult circumstances, distributing lateral flow tests and assisting with vaccinations where possible. Still issuing sanitation certificates in person but not able to carry out impromptu visits due to other staff members either testing positive or self-isolating. There are different interpretations of guidelines and legislation within the port health profession but advice has been sought and risk assessments have been carried out to keep everyone as safe as possible.

**SC, MNWB** – TSC and MNWB have pledged funds to continue the UK Port Welfare MiFi Partnership project which had been due to finish at the due to end in July. Great to hear that DfT will also become a funding partner. The pandemic has presented participating maritime charities with challenges for ship visiting but despite this there has been an increase in MiFi usage. 40 units will be funded for the ongoing partnership project and these will be upgraded by the 5<sup>th</sup> August with unlimited data allowance. The Vehicle Replacement Programme was postponed towards the end of last year due to the pandemic and participating societies have not applied for grants to replace their vehicles. SC thanked the funders; ITF Seafarers Trust, TSC, TH & MNWB for approving an enhanced grant to help the societies replace their vehicles this year. Planning to revert to normal grant levels in 2022. Merchant Navy Honours Consultative Committee (MNHCC) members were encouraged to complete a short survey sent out yesterday to clarify the industry's view on all aspects of the Medal criteria going forward.

**Closing Remark** – Members to forward any links, extra information and note amendments to Celia [celia@mnwb.org.uk](mailto:celia@mnwb.org.uk) Meeting format to remain flexible. Apologies for any unintended inaccuracies.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> August 2021 at 11:00**

DRAFT