



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 9th SEPTEMBER 2020

PRESENT: Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Revd Ijeoma Ajibade (IA)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
Mr Ben Bailey (BB)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
Ms Elizabeth Bentley (EB)	Sailors' Children's Society (SCS)
Mrs Ruth Campbell (RCL)	Tilbury Seafarers' Centre (TSC)
Mr Alexander Campbell (ACL)	Queen Victoria's Seamen's Rest (QVSR)/Tilbury SC
Valerie Coleman (VC)	Seafarers UK (SfUK)
Ms Lynnette Crossley (LC)	Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA)
Mr David Hammond (DH)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
Mr Graham Hockley (GH)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr John Lowry (JL)	Seamen's Christian Friend Society (SCFS)
Miss Victoria Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
Capt. Justin Osmond (JO)	Shipwrecked Mariners' Society (SMS)
Capt. David Parsons (DP)	Merchant Navy Association (MNA)
Mr Andrew Pitcher (AP)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)
Mr Rob Poole (RP)	Fishing Amateur (FA)
Mrs Catherine Spencer (CS)	Seafarers UK (SfUK)
Ms Sara Walsh (SW)	British Ports Association (BPA)

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:

PT, Chair MNWB – Chairman explained that JC could not attend today due to a change of Minister yesterday with Robert Courts taking on the maritime and aviation portfolio. Kelly Tolhurst has moved to DHCLG. He added that the Minister's first official role will be before the Transport Select Committee this morning and JC needed to be on call. ITF/ICS meeting took place yesterday. International picture on crew changes remains unchanged due to spikes in some countries and ports. Response to new cases of Covid-19 taking place at regional and local levels. Notwithstanding countries that had restricted entry/transport issues, many seafarers had been repatriated, however, lack of crew changes remains an extremely high priority issue.

CS, SfUK - Strategy work has gone really well and has been signed off by the General Council. It extends the work done by SfUK's excellent grants team to see them moving to an 'outcomes focused' charity and funder. Five key themes have been identified as areas that SfUK want to work in to get to the core of issues. SfUK will still be working with many of the charity partners that they have always worked with but will want everyone who they fund to demonstrate how their work contributes to SfUK's desired impact. SfUK have allocated over £1 million of the £2 million fund. Seafarers Awareness Week went well. SfUK wants to do more work on getting the recording of seafarer suicide as a requirement in the MLC and are working on this. Fly the Red Ensign Day

also went well. Also working on significantly increasing awareness of SFUK and will be working with all their charity partners to ensure they have great case study examples to use in their PR.

DA, NI – Issues remain the same, crew changes continues to be a huge problem. An announcement was made today by the General Secretary of the IMO that the latest estimate is 300,000 seafarers are still stranded, awaiting repatriation. Therefore 300,000 are at home waiting to join ships. Receiving more complaints regarding shore leave, some crew have been onboard for 17 months. Restrictions that have been put in place by governments on crew changes also apply to shore leave in some cases. Some companies are putting blanket bans on their crew going ashore as a risk mitigation measure. Within the UK, there have been reports that Milford Haven port authorities are denying shore leave. NI questioned whether a private port terminal can deny shore leave above and beyond the UK government's own guidelines or whether a company can impose a blanket ban regardless of the port they are in. In other maritime news, there have been incidents of ships sinking, running aground on reefs and explosions. NI is keen for maritime legislation to continue to be enforced. Kelly Tolhurst, the now previous UK Maritime Minister, had been working hard on securing financial relief for seafarers at this time but her change of role may now impact this work. NI involved in a working group investigating solutions for the large number of redundancies in the UK. NI is continuing a phased return to the office which is now at 60-70%.

GH, MCG – Yesterday's meeting was constructive. The work with RMT and NI to find ways of retraining those who have been made redundant is moving forward thanks largely to the coordination by Lt Cdr David Carter, RN/MN Liaison Officer. Data on demographics for seafarers has been validated and MCG is looking at the issue of caseworkers in a collaborative way with the other major maritime charities to see what can be done. The Secretary General of the IMO will be raising the issue of seafarers at sea at the UN General Assembly.

RCL, TSC - Most of the original 1,600 crew have now been repatriated. This was a major operation involving all of the port community working together, particularly with ITF, the new ships' owners and the P&I Club. As part of the P&I agreement, all crew received the standard 4 months' wages. Some are still owed considerable amounts on top of this - eg crew owed 10 months were paid 4 months' leaving 6 months' owing and will have to wait until the ship is sold to receive their outstanding wages. There are now around 230 remaining seafarers providing safe manning to the 5 cruise ships berthed at Tilbury. There has been a struggle to find new crew and there was concern that these ships were not going to have sufficient minimum safe manning levels. Of this 230, 30 are original crew members who cannot return home at present - 21 Mauritian crew and 9 Nepalese. We are ensuring that we look after this group as a priority as they cannot fly back to their countries due to transport/border issues. We continue to be part of a response service for those depressed and feeling suicidal and are currently working with a Nepalese crew member. The Indonesian seafarer who attempted suicide has now been able to fly back to his family and helped negotiate a payment that will help him support his family on his return home. Hundreds of seafarers have taken the opportunity to leave the ships and visit green spaces via our minibus service. The sea cadet 20 year old mini bus has just about survived but not without some issues along the way. The ITF were thanked for funding this service. We continue to do all we can to support this situation responding to emergencies where needed. Yesterday 2 crew who were waiting to join the cruise ships were in crisis as the hotel they were staying in insisted that they leave as they tested positive for Covid-19. They have now been quarantined for 14 days under the care of QVSR and will join their ship after testing negative. It had certainly been an eventful year for QVSR but we also feel privileged to be able to roll our sleeves up and serve seafarers.

AP, SaSo – The Crisis Response Network is assisting The Gulf Livestock 1, the ship that sunk in the typhoon off Japan. SaSo has been asked to send some Chaplains on standby to Manila, as this is where the families of the affected seafarers are located. There are reportedly two rescued Filipinos, 1 dead Filipino and 39 missing (2 Australians, 2 New Zealanders and 35 Filipinos). SaSo have also been involved in repatriating 3 Russian seafarers who were confined to Bahrain since the start of the pandemic, thankful to be helped by ISWAN's Emergency Fund on this. Ship visiting on ships and in the ports is restricted in Asia. Have held webinars on mental health

awareness and family resilience through the Wellness programme. The new SaSo Chief Executive joined yesterday.

IA, MtS – Continuing to ship visit from the gangway, adhering to the ICMA agreement. Receiving lots of shopping requests from seafarers as many are not coming off the ships. One request was for a large quantity of water. Gradually opening seafarers' centres. Belfast, Fowey and Dunkirk are open with reduced hours. North Tees and South Tees will hopefully reopen this month. South Shields will be delayed as staff there are still on furlough and Covid levels are rising in that area, but ship visiting continues. Port Talbot is not open due to ongoing restrictions in the area and shore leave is being denied there. BB in discussions with the Centre Manager there to see if seafarers can use the centre's 24 hour facility.

Post Meeting Note: It has been confirmed that North Tees will reopen this month but South Tees is not reopening due to a lack of screen availability for the minibus and insufficient team members currently willing to return.

DP, MNA – Expressed general concern over crew changes and had heard that one seafarer had reportedly flown out to Taiwan and had to wait 29 days to join a ship.

EB, SCS – Nearing the end of the Covid scheme supporting fishing families, last few payments are being made. A questionnaire was sent out to approximately 80 families in the last couple of weeks for feedback on how the financial support had helped them through Covid. Responses received have been positive and show that the help was well received. Next week SCS will be considering what the next steps will be, whether to extend the scheme or reassess the offer to those in need. Requests for assistance from fishing and MN families have declined over the last month.

JL, SCFS – Chaplains are supporting seafarers with mental health issues. Communication with home is another major issue for seafarers. Working on a couple of cases involving seafarers who have lost their jobs in Madagascar where there does not appear to be any support for the seafaring community. Three new Chaplains have begun work today and are eager to get involved in this difficult environment.

JO, SMS – Returning to a more normal order of business, seeing some signs of initial distress from people with debt but this is low level. Still anticipating a rise later in the year as the good fishing weather comes to an end and people who have not built up reserves to see them through the winter start to struggle. Not seeing people approaching SMS after redundancy but anticipating seeing this in due course. Now in a more 'normal' pre-Covid grant giving time but anticipating this to change during the course of the year.

RP, FA – Fishing activity is more or less back to normal pre-Covid levels. The last half a million of European funding is being used to help fishers, especially the under 10 metre fleet. Working actively with fishermen in Wales as Wales still has funding. There will be a new fund for fishing vessels, fishermen and port facilities hopefully to be launched next Spring. Good weather is needed to keep catching fish and hopefully put off the problems coming with fishermen not having reserves.

LC, MPHA – Carrying on extending the service, making sure to get on to as many ships as safely as possible. Aware of mental health issues, trying to be encouraging and understanding when onboard. There was a situation a couple of weeks ago where a seafarer could not get ashore for medical reasons for 4 months. With the help of PHE he was finally able to get to a walk in centre for an X-ray and was relieved that his condition was not too serious.

SW, BPA – Trade is picking up for most ports, with the exception of cruise ships and passenger travel on ferries. Ports are planning for a second wave that may come over the winter. Joining in with calls with PHE has been very helpful. Will co-ordinate with Milford Haven regarding rules on shore leave.

VM, TH – The Board held an extraordinary general meeting last Friday and are looking at an incremental response to cover the long term need. Further funds have been put towards this and further funds will be released later on. It has been agreed that the response will focus on training and welfare, and working closely in partnership with others. Open to applications from those needing assistance.

SC, MNWB – The Board is seeking nominations for the Annual Award for Services to Seafarers for those who have made a unique contribution to seafarers' welfare. Nominees can be salaried personnel or volunteers in the maritime charity sector. Nominations can be submitted via the MNWB website and the deadline is the 1st October 2020. In July, the DfT, SfUK and MNWB collaborated on a partnership project to provide ships visiting UK ports with access to free internet. The Board is proud to be managing the project which began on 29th July 2020. 60 MiFi units have been provided to the maritime welfare charities, Chaplains, Mission Officers and volunteers. FM has joined the partnership project this year and 6 devices have been provided to the Missions in Scotland and N. Ireland. In response to the CMV vessels detained in Tilbury and Bristol, there is flexibility to increase the data allowance. The Board also provides a unique point of contact referral service for people seeking help from the UK maritime charity sector. The Seafarer Support website has been rebuilt and went live on the 17th August 2020. It has AI search facilities to signpost users to the most up to date information. An increased amount of visitors has been recorded compared to the old site. Members are encouraged to look at the website and give their feedback. The Board also intends to conduct a social media campaign towards the end of the year to promote the maritime charities which are on the website.

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. Members agreed that meeting notes could be centrally displayed on the MNWB website.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 7th October 2020 at 11:00