



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG)  
VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 10<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2020

<b>PRESENT:</b> Ms Sharon Coveney (Chairman)	MNWB
Revd Ijeoma Ajibade (IA)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
Mr Neil Atkinson (NA)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Mr Ben Bailey (BB)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
Mr Alex Campbell (ACL)	Queen Victoria's Seamen's Rest (QVSR)/Tilbury SC
Valerie Coleman (VC)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Mr Miles Cowley (MC)	SAIL
Cdre David Dickens (DD)	Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Ms Fearn Griffin (FG)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Mr Roger Harris (RH)	Int. Seafarers' Welfare Assistance Network (ISWAN)
Mr Mick Howarth (MH)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
Ms Deborah Layde (DL)	Seafarers UK (SfUK)
Mr John Lowry (JL)	Seamen's Christian Friend Society (SCFS)
Mr Ken McLean (KM)	IMarEst Guild of Benevolence (IMarEst)
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)
Mrs Christine Rankin (CR)	The Watch Ashore (WA)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
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)
Mrs Sandra Welch (SW)	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:

**TS, CoS** – Issues with crew changes was the primary focus at yesterday's ICS meetings. Situation in Hong Kong is becoming easier, expecting to receive a document setting out protocols on crew changes in Hong Kong. Hong Kong could soon become overwhelmed with crew changes due to continued difficulties in ports in other regions. Seafarers entering Singapore to join a ship are supposed to self-isolate for 14 days before boarding the flight although there is no way for authorities to enforce this. Proof of a negative test for Covid is required, to be taken less than 48 hours before boarding a flight. This can only be a chartered flight, not commercial. Off-signing crew members arriving on a ship must go straight to the airport which is problematic if no flights are available for a period of time. Companies are therefore favouring Hong Kong for crew changes wherever possible. Discussions are continuing on the re-opening of Embassies in places such as Manila to allow seafarers to travel to Europe. There are some commercial flights now between Manila and Amsterdam, the problem for Filipino seafarers is obtaining the necessary visas. Last week, the only Schengen area country that had its Embassy open was Belgium, which

were only issuing visas to seafarers joining ships in Belgium ports. Until there is an agreement amongst the Home Affairs Ministers, one Schengen led country is unlikely to issue visas to allow for cross-border travel in the Schengen area. European Commissioners have been very helpful in trying to keep seafarer supply routes open. The Transport Ministers of the member states also recognise the problem. Unfortunately, Interior ministries are not keen to deviate from the rules. In the UK, seafarers are exempt from the 14 day quarantine requirement. The definition of seafarers for this is 'seaman' as per the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 and includes anybody that works on a ship, even if they are not covered by the MLC definition of 'seafarer'. The Chamber has had several meetings with the DfT and the Home Office in the last fortnight and last Friday issued some guidance to companies explaining that seafarers arriving in the UK, whether on-signers or off-signers, would not be required to self-isolate for 14 days. Documents such as a joining letter, discharge book, seafarers' identity document or COC would allow them to pass through Border Force and not require them to quarantine themselves. Seafarers are required to complete the online contact form although this information was only released late on Thursday. The form is clearly designed for people arriving on aeroplanes and staying at an address ashore in the UK, not for crew members who will be staying on ships/arriving to join a ship. The DfT has been sympathetic to the Chamber's suggestions that some other way is needed to advise Border Force of contact details for seafarers arriving in the UK. The online form does not allow for all cases. Reports of at least three seafarers who completed the form to show they were exempt from quarantine, stating they were seafarers, then being told by Border Force officials to complete a new form and that they were not exempt from quarantine. This demonstrates a breakdown in communication, the policy has been rushed through. The Chamber has done its best to get information out to its members and has shared its notifications with Nautilus International and RMT to advise their own members. Remains to be seen how long these requirements will remain in place. If members hear of any incidents of seafarers who are challenged on their exemption from quarantine, please advise the Chamber as a matter of urgency [TSpringett@ukchamberofshipping.com](mailto:TSpringett@ukchamberofshipping.com)

**JC, DfT** – Aware of an issue in Aberdeen where a seafarer was challenged on exemption from quarantine. DfT is taking note of these incidents and feeding back to Border Force, please advise JC on any reports on this issue [John.Cousley@dft.gov.uk](mailto:John.Cousley@dft.gov.uk) Border Force have been trained well in how to recognise/treat seafarers entering the UK so it should be clear that they are exempt from 14 day quarantine. Incident of an Indian seafarer who was at very high risk of mental distress and had to come via the UK to transit back to India - there was only one flight on Friday otherwise he would have had to wait two weeks for another flight, DfT were notified at 12 o'clock, were able to get him a visa exemption for transit, he got on his flight to India at 5 o'clock, this was a good result. Working on another similar case with RH and trying to ensure that this seafarer also has a smooth transit into the UK. When entering the UK, deadline is 23:59 the next day to catch a flight out of the UK, the transit is easier with UK VI if the individual stays close to the airport.

*SC highlighted an issue raised at yesterday's Gibraltar SWB meeting on repatriating crew from Gibraltar via the UK, for crew who did not have a ILO 108 ratified seaman's book and were required to leave the UK the same day they arrived. Due to the crisis, they could not always arrange a flight out of the UK before midnight and were therefore having to reject crew changes. SC and Sarah Edward agreed to discuss with JC in further detail outside the meeting.*

**NA, MCA** – Tentatively looking to restart services. Oral exams for engineers have started remotely and this will shortly be followed by remote deck exams although there is already a backlog of in excess of 700 oral exams of various grades. Will restart document compliance audits for ship owners at the beginning of July and will slowly start to see a reduction in issuing short term certificates. Prefer to limit remote audits to document compliances rather than audits onboard ships.

**RH, ISWAN** – Restrictions are easing in the Philippines, reports from Manila of seafarers being required to pay for tests. Restrictions also beginning to ease in India although cases of Covid are rising rapidly. Some Indian seafarers are able to take chartered flights from India to Doha and on to various other countries. The Indian government is still flying people back from various parts of

the world. RH thanked JC for his help with the seafarer mentioned coming in from Ghana, back to India via London. Have also been involved with a complicated case of an Indian seafarer who died in Haiti, working with the company and various governments to get his remains repatriated. Also thanked MH and Nautilus International for their help with the case of a former seafarer in Chile and MtS for all their help with the Indian seafarers who are stranded in the UK.

**DD, FM** – Reported an uptick in casework over the last 5 days, although not to the level of 3 weeks ago. Green shoots in fishing continue although a natural algae bloom off the West coast of Scotland has made much of the shellfish inedible. Couple of cases of smaller boats which are away from their home port and have no facilities onboard – no toilets, fresh water etc. Under pressure to open centres, which are closed due to dangers of communal toilets, showers etc. Asked what is MCA's view on people living onboard a boat in a harbour which has no access to public facilities and no appropriate facilities onboard (DD to provide more details to NA outside of meeting). Now up to over 4,100 Covid-19 related interactions with clients, in process of drawing down on £250K from reserves to support ongoing operations which is partially linked to fifth failed application for government support for Covid efforts.

**BB, MtS** – Last week, ICMA launched its protocols which are available on MNWB, MtS and ICMA websites. MtS centres and stations now considering how to implement these protocols safely and to start to reopen where possible. Continuing gangway ship visits. Reported on situation on Friday afternoon where a seafarer was in need of antiviral drugs - working with partners the Chaplain managed to obtain the necessary prescription and medication but was denied access to the vessel even though he had a port pass for that terminal in Southampton. Thanks to the intervention of the MNWB and others, the terminal manager was willing to take the medication to the ship. Would be useful to know who can be contacted in these situations. (The Global Network of People Living with HIV is the organisation that assisted with getting the medication to the seafarer. They are willing to help any organisation get medicines to seafarers anywhere in the world. Info on this has been passed to MNWB). Continuing to support an additional 50 Indian seafarer cadets in the UK who will hopefully return home in the next couple of weeks. India have now made repatriation flights available to be booked online directly providing a seafarer has been registered with the Indian High Commission. Also supporting 1,000 seafarers' families in India with food parcels due to significant financial insecurity there. Transportation service in India continues.

**MF, SM** – Gradually undertaking more activity in ports as lockdown eases. Continuing to support cruise ship crew on the South coast who are mostly confined to their cabins, tensions are high onboard some of these ships. Supported crew following a suicide onboard a ship in Falmouth last week, the team did a superb job there. Contacted by a shipping company regarding a ship which has been in dry dock in Swansea with the crew confined onboard. The team in Wales were able to take the crew ashore at the weekend and a good time was had by all. Cruise ship crew are finding lockdown a struggle, important that we all continue to provide support for them.

**JL, SCFS** – Chaplains are getting opportunities to ship visit again wearing the required PPE.

**AP, SS** – Now able to ship visit in Ghana, Reunion Islands and Liberia. Indonesia has opened up a bit, allowed to ship visit in Jakarta with a surgical mask, hand sanitiser and social distancing being all that is required. Still not allowed to ship visit in Surabaya or Medan. In Brazil, can ship visit in Paranagua but not elsewhere. 4 ships in Santos have Covid cases, one has 86 seafarers onboard with Covid symptoms/suffering from Covid. A quarantine vessel in Durban, SA has positive cases onboard.

**ACL – QVSR/TSC** – Seafarer who attempted suicide continues to make progress, delivering his mobile phone to him this morning so that he can contact his family, continuing to support him and the crew on the ship affected. Communicating with the Bahamas Maritime Authority who are concerned about the welfare of seafarers and how they can help. A Filipino seafarer is currently staying at QVSR whilst waiting to be repatriated. If there are any seafarers in the London area waiting to go back on to ships and in need of accommodation, we are here to help and working

with port agents on this. Seafarers are now allowed off ships in the port of London but are still not going ashore, interested to see what happens when the bars re-open.

**MH, NWF** – As of Friday last week, a member of staff and a resident have tested positive for Covid. Over the weekend, another member of staff also tested positive. Care home has now closed again for admissions, down to 75% occupancy. The resident who is poorly does not appear to be too unwell. Following the government announcement for testing for every resident and member of staff in care homes, 94 people linked to the care home were tested yesterday. Everyone on the wider estate continues to be well, starting to make plans to reopen Nautilus House, the main office at MP with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> July. Requests for caseworker service continue to be very low.

**CR, WA** – One new resident at Care Ashore, signposted by MNWB. There are still rooms available in the annex for any seafarers needing repatriation and unable to get flights. Residents looking forward to coming out of lockdown on 1<sup>st</sup> July. Will need to support older seafarers once they are allowed out. Seafarers Link – all groups enjoying weekly phone calls. Reported on initiative with The Silver Line and Age UK to issue iPads to group members. Members from the two groups CR is involved in are all keen to be involved with this so that they can continue to be in touch independently. However, no IT support is included.

**MC, SAIL** – Numbers have been much lower the last couple of weeks. In March, April and May record numbers of clients contacting SAIL were recorded, this has dropped 40-50% in the last two weeks. Those who have been impacted by Covid have already received the relevant government support. Fully staffed, couple of new hires over last few weeks, one full-time adviser in place and now have ten advisers thanks to extra funding from SfUK. StepChange announced yesterday that they are expecting a doubling of normal demand for debt advice by the end of this year, which is what we are working towards also.

**CS, SfUK** – Continuing to provide grants to those in need, these are considered by our grants committee which meets every three weeks. Looking for opportunities to support MN seafarers, please continue to be in touch on this. Seafarers Awareness Week on 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> July was due to focus on safety but will instead be a public facing campaign focusing on the issues seafarers are facing during Covid-19, the bravery they have shown in continuing to keep goods moving during the crisis and the issue of thousands of seafarers stuck on ships. Even though the event is not scheduled until July it is expected that a huge amount of seafarers will still be stuck on ships at this time. The event will also focus on the perspective from families. There has been some media on seafarers being stuck at sea, but not as much as expected given the scale of the problem. This is an opportunity across the sector for everybody to be involved with SAW and to tell their stories. Nick Harvey who is running the campaign will be in touch with SfUK's delivery partners to ask if they have particular stories or issues that can be used in the campaign. A good opportunity to raise awareness across the sector and could provide fundraising opportunities also.

**JO, SMS** – Still seeing a trickle of applications for general living expenses, far below the peak of a few weeks ago. Starting to see more 'normal' behaviour re-established in terms of applications for broader support normally provided. As rent/mortgage holidays are lifted, people will begin to fall into debt. The problems may not always be felt immediately, for example, some in the fishing industry will have already spent money during Covid which they would normally have saved for a poor winter season. The issues are expected to play out in different ways over the coming months and possibly years, important to remain aware of this. SMS and SHS are considering how to respond to that debt as it comes through and will continue to collaborate over general living expenses. Will require a detailed conversation with SAIL in order to be able to respond to issues as they arise.

**SW, SHS** – Steady stream of grant applications, a noticeable decline in Covid related grant requests and a return to the 'normal' grants. A small pot of money is available for MN seafarers who are having difficulties with Covid related issues/debt.

**DT, SCS** – Applications slowed a little last week. Caravan respite breaks – all the caravans across the fleet are on the Haven sites, Haven have announced that they will open on the 4<sup>th</sup> July and have announced a new cleaning policy. It is unlikely that the caravans will be in use this year due to concerns over changeover cleaning however, given that schools are not opening, the caravans would provide a welcome relief to families living in poverty. Will hold off until mid-July until a decision is made, safety must be at the forefront of any decision making. One MN case referral this week via SSAFA, not seeing cases coming through for assistance, any publicity on this would be welcomed.

**KM, IMarEst** – Nothing coming through from MN people.

**VM, TH** – Still looking at emergency applications, applications have slowed down somewhat, please get in touch if you need assistance: [Victoria.Muir@trinityhouse.co.uk](mailto:Victoria.Muir@trinityhouse.co.uk)

**CR, MS** – Support for seafarers provided by MS is education based. Nothing to report on welfare issues but it is important and useful to keep in touch with the WG. Caroline Buckland, Head of Books and Library Services no longer works at MS, wishing her well for the future.

**DP, MNA** - Capt John Sail has temporarily stood down as Chairman and from the MNA Council until at least January next year. This is to sort out his business affairs. In the meantime DP will represent MNA in this forum, his contact is: [mnanationalsec@gmail.com](mailto:mnanationalsec@gmail.com) Only know of one or two cases of Covid among members and none recently. There are no known deaths. Members are both stoic and sensible which might account for this. Many branch and all national meetings are now on line until face-to-face forums can comfortably resume. The MNA is able to award grants of up to £500 but will always, with the client's permission, pass on applications to Seafarer Support and/or SAIL and, if fishermen, also to Fisherman's Mission. If any member wants to publicise their work, as was discussed, then this will be welcome for inclusion in our bimonthly on line newsletter, *The Pulse*. Please forward these to DP.

**VC, MCG** – MCG are meeting on a fortnightly basis. Collaborative Communications group (Communications leads of all the MCG charities) has met for a second time and work is progressing on common messaging that can be used for publicity purposes particularly for MN seafarers. Demonstration of the beta version of the new Seafarer Support facility was shown at the last MCG meeting, have agreed to help MNWB with communication support as needed for the relaunch of this service. Looking six months ahead and considering what the response of the maritime charities might be in the second stage of the impact of Covid-19 – the tsunami of debt. The Unions have warned of the possibility of at least 1,000 redundancies coming up within the cruise and ferry industries. Will be sending out the Covid-19 impact questionnaire to all the maritime welfare charities in the near future.

*SC thanked the MCG on behalf of MNWB for their support in promoting the Seafarer Support website which is expected to be live before the end of July. Working with Laura Simons (MCG Consultant) to promote the benefits of the website to the maritime charities and reach out to MN seafarers requiring support from the maritime charities.*

**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. 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 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020 at 11:00**