



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 12TH JANUARY 2022

PRESENT: Mr Stuart Rivers (Chairman)	MNWB
Revd Ijeoma Ajibade (IA)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
Mr Alexander Campbell (ACL)	QVSR/Tilbury Seafarers' Centre (TSC)
Mrs Ruth Campbell (RCL)	Tilbury Seafarers' Centre (TSC)
Capt Andrew Cassels (AC)	MNWB Chairman
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Ms Sharon Coveney (SC)	MNWB
Ms Lynette Crossley (LC)	Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA)
Cdre David Dickens (DD)	The Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Miss Sarah Edward (SE)	MNWB
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Mr Simon Grainge (SG)	Int'l Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN)
Mr Mick Howarth (MH)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
Capt Ian Hodge	Merchant Navy Association (MNA)
Ms Louise Hopwood (LH)	Sailors' Children's Society (SCS)
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Capt. Justin Osmond (JO)	Shipwrecked Mariners' Society (SMS)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
Mrs Catherine Spencer (CS)	The Seafarers' Charity (TSC)
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:

JC, DfT – The main issues impacting on seafarers are Omicron and the daily LFT testing that is available to critical workers (around 100,000). It is not clear who actually qualifies for those tests. Transport workers include anybody whose work involves keeping the supply chains open, especially those who are in close contact with wide ranging groups of people and working in closed environments. Omicron has led to further changes in requirements for people coming into the UK. In England and N. Ireland, seafarers are exempt from pre-departure testing but are required to take an LFT on day 2 or every 3 days if they are involved in international transport. JC is checking on requirements for Wales and Scotland as Scotland do not require any testing after arrival which is at odds with their previous stance. There have been outbreaks on returning cruise vessels but those rates appear to be lower than the national rates for England. DfT is in contact with DHSC and Port Health to understand how we continue to manage that and support Port Health going forward. On the certification of vaccinations for seafarers, the Maritime Minister was due to meet with the DHSC Minister before Christmas but the meeting was cancelled at short notice. A new date is yet to be rescheduled and the Minister is keen to raise the issue with the DHSC Minister. From a domestic and international perspective, it is extremely important that certification for seafarers can be recognised by other States.

MF asked if the government could help with supplying sufficient quantities of LFTs to Chaplains who are getting requests for these from seafarers. JC will raise this with the Resilience team. Distribution of LFTs is an issue rather than the availability. **Action: JC**

GL, MCA – The MCA is continuing to conduct surveys and inspections on a range of UK and foreign fishing and merchant vessels. The MCA has a copy of the maritime health declaration

and a Covid questionnaire completed before attending. There are now less and less vessels that the MCA is unable to board. There has been one health/welfare case where the Master was found to be over the legal alcohol limit. He was removed from the vessel but has had subsequent health issues. The vessel is still not sailing. Continuing to deal with a small number of seafarers on UK ships who have been onboard over the length of their contract. PWC members received a link to an online questionnaire specifically for fishing vessels to get a better understanding of issues of concern. GL can also follow up on any issues. MF asked if there were any plans to introduce a common reporting form for MLC 2006 to ensure that information shared by the societies is relevant and not superfluous. GL advised that the MLC had a robust reporting and complaints system for seafarers. The Missions are encouraged to bring issues to the attention of the port state and nationally, issues are brought to the attention of the local marine office who follow up accordingly. GL offered to raise the question internally. **Action: GL**

MF, SM – Christmas has been a busy time for SM, distributing Christmas parcels including last week which was Christmas for Orthodox seafarers from Eastern Europe.

LC, MPHA – Have been experiencing problems with getting hold of LFTs to distribute. This is being sorted out with the help of several sources at different local authorities. Agents and agencies have been requesting LFTs for ships. One of the pharmacies carrying out vaccinations for seafarers has been issuing a signed document which has been a solution for certification. There is still very much a need for a national policy for certification.

DD, FM – A decision was made to open the centres over Christmas for those who were stuck onboard vessels. Food and presents were handed out for those individuals. In N. Ireland, three centres had to shut due to Omicron restrictions. The Peterhead centre was closed yesterday due to a Covid outbreak in the bunk space next door. Most fishermen are now managing their own boosters. Home and hospital visits have again been reduced which is frustrating as visits to older people had recently resumed. The majority of migrant crew who wanted to go home for Christmas were able to and have returned. Plans are in place to run the first Seafit event of the year at Cromer, towards the end of January. The NHS Director, England will be attending to look at the models used to access these hard to reach communities. Hoping to connect the Director to 'Engaged Communities', a group in Suffolk with whom FM have worked with successfully on a number of Covid initiatives. Planning to include 'addiction' within Seafit for at least the next twelve months.

CS, TSC – The new Fishing First Safety Management Project has begun in the South West. Thanked the Marine Management Organisation and Trinity House for funding to deliver the project in partnership with the SafetyFolder. The project will develop a national auditing infrastructure to support risk assessments of fishing vessels. 50 vessels have already signed up to the project. This is in line with one of TSC's five strategic outcomes focusing on safety. Congratulations to Natalie Shaw, TSC trustee and Director Employment Affairs, ICS, who was awarded an MBE in the New Year Honours. Pleased to hear the news of MCA's adoption of a new reporting form for ILO 188 welfare concerns. Grants - £12,800 was awarded to ISWAN to provide financial support to seafarers and their families in the Philippines suffering the effects of the super typhoon. This was assessed and awarded within 24 hours; thanked ISWAN for their work on this.

LH, SCS – Volumes are lower than normal at the moment but are fairly steady in coming in.

ACL, QVSR/Tilbury SC – Business as usual. There have been a number of Omicron infections at the accommodation in East London but thankfully the effects have been mild. At one point five duty managers were off work with Omicron at the same time. At the port, 1,020 vaccinations have been given, mostly boosters. Cruise ships are now coming in to Tilbury. 200 boosters will be given to cruise ship crew today. Around 10,000 vaccinations in total have been facilitated at Tilbury. The mobile unit delivering these vaccinations has been working long hours. A clinic has been set up to do 600 vaccinations today. Thanked RCL for co-ordinating the vaccinations at Tilbury. Crew are coming from all over the UK to Tilbury as they are able to provide certification and give seafarers the necessary documentation. Although not official, certificates on NHS

letterhead are signed by the Chief Executive of Essex NHS Trust. This is not the answer but enables seafarers to return home and helps to cut down on isolation periods.

JO, SMS – Below last year's levels of activity but above pre-Covid levels. Dealing with the issue of debts built up during Covid. It has been difficult to get people engaged due to the amount of paperwork that can be involved. Trying a new approach to encourage engagement as a lot of people are still struggling with the burden of debts built up during the last two years.

CR, MS – The MCG Covid-19 Redundancy & Retraining bursary has been extended until 31st March 2022. Members are encouraged to share the news: <https://www.marine-society.org/redundancy-fund> Funds are available to seafarers who are out of contract or have been made redundant and need support with training. Up to £500 per seafarer can be put towards training to help them to secure a job within the sector. As at 31st December 2021, 76 awards had been made since the bursary started in November 2020, amounting to £35K. The first batch of Slater scholarships for 2022 were awarded this week. More than 20 awards were granted to seafarers aiming for their first certificate of competency. More awards will be made later in the year. Martin Coles, Chief Executive of MS, was awarded a CBE in the New Year Honours for services to youth development and seafarers. MS are proud of the significant improvements he has made over the years which is reflected in this Honour.

IH, MNA – The MNA is trying to return to normal. Involved in the Falklands 40 celebrations scheduled for June and hoping for MN seafarers to attend the service at the National Memorial Arboretum. Hoping that the MN Day celebrations at Trinity House will go ahead as normal this year. Working on reopening branches.

SW, SHS – Last year, approx. 365 grants were awarded to the value of approx. £200K. This was lower than the previous year but 20% higher than the levels of grants awarded in 2019. The Maritime Anchor Fund, set up by TSC for MN seafarers affected by Covid, has awarded 33 grants and paid out approx. £23K. Encouraged members to remind MN seafarers experiencing difficulties during Covid that this fund is available to them. In the past year, there has been an increase in the number of seafarers accessing the free and fast track physiotherapy. 277 sessions were provided in the last quarter. The number of NHS spaces for physios is limited and there is a waiting list. In the last quarter 29 seafarers accessed Togetherall, the free mental health and wellbeing service. This was mainly used by MN seafarers as opposed to fishers. Generally there has been a slow take up in the New Year.

MH, NWF – As of Christmas day there were no staff absences and no residents had Omicron. By the New Year nine care home staff were absent and four residents were infected. Six of the home care team were absent and one resident on the Park had Omicron. Fortunately, there have not been any serious illnesses from Omicron. Currently closed for admissions at the care home. 14 days clear of infection are required before being able to reopen for admissions. Still seeing some infections among staff although the situation appears to be improving.

IA, MtS – Staff were ship visiting throughout Christmas. The Port Talbot centre has opened and is being operated remotely. MtS staff are not present when seafarers are there, but the staff will sanitise the centre, as is the agreement with Tata Steel. Crews are booking centres for their sole use, as in South Shields. Some seafarers are visiting the centres just not in great numbers. Receiving large numbers of shopping requests and Amazon deliveries. Vaccinations - Would like to see some uniformity across the NHS as the situation is different at every port. Working well in some ports but, for example, in Newport the local NHS will only vaccinate seafarers who are registered with a GP. This isn't the case in other ports in Wales. Staff are ferrying seafarers to the centres to be vaccinated, mostly second jabs and boosters, but the situation is unnecessarily complicated. Planning activities for the year including for the Platinum Jubilee and the MtS Scouts badge. JC advised that he will check with the NHS DHSC team responsible for vaccinations. Vaccinations are available to all persons in the UK regardless of whether they are there legally or not. This includes seafarers and there is no requirement for them to be registered with a GP. The NHS provided a Q&A to the NHS trusts around August time to confirm that seafarers were

eligible for the vaccine at no cost. JC will raise the issue with DHSC for them to talk to the Welsh administration and resolve the issue. **Action: JC**

SG, ISWAN – The team are working from home. SeafarerHelp has been maintained throughout Christmas and there has been steady demand across the holiday period. Covid related calls are either about accessibility to vaccinations or queries about shore leave.

SC, MNWB – The first round of the 2022 PWC meetings will start tomorrow. The issue of vaccination certification was frequently discussed at all of last year's PWCs. Keen to seek clarification on this. Working on a user friendly C188 guide in close collaboration with FM. The second draft has recently been sent to the MCA and Nautilus for comments. It will then be sent back to DD. Intend to circulate the guide to the Fishing Industry Safety Group for endorsement before it is published. Congratulations to MNWB trustee Richard Ballantyne, Chief Executive, British Ports Association who was awarded an OBE in the New Year Honours in recognition of services to the maritime industry. Congratulations also to a wide range of people working across the UK maritime charity sector who have been recognised in the New Year Honours list. SR was pleased to introduce Joel Holt, MNWB's Communication and Media Manager. AC was pleased to add that this WG had proved to be very effective throughout the pandemic by connecting beneficiary charities to funders, MCA and government. Hoped to continue the connection once the pandemic eases. Members noted that the MNWB Serving Seafarers Working Group would be held on Thursday 17th February at 11:00.

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 MEETINGS: Wednesday 2nd February at 11:00.