



## MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

### NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEO CONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020

<b>PRESENT:</b>	Ms Sharon Coveney (Chairman)	MNWB
	Mr Neil Atkinson (NA)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
	Ms Mary Barber (MB)	Fishermen's Mission (FM)
	Ms Ruhana Begum (RB)	Department for Transport (DfT)
	Capt. Andrew Cassels (AC)	MNWB
	Mr Alex Campbell (AC)	Queen Victoria Seamen's Rest (QVSR)/Tilbury SC
	Valerie Coleman (VC)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
	Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
	Cdre David Dickens (DD)	Fishermen's Mission (FM)
	Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
	Mr David Hammond (DH)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
	Mr Roger Harris (RH)	Int. Seafarers' Welfare Assistance Network (ISWAN)
	Mr Graham Hockley (GH)	MCG
	Mr Mick Howarth (MH)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
	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)
	Mr Justin Osmond (JO)	Shipwrecked Mariners' Society (SMS)
	Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
	Capt John Sail (JS)	Merchant Navy Association (MNA)
	Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
	Mrs Deanne Thomas (DT)	Sailors' Children's Society (SCS)
	Ms Lysanne Wilson (LW)	Seafarers' Hospital Society (SHS)

The meeting opened at 11.00am. The Chairman passed on apologies for PT who was taking a well-deserved week off and reminded members that the working group provides 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** – The weekly ICS meeting did not take place yesterday, ICS have formed sub-group to look specifically at the issue of facilitating the movement of seafarers and bringing about repatriation of approx. 100,000 seafarers who are currently displaced. Possible gradual staged re-opening of airports or 'hubs' close to areas where large numbers of crew changes normally take place, Singapore and Hong Kong in particular. It was not just a case of opening airports and persuading local port authorities to let ships in and allow seafarers to disembark. There was a need to protect health of seafarers as they're travelling – social distancing on flights, safe transit between port areas and airports. It is hoped other countries will open up their airports and sea ports to allow crew changes. European Commission published guidance last week on safety, health and facilitation of movement of seafarers and all maritime workers. ECSA (European Community Shipowners' Association) and ETF written joint letter addressed to all Ministers and the Transport Council calling for a co-ordinated response to re-establish crew change locations in sea ports and airports within Europe. Awaiting next meeting with the Transport Council for positive developments on this. One offshore operation in the North Sea is undertaking all crew changes in Copenhagen, now able to get Danish and Polish seafarers in and out. Continuing to put pressure on and work with other parties wherever possible.

**JC, DfT** – Welcomed ICS work on trying to establish ‘hubs’, keen to carry on facilitating crew changes in the UK. Main difficulties are getting crew into the country or getting them home. Shouldn’t be blockages in the UK but having problems in other countries. Working with FCO with regard to repatriation throughout the world. Some of the Indian students currently in the UK close to being in dire need or support – repatriation flights going to India could be an option for them. JC will touch base with ISWAN separately to see if they can facilitate those movements going forward. MCA MIN on SMarT Funding will address some concern for cadets and their sponsors, will allow funding to continue beyond 150 week period and will apply to anyone in training at the moment. Job retention scheme applies to offshore agencies and should allow ferry operators to consider furloughing staff rather than making redundancies.

**NA, MCA** – *Additional guidance issued on MLC attached with Notes.*

**RH, ISWAN** – Understand there is agreement between ITF and employers that contracts have been extended to 15<sup>th</sup> May - *CoS or Nautilus to advise please*. Still receiving high volume of calls on SeafarerHelp from seafarers concerned about their own welfare, families and repatriation. Recent video on protecting seafarers’ mental health been adapted for superyacht crew. Received some calls from superyacht crew concerned about repatriation and contracts coming to an end. Thank you to members for all help offered to group of Indian seafarers. Received grant from MtS to help 52 of these Indian seafarers around the country. Would like to follow up with JC on the repatriation flights mentioned, India now locked down until 3<sup>rd</sup> May. In touch with 52 of the seafarers, trying to find out more about another 50. Thanked IA and BB, MtS for all their help with this situation.

**DH, HRAS** – Enquiries being passed on to other welfare organisations including ISWAN. Key issue being highlighted last week are access to proper PPE for vessels and individual seafarers stating that they want to have the right to choose whether they wear face masks and not be dictated to. Couple of Masters in contact with concerns about offloading in ports around the world where coronavirus testing and screening is limited. Have been engaged with one case with both flag state, P&I Club and Charterers.

**DD & MB, FM** – Long awaited surge in demand not happening currently. Lot of resilience and entrepreneurship being shown by the industry. Storing up problems for later on. Initial referrals to SAIL and applications for Universal Credit are sorting people out for now. Been said that FM is “not doing anything special”. Whilst we are there to meet the needs of fishers we would normally meet, there could be a messaging issue for FM about getting people to come to us for support. We are due to have a meeting this afternoon to discuss how to get the message across better. Still no consistency with Public Health or port operators with regard to migrant crew, whether they have to stay onboard or can go to the supermarket. Immigration issues – contracts terminated, can’t get home, not receiving wages, stuck in limbo.

JC said they are currently talking with Public Health England and MCA to ensure consistent approach. Consistency at top not filtering down to local level which needs to happen. There is some guidance aimed at ports and shipping but needs more work. Immigration – DD to contact JC out of meeting to see what can be done with Border Force and others. Have intelligence with issues on seafarers but not on fishermen, this is a problem because falls between DfT, Defra and other agencies.

**MF, SM** – Extraordinary times but Chaplains continue to conduct the ordinary, providing support to seafarers and fishers wherever possible with permission of port authorities and providing digital chaplaincy support.

**JL, SCFS** – Chaplains making contact with seafarers, maintaining those connections and establishing new connections. One of the Chaplains was able to repatriate a seafarer suffering from mental health issues, working with SCFS in Australia.

**AC, QVSR/TSC** QVSR – 93 year old retired seafarer with underlying health issues sadly died prematurely, hospitalised Thursday evening and died yesterday. Members passed on condolences. Three other residents in hospital. Speaking to Public Health with regard to testing residents and staff. Population of approx. 200 people in one building, danger of situation getting out of hand. TSC – Continuing to visit ships at DP World and Tilbury either from top of gangway wearing PPE or bottom of gangway. Trying to get seafarer abandoned in UK back home to the Phillipines but it would take six weeks with two week periods of quarantine at each border crossing. Best option was to stay in the UK.

**MH, MP** – Three residents tested on Thursday, one tested positive on Friday. 13 residents showing signs of Covid-19, two quite unwell. Worrying time for staff. Residents confined to their rooms, barrier-nursed. No staff showing symptoms. Supplies of PPE are erratic but adequate. MP wider estate of 125 homes with 170 residents, nobody there has any symptoms.

**DT, SCS** – Process working well for fishing families accessing help, still seeing applications coming through. Emotional support provided via private group on Facebook for disadvantaged families launched yesterday, hoping people will chat and share on this, those in need will be signposted. Group being monitored by SCS family support officers, who have an eye on safeguarding. Reaching out to families we have not heard from since coronavirus hit, stuck at home with children, majority without outside space. Prioritising those children on child protection plans or child in need plans. Trustees initially authorised £10 per week per child for all our families currently living in poverty for food and electricity – already on week five of six, working out funding implications of extending this for another six weeks. Costs haven't gone away for those families. Trustees to make decision by end of this week.

**GH & VC, MCG** – At last MCG meeting all funders agreed to channel information on funding implications through members of the group, lots of correspondence been exchanged since. Waiting for implications of further funding initiatives for the sector due to be coming out in next week or so. Preparing for next meeting on Monday, hoping to come together as a group with a more co-ordinated response in general.

**JO, SM** – Remain very busy, slight lull over Easter, lots of applications still coming through which we are responding to.

**LW, SHS** – Business as usual, busy with applications mostly from fishers but not overwhelmed. Societies agreed with Nautilus to administer hardship fund on behalf of Nautilus members, following similar process to the one with fishers. If a Nautilus member finds themselves in financial difficulty, they can talk to SAIL initially for advice then apply to Nautilus hardship fund through the Society. This has been agreed and signed off and will hopefully be announced soon. LW encouraged members to spread the word that this is available to anybody who is a Nautilus member. *MoU outlining the process for Nautilus members to apply for the Nautilus Covid19 hardship fund attached with Notes.*

**VM, TH** – Talking to all the organisations we support and trying to turn around applications for emergency funding as quickly as possible.

**KM, IMarEst** – Thanked DD for his work on supporting fishers. Also thanked LW for document sent last week on process for agreeing applications. IMarEst were able to use a lot of information from this, helped us recognise what poverty and welfare are, where the breadline exists and how our money can support others at this time. Trustees meeting last week, getting ready to provide financial support to those who need it. Ref. article in the press from CLIA (Cruise Lines International Association), cruise industry looking at repatriating some seafarers by sending a cruise ship to India and Manila. Perhaps this could be a way of repatriating students from the south coast and Miami. TS to raise this option with the cruise companies.

**CR, MS** – Have pot of money available to support seafarers through hardship at this time. Learn@Sea courses being offered to seafarers free of charge for three months, includes any seafarer education resources available online and off-line.

**JS, MNA** – Made contact with the branches around the UK, members seem to be ok but their families reporting problems. Chairman in Liverpool branch in his 80s registered in 'extremely vulnerable' group, signed up to [www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-extremely-vulnerable) and received food parcel in days, consisting of toilet rolls, tinned foods, milk, veg etc and a letter advising him he would receive weekly deliveries until further advised. This doesn't affect any pension payments.

**SC, MNWB** – The Board is pleased to offer online courses to constituent members in mental health and remote workers health & safety, both presented by the British Safety Council. The Board also has access to an iHASCO video based eLearning platform. If there is sufficient demand, the Board will purchase training licenses for our Constituent members to have access to the extensive library of accredited courses. Please contact the Board's Welfare & Training Officer Helen van Gass [helen@mnwb.org.uk](mailto:helen@mnwb.org.uk) if you or a member of your team would like to find out more information on the courses offered.

**AC, MNWB** - Would be beneficial to have an overall picture of the current situation amongst maritime care homes so that feedback can be given to JC. **Action:** Board to make contact with accommodation-based services who have so far been unable to attend the WG so that members can support each other through this crisis.

**Post-meeting updates received:**

**Ijeoma Ajibade, Mission to Seafarers**

(IA was unable to attend the meeting due to broadband difficulties). We are working in partnership with ISWAN to support 54 abandoned seafarers. We have received funding from ISWANs SEF fund. ISWAN have identified the seafarers who were all attending courses in Glasgow, South Shields, Liverpool and Southampton. Ben Bailey is taking this work forward on behalf of MtS. The grant from SEF will cover the cost of food and accommodation for the seafarers. Digital Chaplaincy - Our 24 hour digital chaplaincy is about to go live. Staff are being trained. This will be a 24 hour chaplaincy provision and will involve MtS chaplains from around the world. It is ecumenical and has been developed in partnership with ISWAN.

**Tracy Keane, Care Ashore**

With regards to Covid-19, we are all safe, well and happy. We have implemented restrictions on everyone's movements and limited access off site to 4 members of staff including myself. Between us we are facilitating and supervising medical appointments in full PPE, collecting food supplies, having food supplies delivered and put into parcels, delivering those parcels, one of us in charge of tobacco supplies. I am staying on site and providing extra support to support staff and beneficiaries. The feedback is amazing, the residents feel safe, supported and are all complying with the measures. They liken it to a 'trip away at sea' where they can't get off... they are very settled. I have temporarily outsourced staff supervision (Zoom sessions) so that the staff have someone other than me to bounce off, this so empowering for them as they are all stretched to the limit. If there is anything I can do to support others or share best practice, I am of course happy to talk to anyone and I will do my best to join a future meeting.

**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 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2020 at 11:00**