



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 15th JULY 2020

PRESENT: Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
Mr Neil Atkinson (NA)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Mrs Ruth Campbell (RC)	Queen Victoria's Seamen's Rest (QVSR)/Tilbury SC
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Ms Lynnette Crossley (LC)	Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA)
Cdre David Dickens (DD)	The Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Mr Roger Harris (RH)	Int. Seafarers' Welfare Assistance Network (ISWAN)
Mr Graham Hockley (GH)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Capt. Malcolm Mathison (MM)	Merchant Navy Association (MNA)
Miss Victoria Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
Mrs Susan Newcombe (SN)	MNWB Observer
Capt. Justin Osmond (JO)	Shipwrecked Mariners' Society (SMS)
Mr Andrew Pitcher (AP)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)
Mr Darren Procter (DP)	RMT
Mrs Christine Rankin (CR)	The Watch Ashore (WA)
Ms Carla Rockson (CRS)	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)
Mr Christian Turner (CT)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
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, UK CoS – ICS welfare meeting took place yesterday. Ministerial summit on crew changes took place last week, 13 countries were in attendance that had all signed a declaration (may have been more since). If carried through, the declaration should solve a lot of the current problems. Standard practice for visa waivers is that when a crew member of a vessel arriving in the UK signs off and enters the country in order to be repatriated, the visa requirement is normally waived. However a visa is still required if they are coming into the UK to sign on to a vessel or if they are arriving into a UK airport to take a connecting flight elsewhere, they still need a visa even if they are remaining airside. There are reports from member companies that in practice Border Force is waiving the visa requirements. The UK CoS has asked for a statement from the Home Office to state that this is happening because the crewing managers need something they can rely on and there have been some incidents where seafarers have been prevented from coming into the country. However missions are dealing with enormous backlogs of applications, given how overdue some seafarers are for relief and crew changes to take place, this is another factor that is holding that up. Hoping for some positive news on this soon. Taking reservations for the CoS webinar 'Covid-19 and seafarers' mental health' next Tuesday 21st July from 10:30 – 12 noon,

excellent panel of presenters in place, thanked MF and RH for their help with identifying the relevant people. Webinar is open to all, free of charge, can register via:

<https://www.ukchamberofshipping.com/events/uk-chamber-shipping-webinar-mental-health/> It is hoped to be a successful and useful event for everybody involved. During yesterday's ICS meeting, German shipowners stated that the German government is keen to use the declaration to help push the messages that ECSA, the ETF and other associations will try to get visa waivers established in the Schengen area, which is a positive development.

JC, DfT – Will be talking with Border Force's national command centre today regarding visa concerns which had been raised previously. There seems to be some confusion with the messaging. Trying to get a statement from Border Force/Home Office to provide to shipping companies to try and sort this issue out, there shouldn't be problems particularly in cases where seafarers have seafarer identity documents, as this has previously been treated as a visa waiver. Hoping to advise TS on the outcome of the call later today. International summit on crew changes took place last week, went very well. 15 states participated, 14 spoke and 1 observed. 14 have now signed up to the joint statement, hoping that South Africa will sign up this week. Starting to see positive signs coming out of this. Dubai are changing their requirements for crew changes and this might extend further to cover all of the UAE in the next couple of days. Hoping this will also prompt Saudi Arabia to sign up to follow their lead. Seems likely that the Philippines will have a hub for crew changes in South East Asia, will be interesting to see what this means for crew changes in that part of the world. MiFi project was covered in the Daily Telegraph, New York Times and Wall Street Journal. DfT, SfUK and MNWB were mentioned. Great to see this positive news in the mainstream media. Concerns over CMV vessels in Tilbury as to whether crew are being moved between vessels instead of being repatriated (RC confirmed that crew were not being moved between vessels anymore).

DD requested that JC share the list of the 14 countries that have signed the declaration which would be useful for advising skippers and crew. Experiencing difficulties getting a sitrep for Ghana, whether flights are opening up and what the quarantine requirements are for seafarers both returning home and outward bound to join vessels. (DfT in contact with FCO regarding Ghana).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-of-the-international-maritime-virtual-summit-on-crew-changes> *The list of those who have signed is at the bottom, the list does not yet include Georgia who have also signed.*

JC advised RH that India were invited to the summit but apologised that a minister was unable to attend as the summit took place at short notice.

DA, NI – NI observed the meeting last week and welcomed the declaration. Had concerns as to whether countries could follow through on the promises. Promising to hear from JC that countries such as UAE are already changing their procedures. Reports were still being received up until a week or so ago that seafarers were incorrectly being told to quarantine but the situation seems to be somewhat resolved now, perhaps due to air bridges. Conducting a survey of members to try to determine the extent of the crew change issue and to find out from members exactly how long their repatriation has or had been delayed or how long they have been at home and waiting to sign on to a ship. Asked WG members to encourage seafarers who have experienced these issues to complete the survey on the NI website. Treasury will not extend the self-employed scheme to seafarers and will not offer exemptions to seafarers who find they are no longer eligible for the SED as they have fallen short of the required 183 days. (The letter from Treasury also pointed out that UC is being increased by £20 per week). NI will consider how to respond to this but concerned that this will put seafarers who are coping into a bracket where they are no longer coping when they get a large tax bill that they had not budgeted for, if this decision is enforced.

TS added that the UK CoS is also disappointed by the letter from Treasury and is prepared to up the ante along with NI to try to get this decision reversed. Asked DA to keep the UK CoS informed on support they may need on campaigning on this matter.

JC asked DA to share the response received from HMT. The Minister had written to Treasury on this and had received a similar response which she was extremely displeased about. She has a call with Jesse Norman, the Finance Secretary, tomorrow to discuss this again as it is felt that Treasury have missed the point on this matter.

DP, RMT – Would also be happy to support NI on the matters reported on as seafarers should not suffer financially due to Covid-19. RMT is concerned about the situation with cruise ships around the country, particularly in Tilbury. DP has been in close contact with Liam Wilson who is assisting seafarers onboard vessels in this area. Paid tribute to the role that Tilbury seafarers' centre has played in these unprecedented times and highlighted the fundamental role of seafarers' centres in ports around the UK. Concerned about the lack of availability of transport to enable the seafarers at Tilbury to go shopping because there is a huge demand from in excess of 1,000 seafarers. Expecting to see vessels around the UK, particularly within the offshore sector that will go to the smaller ports and lay-up as a consequence of Covid-19, seafarers will potentially be stuck onboard these vessels and not be paid. Need to be vigilant about what is going on. Health and safety onboard vessels during Covid-19 is an important topic and was raised at a productive meeting last week with the National Maritime Occupational Health and Safety committee. Engagement between the ports and seafarers onboard vessels at this time has not gone as well as it could have, many improvements could be made on the sharing of information and much can be learnt. Feedback from ITF inspectors in Tilbury is that they couldn't have done the job of getting the seafarers paid and getting them home without the support and mechanisms that have been put in place. DP can be contacted on 07949 246219 or D.Procter@rmt.org.uk

NA, MCA – Survey inspection work to restart next week, concentrating on surveys on domestic vessels, international vessels and cargo ships will be delegated to class. There will be a limited amount of port state control inspections under certain conditions. MLC complaints will be treated in the normal way.

AP, SaSo – Resumed visiting in Greenock since Monday. The India helpline is now live, there are three numbers, one is for seafarers and their families, the other two numbers are for members of Master Mariners in India. There will be another helpline in the Philippines and a mental health awareness programme will soon be launched, supported by the United Methodist Church.

CRS, MS – Pleased that seafarers are being able to complete their orals and that some temporary CoCs have been issued which will enable some seafarers to look for work or get back to sea. MS has launched a new English@sea Plus course. Asked members who can recommend international seafarers to give feedback on this course or who would like to find out more information on it to please email crockson@ms-sc.org The course will officially be launched on 3rd August.

CS, SfUK – Thankful to be involved in the MiFi project. Thanked members for their engagement in SAW which had extensive press coverage and a good response from the industry. SfUK received a lot of press over their comments on the lack of an essential resource for suicide statistics. Pleased to see some traction on this as it is important to give a clearer idea on the challenges and the dangers of working at sea and the impact of suicide. Making progress on this work and will provide a further update in due course. Working with ISWAN also. Pleased with how the work during SAW was used to raise awareness and inspire positive change.

CR, WA – Residents at Care Ashore are enjoying a little bit more freedom. Seafarers Link has been approached by two elderly seafarers but they have not yet joined the calls. Thanked members for sharing Seafarers Link with the elderly and encouraged them to continue to do so.

DT, SCS – Decision was made not to open the caravans for any respite breaks for this season at all. Have instead announced a £25 per child activity grant to be paid out in the next couple of weeks. The Divisional Secretary of SSAFA in Kent has reportedly resigned, there are no case workers in Dover at the moment. This is concerning due to the pending redundancies in the Dover region.

DD, FM – With shellfish prices remaining suppressed, now seeing a trend of skippers of smaller boats 'going it alone' and leaving their crew ashore. Seeing a bit of a rush of crew asking for financial assistance. There is a health and safety angle here as well as the welfare need. Some

concerns, which have been shared with the MCA, over living conditions onboard some of the older boats, especially for those who have been onboard for long periods. Many of these boats do not meet the requirements of ILO 188. Have reviewed the centres after the recent relaxation of restrictions but this does not alter the risk assessment for opening the centres so these will remain shut for the foreseeable future. Up to nearly 4,000 Covid-19 related interactions with fishermen and their families to date.

DP concerned to hear about safety issues onboard fishing vessels, need to monitor the situation closely and keep safety at the top of the agenda. Asked DD to email D.Procter@rmt.org.uk

GH, MCG – MCG members met on 7th July. Research indicates that to date the maritime charities have put up over £6 million towards Covid related issues, thanked members for this. Comms co-ordination between the charities is going well. MCG and MNTB's standard on mental health and wellbeing training was launched last week and had good coverage. Forming a new health sub-group to keep track of this and have also formed a new working group amongst MCG members and others, to look at how to assist seafarers who have been made redundant to retrain within the maritime industries and how else they may be helped.

JO, SMS – Made announcement on first day of SAW on £1 million being set aside. Received good coverage in local and regional media. Had first phone call from someone who picked up on this news but still need to keep putting the word out there particularly to merchant mariners about the help that is available to them. Not seemingly gaining much traction on this but encouraged members to keep pushing the message.

LC, MPHA – Carrying on trying to expand the service, taking advice from ships that we have been on to for sanitation certificates and water samples and have discussed the possibility of carrying out standard boarding inspections. This was welcomed and ships requested to be advised in advance including how MPHA is handling Covid protection. This is now being written into the procedures which will be circulated in due course.

MF, SM – Now that the Chaplains are resuming somewhat normal ship visiting, plans are being made to enable volunteer ship visitors, who may have been shielding, to resume their activities should they be willing to do so.

RH, ISWAN – Will be issuing a press release with ICMA on crew changes and supporting out of work seafarers. Held webinar on social interaction at sea, a project funded by the MCA. Thanked SfUK for raising the issue of suicides at sea and particularly the data collection. ISWAN have been dealing with two very sad cases of suicide by Philippino seafarers in the last couple of weeks.

RC, QVSR/TSC – Continuing to work very closely with cruise ship crew at Tilbury. Have heard some shocking stories from seafarers who have been onboard for the past four months. Crew are currently being repatriated and ITF have been working closely with CMV to ensure that this goes smoothly. Have been given the go-ahead to commence shore leave after two weeks of negotiation and all five ships are participating in this. Crew have been delighted to leave the vessels after four months to go to supermarkets and country parks in small groups of 12. One staff member has been un-furloughed to help with driving several hundred crew, ITF has kindly agreed to help top-up the wages. Driving a 20 year old minibus to pick up crew, along with the centre's own minibus. Three ships have two Mifi units on each and they have unreliable internet onboard. Any available Mifi units would be gratefully received.

PT reported that MNWB are currently looking into any underused minibuses within MNWB's Vehicle Replacement Programme that could be made available and MiFi units that could be supplied.

SW, SHS – Small number of grants coming through, have made a total of approx. 230 grants at a total of around £85K. Have substantial funds still available for the MN but have received very few applications.

VM, TH – Board meeting will be held next week and will report thereafter.

DP noted at the close of the meeting that a number of organisations had reported on the lack of MN applications for assistance and asked for this to be raised at the next meeting to continue discussions on how to promote the help available.

Post-meeting note from John Lowry, Seamen’s Christian Friend Society (unable to link in due to technical issues): SCFS has been dealing with issues regarding seafarers and depression, bereavement and job losses as a result of the ongoing situation within the merchant and cruise industries.

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 29th July 2020 at 11:00

DRAFT