



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 17th JUNE 2020

PRESENT: Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
Mr Neil Atkinson (NA)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Mr Alex Campbell (ACL)	Queen Victoria's Seamen's Rest (QVSR)/Tilbury SC
Capt. Andrew Cassels (AC)	Chairman, MNWB
Cdre David Dickens (DD)	Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Ms Fearn Griffin (FG)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Mr David Hammond (DH)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
Mr Roger Harris (RH)	Int. Seafarers' Welfare Assistance Network (ISWAN)
Mr Graham Hockley (GH)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
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)
Mrs Christine Rankin (CR)	The Watch Ashore (WA)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
Mr Marc Schippers (MS)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)
Ms Laura Simons (LS)	MCG Comms Consultant
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)
Ms Sara Walsh (SW)	British Ports Association (BPA)
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:

FG, DfT – DfT continuing to work with Border Force on reported incidents regarding seafarers and quarantining. Following up on cases referred to DfT with the relevant people at Border Force. Issue with Indian seafarers whose passports have expired is now being resolved. India had stated that seafarers would be denied entry on arrival at airports. Their applications for passport renewal have now been fast-tracked, a positive step but concerns that there are no scheduled repatriation flights beyond June, working to get them on a flight as soon as possible. This week, the second 'Restart and Recovery' working group was held with the trade associations and the Unions, working on different guidance for the maritime sector and how this is being applied on the ground. *Regarding the issues raised at last week's WG on repatriating crew from Gibraltar via the UK, FG reported that John Cousley will follow up with Border Force colleagues on this. Action: DfT DD considering what returning to work will look like. Guidance available states that communal shower/washing machines/toilets are not permitted but some harbours have now opened these facilities. Direction from Public Health on whether centres, communal toilets and washing facilities*

can be opened would be useful. The approach is different across all the devolved authorities, would be useful to have UK wide view also. **Action: DfT**

DA, NI – Main issue this week is that quite a large number of seafarers have been in touch to advise that they have been incorrectly told at various airports across the UK that they must self-isolate for 14 days. In many cases they have been instructed to complete the form again stating that they do have to self-isolate, this has caused a lot of concern. There appears to be a misunderstanding and Border Force does not seem to have the right information. In Scotland, Border Force have instructed seafarers to self-isolate for 14 days. This does not tally up with all the assurances given previously either during conversations the Nautilus General Secretary has had with the Transport Minister or in the meetings with Home Office and the DfT or the UK government's stance that they would abide by the crew change protocols. If guidance hasn't been issued to Border Force, this urgently needs clarification. 5-7 members in touch with NI every day, there are no doubt more cases. ITF crew change agreement has expired, ITF has issued 'Enough is Enough' statement and will support seafarers if they refuse to work and demand to be repatriated. Nautilus is supporting the statement, understand that there is some controversy around it and will support seafarers who want to exercise their right to be repatriated under the MLC.

NA, MCA – With regard to issue discussed last week on fishermen living onboard fishing vessels without adequate accommodation, MGN413 explains the requirements that should be in place. In the case discussed, if centres are not open then fishermen should not be living onboard. Information on this had been sent on to those who deal with the fishing industry. In process of issuing two MINs on how to restart the survey regime. One deals with alternative measures for the completion of surveys and the second deals with the phased return of surveys, both for international and domestic fleets. Hoping to be able to carry out surveys again in 2-3 weeks' time. A report from a shipowner, since referred to DfT, stated that if a seafarer is infected with Covid-19 on a short sea vessel on crew change day or just before crew change day, this could stop the ship from working because both crews would have to self-isolate (the crew the seafarer sails with and the incoming crew). Awaiting an answer on this.

DP, MNA – MNA is happy to help members to communicate information to MN personnel via their bi-monthly online newsletter *The Pulse*. Please send information to DP or Malcolm Mathison mnanationalsec@gmail.com

ACL, QVSR/TSC – Largest container ship in the world called into DP World this weekend on its maiden voyage. Feedback from vessels suggested that over the weekend some crew on the cruise ship Astoria commenced a hunger strike. Apparently this was for two reasons. Firstly, the ship was leaving for Lisbon and some crew did not wish to travel with her. Secondly over wages, as crew were being charged to send money home and also over not having a cash advance. Working with John Cousley, DfT on this matter. The Chaplains successfully negotiated with the ship owners, Global Shipping Group, to allow the transfer of all crew who did not wish to travel on to Lisbon. 120 crew have now been transferred. With regards to wages, the ship owners have informed the Chaplains that there is a 'tab' scheme in place to help the seafarers. Many of these crew have been onboard for four months without being able to leave the ship. At this time it almost impossible to get cash advances onto the ship. This scheme has been set up to allow crew members to purchase items on board. Sadly, on the ship with the suicide attempt previously discussed, a young seafarer aged just over 40 suffered a heart attack and died this morning. In contact with the affected ship this morning, offering the crew a telephone counselling service (still not able to board the ship) and already received two calls this morning from crew. Continue to be very concerned about the welfare and well-being of around 1,500 crew who have been stranded on cruise ships at Tilbury. Have offered to the owners to organise coaches to take these seafarers, who have not left the ship, to a country park.

CR, WA – No health issues associated with Covid-19 at Care Ashore. CA continues to be very community driven, residents looking forward to coming out of lockdown in July. Making plans for the centenary due this year, all have agreed to postpone the major centenary celebrations until

2021 but are planning a small celebration to keep everyone's spirits up. Seafarers Link – many are enjoying the weekly phone calls. This has been incredibly successful, still need more members, we know the MN seafarers are out there and now would be the time to signpost them towards Seafarers Link.

TS, UK CoS – Key issue for ICS and ECSA (European Community Shipowners' Association) is re-establishing the chain required to allow crew changes to take place. French Mission in Manila is open, they claim not to be overwhelmed with applications from seafarers for Schengen visas and therefore do not see the need to apply any visa waiver for seafarers coming into the Schengen area. Travel within the Philippines is still difficult, there are no direct flights available from Manila to France and with stopovers, availability is limited. Working hard within ECSA to get some co-ordinated actions from the member states, working with transport ministries, home affairs ministries and health ministries to resolve the visa issues. Joint letter from ECSA, the ETF and Cruise Lines International was issued last week to the Health Ministers of all the member states stating the importance of their involvement on this. An approach will also be made this week to the Health Commissioner from Cyprus seeking support. Yesterday's ICS meeting – major problems in Singapore, the protocols have been introduced there, on the face of it they should be allowing for crew changes but in practice there are obstacles. ICS is working with its member organisation in Singapore to see what can be done about alleviating those obstacles. Better news now from Hong Kong, all restrictions on crew changes have now been lifted. Being the only major airport and seaport in that part of the world where it is now possible to change crew, they could soon be overwhelmed. In the UK, seafarers are supposed to be fully exempt from the 14 day quarantine requirement but there are reports of seafarers completing the online contact form, being told by Border Force that they have filled it in incorrectly and told to tick the box which states they are not entitled to benefit from an exemption from quarantine. This demonstrates a failure in the briefing given to Border Force. The situation is particularly confusing in Scotland where regulations state that seafarers returning to their home in Scotland are only entitled to benefit from an exemption from quarantine if they are going to rejoin their ship within 14 days of arrival. Example of one member company with contract work in Guyana, the crew are required to self-isolate for 14 days in a hotel in Aberdeen before travelling on to Guyana, then are required to self-isolate for a further 14 days after returning from a six week tour. They are therefore having to spend 4 weeks out of their 6 weeks' leave in self-isolation. UK CoS has held urgent talks with the Scottish government yesterday afternoon, matter has been drawn to the attention of the policy makers and is being reviewed as a matter of urgency. Asked that Scotland brings its procedures into line with the rest of the UK so that a seafarer is fully exempted from the quarantine requirements in all circumstances. Yesterday, the Chamber's Executive Board approved a nomination from the Chamber for a replacement member on the MNWB Council of Management for David Colclough. *DA asked whether the issue in Scotland might be an immigration issue or a health issue. If it was immigration then it would be a UK policy issue, if it was health then the approach could be correct. TS – advised that the regulation was a devolved power named the Health Protection Coronavirus International Travel Scotland Regulation 2020. There should be a consistent approach across the four nations but it was clear from the way the regulations were written that a more restrictive approach had been decided on. Hopeful for an announcement tomorrow on a change to this approach.*

DD, FM – After an uptick in demand during the first week in June, there has been a drop over the last five days to more routine levels. There have been a few issues with repatriation to Ghana which are close to being resolved. Some crew off contract and waiting to be repatriated have now been signed on as boats get back to fishing.

DH, HRAS – members noted the controversy surrounding a very recent HRAS press release.

DT, SCS – Received a direct call from a MN family looking for support, an individual working for Condor, down to 50% wages. The family had found SCS by Googling 'Help for MN children'. On the fishing side, have seen a nearly 100% take up on the extension for support into the second 3 month period as fishing families are still struggling. Have seen a big increase in safeguarding and emotional support in the last week and therefore seem to be going into a new phase of Covid-19.

DL, SfUK - £2 million Covid emergency fund provides support in both the UK and internationally. Trustees have been pleased to support grants for additional staff costs to support ISWAN in the UK, India and the Philippines, MtS 'Chat to a Chaplain', MtS for 2,000 meals for seafaring families experiencing problems (job loss, isolation etc). Two grants have been awarded in Africa this month, one via MtS Africa for seafarers' centres suffering during lockdown in Durban, Cape Town, Richard's Bay, Mombasa in Nairobi and Walvis Bay in Namibia. The other to Stella Maris, supporting four ports in socially distanced ways in South Africa and Port Elizabeth. In the UK, SfUK has supported seafarers' centres in Aberdeen, Felixstowe, Humber and Tilbury. Of the £2 million emergency grant, £844K has been spent and half of the main grants fund has already been spent. Information on the website about SAW (Seafarers Awareness Week) has been updated and highlights the challenges faced by seafarers and their families during the pandemic. This is a free promotional platform for the whole maritime industry including government bodies. Please contact Nick Harvey regarding the campaign. Working with governments on providing information needed for funds, this has been unsuccessful for the fishing industry in England but better in Scotland and Wales. SAIL has seen 51% increase in requests to the helpline from February to March and those increased levels have continued for April and May. Having spoken with Mark Dickinson (NI) and Mark Carden (RMT), work is being done on a redundancy support package for those facing redundancy/already made redundant, providing additional signposting and information on welfare support available.

GH, MCG – MCG met last Monday, expecting further demands once government initiatives (mortgage holidays etc) come to an end. To date, the maritime charities have committed approx. £5 million Covid-19 related support. Will be holding a seminar for Treasurers, Trustees and Heads of Finance to consider how investments for maritime charities will look in the future. Mark Carden, RMT, has been in contact with the MCG, we will be working together to form a working group to look at how charities funding training might help those who have been made redundant from the ferry industry to retrain within the maritime community. MCG meetings will now be held fortnightly.

LS – Working with the communications representatives amongst MCG members to refine the message to MN seafarers about where they can find support. The key message being worked on is to 'Tell your crew, tell your colleagues, tell your mates'. In the seafaring community and particularly amongst Merchant seafarers, word of mouth is the best way of getting information to people. LS will also be working with MNWB on the promotion of the revamped Seafarer Support, another key tool for helping seafarers to get to the right place when they need help and support.

JL, SCFS – Chaplains are getting opportunities to ship visit in ports. Still looking for a reliable source for PPE.

JO, SMS – Still receiving a steady trickle of applications for help with general living expenses, good to see a return to more normal patterns of behaviour on general grants. Positive to see one MN application related to Covid-19 and hopeful that the work being done by LS and everybody else will bring forth those people who need support.

KM, IMarEst – Congratulated ACL on his good work at Tilbury. Have supported one engineer from Royal Caribbean – thanked VM, TH for this referral. Another has been in touch today looking for help with ENG1 and medical expenses.

MS, SS – Situation in Europe is improving. From the UK to the Ukraine, Chaplains are ship visiting, using the necessary precautions. Africa, South America and Asia remain problematic. Tensions onboard are rising as crew are fed up with staying onboard for so long, this is an ongoing concern. Opening of seafarers' centres depends not only on the rules of the governments and ports but also on shore leave granted by shipping companies and captains. In Belgium, seafarers' centres are under the same regulations as bars and restaurants, so sanitary requirements must be taken into consideration (toilets cleaned immediately after use etc).

MF, SM – Chaplains are undertaking more activity in the UK as restrictions are eased.

RH, ISWAN – Continue to be involved in various cases, particularly the repatriation of Indian seafarers. Still receiving a high number of calls relating to Covid-19 on Seafarer Help. Recently produced a poster on psychological first aid in conjunction with ICMA, NUSI in India and AMOSUP in the Philippines. Developed an online course dealing with stress during the pandemic. Thanked SfUK for their grant which was very welcome.

SW, SHS – Received a number of routine grant applications over the past week but there has been a huge decline in the number of Covid-19 related grant applications. Reminded members to direct MN seafarers in need of help to SHS.

SW, BPA – Interested to see what the ports can do to assist with any issues raised. For BPA, operational challenges are still there, returning to 'business as usual' and starting to work with government and members on restarting the recovery.

VM, TH – Thanked KM and Karen Lendor at IMarEst for helping the individual who initially approached TH.

MNWB – Seafarer Support is near completion and will ensure that anybody looking for help online amongst the maritime charities will be directed towards the charity or charities best suited to help. Members will be contacted in the near future to make sure the information currently on Seafarer Support is current.

Closing Remark - Members to forward any links, extra information and note amendments to Celia celia@mnwb.org.uk Meeting format to remain flexible. Members content to continue meeting on a weekly basis but will reassess periodically. Apologies for any unintended inaccuracies. Members agreed that meeting notes could be centrally displayed on the MNWB website.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 24th June 2020 at 11:00