



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 20th May 2020

PRESENT: Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
Mr Neil Atkinson (NA)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Mr Ben Bailey (BB)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
Mrs Ruth Campbell (ACL)	Tilbury SC
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Mr Miles Cowley (MC)	Seafarers Advice & Information Line (SAIL)
Ms Lynette Crossley (LC)	Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA)
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 Graham Hockley (GH)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
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)
Mr Andrew Pitcher (AP)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)
Mr Rob Poole (RP)	The Animation Project (AP)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
Capt John Sail (JS)	Merchant Navy Association (MNA)
Ms Laura Simons (LS)	MCG Comms Consultant
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)	Chamber of Shipping (CoS)
Mrs Sandra Welch (SW)	Seafarers Hospital Society (SHS)
Ms Debbie Whitehead (DW)	Queen Victoria Seaman's Rest (QVSR)
Mrs Lysanne Wilson (LW)	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 – CoS and the Unions jointly wrote a letter to the Chancellor last week pointing out that a large number of seafarers were not able to benefit from the job retention scheme due to their employer not operating PAYE. Under normal circumstances seafarers may claim seafarers earning deduction or are exempt from paying income tax as a result of being out of the UK for at least 183 days in a tax year. Under current circumstances they may be unable to rejoin their ship therefore falling short of this number and subject to full income tax for the year. Have asked for this to be waived as some seafarers may find themselves in financial difficulty if they are asked to pay tax when not expecting to do so. Awaiting a response on this. In Europe, gradual easing of lockdown measures is contributing to ports beginning to re-open and transport links beginning to be re-established. Fewer reports of seafarers being prevented from

getting off their ships to be repatriated or for medical treatment. This may be partly due to shipping industry lobbying, actions of the European Commission and IMO protocols. From this week there will be four return flights a week between Manila and Amsterdam, aiming to re-establish crew changes. Concerns that seafarers may be unable to obtain visas for the Schengen areas. Most EU member state's missions in Manila are currently closed and the option of visas on arrival in Europe remains uncertain. Looking for alternative solutions including the use of recently expired visas but a series of measures needs to be in place to enable crew changes to be re-established. Discussions regarding PPE are ongoing, one suggestion is for a standard of PPE for charity workers in ports so that they may re-establish ship visits. Availability of PPE is clearly limited although progress is being made. A joint shipowner, Union and Pilots' Association statement on this matter will soon be agreed and it is hoped this will have some impact. Yesterday in Milford Haven there was a report of a local port authority (**post meeting note:** Terminals not port authority) preventing crew changes from taking place – replacement crew was allowed to get on the ship but the crew member being replaced was not allowed off. In another terminal no changes were allowed at all. No reasons were given and there was no official guidance on the matter. Yesterday a meeting hosted by Public Health England and attended by representatives of the four nations of the UK took place. Representative of NHS Wales was concerned to hear of this report and the matter was taken up by the DfT. Hoping for a satisfactory resolution. Please pass any info on this case to Tim TSpringett@ukchamberofshipping.com

JC, DfT – Further to the above, Dragon LNG Terminal at Milford Haven is where the alleged issue had occurred. Problem seems to be that the terminal runs its own bus system from the vessel to outside the port facility, or seafarers must use a taxi. The requirements seem to be that nobody may leave a vessel without being escorted. This has caused concerns for the bus driver, taxi driver or the escort being exposed to crew at less than two metres distance. There may then potentially not be any accommodation or means of travel thereafter. This seems to be the only place in the UK where this is happening. Part of the issue may be LNG's high health & safety standards. DfT is looking to resolve this issue. Potential UK quarantine requirements still waiting to be announced although seafarers and offshore workers expected to remain exempt from this. Not expecting any exemption for the French unless there is a general EU wide exemption. 'Air bridges' is another area that may also be considered. IMO protocols have all been reviewed and we are compliant with about 75%-80% of those requirements. Areas presenting some difficulties are requirements for airports to include fast-tracking and dedicated areas for seafarers. Could be helpful for a selection of airports to have these facilities although it wouldn't be possible to have this in place for every airport in the UK. Hoping for the UK to be able to sign up to these protocols fully going forward. Modified quarantine has come into place for the Philippines over the weekend leading to further restrictions, it is hopeful to hear that some flights are operating although there are not many. Would expect to fast-track those flying into the UK for transit with visa requirements. Would support a standard for PPE for the welfare sector as Chaplains should be considered as key workers but concerned that there may be confusion if ship welfare visitors are expected to wear PPE to board a vessel although this is not a requirement for pilots.

MN Medal – the closing date for nominations has been extended to 30th June 2020.

DA, NI – Welcomed the news on aviation and enquired whether international delegations or diplomats are likely to have exemption because if the two week quarantine is enforced then the IMO is unlikely to resume business anytime soon. Repatriation beginning to resume partly due to lockdown easing and protocols being implemented. Trying to keep this issue in the public eye, Mark Dickinson appeared on the local news this week. Reports from Inverclyde of significant opposition from the Council to cruise ships being laid up. Provided feedback on joint letter referred to by TS on EU guidelines for PPE which are expected to apply to pilots and ship visitors.

LC, MPHA – Covid-19 maritime FAQs general guidance is for face coverings to be worn. However, pilots are not required to wear these. There has been a lot of interest in MPHA's procedures for resuming proper inspections for ships to include water sampling and six month

sanitation certificates, however, many PHAs are reluctant to board ships without clear guidance. The latest maritime FAQ guidance stated that agents should co-ordinate medical care for seafarers but there was no mention of PHAs in this document. Agents appear to be unsure of what they need to be doing and require clarification. Any medical matters should be referred to MPHA via the Declaration of Health to be passed on to PHA.

JC stated that medical matters should be raised through the port health teams and not the agent but agreed that the message was confused.

*TS – Proposal for ship sanitation certificate with three month validity, issued via photos etc instead of a physical ship inspection. This was approved by PHE, and the WHO only approved monthly extensions of existing ship sanitation certificates and an unlimited number of extensions on condition that the ship owner was not able to dock. The proposal has been with the Department for Health & Social Care for several weeks. This was also raised yesterday by Gary Gould, the Executive Officer of The Association of Port Health Authorities. TS suggested that the Chamber could write a letter of support to the DHSC to bring this matter forward. JC and LC fully supported TS's proposal. **Action: TS***

NA, MCA – MCA issued MIN 612 which provides details on statutory surveys on ships because surveys and inspections are not being undertaken. Currently issuing three month short term certificates based upon the owners' declaration and this is being recognised by the IMO as best practice. IMO are encouraging all states to do likewise. One UK operator not allowing any outsiders onboard their ships in the UK due to concerns over the spread of Covid-19. Looking into carrying out compliance audits remotely. Classification societies also looking into how they might carry out annual surveys remotely in the future. Suggested that PHE consider being guided by how MCA are dealing with statutory surveys through MIN 612. Port state control inspections within Europe have been suspended so there are unlikely to be problems with respect to certification in Europe. Noted that there have been problems regarding shore leave for seafarers in Milford Haven terminals in the past.

AP, SS – Continuing with ship visiting where possible, mainly from bottom of the gangway. Southampton Centre Manager will hopefully resume work and ship visiting next week. Ship visiting still not allowed in Singapore and the Philippines. Worst case is in South Africa where a staging system is in place. They are currently on stage four of lockdown and it is said that ship visiting will resume in stage one which is expected to occur in Nov/Dec.

DD, FM – Minutes of the WG are useful for FM staff and grateful to MNWB for his work on PPE. Continuing to work from home and carrying out 'walk by' or 'drive by' harbour visits. Slight downturn in demand over the last week, new cases are people who are now running out of options – state benefits/savings/credit cards reach max limits etc. Seeing a number of repeat requests, which remains a challenge. Also a new population of those struggling to cope on state benefits. Remain concerned over the longer term debt, external and internal comms aimed at encouraging fishermen to come forward now. Working with SAIL and others to assess the picture going forward. Also working with JC and Scottish government officials on issues with migrant crew on leave to remain and on transit visas, regarding both immigration status and access to state support.

DT, SCS – Another large influx of fishing families has come through in the last week and only a few MN cases. Currently helping 138 children from 68 families with the Covid temporary support, predominantly fishing. Also helping around 50 families with 136 children on the standard scheme. Around 300 children being supported through the crisis. Considering the longer term impact – anticipating increase in divorce rate and therefore more children living in poverty in the future.

DW, QVSR – No further illnesses to report, continuing with social distancing measures and looking after shielded residents. PPE a little easier to get hold of. Thankful to SfUK for grants awarded.

RC, TSC – Crew still not permitted to leave ships in London Gateway and London Tilbury. Providing ship visiting service from the bottom of the gangway. Six cruise ships still in port with approx. 1,600 crew onboard. Yesterday, the Chaplaincy team received a call from a crew member as a seafarer had very sadly attempted to take his own life by jumping from the twelfth floor of a ship onto the quayside. The crew member is still alive but critical. Thanked MNWB for their immediate financial support yesterday which enabled the welfare providers to provide emergency support to seafarers affected by the incident. Unable to board the cruise ship to provide counselling but are providing support via a telephone service into the seafarers' centre. Hearing from cruise ship crew that they are experiencing difficulties accessing their bank accounts and are therefore struggling to purchase phone cards from ship visitors. They have limited access to the internet. Ask if pressure could be put on to shipowners to allow free internet access a couple of times a day. *TS to discuss this with RC outside of the meeting.*

DH, HRAS – Update on ship visiting and shore leave to be circulated with meeting notes – example of a positive step forward. Reports on crew changes are less encouraging. Increased reports on poor living conditions and mental health issues on cruise vessels. Reports also on lack of access to wifi, crew having to purchase local sims and only having communications every 4/5 days. Reports of a number of cases of commercial ships failing to conduct search and rescue. Seeing an overall increase in positive reporting on global hubs and flights for crew changes.

GH, MCG – Productive meeting on Monday, taking forward the questionnaire mentioned last week. LS has done some good work on comms. GH has written a blog which is live on SfUK's website. At the end of the month will be publishing a standard in seafarer health & wellbeing training. Thanks to LW at SHS, MCA and others for their contribution on this.

JL, SCFS – Trying to find out more information on PPE requirements in ports. Chaplains continuing to communicate with seafarers using Zoom, Skype and Microsoft Teams.

JS, MNA – Maintaining contact with members. No further loss of life to report. MNA extends its appreciation for all members who are in direct contact with those in need.

JO, SMS – Applications remain high but reduced a little since last week. Support is focused on providing general living expenses. Anticipate that people are running up debts in the background and will then reach out for support instead of having done so immediately - may continue to see applications like this for some time to come. Debt problems will be phased in as rent/mortgage holidays end, expect the pattern for providing grants to be somewhat unpredictable over the coming months. Still expecting an upward trend in applications to come through in the long term.

LS, MCG – Addressing the issue of getting the messaging across to MN seafarers about help available to them.

MF, SM – Report from Chaplain in Manila to be circulated with meeting notes. Estimated that 50,000 Philippino seafarers will be made redundant from cruise ships before the end of the year. SM working hard to support them. SM provides a transport service in Milford Haven, MF will speak to the team there to see if they can assist seafarers experiencing difficulties.

BB, MtS – Continuing to support 30 Indian nationals in the UK who are still waiting for repatriation flights. A significant number were repatriated last week. Continuing to review guidance and working on own draft guidance for preparing to open centres. Will be sharing the work for comments and it would be useful to receive assistance on this. Continuing ship visiting where possible from the bottom of gangways.

RP, AP – Helping fishers across the UK to submit funding bids to help them diversify with their own direct sales. Approx. £1 million of bids have been submitted. Fishermen's income is heading towards a crisis and this is expected to hit at the end of this year or early next year.

Making bids to help fishermen sell direct as their markets are down 30% and are likely to stay that way for some time.

SW, SHS – Thanked LW and the team for helping her settle into her new role as CEO. Steady stream of applications for assistance and have awarded £64K in grants to date from 118 applicants. Not yet at the end of Q2 but on track to be 50% higher than in the same quarter last year in grants awarded. Expecting this trend to continue and possibly increase this year. Looking into ways to source additional funding.

CS, SfUK – Congratulated members for their work supporting seafarers in difficult circumstances. SfUK interested in the delivery work members are doing and in how their respective organisations are coping through the crisis. Half a million pounds has already been allocated to fishers from the £2 million fund and discussions with trustees are ongoing on how best to respond through the crisis. Listening to the challenges the maritime charities are facing to ensure that the essential services provided are still available to seafarers beyond the current crisis. Seafarers Awareness Week at the beginning of July will be a good opportunity to tell the unseen story of the challenges seafarers are facing to the British public. SfUK will be contacting members on this. Continuing to support members through this crisis in the traditional way, investigating the role SfUK might play in terms of advocacy and to understand what more can be done to support maritime charities.

MNWB – Government, shipowners, Unions and maritime charities are working closer than ever before during this crisis. Created a short video, with no branding, to help raise the profile of seafarers/fishers and combined efforts to support the sector. This can be viewed on MNWB's Covid-19 Maritime Resources page and using the following link: <https://vimeo.com/419851515> Members encouraged to download and share video using it via their own social media.

Post-meeting update from Chris Rankin re: Care Ashore and Seafarers Link

Care Ashore - All continues to be well, with no Covid cases on site. Residents/beneficiaries seem to be adjusting to the new lifestyle and the results of our internal survey show they feel happy, safe, secure and valued. Our staff have stepped up and are managing really well under the circumstances, some staff still remain at home working due to underlying medical conditions which means that there is more work for the small number of staff on site. We will continue to follow government advice on the way forward.

Seafarers Link - All participants now receive a 30 minute weekly slot and are very appreciative of it, there is plenty of scope for new members if anyone knows of a seafarer or fisherman who would benefit from this.

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. Apologies for any unintended inaccuracies. Members agreed that meeting notes could be centrally displayed on the MNWB website.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 27th May 2020 at 11:00