



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 22nd April 2020

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| PRESENT: | Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman) | MNWB |
| | Revd Ijeoma Ajibade (IA) | Mission to Seafarers (MtS) |
| | Mr David Appleton (DA) | Nautilus International (NI) |
| | Ms Nicole Ash (NA) | Trinity House (TH) |
| | Mr Neil Atkinson (NA) | Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) |
| | Mr Ben Bailey (BB) | Mission to Seafarers (MtS) |
| | Ms Caroline Buckland (CB) | Marine Society (MS) |
| | 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) |
| | Mr Miles Cowley (MC) | SAIL |
| | 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 Graham Hockley (GH) | MCG |
| | Mr Mick Howarth (MH) | Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF) |
| | 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) |
| | Mr Justin Osmond (JO) | Shipwrecked Mariners' Society (SMS) |
| | Mrs Christine Rankin (CR) | The Watch Ashore (WA) |
| | Ms Carla Rockson (CR) | Marine Society (MS) |
| | Capt John Sail (JS) | Merchant Navy Association (MNA) |
| | 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) |
| | Mrs Sandra Welch (SW) | Sailors' Society (SS) |
| | Ms 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:

JC, DfT – Repatriation – All British national passengers have now returned to the UK. India have amended their standard operations procedure and are now allowing Indian seafarers back to India. Carnival have been given permission to take a vessel to India to repatriate Indian seafarers. Still exploring with Indian government the option to include Indian students here. Aviation flights still closed, only route for seafarers to get back to India is on a vessel (15 days on a cruise ship, longer on container ship). PPE – Continuing to talk to Public Health England and other administrations on this to ensure consistent approach across UK ports. Looking at issues where onboard facilities being kept open, difficult area as a lot of vessels eg ferries not flagged with the UK. We can only put our requirements in territorial waters and not beyond that, this is a negotiation process. Continuing to talk with FCO and India on repatriation. Indonesia proving difficult on this, might be some progress with repatriation back to the

Philippines although not many commercial flights available. Furlough scheme went live on Monday, expecting a number of shipping companies to make use of this set up. Not all seafarers covered under the scheme, basic requirements are for employer to have UK PAYE account and UK bank account. Exploring with HMT and HMRC whether eligibility covers those who have sterling account and are based outside the UK ie. Jersey, Guernsey or Isle of Man. Exploring whether seafarers who make own NI contributions under Class 2 might be regarded as self-employed by HMRC and therefore eligible for the self-employed scheme. Treasury have issued revised guidance on which employers are eligible but at the moment there is no alternative if they do not meet the criteria. HMRC do consider certain areas as self-employed because of Class 2 contributions. For those seafarers who do their own tax returns or pay Class 2 contributions, Treasury may advise contacting HMRC on an individual basis.

JC advised TS that the Shipping Minister has noted the points raised in the recent European Commission guidance and is interested in the idea of having a network of ports. UK is fully open so not proposing to specify any single airport in the country as a point of entry. Heathrow, Manchester and Aberdeen have been identified as potential UK hubs so as not to place any one sea port under increased burden. Talking to ICS on this proposal. Shipping Minister following this issue and are ready to offer any assistance if needed.

In response to question from MF on PPE guidance for port welfare workers, JC advised that he would check how existing guidance to port sector applied to the welfare sector. Generally, Public Health England guidance is that PPE is generally not required unless dealing with somebody who is symptomatic. Public Health England pushing standard hygiene procedures, hand washing etc. **Action: JC**

TS, UK CoS – Weekly ICS welfare co-ordination meeting held yesterday, ad-hoc task force established to enable crew changes to be resumed asap. This could start in a few airports and be expanded out. Health and safety of seafarers in transit must be protected. ICS drawing up protocols aimed at shipping companies with recommendations to seafarers and for national authorities to facilitate crew changes. At welfare co-ordination meeting there was a discussion on PPE, there are different opinions in different countries on PPE recommendations. Also a discussion on testing – many shipping companies see this as the way ahead. However, there are many different types of testing and there are issues on reliability, availability and government policy to be considered. It is a complex issue, ICS and UK CoS doing background work learning what tests are available and how they can be used for the benefit of seafarers and the shipping industry. Timing of tests and how often they need to be repeated to be considered. With regard to jobs exchange service (outlined by DA), hosted by MNTB after discussions between CoS, NI and RMT, this is now being advertised to shipping companies to advertise available opportunities whether short, medium or long term. TS will check with MNTB staff how this is being received. It is completely free of charge for seafarers and companies advertising roles. **TS to provide link to jobs exchange service.**

DA, NI – Continue to be very busy, lots of enquiries from members and huge increase on enquiries on 24/7 helpline administered by ISWAN, up to over 70 this month, normally around 20 per month. Repatriation is biggest issue, getting people home from their ships and those who can't get to their ships. Those on Voyage contracts now not earning. Issues with job retention scheme, DfT and MCA have been very quick to respond to issues that have arisen. Large number of seafarers either looking at job losses or currently not earning, they need some certainty on whether they are eligible for these support schemes. Reports of members turning up to ships and being told they must have blood test or go home. Lots of questions on reliability of tests, which are appropriate, and privacy issues on mandatory blood tests. Nautilus have had meetings with UK CoS and RMT to progress jobs board for seafarers who have permanently or temporarily lost their jobs and could be matched with areas where there is increased demand eg offshore. MNTB will be taking this forward.

DD, FM - Acknowledged extra support being given to FM by Royal Merchant Navy Education Foundation and SCS. Focus remains on hearth and home, have had doubling of use of emergency aid fund over last 5 days. Also started regime with SM, SHS and hoping SCS will join also, to look at Covid related stats every week to see which way trend is going and how much is being spent. Issues with crew not being taken care of by owners and skippers in parts of Western Scotland, these issues being picked up by FM. Delivery of 400+ 'parcels of kindness' begins today, working in partnership with local Norfolk and Suffolk providers/producers and company involved in Seafit programme in mental health. Currently 25% down on voluntary income compared to this time last year, dispersed £40k since 1st March and seeing doubling of applications to our emergency fund over the last week. Continuing to predict the really big need will come after lockdown is over.

DD to contact JC out of meeting on issue of group of 40 fishermen who are still awaiting decision from Home Office on 'leave to remain'. They are at appeal stage therefore don't qualify for state support, owners have deserted them, their only recourse is charity like FM. This must be a wider problem, not just seafarers.

SW, SC – Continuing to support seafarers digitally where we can and through our 24/7 helpline. Had a number of requests for more practical assistance in ports, reviewing our policy of port suspension and are looking into Chaplains resuming their work in ports where possible. Keen to receive an update from JC on PPE guidance. Following WHO guidelines on this.

BB, MtS – UK centres remain closed, Port Chaplains providing gangway ship visits on request. 'Chat to a Chaplain' service launched yesterday in conjunction with ICMA. Chaplains are online and able to take chat requests from seafarers. Had over 100 requests for assistance since opening yesterday afternoon and have been able to meet 38 of those requests. Have also been working with ISWAN in the UK to support the 52 Indian seafarer students, particularly keen to find out any advice as to how long negotiations with India may last and whether there is any timeline on a resolution. MtS contacted by a seafarer who is working on a ship where there is a confirmed virus case, vessel due to depart UK waters tomorrow and there is no plan for retesting on that vessel. The seafarer with the confirmed case is in isolation – is there any guidance as to who we can connect a seafarer to in this case? PPE – looking to see what we can do from a central perspective although some local teams are able to source PPE. TS and JC recommended a seafarer showing symptoms be isolated in their cabin or preferably be removed from the vessel if possible. Any crew members who have been in contact with this person should self-isolate. BB to email TSpringett@ukchamberofshipping.com with precise details of the case and John.Cousley@dft.gov.uk who can talk with local Port Health authorities to see if they can help get the seafarer off the vessel.

MF, SM – Continuing to offer support to seafarers at the gangway when appropriate and safe to do so, continuing to provide remote support. At the invitation of Carnival, supporting crew onboard some of their vessels laid up in Southampton and Dover.

AC, QVSR/TSC – QVSR – Further positive test on Friday and an emergency hospital admission. Worked with Public Health over the weekend, over 100 residents (not staff) tested on Monday, testing offered to all residents, awaiting results within 48 hours. TSC – One Chaplain still visiting ships in Tilbury and DP World, has been working since lockdown, wearing PPE and going as far as the gangway. Stranded seafarer has this morning begun his return journey to the Philippines on Qatar Airways. Thanks to JL for PPE contact which AC will follow up.

CR, WA – Care Ashore – financial support received from ITF for extra staff. Focus remains on supporting residents and keeping their spirits up. No cases of Covid although testing is not carried out in the area. Seafarers Link has now gone to weekly calls, extra phone calls are appreciated, one member is unwell with Covid.

DT, SCS – Thanked DD, 2-3 new fishing families applying to SCS on a daily basis. Happy to work with DD on weekly stats on who we are supporting and ensuring each family receives appropriate level of support. Trustees have authorised additional weekly support for existing families, extra £10 per week per child. Safeguarding – concerns for children on child protection schemes and child in need plans who have not been visited in 4 weeks. 95% children on child protection schemes are not attending school, trying to get local children services to see those families, some of those children not being let outside.

CR, MS – Remit is educational focus, we are supporting seafarers who are able to continue studying remotely, many have had to stop their studies because colleges are closed. Anticipating majority of work will come after the lockdown, supporting those trying to resume their studies. Trustees have agreed to offer financial support to FM, SM and MtS, including offering Learn@Sea licences to fishermen and seafarers during lockdown.

JO, SM – Thanked MS for stepping outside their normal remit and providing support. Average spending per week is significantly elevated, very heavily driven by general living expenses. SM, SHS, SCS and FM remain very well joined up on collective attempt to make sure people are adequately supported.

KM, IMarEst – Holding weekly meetings with relief committee, applications have started to come through for relief, happy to collaborate with welfare organisations as we have done in the past. If anybody has a case that fits with IMarEst's remit, please contact Karen Lendor karen.lendor@imarest.org

JL, SCFS – Chaplains making contact with seafarers using Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams. Concerned that seafarers are still struggling to get home, still struggling for basic rights, we need to look after seafarers and assure them that when they go to sea they will be able to get home afterwards.

LW, SHS – Nautilus hardship Covid-19 scheme is up and running. Information, process and application form is on the website <https://seahospital.org.uk/grantstoseafarers/> Have had over 30% increase in grants given out in first quarter and already three weeks into second quarter we are on track for being over this figure, 90% of that is for urgent living expenses. Still open for normal business.

MC, SAIL – SAIL service operating as normal, staff working from home. Record numbers contacting SAIL. 2-3 weeks ago, enquiries dominated by fishermen, over last week and a half more MN and a significant number of spouse enquiries. Enquiries from employees, employers and seafarers unable to get government support. Heavy workload will come in 2, 3 or 6 months' time, storing up problems for later on eg. rent and mortgage holidays.

MH, MP – MP sadly had first death from confirmed Covid-19 case last Thursday and one this morning, not yet tested but suspected Covid-19. Some residents seem to have got through the symptoms and some are struggling. On the wider estate, no residents are displaying symptoms although one resident was taken to hospital yesterday with possible symptoms and will be tested as will one home care staff member who has been off work since Monday with possible symptoms. Testing is up and running for staff who have symptoms and members of their families who have symptoms but not for general testing. Regular supplies of PPE coming through from local authority and from normal supplier.

JS, MNA – MNA thankful to all those working at sea. MNA members have advised that they are coping. First death sadly at branch in Dumfries was youngest and fittest member, 62 years old. Council allowing 6 family members to attend burial which will be significantly delayed. Another member with bowel cancer has had treatment postponed. A number of branches engaging with video-conferencing to maintain contact. Local Councillor in Mansfield area has been serving teas and coffees in the hospital and now has symptoms. Anzac Day worldwide programme starting at 05:30 in the UK, Westminster Abbey service at 11:00. VE Day 75

revised programme being circulated and will include civilian services. Everybody will be advised of the programmes going forward, much of which will be on the BBC.

GH, MCG – Monday's meeting went well, best thing we can do as a group is bring everyone's efforts to a wider audience and quantify what has been achieved so far. We have a consultant working with us who Val will put in touch with the frontline charities.

DH, HRAS – Acknowledged the engagement and support received in the last week from MNWB, ITF and FM and acknowledged financial support received from SfUK. Seeking clarity on PPE – advice on this would be very welcome. Report commissioned by MtS in New Zealand on port welfare support – thanks to PT and SC from MNWB from their input. It is hoped the report will encourage the creation and support of PWCs. Increasing 'chatter' on social media groups for Unions on 'right to strike' if crew changes can't take place and increasing concerns about sea lanes becoming longer term spreading routes for the virus. HRAS more than happy to offer support from our platforms if needed. Also happy to promote good news articles and positive developments within the sector through the HRAS network.

VM, TH – Still turning around applications for emergency funding as quickly as possible and welcome anybody needing additional support to get in touch Victoria.Muir@trinityhouse.co.uk

CS, SfUK – Trustees have agreed £2 million release from reserves to assist the maritime sector tackle Covid-19, there has been extensive coverage on this on social media and in the maritime news. Probably the most significant emergency funding since the Second World War and the largest amount from a single organisation in the sector. To be split roughly 75% MN, working with charity partners based in the UK and the Commonwealth. We see this fund as falling into 'exceptional circumstances' and welcome grant applications through our website. Please speak to CS, DL or TB (Tina Barnes) with regard to any applications: catherine.spencer@seafarers.uk deborah.layde@seafarers.uk tina.barnes@seafarers.uk 25% will be allocated to British fishers - in conversation with FM and The Fishmongers' Company to work out how SfUK can best help. Some of the money will be used to react to severe and acute hardship and some will be used for innovative, more preventative solutions in order to stop people getting to a point where they need welfare. SfUK working with organisations like The Fishmongers' Company and Sea Fish to try and help more fishers sell their stock direct to the public by using postal delivery via online methods. This will enable fishers to carry on fishing and earning money. Still working out the finer details including the grant process for approval and how to turn grants around quickly. This year's Seafarers' Awareness Week will aim to draw public attention to the plight of seafarers, to tell the stories of the problems seafarers are facing during Covid-19. Members encouraged to share stories of either challenges faced by seafarers or heroic acts taking place to ensure supply chains stay open. Highlighting what is currently going on in the sector will help fundraising across the board.

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 29th April 2020 at 11:00