



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

**NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG)
VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 24th JUNE 2020**

PRESENT: Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Mr Tim Alsop (TA)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Mr Neil Atkinson (NA)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Mr Alex Campbell (ACL)	Queen Victoria's Seamen's Rest (QVSR)/Tilbury SC
Valerie Coleman (VC)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Mr Roger Harris (RH)	Int. Seafarers' Welfare Assistance Network (ISWAN)
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)
Capt. Justin Osmond (JO)	Shipwrecked Mariners' Society (SMS)
Mr Andrew Pitcher (AP)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)
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)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Ms Phoebe Warneford-Thomson (PWT)	British Ports Association (BPA)

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 – Weekly ICS meeting did not take place yesterday. Modifications to crew change protocols for Singapore - Singaporean authorities have designated two accommodation facilities for seafarers to use once they arrive in Singapore, by air to join a ship or by ship in order to be repatriated, and are not able to immediately get a flight home or to join their ship in port. It is hoped that this will help overcome some of the problems with crew changes. The message from ICS also states that telemedicine facilities are being set up which will make it easier for seafarers to obtain certificates stating that they are not infected by Covid-19, this is another requirement of the Singaporean authorities. Last week, it was mentioned that there were differences in the Scottish legislation on quarantine for seafarers compared with the rest of the UK. If a seafarer was arriving in Scotland whether signing on or off and was not due to go back to work on a ship within 14 days then they were required to spend a 14 day period of self-isolation. After raising this with the Scottish government, as of Monday evening, this has now been resolved. Scotland has brought its legislation with regards to seafarers and Masters back into line with the rest of the UK. Seafarers arriving into Scotland are no longer required to self-isolate under any circumstances and any that were self-isolating as a result of the previous legislation have been immediately released from that obligation. MCA has detained six cruise vessels this week, all owned by the same company, in Tilbury and Bristol. Requested more details because the MCA notice specifically referred to two MLC requirements on which the ILO have called for flexibility in their application and the MCA had previously shown flexibility with regards to UK flagged ships. Other national shipping associations are concerned that the UK was perhaps not operating the flexibility that had been called for. Clarification received from the MCA indicated this was taken into account in the

decision taken to detain. The UK CoS did prepare a press statement, which may not have been used, calling on all parties that have a role to play in resolving the issue to do so as speedily as possible and to get the crew home. Heard a report that the Indian High Commission was open and that some seafarers with expired passports were able to obtain new passports even if they weren't able to give addresses in India. It is unclear how straightforward that process is in practice. In a discussion with DfT yesterday, TS was told that the government is looking to help with the repatriation of UK seafarers who are stranded abroad, either on cruise ships not going anywhere or on ships where a replacement crew is needed. In the discussion involving both TS and Nautilus International, neither party were able to identify how many UK seafarers are out there, in a position where they need to be repatriated urgently because either their ships are no longer working or because they have been onboard longer than their specified tours of duty. TS has undertaken a consultation exercise with Chamber members to try and find out how many UK seafarers there are and where they are so that arrangements can be made to get them home.

PT attended an ICMA webinar discussion with CLIA (Cruise Lines International Association), where it was estimated that around 225,000 seafarers from 100 different countries are waiting to be replaced. Six suicides have been reported although there may be as many as ten. PT asked at the webinar what the maritime charities and welfare organisations could do best to help their seafarers to which the response was communication and the provision of internet. It was also asked why all shipowners were not providing free internet to seafarers, as they had been recommended to do so by the ICS. A recording of the cruise ship crew welfare webinar can be viewed here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQ5sZPAJ_4E&feature=youtu.be

MNWB runs a Mifi project, of 60 Mifi units around the country, only 40% were being used. ACL stated that the Mifi units have to be left untouched for 3 days before they could be used due to Covid-19.

TS stated that the Chamber also recommends the provision of free internet facilities for seafarers for their personal use and is working at European level with social partners to promote this further. Recognising there may be connectivity issues when the ship is out at sea and that the internet may be needed at times specifically for the ship's own operations.

JC, DfT – MCA detained five CMV vessels at the end of last week because of MLC deficiencies, action plans are required for repatriation of the seafarers and there were outstanding salary issues. Working with all the cruise vessels in the UK, a pragmatic approach has been taken up until now but this situation could not be ignored and action had to be taken. DfT is now in talks with the Bahamian maritime authority, CMV and Global on a daily basis. There are arrangements for some of the Indian and Indonesian crew to be repatriated before the end of the month and plans to repatriate the remaining crew after that. There is now an agreement in place with HMRC that the bonded goods onboard the vessels can be used for the crew although there are some conditions attached which have been shared with the MCA. The small number of Indian seafarers on the Carnival vessels who had passport issues are now all on flights home and the passport issues resolved. The process the Indian High Commission has put in place, thanks to constant pressure, seems to be working. The Indian High commission has said that those in this situation will be fast-tracked. Identifying UK seafarers - DfT is talking to UK Ship Register but not all UK seafarers are working on UK registered vessels so it is very difficult to know how many have worked beyond their contract and are waiting to be repatriated. DfT may be notified of individuals by worried family members. If the vessel name and location is known then this can be followed up but there could be 2,000+ UK seafarers around the world who have worked beyond their contracts and need to be repatriated. Anything that ICS/CofS or the Unions can do to help build up the DfT knowledge base of UK seafarers in this situation would be gratefully received.

TA, DfT – Working with JC over the last couple of months to provide support for seafarers' welfare.

SE, MNWB PWC Manager, was contacted by the Vice Chairman of the Milford Haven PWC who has reported that the locator form now has to be completed by any seafarer leaving their vessel to go to the doctor's/hospital/shopping. JC is working with Department of Health, Public Health England, Cabinet Office and other government departments on this to try to find a solution and hopes to have news on this by the end of the week.

Regarding the issue discussed last week on repatriating Filipino crew from Gibraltar via the UK, JC stated that the requirement is for them to leave at 23:59 the next day, not the same day, if they do not have one of the visa exemption documents. Border Force and Immigration can take a view on the individual case and extend this as necessary. JC will ask the Repatriation team to talk with Gibraltar again to make sure that they are using the correct information.

NA, MCA – MCA expecting to restart surveys and inspections towards the end of July.

RH, ISWAN – Still receiving a high number of calls on Seafarer Help. Preparing for Day of the Seafarer tomorrow which will be a digital campaign. Also conducting a digital campaign on encouraging social interaction onboard, particularly for those seafarers having to remain onboard, working with the International CoS and ITF. Working on some of the cases involving the Indian High Commission, through ISWAN's regional office in India, where one of the trustees used to be Director General of Shipping. Feedback is that the Indian High Commission in London has been exceptional in assisting seafarers. If there are any issues involving seafarers and passports it would be useful to hear about this.

ACL, QVSR/TSC - Four vessels are currently detained in the port as a result of an MCA inspection which found that wages had not been paid for up to four months and in some cases crew had far exceeded their contracts. Some had been on board for up to 15 months. Both wages and length of time on board has been voiced by QVSR for some months. On Monday the ITF arrived to carry out inspections on all the cruise ships. The Indonesian Embassy also arrived to visit all their nationals. They have successfully completed this (with the exception of the Marco Polo currently berthed in Avonmouth). What the Embassy found mirrors QVSR's observations and those of the MCA and ITF: lack of wages and a need for their nationals to be repatriated. Following the visit by ITF and TSC the crews' hopes have been lifted and they are relieved that their voices are being heard. ITF are now negotiating with CMV regarding wages/contracts and repatriation. There are currently approx. 1,400 crew still onboard cruise ships in Tilbury. Whilst the restrictions for seafarers within the Port of Tilbury was lifted almost a month ago, Port Health have advised the cruise ships crew not to disembark which has led to some confusion. TSC have offered to arrange transport out of the port for those wishing to disembark and the Chaplains have been working to ensure both the mental and physical well-being of the seafarers are met as much as possible. They have supplied a listening ear where it is needed and are working closely with the crew management to identify those who are particularly vulnerable. They have provided practical items for the vessels such as footballs and basketballs to use onboard the ship and are providing cruise ships with toiletries, snacks and phone top ups. QVSR is currently accommodating eight seafarers waiting to return home with four more coming next week.

AP, SaSo - Still no ship visiting allowed in Singapore, the Philippines and other countries in the Far East, just reduced access. The Portbury centre (run jointly by SaSo, SM and MtS) and the Southampton centre have reopened, operating within the ICMA guidelines. Will be setting up two new Indian helplines, a general one for seafarers and another specifically for Captains, Chief Officers, Chief Engineers and Second Engineers. Some of the people they can speak to will include a lawyer and a psychologist. These helplines should be available soon.

CS, SfUK – Receiving applications now for the MN part of the £2 million fund. Grants meetings are now taking place every three weeks with one is next week. SAW (Seafarers Awareness Week) taking place from 6th-12th July, some good work has been done by Maritime UK on this and all members are invited to take part. Planning for staff to work from home until at least the beginning of September with review in August. Considering how staff will work in the future and recognise that remote working is working well for staff. Would like to hear from others based in London who are interested in an innovative approach to sharing office space to include a remote working set up/hot desking.

DT, SCS – Fairly steady week, strong uptake on fishing fleet extension to the Covid-19 temporary support which has just been extended for a further three months. Around £100K has now gone out to MN and fishing families. Question to the group – P&O redundancies seem to be moving

forward, 600 based in Dover, over 100 in Hull, are we happy that we have a route into P&O to provide help for these people should they need it? **Action: MNWB**

JL, SCFS – Chaplains receiving a lot of invitations to ship visit within Europe. Also very active in Portsmouth. Looking to ship welfare visit wherever and whenever the opportunities arise.

JO, SMS – Seeing more regular patterns of grant applications from individuals. Still a small trickle of general living expenses and Covid-related financial distress. Awaiting the onset of debt-related issues.

KM, IMarEst – Queried whether SSAFA are back to work. PT confirmed that SSAFA have worked throughout the pandemic, working by telephone not face to face with some excellent results.

PWT, BPA – Ports generally seem to be getting back to business as usual or to a new normal. Aware that some operational challenges may still arise. Found the WG updates to be valuable and encouraged members to get in touch with BPA if any issues arise that they can assist with or should be aware of.

MH, NWF – Case of Covid-19 reported on a couple of weeks ago has not developed or spread, residents in the care home and across Mariner's Park are fit and well. Residents are being kept updated with all the latest government guidelines. Caseworking - Looking to restart assessment visits at home with beneficiaries at the beginning of July, putting in place arrangements for that.

VC, MCG – MCG members meeting monthly. MCG members have recorded around £5 million in Covid-related expenditure over the last quarter, looking at what might be needed in the future. Questionnaire will be sent out to members in due course. Regarding P&O redundancies, have been asked what our response might be in terms of redundancy and retraining opportunities, first meeting of small group of people with a training remit will be held on the 30th June. Mental health training standard funded by MCG and MNTB will hopefully be out by next week.

LS – Had meeting last Friday with communications representatives amongst MCG members. All are putting weight behind the message directed at merchant seafarers: If you're a seafarer feeling the financial impact of Covid-19, go to Seafarer Support to find out what support is available. Tell your crew, tell your colleagues, tell your mates. This is a clear, strong endorsement of Seafarer Support which will be launched in time for SAW (Seafarers Awareness Week). The message is very adaptable, good to see Deborah Layde tweeting it and linking it to SAIL. Encouraged members to promote the message: "Tell your crew, tell your colleagues, tell your mates, support is available".

DT asked whether VC was in contact with Philip Eastell from Container Shipping Supporting Seafarers, a volunteer industry group founded to support maritime charities. VC will contact him.

In future, members voted in favour of the WG being held in the same week as the fortnightly ICS/ITF meetings so that the international information can be filtered down to the WG on a national level. The next fortnightly ICS/ITF meeting will take place on 30th June, therefore, the next Covid19 meeting will take place the following day on Wednesday 1st July 2020.

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 1st July 2020 at 11:00