



## MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

### NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 27<sup>th</sup> May 2020

<b>PRESENT:</b> Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Revd Ijeoma Ajibade (IA)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
Mr Neil Atkinson (NA)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Ms Mary Barber (MB)	Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Mr Alex Campbell (ACL)	Queen Victoria's Seamen's Rest (QVSR)/Tilbury SC
Capt. Andrew Cassels (AC)	Chairman, MNWB
Val Coleman (VC)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Ms Carol Florin-White (CFW)	Relate
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Ms Fearn Griffin (FG)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Mr Mick Howarth (NWF)	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)
Mr Andrew Pitcher (AP)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)
Mrs Christine Rankin (CR)	The Watch Ashore (WA)
Capt John Sail (JS)	Merchant Navy Association (MNA)
Mr Mark Simmonds (MS)	British Ports Association (BPA)
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 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** – Crew changes/movements was reported as one of the main issues discussed at yesterday's ITF/ICS meeting. ICS protocols are gaining increasingly wider acceptance, there is a greater willingness from some of the major crew change hubs to follow these, in part at least, to enable crew changes to take place. Some trial crew changes are taking place in Singapore. Hong Kong has indicated that it is prepared to allow crew changes even if a ship is not due to stop in Hong Kong as part of its standard business to drop off/pick up containers. Not simply a case of re-opening airports and re-establishing commercial flights: visas are a big issue at the moment, particularly for crew from Asia wishing to enter the Schengen area. Normally crew would obtain their Schengen visas from any mission embassy or consulates of an EU member state that is part of the Schengen area in their own country. Only the Belgium mission is currently issuing visas to seafarers joining ships in Belgium ports. The alternative under the Schengen visa code is to issue visas on arrival although this is normally a last resort. Logistical difficulties are making the process more difficult than usual at the moment – Schiphol airport in Amsterdam is only able to process a maximum of four applications per hour which has created

a backlog. ECSA has joined with ETF to call upon the European Commission and the member states to come up with an alternative solution to allow seafarers to travel, eg. the use of recently expired or single entry visas within the last twelve months. Difficulty here is that as the Schengen visa is valid for the whole Schengen area no individual member state wants to be the first to agree to this. Co-ordination at commission level is needed. Response on this has been encouraging - ECSA has held meetings with attachés of the member states based in Brussels, hopeful for progress on this quite soon. The Chamber has been working with Natalie Shaw, ICS to find out more information on testing. CT has produced a comprehensive analysis on the various tests available. This will be discussed further with Natalie and may form the basis for more detailed advice. Welfare support for seafarers was another important issue discussed at the meeting, particularly the hardships faced by seafarers who are unable to work. Some good work is being carried out especially in India and the Philippines although more help is still needed. Pleased to secure an exemption for seafarers and offshore workers from the quarantine requirements due to be introduced from 8<sup>th</sup> June. Need to know how this will operate in practice: what documents seafarers and offshore workers will require in order to prove their status to Border Force officials. Every crew manager in the world sending seafarers to join ships in the UK will need access to the right information on this. Congratulations to John Diamante, a former seafarer and friend of Roger Harris and TS, who completed a 100km run last Thursday and raised several thousand pounds for the ISWAN hardship fund for Filipino seafarers and their families.

**FG, DfT** – Guidance will be drawn up regarding exemption of seafarers and offshore workers from quarantine requirements, will provide and update on progress and how this will work. Questions on this can be sent to [Fearn.Griffin@dft.gov.uk](mailto:Fearn.Griffin@dft.gov.uk)

**Post Meeting Note:** John Cousley sent apologies as another meeting ran over, has sent through updated FAQ's (see **attached**).

**DA, NI** – Nautilus conducted a survey last week regarding the financial situation of seafarers; employment contracts and their eligibility for government schemes. The results were published yesterday and over 1,200 responses were recorded. It is estimated that up to 11,000 UK seafarers could be ineligible for any government support, 20% are at home and not earning as they cannot join their ships. Of those that answered, 48% of their employers do not operate a PAYE scheme and 52% are based overseas. Of the 20% that are not earning, this number is expected to increase and will lead to problems over the next few months.

**ACL, QVSR/TSC** – Sadly, last week a seafarer attempted to take his own life in Tilbury. Contrary to reports in the press, he did survive, has recently undergone surgery and is in a reasonably stable condition. The team at Tilbury have been keeping anxious crew updated on the welfare and health of their colleague. Hopes and prayers that he will survive and can get access to the support he needs. Continuing to provide support to around 1,600 cruise ship crew in Tilbury, helping them to maintain contact with their families. Have provided crew with materials to set up a prayer room on the ship affected by the recent tragedy. ACL based at Tilbury today as the decision was made yesterday to allow seafarers to come ashore, unclear whether this will actually happen but ACL will be present to keep control of the situation if large numbers of crew try to visit the centre. WG meetings have been a great resource for help, John Cousley has also been a great help regarding concerns over crew wellbeing. Thanked Catherine Spencer who put ACL in touch with Inmarsat and who are supplying satellite phones to seafarers so that they may contact their families.

**AP, SS** – Singapore and Philippines are still in lockdown, no ship visiting allowed in Indonesia and Myanmar. Hoping to resume ship visiting in Southampton, have been allowed to resume ship visiting in Albania and in some ports in the Ukraine. Will find out on 1<sup>st</sup> June what will happen in Singapore going forward.

**CFW, Relate** – Free relationship support service is now available to MN & FF thanks to a grant from SfUK. Seafarers currently at home when they would otherwise be working can have an impact on relationships, there may be financial issues, families may be separated for longer periods of time than normal and loved ones back at home may experience anxiety. Relate can offer a range of relationship counselling services to individuals, families and young people who may be affected when a parent is absent for a long period of time. The referral process is through a referral form that any beneficiary charity of SfUK can complete, this can be at the local level and doesn't have to be at the central level. Information on the referral process has been sent to all of SfUK's beneficiary charities. Larger organisations with dispersed staff can make referrals direct although they should provide SfUK with details of staff numbers who might make referrals. Relate can see people quickly through webcams, telephone or text counselling service. Dependants of seafarers and fishers can also make use of the service. Relate can also help people with relationships with work colleagues. Please contact Carol at [seafarers@relate.org.uk](mailto:seafarers@relate.org.uk) for further information.

**CR, WA** – Residents are happy at CA, sense of community is strong. Quiz and BBQ will be held this Saturday, several trustees will be joining by Zoom. Suggested holding quiz between QVSR and MP. One resident has returned from hospital for end of life care. A temporary manager is now in place.

**DT, SCS** – Lots of families still applying for help. Trustees have decided to extend temporary Covid-19 support for FF/MN families for another three months. These are families who wouldn't normally meet the strict entry criteria but who are being helped on a temporary basis. Still not seeing applications from as many MN families as expected, only a couple have come through via traditional routes of SSAFA. This issue needs to be addressed.

**JL, SCFS** – Appreciative of how the WG has enabled members to communicate with each other. SCFS Chaplains are able to enter European ports through invitation from ships' crew. Not meeting with the crew with the exception of one port in Germany but are able to go about their business in the 'new' normal. Within the UK the high cost of PPE is problematic. A reliable source is needed.

**JS, MNA** – Branches continue to report that members are safe and well despite wider concern of high number of seafarers in this country. Members continuing to stay home and are enjoying Zoom meetings with their own families and the branches.

**JO, SMS** – Level of applications has somewhat stabilised beneath the peak of 2/3 weeks ago, still heavily weighted towards fishing sector but a little more regular activity coming through. Important to continue to spread the word in MN circles and to do everything we can to make people aware that we are here to help them.

**KM, IMarEst** – Many members in the MN and offshore industry have been badly affected by the crisis but are stoic people so may be reluctant to ask for help. Delighted to hear about the funding from SfUK for Relate and was pleased to receive information from MNWB (received via Val Coleman) about the Coronavirus Community Support Fund.

**LW, SHS** – Applications have plateaued a little this week, have received a few more 'normal' applications for white goods etc. Again, heavily weighted towards fishing. Laura Simons is in the process of setting up a meeting for Friday morning with the comms leads of the various organisations to discuss how to get the message out to MN organisations/stakeholders about what support is available to them.

**MS, BPA** – Very useful to hear all updates from the WG which will be fed back to BPA members. Ship welfare visit protocols noted.

**MF, SM** – Thanked ACL and the QVSR team for the way in which they have been working in partnership with SM and others in Tilbury, this is a great example of partnership working.

Notified by Tyne Port Health of the death of a Filipino seafarer on a vessel on the Tyne. Liaising with colleagues in the Philippines to ensure that support can be offered to the family of the deceased seafarer. As lockdown is eased, SM Chaplains in the UK are undertaking more activity which is being informed by a recent survey led by Father Bruno Ciceri. This survey of seafarers aimed to identify their needs during Covid-19. It was clear that financial challenges are the primary concern of predominantly Filipino and Indian seafarers who referred to concerns over tuition fees and costs for school uniforms in different parts of the world. Jobs are under pressure, particularly in the cruise industry. Copy of survey **attached**

**MB, FM** – Continuing to see a flattening of the curve, still seeing large amounts of debt on application forms that is not being addressed due to payment holidays for loans/rents/mortgage etc. Anticipating a second 'peak', probably towards the end of June when the various government schemes that have enabled these payment holidays start coming to an end. Seeing an increase in concerns over mental health issues – the Relate offer is very welcome. Starting to see green shoots in the fishing industry, small boats are returning to sea although it remains to be seen what the markets will be like for them.

**IA, MtS** – BB is developing Covid19 'hygiene' protocols for use in the Mission around the world, all the MtS Regional Directors have now seen these. BB has had discussions with ICMA, the protocols will be developed to become an ICMA document which all the societies and maritime organisations around the world will be able to use. At the heart of the protocols is safe ship visiting, how to run the centres safely and the safe operation of port transport (minibuses). The document will most likely be published next week or the week after. The European region will next be looking at how to adapt the centres so that when they can re-open they can do so safely and minibuses can be run safely. Once completed, the protocols will be shared with all the organisations. Continuing to ship visit from the gangway in all ports in the UK except Felixstowe and in other ports in Europe. Using masks, gloves and hand sanitiser.

**MH, NWF** – All is well at MP, there are no cases of Covid-19 in the care home or across the wider park. A no visiting policy is still in place and staff are still wearing full PPE to protect residents. The hard work of keeping Covid-19 out continues. Information on the Relate scheme has been shared with staff at MP (may be useful for older couples) and with NI officials to pass on to members. Caseworkers remain fairly quiet in terms of enquiries from older mariners. Anything that can be done to reach these people would be much appreciated.

**VC, MCG** – MCG have created a questionnaire, to be sent out to members within the next couple of weeks to get an accurate picture of how the situation has impacted on the activities and the spend of charities. Cobseo circulated a similar questionnaire, not looking to repeat this work but do need to collect our own data. Laura Simons will be holding a meeting for communication specialists within the maritime charity sector on Friday to develop a common message for the MN sector about getting in contact as quickly as they can and not storing up problems for the future. Will be updating members on this.

**VM, TH** – Board meeting took place last week, looking at the long term response over the next 1-2 years. Will update members in due course. Still looking at emergency grants, received a couple of these last week.

**DL, SfUK** – Almost £700k of SfUK's £2 million fund has now been spent – details on this will shortly be available on SfUK's website and will be emailed to all current beneficiaries. Expecting the need of the MN to be a 'long game'. Held discussions last week with Mark Dickinson (General Secretary, Nautilus International) and Mark Carden (Assistant National Secretary, RMT) on how to reach more MN seafarers. They have been very supportive in placing information about SAIL and how to access UK welfare providers in Nautilus Telegraph and RMT's magazine. There are many redundancies and other issues coming through and it may be that the welfare need from a MN point of view could be very different in the coming months - the traditional support provided for older MN could shift quite dramatically. The fishing

community continues to be hard hit, SAIL has reported that debts are rising in this sector and a higher influx from fishers is still expected.

**MNWB** – Rebuild of SS signposting web platform is near completion. Will be contacting members towards the end of next week to ask for their help to promote this on behalf of the sector. Important to find innovative ways of reaching out to the MN sector. Suggested members consider the number of cases coming through which would be helpful to know now to address the expected longer term issues.

**Closing Remark** - Members to forward any links, extra information and note amendments to Celia [celia@mnwb.org.uk](mailto: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 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2020 at 11:00**

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