



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 29th April 2020

PRESENT: 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)
Mr Ben Bailey (BB)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
Ms Mary Barber (MB)	Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Mr Alex Campbell (ACL)	Queen Victoria Seamen's Rest (QVSR)/Tilbury SC
Capt. Andrew Cassels (AC)	Chairman, MNWB
Valerie Coleman (VC)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Mr David Hammond (DH)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
Mr Roger Harris (RH)	Int. Seafarers' Welfare Assistance Network (ISWAN)
Cdr Charles Heron Watson (CHW)	Royal MN Education Fund (RMNEF)
Mr Graham Hockley (GH)	MCG
Mr Mick Howarth (MH)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
Ms Tracy Keane (TK)	Care Ashore (CA)
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 (SS)
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)	Department for Transport (DfT)
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 – India has changed their standard operating protocols, Indian seafarers are now being repatriated but only by sea. Aviation routes still not opened up to seafarers although this is potentially part of a next phase. Thought DfT had a solution to the situation with the Indian students in the UK as some cruise ships have been used to repatriate seafarers, however India rejected this option. DfT will re-iterate in a call tomorrow that the seafarers were studying here in the UK. All key workers are eligible for testing, there is a shortage of available tests but this situation should improve soon. DfT would suggest that port welfare workers are key workers and that Chaplains should be covered by the government's definition of key workers. Although they do not fall directly under social care, they do provide a level of care. Will work with the ports to get clarity on this subject. **Action: JC, DfT**

JL raised concern about how to get proper training in use of PPE to ensure Chaplains are not put at risk and to avoid cross-contamination when handling masks. JC advised that there are HSE training videos available on YouTube which cover all forms of PPE. ACL advised that their local authority in port health is carrying out intensive training with care homes which could be useful to others.

JC advised that companies who have applied for assistance from the job retention scheme should have a sterling bank account to receive the grants but would confirm this with HMT.

Action: JC, DfT

JC advised that PHE/DfT FAQs for the maritime sector initially distributed are being updated. It should be finalised today and shared by the end of the week. **Action: JC, DfT**

NA, MCA – UK remains open for the repatriation of seafarers. Vessel returning from the Canaries with approx. 500 seafarers to be repatriated from Tilbury. One vessel was refused entry by 9 countries to allow repatriation. The cruise industry is using ships to repatriate and is facing delays at the port of arrival. Filipino seafarers are quarantined for 14 days on arrival and this is not considered to be part of their leave. Brittany Ferries are only carrying freight, not passengers at the moment. For seafarers needing medical care in the UK, if they can't get a face to face appointment, the alternative is a video or telephone call appointment.

TS, CoS – ICS meetings ticking off list of objectives. Crew changes - ICS have set up an ad hoc group which is aiming to get airports around the world, in key areas where crew changes customarily take place, to be re-opened and for procedures to be put in place to allow seafarers to travel to and from airports to ships whilst minimising interaction and exposure to the virus. This is still in the early stages but ICS has prepared a draft series of protocols for ship owners, national authorities, local authorities and airports to facilitate crew changes and protect the health of seafarers in transit. The European Commission has published guidelines to member states calling on them to progressively open up ports that are currently closed to enable crew changes to take place and to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is available so that seafarers can access medical treatment and are able to transit in conditions that safeguard their health. European Transport Council meeting to be held today. CSA (European Community Shipowners' Association) and the union's ETF have written to all the transport ministers calling upon them to adopt a co-ordinated approach for the re-opening of ports and the facilitation of crew changes. Testing of seafarers and PPE both depend on what is available and on government procurement rules. CT, new member of staff at CoS will be looking at the areas of testing for seafarers and PPE to make sure the industry has a good level of in-depth knowledge when it makes its representations.

DA, NI – Same issues are at top of agenda including crew changes. Still a lot of confusion around testing – which types and for what circumstances. A level of knowledge is needed in the industry before widespread testing can be rolled out. ITF inspectors have been asking questions about the issue of medical prescriptions as crew with extended contracts may be running out of medication. This was highlighted in last week's joint statement from the ILO, WHO and IMO as an issue rather than offering a solution.

See below email extract from Dr Sally Bell, MCA Medical Advisor in response to how a foreign seafarer might obtain a repeat prescription in the UK (received by NA):

There are a number of options available to the seafarer or master in this situation.

- *The seafarer could either be seen face to face as a temporary resident by a local NHS GP (not ideal in the current situation) or potentially have a telephone consultation with them. A GP should be able to see someone who was not entitled to NHS care, probably with a fee, and to issue a private prescription. Whether or not they would be willing to do this*

would be the decision of the doctor themselves. Verification of the drug and dose might be requested.

- *Internet providers of GP care would be able to issue a prescription (again, for a fee)*
- *The Master would be entitled to request prescription medications from either a local pharmacy or a wholesale pharmacy. As local pharmacies might not be aware of the regulations and how to apply them the Master would be well advised to check in advance whether the pharmacy would be willing to do this, and what evidence they would require of the identity and position of the Master, and also the need for the specific medication requested. Wholesale pharmacies used to supplying ships would be better informed about the regulation, but would have to arrange delivery direct to the ship.*

RH, ISWAN – Reporting from yesterday's ICS meeting also attended by MNWB, ILO sent out a circular asking countries to designate ship welfare workers as key workers although unsure what the situation is in the UK. Still receiving large number of Covid-19 related calls on SeafarerHelp. Have received a lot of funding for the seafarer emergency fund. Would like to make contact with some of the organisations that pay out hardship grants in the UK in order to understand the criteria required. Would like to know more about the issue of Indian seafarers being repatriated back to India on cruise ships. Received an email from an Indian seafarer with concerns about a Marella ship in Southampton transferring the Indian crew to one vessel - two seafarers onboard that vessel died of Covid-19. Have given a grant to MtS to support around 50 Indian seafarers stranded in the UK.

DA responded with regard to the Marella cruise ship – ISWAN received the same enquiry, took it up with the crewing agent and brought it to the DfT's attention. ITF responding to this also. Ascertained that the company has been in contact with Public Health England, DfT and port health authorities who were all satisfied that the change was undertaken in accordance with all relevant safety procedures. Satisfied that this issue is resolved.

CS, SfUK – Working on £2million fund recently announced with funds lined up for particular schemes. Huge amount of work to ensure the resource is used correctly for the MN, need to ensure that this fund works well over the next 18 months. Whilst some people may get back to work in the next month or so, the financial implications people face will last for some time. Keen to see collaboration and want to work with others to leverage funds. Thanks to all for the incredible way you are supporting the sector and please stay in touch with your ideas for additional COVID services that will make a meaningful difference to seafarers and their families.

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

CHW, RMNEF – Set up £35K fund last week to help fishermen in difficulties. Main aim is to get money and equipment to them as quickly as we can. So far we have spent £21.5K and are now helping 102 children from 48 families. Reminded all the almonising charities not to forget the children and their education.

DT, SCS – Have recognised there are 3 distinct phases. First, is existing cohort of providing computers and emergency funding. Second phase, which we are entering now, is temporary support for the fishing families until they get back to sea. The third phase which trustees are thinking about strategically is the anticipated increase in divorce rate which puts a lot of seafarers' families into the entry criteria for our support scheme in the future. So far almost £60K has gone out just on Covid-19 funding. Have this week started a joint call with FM, SHS and SMS. Not seen any new cases from MN families during the crisis. Would appreciate anything members could do to highlight the charitable aid that is available to them.

JO, SMS – Useful weekly interaction taking place with SHS, FM and SCS. Discussed likely move forward of welfare need and recognising the current 'general living expenses' phase until

benefits or government support schemes kick in. Phase 2 will probably encounter a number of people who require support in the longer term that are falling through the cracks for general living expenses. The debt situation will come to life next, bearing in mind that SAIL are not giving debt advice at the moment but focusing on immediate benefits. This situation will include 'priority' debts, people being evicted from their homes, and 'non priority' debts, for reclaiming of cars etc. Thinking of how to respond to those needs as they occur. Most of the organisations don't deal with 'non priority' debts but we hope to be able to help people to the maximum extent for the 'priority' debts. Numbers of applications are up.

LW, SHS – Exceptional week last week, nearly reached capacity in turning around grant applications, mostly fishermen at the moment for general living expenses until other benefits kick in. Hardly getting any increase in terms of individual grants for MN applications, not as many as we normally receive. Concerned that we are almost at end of first month of Q2 and have almost spent all of Q2 budget allocated. Trustees are committed to supporting in whichever way they can. SAIL not receiving as many requests for debt support as normal because of the government schemes available plus those in debt are not being chased up. There are other debt support organisations that SAIL are advising people to contact if they are worried about debt. Issue of debt is expected to be a higher priority in a few months' time. Senior debt advisor started at SAIL yesterday. SAIL are also recruiting for a further two vacancies in preparation for a few months' time when they will be extremely busy.

MB, FM – Demand from fishermen is still very high, still seeing a rise in numbers requesting welfare support and applications. Issues with migrant workers ongoing – contracts were ended at the beginning of the crisis, they are left in limbo being unemployed and have immigration status. Although some skippers have offered to pay for repatriation, flights are not available. Their welfare needs are being taken care of in terms of food and heating. FM continuing to look at the medium to long term, anticipating a rise in need moving forward through the crisis. Looking at potential issues with cash flow that might emerge; downturn in voluntary income in April; not expecting a quick recovery.

AP, SS – Chaplains had refrained from active ship visiting, now asking regional managers around the globe if any restrictions have been lifted in their country. Shared concerns raised about PPE in terms of procurement and proper use. Chaplains keen to return to work but they have got to be safe. Care home in Scotland is closed to new admissions, open to staff only, delivery is by the back door, no access to the general public to the home. Trying to keep residents happy and occupied is difficult, especially those with dementia - having to explain to them repeatedly why they can't see their families, which is a very sad situation. Residents communicating with their families digitally.

BB, MtS – 52 Indian seafarers, whose details were given by ISWAN, have had their rents paid for the next month and have been issued with food vouchers. Have received a further 28 applications from seafarer students across the UK, not just Indian nationals, but also Nigerians seeking assistance. MtS in the process of assessing their need and will be having discussions with ISWAN and others on this matter. 'Chat to a Chaplain' digital contact service continues, very grateful for the funding support from Seafarer UK and the Marine Society.

CR, MS – Working with three charities to offer their support and making sure they have funds and Learn@Sea licences as quickly as possible. Some colleges are shifting over to online courses using Zoom.

Note: MNWB also offering instructor led online courses using Zoom.

MH, NWF – Sadly, another resident has died in the care home at MP this week, bringing total to three deaths from Covid-19. Most residents who were showing symptoms are now much better. Planning to get back to more normal operations possibly from next week although residents will still not be allowed visitors. One member of staff being tested today, still able to access tests for staff. One resident on the wider park is currently in hospital, had tested positive but now negative and has been moved to a general ward. No other residents with any

symptoms. Three home care staff have been absent with Covid but are doing well and we hope to see them back at the beginning of next week. Welcomed news that all care home staff and residents whether symptomatic or not can be tested. Over 65s showing symptoms can now be tested – this age group applies to all residents at MP. Have seen drop off in new requests for assistance over the last month.

TK, CA – Everyone healthy, started lockdown a week before the rest of the UK. Beneficiaries and residents have adjusted well to the lockdown. Have seen increase in mental health anxiety linked to the situation so have implemented a busy activities programme. Thanked SHS and TH for grants that have enabled the purchase of lots of new games and activities. Waverley Borough Council is not testing unless someone is showing symptoms. Thankfully CA Covid free. Footfall from the estate has been reduced to around four people. Residents are accompanied to medical appointments then placed on seven-day isolation when they return. Robust risk assessment in place and being updated regularly. All beneficiaries and residents on the estate have been issued with PPE which they are using. Update letter is sent out every week to everybody on the estate. Some beneficiaries who were working are having trouble paying their rent, we are managing this with rental holidays.

ACL, QVSR/TSC – QVSR – Over 100 residents tested last week, four tested positive and are currently in isolation with another four residents. Sadly, one resident died yesterday in his room which was traumatic. TSC – attempting to meet the needs of the seafarers whilst remaining safe, experiencing problems with some agents. Grateful to MNWB who helped meet the needs of seafarers on a cruise ship and appreciated the support provided. Ship visiting from the bottom of the gangway, providing goods in this way and then retreating four metres, as required by the port.

MF, SM – Chaplains continue to be active albeit in a limited capacity. Thanked JC for the clarification on key workers.

JL, SCFS – Chaplains keeping up the communication where they can, everybody is keen to get back to work. Good to hear that Chaplains are designated as essential workers.

KM, IMarEst – Continuing to be available, communicating with our members and looking forward to collaborating with other associations. These weekly meetings helping us to learn where the benefit levels are, what poverty is and how best to address it.

JS, MNA – MNA continues to work with national hub and branch clusters to sustain contact with members and other independent MN groups. Regular online updates through The Pulse and quarterly magazine. More branches are holding regular Zoom meetings. One ancient mariner has downloaded the 'Party Time' app and enjoys quizzes with three generations of his family. Have advised branches to make themselves known to their local community resilience groups and their local council community hubs. One MNA boat club member has received five face masks, printed with the Boat Club pennant. MNA welcomes IMarEST and KVH support for those at sea: 50% discount on calling cards and KVH offering free Voip calls to ISWAN's helpline.

GH, MCG – There will be a debate in the House of Lords on Thursday on the roles being played by the various charities across the country. Hoping that Lord Mountevans will speak on behalf of the maritime charities. LS has put together the brief and hoping that he will make the case that we are all working together and achieving good joined up work.

DH, HRAS – Received a report yesterday that the NZ government is looking to designate Port Chaplains as key workers to allow them to make onboard visits. Thanks to ISWAN for a case passed on concerning a stranded crew member in Tunisia whose hotel fees have now been paid.

Members expressed their condolences to those working in care homes for the reported Covid-19 related deaths.

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 6th May 2020 at 11:00

DRAFT