



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

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

PRESENT: Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Mr Ben Bailey (BB)	Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
Mr Alex Campbell (ACL)	Queen Victoria's Seamen's Rest (QVSR)/Tilbury SC
Mr Mark Carden (MC)	RMT
Ms Sharon Coveney (SC)	MNWB
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Mr Roger Harris (RH)	Int. Seafarers' Welfare Assistance Network (ISWAN)
Mr Nick Harvey (NH)	Seafarers UK (SfUK)
Mr Mick Howarth (MH)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
Supt. Tim Jenkins (TJ)	The Fishermen's Mission (FM)
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)
Capt. David Parsons (DP)	Merchant Navy Association (MNA)
Mr Andrew Pitcher (AP)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)
Mrs Christine Rankin (CR)	The Watch Ashore (WA)
Ms Carla Rockson (CRS)	Marine Society (MS)
Ms Laura Simons (LS)	MCG Comms Consultant
Mr Christian Turner (CT)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)

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:

CT, UK CoS – The main theme of yesterday's ICS/ITF meeting was the increase in restrictions in Asia, specifically in Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Vietnam and Malaysia. In Hong Kong, seafarers now have to self-isolate for 14 days in Hong Kong waters, whereas previously if a seafarer had not had shore leave and there were no positive cases onboard, the 14 days were counted as having been completed. There has been a shift in public attitude, particularly in Hong Kong, where some seafarers are being seen as carriers of the virus as opposed to safe, essential workers. The Hong Kong press has been particularly critical. ICS is involved in a number of discussions to try to help alleviate the situation. This seems to have been brought on by a minority of both companies and seafarers not following the protocols. The hope is to apply pressure on Singapore so that other countries may soften their stances. At a European level, ECSA and the EU are looking at establishing travel corridors between airports and seaports to help crew changes take place. Spain are on the verge of or have already started issuing visas on arrival, the hope is that Las Palmas could be used as a potential destination for vessels. Last Tuesday, the Chamber held a mental health webinar, well attended by 150 people, which can be viewed via the following link: <https://event.webinarjam.com/t/click/n6ky9hgtqh5h7vfkofv9i4>

RH, ISWAN – Concerns that Manila may go back into an enhanced community quarantine, which would impact welfare agencies in the Philippines and the transfer of seafarers. Involved in various cases around the world regarding repatriation, it is a difficult time for seafarers who are stuck onboard for a long time with many mentally and physically exhausted. There has been a reduction

in calls to Seafarer Help; double the number instead of triple. The overall number of applications to Seafarers Emergency Fund are also declining. Important to continue to focus on the issue of seafarers' mental health; have received a number of calls from seafarers with suicidal thoughts and dealt with a couple of tragic suicides in the last few weeks. The team are working through a backlog of 1,500 applications to the hardship allowance and then will review next steps for the allowance.

MC, RMT – P&O Ferries reported to be announcing several hundred compulsory redundancies this week and next week. SAIL will therefore be very busy over the next few months and could be overwhelmed. There are reports that SAIL could employ another person if they see an increase in demand. Participating in a working group looking into the possibility of retraining seafarers who have been made redundant to help them move into the renewable or offshore decommissioning sectors. Vital that the maritime charities are agile over the next six months and are able to respond to seafarers in need in whatever capacity they can.

ACL, QVSR/TSC – TSC was awarded a small grant from MNWB on 13/3 to help repatriate seafarers in Tilbury, unfortunately, some are still stranded in Tilbury today. Sadly, CMV went into administration last week which has made the situation at Tilbury worse. The setup is being overseen by the insurance company. Trying to support crew day to day, priority is supporting the individuals and to be able to offer them shore leave. Up to 60 crew are coming ashore each day, there are 302 crew on cruise ships at Tilbury today. Working with SM to get supplies to the Marco Polo in Bristol, the crew do not have money or an allowance. Working with MNWB to supply communications with the MiFi units. 200GB of data are being used on one ship in two days as the seafarers are making video calls to their families. Trying to work with five ships. Thank you to SC and Aiden Harvey of MNWB for getting as much data as possible for this. The seafarer who attempted suicide at the start of lockdown is visited and making steady progress in hospital, and has been able to speak with family.

AP, SaSo – New Southampton Port Chaplain has started work in the port. In Indonesia, no ship visiting is allowed in the four ports SaSo operates in. Jakarta has seen an increase in Covid cases. SaSo Chaplain is visiting seafarers and following health protocols there. India helpline is receiving calls, and seafarers are contacted through personal social media platforms. Tried to recommence ship visiting in Singapore on 27th July but were advised not to by Singaporean port authorities. Processing 60 welfare grant applications in the Philippines. Have access to all ports in South Africa but only allowed to visit from the gangway. In the Réunion Islands the Chaplain is providing accommodation for seafarers in quarantine, most likely at the SM centre, providing a service to move seafarers between the ship and the airport.

BB, MtS – Continuing to support Indian seafarers, particularly in the UK, the last ten are being repatriated, two this weekend. Grateful for funding from ISWAN Seafarers Emergency Fund that has made this possible. Pleased that the MNWB MiFi project is to continue. MtS looking to implement a similar programme, have recently received a significant donation from a high net worth individual and will be trying to provide a MiFi unit in every port where MtS operates. Ship visiting continues in approx. 70% of MtS network from either the top or bottom of the gangway. Concerns about Singapore, Hong Kong and Antwerp where local lockdowns seem to be increasing and restrictions could be imposed. Concerns that Cyprus may be entering a second wave. Port Chaplains adhering to rules and maintaining social distancing although seafarers have invited them onboard. PPE and centre adaptations continue in the UK, hoping to reopen in Belfast on Monday and the remaining UK centres in the middle of August. ICMA planning to host a Chaplaincy webinar on the afternoon of 12th or 13th August (date TBC next week), open to all organisations.

CR, MS – Thank you to ISWAN and SM (and others) for putting seafarers forward to test the English@sea Plus course. This will launch on 3rd August. Books available to donate, anyone who can suggest a port centre that might want a ship's library supply of 100 books, please email Lenka at books@ms-sc.org

DP, MNA – Reported one Covid related death, sadly. Branches keeping in touch with members, some via Zoom. MNA has promoted Seafarers Link amongst its members.

JL, SCFS – Some Chaplains are able to get onboard to ship visit. PPE remains an ongoing concern.

KM, IMarEst – Maritime charities all trying to be agile at this time and are able to make contact with each other quickly. Would be happy to hear from ACL if IMarEst can support any seafarers at Tilbury. A lot of seafarers who have moved into shoreside positions in the oil & gas industry are expected to lose their jobs at the end of the month.

MF, SM – Stepping up activity in ports as lockdown is gradually eased, combining actual ship visiting, with permission to go onboard, and gangway ministry. Taking advantage of the network around the world to connect seafarers in the UK with anxious families back home. Further details can be found on SM's Facebook page which contains a lot of information about ongoing activity being undertaken by Chaplains and ship visitors.

LS, MCG – Danny Kruger MP has been asked by the Prime Minister to look at the role of charities in the next phase of the Covid-19 recovery, working to a very short deadline of 4-5 weeks. MCG has made a submission on behalf of the maritime charities reflecting on the agility of the sector and its ability to respond quickly and creatively. The response will soon be published on the MCG website. The recent mental health and wellbeing awareness training standard launch received a positive response and a lot of media coverage. Thanked members who have promoted the standard and asked them to please contact MCG to advise how they have promoted this and what response they have received so that MCG can understand how successful the initiative has been.

MH, NWF – All residents and staff at MP are well. Carrying out weekly testing for all staff, which is a day's work to process and record details of 60 staff. Thankfully, all results have been negative. Waiting for local Director of public health on The Wirral to confirm if it is safe for family and friends to visit care home residents in the area. Shielding ends at the end of this month. Six members of staff have been shielding, three are happy to return, three are anxious and refusing to return despite the safeguards in place and the home being Covid free. Communal facilities in the hub are slowly returning to normal – hair salons, the chiropody, laundry facilities and gym have reopened, all in line with the government announcements. Slowly restarting activities, usually with limited numbers and social distancing but all beginning to feel somewhat normal. Shielding for all residents comes to an end on Friday. Caseworking service has restarted home visits, which are appreciated and going well.

NH, SfUK – SAW took place on the 6th-12th July this year. As a result of Covid-19, the decision was taken to change the way in which SAW was promoted this year and the budget reallocated (£1 million out of the £2 million Covid-19 emergency fund has already been allocated). It was initially decided that SAW would focus on the safety of MN seafarers as the promotional theme but as the crew change crisis evolved there was concern over what this meant for the mental health of seafarers who were stranded. SfUK decided to take a closer look at the issue of seafarers' suicide and discovered that there was no central resource or database which accurately records instances of suicide of MN seafarers at sea. This news resulted in a huge volume of traffic on SfUK's social media channels, drawing attention to the issue and starting conversations on seeking fresh mental health interventions, if we could better understand the numbers and issues involved. This initiated discussions with the P&I Clubs, ILO, IMO & ICS. Catherine Spencer will be holding more in-depth conversations with these organisations with a view to a possible modification of MLC to ensure that suicides are accurately recorded going forward. A lot of fatalities at sea are not being accurately recorded as suicide. Developments will be shared with members at future meetings. MC thanked NH and MCG for promoting the MCA's 'Wellbeing At Sea, A Guide for Organisations' during SAW and encouraged members to order a copy. The guide is published by TSO and costs £30 for the big book and £15 for the pocket size version. It is an excellent tool for seafarers and contains signposting and coping mechanisms for seafarers.

TJ, FM – FM is recruiting Missionary Officers for Newlyn, Brixham and the South Coast. The UK fishing scene is slowly and quietly returning to how it was, some fishers continued fishing during Covid and some stopped due to market closures. With the hotels and pubs opening these markets are reopening. The shellfish recovery in Scotland and Ireland has been quicker than expected. As credit card and mortgage holidays come to an end, it is expected that applications for financial assistance will increase. Thanked SAIL for all their help during this time. SAIL have taken on an employee with specific debt management experience. Thanked MNWB for the MiFi provision. Very slowly getting back to port visits, maintaining social distancing. Staff continue to work from home and working on decluttering and sanitising their offices. This month we have contacted more of our current and retired fishermen in East Anglia by phone, email and letter than previously, although this is not the same as face to face appointments. Thanked all maritime partners for their continued support.

VM, TH – The Board met last week and took the decision to release further funding for immediate need. Will be looking at an incremental release of funds for the longer term response as that need becomes clearer and this will be focused on welfare, education, training and safety. Taking part in the MCG working group on seafarers' redundancy and looking forward to seeing the results from this. Will keep members updated on future funding.

SC, MNWB – It was recently announced that MNWB would be working on a joint collaborative project with DfT and SfUK to provide free internet access onboard vessels visiting UK ports. Initially looked at 50 units but this has been increased to 60 units and due to the escalating need. The project starts today and MNWB will be working in partnership with the numerous participating maritime charities. The vessels in Tilbury and Bristol have a set, capped amount of 60GB which is being used very quickly. The provider (O2) has just confirmed that they can increase the allowance to unlimited data and this will be applied to the four vessels in Tilbury and one in Bristol. Seafarer Support - The Board continues to provide a valuable and unique service of a single point of contact and referral service for people seeking help from one or more of the numerous UK maritime charities. The new website is 98% complete and expected to be live by the end of this week or by next week. The new software will have artificial intelligence, the search facilities will continue to grow and will signpost users to the charity or charities best suited to help them.

CR, WA – The staff and residents at Care Ashore are all well and Covid free. The residents recently enjoyed a scaled down centenary celebration. Now recruiting a new CEO at Care Ashore and the advert will be published shortly, looking to recruit new trustees also. Delighted to hear from Silver Line that, in partnership with Age UK and Dixons, a recent Seafarers Link group received free tablets and are hoping to link up with each other via Zoom. Recently welcomed a new member to the group. The members are missing being able to go to a pub to sit at the bar and chat. Need to be thinking about how to use the tablets to maximum potential.

In future, members voted in favour of Covid-19 WG meetings being held on a monthly basis. Members also agreed that there should be no meetings in August and the next meeting should be held on [Wednesday 9th September 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 9th September 2020 at 11:00](#)