

Nigel Gooding CBE
Deputy Director - EU Fisheries Policy and Negotiations
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
1st Floor Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

27 March 2020

Dear Nigel

Thank you for engaging with the charity welfare sector as you develop your response for fishers impacted as a consequence of the coronavirus. It is appreciated that some measures have been announced that may be beneficial to the sector; such as the package of support for the self-employed. However, like many, we are still learning the detail of this, and would appreciate maintaining an open dialogue until matters become clearer, and indeed, as further issues may arise.

We are providing this information following our recent phone conversation where we suggested a range of measures that we think could help the charity welfare sector to help Government with its response for fishers impacted by the coronavirus crisis. We are happy to provide more detail, or discuss further if you are interested in any of these measures. Indeed, as a significant charity funder (alongside Fishmonger's Company) for those working within the maritime charity sector, we could also help you to co-ordinate your response.

1. Recognition of Share Fishers as self-employed and eligible for support - share fishers are in effect self-employed precarious workers and therefore should be able to benefit from Government's package of support for the self-employed. However, their eligibility is not yet clear. This is in part because there are particular issues that differentiate share fishers from other self-employed workers. For example: they are really the first gig workers and for centuries have required bespoke consideration in employment matters - as recognised by HMRC tax status. A share fisher can also be a business/vessel owner.

As a practical measure, all of the welfare charities listed below are encouraging and supporting all fishers to take up universal credit as it opens up additional access to housing benefit and Council Tax Benefit which will be a helpful form of support at this time.

ACTION: Recommend a further bespoke package from government specifically for fishers, which builds on Government's existing self-employed support package.

2. **Raise awareness of the charitable welfare support and advice that is available.** Many fishers are struggling and worried and are not aware of where to turn to for support, help and advice. As discussed, Defra could use its own communications platforms to help to raise awareness of the range of charitable welfare support that exist.

In addition, Fathom Podcasts (a Cornish Fish Producers Organisation project, funded by EMFF funds and match funded by Seafarers UK) could be used to interview key personnel from MMO/Defra as interviewees to put over key Government messages at this time.

ACTION: Defra Comms team to assist with providing key staff for Fathom Podcast interviews. Defra Comms team to also use own media platforms to raise awareness of the range of charitable welfare support that exists, e.g.

- a) **Support for fishers from Fishermen's Mission (FM) - ACTION:** Defra Comms team to publicise the help from Fishermen's Mission/signpost to website/Freephone number etc.
- b) **Advice from Seafarers' Advice & Information Line (SAIL) - ACTION:** as above. In addition, Defra could increase access to advice by providing funding for the Fishing Specialist Caseworker post, thereby allowing existing Seafarers UK funding for the post to be repurposed to provide additional advice opportunities and access through an extension of hours of service (more details contained below).
- c) **Mental Health Support - Seafarers' Hospital Society (SHS)** provide access to free counselling through the Big White Wall¹. Also, currently in development is the roll out of a mental health initiative that is based on the success of GetSeaFit²- initially this will be funded by the Scottish Government in Scotland.

ACTION: can Defra influence Government to roll this initiative out to the whole of the UK - run by FM and SHS under the GetSeaFit brand (initial costs are £230k for Scotland; £500k UK wide).

Defra Comms team to publicise SHS access to Big White Wall initially, and when given OK publicise the GetSeaFit mental health initiative (if funded UK wide) as well.

- d) **Animation support for fishers accessing welfare and business support - The Animation Programme³** is already working in partnership with the Marine Management Organisation to ensure those who have spent on grant supported activity are reimbursed their expenditure more swiftly; additional co-ordination on this measure is welcomed.

ACTION: Defra Comms support of updated www.fishinganimateur.co.uk with latest advice on accessing business support and benefits via short mobile phone friendly videos. NB: the Animation project will be offering information NOT advice, and plan on supporting people who do not know where to go for help or have no internet access. Defra Comms to help signpost an existing survey which seeks to gather opinions on the challenges and opportunities facing the fleet. <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/XZT6LM3>

¹ As SHS fund this service, it is necessary for fishers to access it through their webpage - <https://seahospital.org.uk/mental-health-and-wellbeing-2/>.

²Get Sea Fit - <https://seahospital.org.uk/seafit-programme/>

³ Fishing Animation Programme - <https://www.fishinganimateur.co.uk/>

3. **Defra to consider a Hardship fund** similar to that introduced by the Scottish Assembly on Wednesday. Fishmonger's Company and Seafarers UK (alongside Seafish) are also likely to award funds towards an emergency/welfare relief fund and it would be useful if Defra's funds, if awarded, are amalgamated into, and awarded as, one shared fund. Recognition that any loan schemes will lead to an extended period of demand for welfare support linked to financial difficulties that could run to years.

ACTION: Defra to consider financial support for this initiative.

4. **Re-consider the proposal for funding a specialist fishing caseworker at SAIL -**
ACTION: Defra to consider assisting financially with this post so that Seafarers UK can enable existing grant funding for this post to be repurposed and used to enhance the advice service through providing additional hours of advice - thereby increasing the availability of advice and fisher's access to the advice service. The Fishing Specialist Caseworker was part of the package of support Seafarers UK proposed in September 2019. The aim was to support fishers in the event of a no deal Brexit, in anticipation of an interruption or disruption of trade to the large EU export market.

5. **UK Fishing Ports** - harbours and ports are a vital, necessary and interconnected part of the food supply chain and fishing industry. Unfortunately revenue for many fishing ports has been impacted as income from fish landings and tourism has plummeted. A practical measure of support for fishers would be to suspend payment of mooring fees at ports and harbours, as well as landing fees, loft rental and bait store fees for at least 6 months but also to ensure that the financial strain of this measure is not passed on to the ports, particularly harbour ports. Indeed some ports have already unilaterally suspended mooring fees. However, it is important to recognise that this measure would further impact the income of local ports and harbours. Given the interconnectedness of ports and harbours with the fishing industry and food supply, it becomes even more apparent that it is necessary to include fishing ports and harbours within the package of support on offer to the fishing industry.

The inclusion of fishing ports and harbours is an opportunity for UK Government to get the response right, as the Scottish Government failed to include ports within their recently announced support package. It is important to ensure that this does not occur in the rest of the UK when matters impacting fishing ports can often fall between a Defra/DfT policy gap. Colleagues at the British Ports Association will be able to advise further on matters impacting fishing ports.

ACTION: 1. Establish measures to cover the ongoing business costs of tied up or furloughed fishers, such as mooring, insurance, loft rental and bait fees.

ACTION: 2. Recognise that many fishing ports are an interconnected part of the fishing industry and will also be suffering from cash-flow/revenue issues and require income support. As such, fishing ports must also be included in any support package for the fishing industry.

6. **Direct selling and market/supply chain support** - The Fishmongers' Company are launching a UK-wide rapid response grant programme for food charities and seafood businesses looking to:

- a) Diversify due to Covid-19,
- b) Promote the consumption or sale of local seafood through virtual fish markets
- c) Provide community meals (including the vulnerable and key workers) using seafood. The grants will prioritise initiatives that demonstrate collaborative working between stakeholders and will be assessed by a panel of industry experts.

ACTION: Defra to consider supporting the grant by way of Comms support and possible financing, which may involve covering some IT infrastructure costs, administration, packaging and subsidising the cost of delivery for an initial period of time or until this new direct to consumer market has reached sufficient volume to become self-sustaining. Direct Comms support of a few specific online national programmes would also be beneficial.

We hope you find this response useful and of interest. We are very happy to continue a dialogue in order to ensure that the broadest range of measures can be brought into play to support fishers at this difficult time and welcome the invitation to discuss further on 03 April.

Yours sincerely,

Deborah Layde

Deborah Layde, Seafarers UK Grants Director, on behalf of:

Animation Project - Rob Poole, Fishing Animateur

Fishermen's Mission - David Dickens, Chief Executive

Fishmonger's Company - Alison Freeman, Fisheries Programme Manager

Seafarers' Advice & Information Line (SAIL) - Miles Cowley, Manager

Tony Delahunty, independent