



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE SEAFARERS' WELFARE – CRISIS WORKING GROUP VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 3RD AUGUST 2022

PRESENT: Ms Sharon Coveney (Chair)	MNWB
Capt. Marc Evans (ME)	The Fishermen's Mission (TFM)
Ms Hannah Gilbert (HG)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Mr Simon Grainge (SG)	ISWAN
Mr Andrew Jones (AJ)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Mrs Deborah Layde (DL)	The Seafarers' Charity (TSC)
Miss Victoria Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
Ms Laura Simons (LS)	MCG Consultant
Ms Andrea Smith (AS)	Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA)
Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Mr Daniel Yarker (DY)	Seamen's Christian Friend Society (SCFS)

The meeting opened at 11.00am. The Chair reported that MNWB Chief Executive, Stuart Rivers, was recovering well and expected to return to work end of August/early September. To date, the Board has issued 8,000 SIM cards to be distributed to Ukrainian seafarers and has applied to Vodafone for a further 5,000 SIMs. SC reported that the Scottish government has commissioned the MV Victoria passenger ship until January 2023 to accommodate displaced Ukrainians, with 100 crew onboard. Revd Joe O'Donnell, Stella Maris Chaplain, Scotland, had visited the ship which is docked in Leith and raised concerns about the crew being unable to contact family and friends. The Board hoped to fund additional MiFi devices for the crew.

TS & HG UK CoS – Covid - TS reported that the Chamber has been in discussion with members regarding restrictions that were still in place. Shore leave seems to be taking place more widely although some operators still require crew members to test regularly and wear PPE onboard. Infection outbreaks were still occurring; there was anecdotal evidence that this was due to pilots coming onboard ships. The Omicron variant was causing concern particularly in India and had also been detected in the UK. HG reported on yesterday's ILO Ukraine Crisis meeting. Marshall Law still applies to Ukrainian seafarers until 24th August and it is expected that the Ukrainian government will extend Marshall Law by a further three months. Ukrainian seafarers, of a certain age, working on ships would therefore be expected to join the armed forces if they return to Ukraine. There were calls for the Ukrainian government and President to make an exception for seafarers as had been done for other industries, due to their important work to kick start the Ukrainian economy. The first ship using the grain corridor set off on Monday and has reportedly entered Romanian waters. There were concerns over checks being completed once the ships reached Turkey. Although these security checks were expected to be vigorous there was also concern over what type of welfare services would be made available to the seafarers once they reached Turkey and beyond. This topic would be discussed at the next ILO Ukraine Crisis meeting.

SG, ISWAN – SG reported that calls to Seafarer Help remained steady. There had been a peak with enquiries mostly about the Ukraine Crisis Support Fund and the hardship grants offered. The fund had been suspended as the money has been expended. £250K had been distributed to seafarers affected by the conflict. The SIRF stakeholders have been considering what the next steps might be. A survey has been circulated and 98 responses received from the industry, unions and welfare organisations. SG thanked all those who had taken part in the survey. The survey took into account what type of support had been made available to Ukrainian seafarers, how effective this had been and what type of support might be needed in the future. There would

be a meeting today to consider the responses and create a report. The findings were expected to be circulated in a week's time.

GL, MCA – Surveys and inspections are continuing, including overseas. Covid – The MCA is looking to withdraw MIN 632, referring to Covid guidance. Any of the provisions could be implemented within other relevant M Notices. The revised M Notices had been drafted and were with the MLC Tripartite Working Group for review. Ukraine – The first ship carrying grain had left Ukraine, as reported by HG. There was a shortage of crew willing to go on these vessels. P&O – MCA is aware that the issue regarding seafarers' belongings was ongoing. MCA was trying to help with this although there has not been a breach of the MLC or other maritime legislation. MCA was aware that nationally there were some challenging port states going on. The various organisations represented at this meeting had been in contact with the vessels in question and provided support. MCA had provided those charities and organisations with support when requested to help facilitate better outcomes.

AS, MPHA – AS reported that MPHA continued to board vessels and to distribute lateral flow tests. Still facing issues regarding seafarer vaccination certification. Requests for boosters were being received but crew members were choosing to have the vaccinations elsewhere as no proof of vaccination could be given.

ME, TFM – Covid is still an issue for conducting home visits. TFM expect the next big challenge in supporting the booster programme for fishers, particularly migrant fishers, in the coming weeks. Very few Ukrainian fishers work on UK fishing vessels. There are those have been here for some time and their concerns are limited to extended family members in Ukraine. ME congratulated MNWB on the letter sent to the Home Secretary regarding transit visas. The letter had created a lot of dialogue. The letter ties in well with contact TFM had last week with Victoria Prentis, Minister of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Last week she joined the AGM for the NFFO (National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations) and was open about wanting to see change to lead towards a sustainable and safe fishing industry. If she does not get back into office, she plans to give her successor a thorough briefing on the key issues. SC reported that although transit visas worked well for MN seafarers they needed to be reviewed for migrant fishers.

CR, MS – CR reported that an event was held in July to promote the Coming Ashore programme to employers to encourage them to offer work experience to seafarers wanting to transition to shore side roles. A couple of Ukrainians, based in the UK with family/friends, had enquired about making this transition. MSSC offered their full support to Ukrainians also. There had not been many enquiries for the Covid-19 Redundancy & Retraining Fund. The Green Skills Bursary had been very popular for seafarers needing financial support for specific courses to be able to find work in the offshore & renewables sector.

VM, TH - TH held their Board meeting last month and had awarded their annual grants.

LS, MCG – LS reported that the Covid-19 Redundancy & Retraining Fund, funded by MNWB, TH and the Nautilus Slater Fund had been very successful and had helped over 100 seafarers with £500 towards training to help them to stay in the maritime industry. MCG was looking at the possibility of closing the Fund although no decision had been made yet. Members were encouraged to continue to promote the Fund. Collaboration in a time of crisis was the key theme for the MCG conference to be held on Tuesday 6th September at Trinity House. Members were encouraged to sign up to attend and to encourage others within the sector to also sign up: <https://www.maritimecharitiesgroup.org/en/conference-2022/> Robert Courts MP was scheduled to deliver the keynote speech. An informal drinks/networking event would be held the evening before at the Union Jack Club. The conference is free to delegates thanks to the generosity of MCG members and additional funding from the TK Foundation.

DL, TSC – Ukraine - DL reported that the results from the recent survey (mentioned in SG's update) would be considered at the next SIRF stakeholder group meeting and a decision to be

made thereafter. TSC had attended two meetings with Oleg at Mortrans and were pleased to have met in person. They were in need of a financial support hardship grant to help seafarers and their families moving from areas that have been demolished. Mental health support was also being considered. Many seafarers had not worked for five months and had no savings left. SIRF had a £58K surplus; a decision on how this could be spent would be made following the SIRF stakeholders meeting. This year, MN Day will be on Saturday 3rd September. In aid of the MN Fund, MNWB & TSC are working together to make the Fly the Red Ensign campaign bigger by introducing a stronger fundraising angle. All funds raised will go towards the MN Fund, a dedicated Fund to support UK merchant seafarers and their families at times of need. TSC has developed foldable collection boxes and window stickers to help promote the campaign and raise awareness of the day. A social media toolkit will be also made available to those who requested; also uploaded onto TSC's website to help those who would like to get involved, to take part online. It includes visuals and easy to use suggested social media posts. 2022 marks the MN Fund's 10th anniversary as well as the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. As well as being a Patron of TSC, the Queen is also the 'Master of the Merchant Navy and Fishing Fleets'. A special 10th anniversary MN Fund newsletter is planned to be sent out w/c 25th August. In the w/c 29th August, a reminder email will be sent about the campaign and how to get involved. <https://www.theseafarerscharity.org/merchant-navy-fund/merchant-navy-day>

DY, SCFS – In the last 18 months, SCFS has recruited 8 new trustees and is about to appoint a GM. Ship visiting continues and SCFS looks forward to working again with other organisations.

AJ, NWF – The caseworkers are seeing a continuous increase in referrals. There has also been a steady increase in applications for the Park. A planning meeting is scheduled for 8th September for planning permission for the new 28 apartment building. A contractor has been appointed to carry out the work. Staff and residents on the Park are continuing to test positive for Covid; strict and robust procedures are in place to keep this under control.

Closing Remark – Members to forward any links, extra information and note amendments to Celia celia@mnwb.org.uk Notes from the meetings to be posted on the MNWB website [Ukraine and P&O Ferries : Merchant Navy Welfare Board \(mnwb.org\)](#) Meeting format to remain flexible.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 7th September at 11:00.