



## MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

### NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 4<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2022

<b>PRESENT:</b> Ms Sharon Coveney (Chair)	MNWB
Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
Mr Mark Carden (MC)	RMT
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Mr Ben Gibbons (BG)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr Simon Grainge (SG)	ISWAN
Ms Barbara Kidd (BK)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Capt. Justin Osmond (JO)	Shipwrecked Mariners' Society (SMS)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
Mrs Catherine Spencer (CS)	The Seafarers' Charity (TSC)

The meeting opened at 11.00am. The Chair reported that the Seafarers' Welfare: Crisis WG would meet fortnightly and continue to provide a valuable two-way communications route between government, industry, maritime charities and local Port Welfare Committees around the UK. It was agreed that useful links and notes from the meetings would be posted on the MNWB website [Ukraine and P&O Ferries : Merchant Navy Welfare Board \(mnwb.org\)](https://www.mnwb.org) MNWB Chief Executive, Stuart Rivers had given his apologies for the meeting which was chaired by Ms Sharon Coveney. Members provided crisis specific updates on their respective organisations as follows:

**DA, NI** – Quiet on the Covid front. There were still reported issues with crew changes in Asia but otherwise very little contact from members on Covid related issues. Ukraine – At last week's IMO Maritime Safety Committee there had been a long discussion on a resolution on the formation of blue maritime corridors (safe routes) to evacuate seafarers trapped in the region. There were doubts as to Russian claims that they were doing everything required of them and there were concerns about mines in the area. According to an update from IMO last week, there were currently 84 ships with approximately 500 seafarers onboard stranded in the area. This was down from 2,000 seafarers and 94 vessels at the previous update. NI has received a lot of contact from yacht crew members with concerns that sanction regulations could criminalise seafarers working on Russian yachts. There was concern that the definition of 'technical services' within the regulations could apply to somebody working on a yacht. DA thanked GL and John Cousley for assisting NI with clarification that any individual seafarer working on a yacht was not committing an offence. There was also concern as to whether a crewing agent employing UK seafarers working on a Russian yacht were providing technical services. This was unclear and NI's view is that it would be up to that organisation to seek their own legal advice on this. The sanctions had affected yacht crew members who had lost jobs and there were issues around payment of wages for those who remained employed on Russian owned yachts. P&O – All but one seafarer had reportedly accepted the package that was offered by P&O. NI has since changed its message of reinstating seafarers who had lost their jobs to how to prevent this scenario from reoccurring in the future. Grant Schapps had recently set out a plan to include minimum wage corridors between countries operating ferries; NI is working on policies to ensure the effective implementation of this.

**MC, RMT** – Covid – There are still some reported issues for crew joining ships particularly those ships going to Antarctica and not wanting to take chances with Covid. Generally, there are less issues with crew joining vessels and repatriation; the use of risk assessments has been beneficial. P&O – One RMT member, a long-serving P&O employee, has not wanted to accept the redundancy package offered by P&O. He was disgusted to be sacked, along with colleagues, over a Zoom call and has decided to take legal action against P&O. RMT will support the seafarer through his court case, on a point of principle. MC is interested to hear how the maritime welfare charities have supported those P&O workers who lost their jobs. RMT has signposted members

to SAIL and charities providing grants to individuals. MNWB, SMS (and SHS) reported that they had not been contacted by P&O workers for support. It was expected that there could be requests for support once the redundancy money had run out. CR reported that MS had received enquiries and requests for support for education and training offered by the Covid-19 Redundancy & Retraining bursary. To date the bursary had helped 13 people affected by the P&O redundancies.

**GL, MCA** - MCA is continuing to carry out surveys and inspections on a full range of merchant and fishing vessels. The latest figures for SEA extensions, as at the end of last week, show that there are 16 cases where seafarers are reported to have been onboard for more than 11 months. 9 were reportedly being repatriated over the weekend. Ukraine – MCA can be contacted to assist with queries as needed. For UK seafarers working on a foreign vessel, the foreign flag state should be their first point of contact to resolve MLC related issues. P&O – MCA is continuing to conduct inspections of P&O vessels; one is currently detained. GL reported that the Seafarers' Happiness Index showed that in the first quarter of this year the Happiness Index dropped significantly due to issues including shore leave: <https://www.happyatsea.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Seafarers-Happiness-Index-Q1-2022.pdf> The MCA have not received any direct complaints about shore leave since October. GL reminded members to contact MCA if they are aware of issues to do with shore leave in the UK. MC reported that ITF inspectors had recently been refused access on board P&O Ferries vessels in Dover port, to check on seafarers' welfare. GL reported that the issue had been resolved and that ITF had gained access to the dock.

**SG, ISWAN** – ISWAN is running The Ukraine Crisis Support Fund on behalf of SIRF; the first tranche of money £50K, has now been spent. There were around 130 successful applications. The second tranche of money has now been received. 125 applications are being reviewed by advisers before a decision is reached and a further 200 are in the pipeline. ISWAN is working closely with MTWTU, the ITF affiliated union in Ukraine, who are helping ISWAN to work out who are the people most in need. The criteria has also been tightened up as it will not be possible to satisfy all the demand.

**BK, SaSo** – Ship visiting continues across the globe with restrictions only in place in one or two locations. Two SaSo Chaplains have tested positive for Covid. There has been a sharp increase in crisis grants for Ukrainians. Three SaSo Chaplains remain in Ukraine; one in his own city and the other two are displaced. They continue to work hard and are giving out crisis loans on the ground to those in need. Grants are being given to those who have lost their homes in Mariupol and in the last week there has been an increase in those coming from the Odessa area. A SaSo Chaplain based in Izmail is working closely with his Church and is now running a refuge centre for those who are making their way over the border to Romania. SaSo is supporting the seafarers coming into that centre. ICMA hosted Prayers for Peace on Friday which was an opportunity to join with colleagues across the Mission and colleagues within and around Ukraine.

**CS, TSC** – The SIRF Ukraine Fund has awarded a grant of £84,700 to Stella Maris. This is to provide temporary accommodation in Gdynia, Poland for seafarers' families fleeing from Ukraine. An additional grant has been made to ISWAN, bringing the total available from the ISWAN Crisis Fund to £100K. CS thanked SG for his work with this fund. Five grants have now been awarded from the SIRF Ukraine fund, bringing the total to £244,700. In a collaboration with the International Association of Ports and Harbours the SIRF fund is being used as a model to raise and award funds for port workers impacted by the Ukraine crisis. All money raised will be awarded to MORTTRANS, the welfare fund of Marine Transport Workers Trade Union of Ukraine who support and represent port workers and seafarers. Ukraine is still a developing situation and TSC was working to understand what the long-term need could be. P&O – The UK Maritime Anchor Fund was still available through SAIL. The support provided includes access to mental health counselling and relationship counselling. The Fishing First Safety Management pilot project has developed a national auditing infrastructure to support vessel owners to support risk assessments of their fishing vessels.

**JO, SMS** – Business as usual. Waiting for the ongoing impacts of the energy crisis and P&O.

**CR, MS** – The Redundancy & Retraining Fund, administered by MS, was extended at the end of March. 6 grants were approved in March, 7 in April. All but one application was made as a result of the P&O redundancies. MS has launched the Green Skills Bursary to help seafarers who are interested in finding work in the growing offshore & renewables sector. This will help those seafarers gain qualifications for GWO (Global Wind Organisation) courses that are needed within that sector and is capped at £750 per applicant. The Coming Ashore programme supports seafarers who are interested in transitioning into a shore side role within the maritime sector. The programme which has been running for three years has already successfully helped seafarers to find new roles ashore. The MS continues to help seafarers with their education, training and career development. DA reported that NI and RMT would be sending a bulletin to members regarding the availability of the Redundancy & Retraining Fund.

**BG, MCG** – BG reminded members that the Redundancy & Retraining Fund was available to all seafarers who had been made redundant or lost a contract as a result of Covid and/or affected by the P&O redundancies. Up to £500 per person could be put towards the cost of training. 95 awards had been made to date and over £40K paid to seafarers to help keep their certificates updated. BG thanked MNWB, Trinity House and The Nautilus Slater Fund for providing funding and thanked CR and her colleagues for assessing the applications and getting the money to those in need. He also thanked NI and RMT for helping to spread the message to seafarers. The fund would remain open so long as there was a need.

**MNWB** – The Chair reported that the Board had been asked by DfT to provide numbers of vaccinations given to seafarers in ports around the UK. This would help to inform DfT's discussions with DHSC who were looking at how to provide an effective certification for those seafarers who had already been vaccinated in the UK. The Chair hoped for an update from DfT on these discussions at the next meeting. MNWB would also remind JC for an update on the issue of allowing Ukrainian seafarers an extended period of stay in the UK before going on to be reunited with family in Europe or elsewhere.

**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. It was agreed that the next meeting would take place in three weeks' time when SR/SC would be available to chair.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> May at 11:00.**