



## MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

### NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 6<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2022

<b>PRESENT:</b> Mr Tom Holmer (Chair)	MNWB
Mr Richard Ballantyne (RB)	British Ports Association (BPA)
Ms Tina Barnes (TB)	The Seafarers' Charity (TSC)
Mr Alexander Campbell (ACL)	QVSR/Tilbury Seafarers' Centre
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department of Transport (DfT)
Ms Lynette Crossley (LC)	Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA)
Capt Marc Evans (MS)	The Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Mr Ben Gibbons (BG)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr David Hammond (DH)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
Ms Barbara Kidd (BK)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Mr Steve Trowsdale (ST)	ITF

The meeting opened at 11.00am. The Chair reported that the Seafarers' Welfare: Crisis WG would meet fortnightly and would 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) The Chair welcomed new member ME, Chief Executive, FM, who had recently taken over from Cdre David Dickens. Members provided crisis specific updates on their respective organisations as follows:

**ST, ITF** – A substantial number of seafarers had approached the ITF on a number of issues including medical, wages and repatriation. The ITF inspector in Ukraine had now moved to Romania and was helping Ukrainian seafarers there. Tensions between mixed crews were rising; ITF was doing as much as possible to help Ukrainian seafarers and to help Russian seafarers to return home and to get paid. Not seeing the numbers of seafarers reaching out for help that was expected. P&O – Working on demonstrations and petitioning the government; ITF has been very public with their outrage on this. This is part of the Flags of Convenience campaign as the ships are not even registered in the UK. ITF is trying to get the seafarers reinstated. A number of the ships have been stopped; the Pride of Hull has been stopped until the end of April. ITF had five inspectors onboard this ship two days ago in Rotterdam to check on the conditions for the replacement crew. Covid continues to be an issue although there are still a number of issues with crews over contract and the long standing issue of crews not being paid. ITF has reported around 40 cases of abandonment this year to the ILO.

**JC, DfT** – Covid – A number of operators have written to DHSC about vaccination certificates for seafarers which remains an ongoing issue. Not heard of any response from DHSC. Ukraine – Have heard reports that some Russian seafarers have been denied access to training (not in the UK) as part of the general sanctions rules that are in place in various states. There are no restrictions on access to training or shore leave for Russian seafarers; MCA have clarified this to all training providers. DfT will be watching to see what the latest EU sanctions will include as these could potentially cover shipping. The next UK sanctions are likely to apply to further named individuals. P&O Ferries – DfT is working on a number of legislative options and proposals; some of the 9 point plan fits in with the Maritime 2050 strategy and will be accelerating some of those objectives. On the operation of international ferries from the UK, there has been an agreement on a legislative measure which is still being finalised with lawyers. Trying to get this brought in very quickly and there will be consultation on this.

**GL, MCA** – Covid - There are currently 45 seafarers onboard over their contracts. Russia/Ukraine - MCA has reissued amendment 6 to MIN 632, published in March 2022, which strengthens the criteria of extensions between 11-12 months and states that extensions above 12 months will not be approved. Expecting some more applications in the next few weeks due to the lockdown in Shanghai. There has been a new amendment to MIN 674 - Guidance for shipowners regarding seafarers affected by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This clarifies a few points on wages and repatriation and a section has been added on seafarers holding Russian CoCs. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/min-674-m-guidance-for-shipowners-regarding-seafarers-affected-by-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/min-674-m-guidance-for-shipowners-regarding-seafarers-affected-by-russias-invasion-of-ukraine> P&O – MCA has inspected a number of P&O ferries and others are due to be inspected to look at safety, to ensure international regulations are met, minimum manning, safe operations and drills, and MLC documentation is being checked, amongst other things. MCA has stated that Russian seafarers are still entitled to health and welfare. MCA is following up in writing to all MCA approved training providers to remind them that all seafarers regardless of nationality (unless they are specifically named as a sanctioned individual) should be allowed entry onto a course provided the course entry and prerequisite requirements are met. Members were reminded that if they are aware of issues on any vessels in UK ports or onboard UK flagged vessels anywhere in the world, MCA would follow up as appropriate.

**RB, BPA** – On Russian sanctions, there was now a legal responsibility for Harbour Masters to prohibit Russian registered or flagged vessels. This was being rolled out to the harbour authorities with the support of DfT. Some ports were investing in commercial systems and tools to check on those ownership levels. Whilst understanding the reasons for this, BPA believes this should be a function of government. Some smaller ports were finding the new arrangements confusing and small yachts with some level of Russian ownership were affected. JC reported that he was aware of the concerns reported by RB and the port sector, and that DfT was considering all options. RB reported that the Secretary of State wrote to the ports industry last week, prior to legislation, asking ports to start prohibiting vessels already. RB considered this to be unlawful. P&O – Government is delegating the responsibility on to harbour authorities to prohibit ferries that are not paying the minimum wage. It would be preferable for government to police and enforce this instead of the harbour authorities. Covid infections across the port sector are reportedly increasing but does not appear to be affecting its resilience so far. The P&O ferries being out of service combined with a DFDS ferry being taken out of service last Friday, amongst other factors, resulted in large traffic jams on the A20 & M20 and queues outside of Dover over the weekend.

**BG, MCG** – The MCG Redundancy & Retraining Bursary Fund which had been due to close at the end of the month, has now been extended indefinitely. The fund was pending review according to how much money was left in the pot and there had been an uptake in interest in the scheme from applicants. Up to £500 was available to each applicant: <https://www.marine-society.org/redundancy-fund>

**CR, MS** – The Redundancy & Retraining Fund has been extended and there have been some applications from P&O crew. The Coming Ashore programme was open internationally for seafarers who were interested in transitioning into a shore side role. On Friday, MS launched the Marine Society Green Skills Bursary <https://www.marine-society.org/green-skills-bursary> The bursary is aimed at seafarers looking to obtain qualifications to be able to work in the offshore & renewables sector. It had become apparent during Covid that there were job opportunities in this sector. Each seafarer can claim up to £750 to offset the cost of a course for this sector.

**BK, SaSo** - Ship visiting continues in ports around the world. Thanked MNWB for the Ukrainian Seafarers Emergency Communication Fund which enabled Ukrainian seafarers to keep in contact with home. Three SaSo Port Chaplains remained in Ukraine and were busy dealing with welfare and support needed in their areas. Two Port Chaplains had moved out of the area with their families. One Port Chaplain had been able to stay in his port city, Izmail. He was providing

support, transport and provisions along the coast, up to Odessa, and potentially further. P&O - On standby and ready to respond as needed.

**ME, FM** – ME reported that he had taken over from Cdre David Dickens on 1<sup>st</sup> April having completed a two and a half week handover with FM. He had served in the Navy for 36 years and had begun his career as an operational logistician with a humanitarian and personnel management background. His role in the last two and a half years had been as Chief of Staff in the newly integrated People & Training directorate running the Royal Navy People Change Programme. According to FM's records, one Ukrainian national was working in N. Ireland, one in a port in the NE; neither had family ties back in Ukraine. Four Russian nationals had been working in the UK for a number of years and had no interest in the politics in either Ukraine or Russia although were concerned about the current situation. The cost of living crisis was starting to bite and there was a slight upturn in requests for emergency financial support. There have also been an increasing number of requests for access to mental health support services which are being provided through the Seafit programme. There is a level of anxiety amongst Ukrainians and Russians who are living in this country; it is important to keep in mind their mental health and wellbeing.

**TB, TSC** - The Seafarers' International Relief Fund (SIRF) has reopened both for donations from the shipping industry and for making grants to charities working to support seafarers impacted by the situation in Ukraine. The fund can support any seafarer impacted by the Ukraine situation, not just Ukrainian seafarers. Three grants, totalling £110K had already been awarded, including £50K to ISWAN who were managing a hardship relief fund <https://www.seafarerswelfare.org/relief-funds/ukraine-crisis-support-fund> Organisations supporting seafarers could apply to the fund for any seafarer affected by Ukraine for a grant of up to \$500 or up to £1K if a seafarer is deceased as a result of the crisis. The SIRF fund was being used as a model for a new fund to be announced tomorrow for port workers. All money raised would be awarded to MORTRANS, the Welfare Fund of Marine Transport Workers Trade Union of Ukraine: <https://mtwtu.org.ua/en/charity> This would be a collaboration between TSC and The International Association of Ports and Harbours. P&O – The UK Maritime Anchor Fund has been reopened and can be accessed via SAIL. Support provided included hardship grants, financial advice, online mental health support and free relationship counselling.

**TS, UK CoS** – TS is continuing to attend regular meetings hosted by ICS and ECSA to discuss seafarer welfare issues. Russia claims to have established blue corridors for safe passage for ships out of the Black Sea; these are of no value at all as they do not extend into Ukrainian waters, so no ships can use them. The IMO is due to publish a list of ships understood to be trapped in Ukrainian ports in the Black Sea, unable to move due to the number of mines in the sea. Once Russian aggression stops, it may still be at least two months before it is safe to navigate those seas again. Filipino and Bangladeshi seafarers stranded on ships in Ukraine ports are understood to have been given safe passage to Moldova, but considerable numbers were still stuck onboard. Supplies were running out for those stuck in the port of Mariupol; ICS was writing to the Red Cross on this issue. The IMO's list was expected to include names of ships and IMO numbers. Chamber members had not reported any British crew stuck onboard. ST reported that ITF had access to a list of 102 foreign flagged vessels stuck in Ukrainian ports. The list included the IMO number, the vessel type and flag. The majority of vessels stuck in Ukrainian ports were flag of convenience. The list also included ports and the details and nationality breakdown of the crews. This information was being passed to the ILO and the IMO. 30 foreign flagged vessels were stuck in Rostov-on-Don; most had reportedly left. A number of ships stuck here and in Ukrainian ports had reportedly switched off the AIS and it was thought the crew of those ships had left and the ships were now empty. This was being verified. 483 Filipinos were stuck onboard these ships but 400 had got out. Some Ukrainian and Syrian crew remained onboard. TS reported that the Ukrainian banking system was functioning; the sums of money that could be withdrawn from cash machines had recently tripled. It was helpful for seafarers not to be paid in large amounts of cash. Russian seafarers were being repatriated via Helsinki and then continuing the journey by land. A regular train service between Helsinki and St Petersburg had ceased on 26<sup>th</sup> March, although the border remained open. Covid – There were some disturbing reports from Belgium and the

Netherlands regarding the treatment of seafarers who had tested positive; a Danish crew member was taken off his ship, his passport confiscated and he was required to quarantine for 14 days. JC reported that unfortunately there had been no progress on vaccination certification, there could be a solution but it was taking DHSC a long time to progress.

**LC, MPHA** – LC thanked members for the useful welfare information received which could be handed out to Ukrainian and Russian seafarers. Crew seem to be mostly vaccinated; those who were not were reluctant to be vaccinated here due to the uncertainty around vaccination certification. Any issues involving Russian or Ukrainian seafarers would be reported to the relevant authorities. Continuing to visit as many ships as possible.

**ACL, QVSR/Tilbury SC** – QVSR is on standby to help anybody needing to help Ukrainian seafarers with accommodation or needing to come to London to visit embassies. QVSR has been working with SM on this. This offer of help also applies to seafarers affected by the P&O crisis facing issues with accommodation. An increasing number of Ukrainian seafarers are wanting to come off ships and it has sometimes been difficult for the Chaplains to give advice especially as Ukrainian seafarers are unsure of which country they might want to seek asylum in. Some Ukrainian seafarers are reportedly not being paid; this is mostly through Mariupol, and it is unclear whether this is due to a problem with the banking system there. TB reported that Errikos Andreakos from MarTrust had reported that while the ATM network was not being restocked with cash, the electronic networks for Swift payments, as well as Mastercard and Visa were still operating in Ukraine. Wire transfers could still be made and moneys could be transferred to e-wallets. ACL reported that it was important to be sensitive to how tensions could flare amongst mixed crew onboard large vessels. The Chaplains were mindful to provide a service to all seafarers onboard ships not just to Ukrainians.

**MF, SM** – Over the last couple of weeks, SM has supported a number of Ukrainian seafarers leaving vessels in the UK at the end of their contracts, wanting to be reunited with family in Europe or elsewhere. To do this, they need a Brief Stay in the UK but Border Force have not been helpful. It would be helpful to see a more generous and understanding response from Border Force as these seafarers were in need of more time to sort their lives out. MF asked JC to feed this back to the Home Office. It was important to be ready for Ukrainian seafarers who were expected to leave their vessels in UK ports and be in need of a temporary stay in the UK whilst sorting out visas. The SM centre in Poland was full to capacity with refugees and an additional house had now been rented out. P&O – SM was invited to meet with Louise Haigh, Shadow Transport Secretary, on her visit to Hull last week and to brief her on their work. TB reported that Aberdeen Seafarers' Centre (ASC) had secured temporary accommodation at £20 a night for Ukrainian seafarers. These seafarers did not have family in Europe and did not want to return to Ukraine, they wanted to continue to work at sea but needed accommodation ashore for five weeks. ASC had reported that Border Force Scotland had agreed to extend the right to stay for a period of six months. JC reported that he would raise this issue with the Home Office and Border Force. Border Force in the North had been accommodating for seafarers and had helped Stena with seafarers who did not have their frontier worker permits during the P&O crisis; he would ask if a similar agreement could be put into place. MF reported that one of the cases SM had dealt with had occurred in Glasgow and that the Chaplain had reported that Border Force had not been helpful in that particular case. **Action: JC**

**DH, HRAS** – DH had recently been in Ukraine making contacts and finding out more about the current situation. HRAS had published a number of reports on their website and LinkedIn on the situation for seafarers from a welfare perspective: <https://www.humanrightsatsea.org/news>

**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. Members content to continue meeting on a fortnightly basis. Useful links and notes from the meetings will be posted on the MNWB website [Ukraine and P&O Ferries : Merchant Navy Welfare Board \(mnwb.org\)](https://www.mnwb.org.uk)

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> April at 11:00.**