



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE SEAFARERS' WELFARE – CRISIS WORKING GROUP VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 7TH SEPTEMBER 2022

PRESENT: Mr Stuart Rivers (Chair)	MNWB
Ms Tina Barnes (TB)	The Seafarers' Charity (TSC)
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Capt. Marc Evans (ME)	The Fishermen's Mission (TFM)
Ms Hannah Gilbert (HG)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Capt Ian Hodge (IH)	Merchant Navy Association (MNA)
Ms Barbara Kidd (BK)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Miss Victoria Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
Capt Justin Osmond (JO)	Shipwrecked Mariners' Society (SMS)
Mr Daniel Yarker (DY)	Seamen's Christian Friend's Society (SCFS)

The meeting opened at 11.00am. Members noted that the MNWB Serving Seafarers Working Group would take place tomorrow and were invited to give Crisis specific updates from their respective organisations as follows:

JC, DfT – P&O – DfT is continuing to work with industry and the Unions on the development of the Seafarer Charter. At the moment, the proposal is that this will be voluntary although it could become regulatory if necessary. If it is voluntary, those operators who do not agree with it are unlikely to sign up to it. The Seafarers' Wages Bill goes to the Lord's committee next Thursday 15th September. There are expected to be amendments proposed and these will be on the Parliament website. There are ongoing disputes regarding compensation for the return of seafarers' belongings from P&O. MCA has no powers on this and cannot intervene. Anne-Marie Trevelyan has been appointed the new Secretary of State. The Junior Ministers have not yet been announced although it is hoped that Minister Courts keeps his portfolio. He is keen to continue his work with the maritime charities, industry and the Unions. It has been reported that the new Secretary of State's three passions are maritime, security and international. It will be interesting to see whether she takes a greater interest in the maritime sphere than the former Secretary of State.

GL, MCA – There have been five reported seafarer repatriation issues recently. There are still issues getting seafarers back into China because of issues with Covid and lockdown. The easiest way may be on arrival at a Chinese port and there have been a few extensions. There have also been issues with the repatriation of Ukrainian seafarers; there is a IMO circular which details how to deal with expired national certificates. This is being looked at to consider what happens longer term. The longer the Ukraine crisis goes on the more likely some seafarers' national certificates or courses will expire. If they return to Ukraine they are likely to be conscripted. Consideration is being given to what can be done to facilitate this both in the UK and internationally. P&O – It is not within MCA's powers to take action regarding the dispute over seafarers' belongings, only some recommendations can be made.

HG, UK CoS – The Ukrainian Cabinet has recently agreed a resolution to exempt Ukrainian seafarers from Marshall Law; to enable seafarers to return to Ukraine and then leave again. This applies to international trade in general, not just the grain corridors. The Chamber is awaiting a copy of the final text; the last piece of news reported was that Ukrainian seafarers may still need to obtain permission to join international trade from their local military commander. The Chamber hopes to have an update in a call later today organised by the ILO with the Chairman of the Marine Transport Workers Union of Ukraine. Covid – The Chamber attended a meeting recently with the ICS and ITF who outlined that in their role as part of the joint action group organised by the UN, they are still trying to push for a globally recognised vaccination card. It has been reported that

there is still some reluctance from other States to engage with this and this work remains ongoing. Hamburg is reportedly still seeing at least 10-20 seafarers each week who have either not been vaccinated at all, not fully vaccinated or are using non-recognised vaccines. Whilst the Ukraine crisis is ongoing and there is an increasing shortage of seafarers, the concern is that organisations are employing from States that are not normally labour supplying countries and therefore not undergone a rigorous vaccination campaign as other countries have.

VM, TH – The Covid-19 Redundancy & Retraining Fund had been extended and will be closing next Friday 16th September. UK-based seafarers who might be eligible are still encouraged to apply.

JO, SMS – Increasing numbers of people are approaching the welfare charities mentioning forthcoming distress over rising bills and fearing falling into debt. SMS provides help for those who are in debt rather than stopping them getting into debt, and is reassuring people that they will be able to offer support when it is needed. Not yet seen a surge of applications for support but fully expect to in the months to come.

DY, SCFS – SCFS have finally got on to the cruise liners in Portsmouth dockyard. Seafarers have been requesting SIM cards which SCFS have been able to deliver. SCFS is able to access most ships but is still being refused by some ships with Russian Captains. Also experiencing some issues in Dublin and Cork which is being worked on.

TB, TSC – TSC previously operated the Seafarers International Relief Fund (SIRF) which was used to fundraise and award grants to support seafarers affected by the crises in Ukraine. This had been put on hold and a research survey was undertaken. Over 100 responses were received from ports, Chaplains and shipping companies which clearly showed that there is still a need for the very basic hardship grants. TSC is considering offering further support for Mortrans in Ukraine and for ISWAN to award hardship grants to seafarers again. This is likely to be announced in October. On the cost of living crisis, the Seafarers' Safety Net <https://seafarerssafetynet.org/> is a piece of preventative work offered by TSC and MNWB. This contains information, tools and resources aimed at helping UK seafarers to manage their money and make informed financial choices. SAIL has successfully recruited for two vacant posts including a new manager and will resume the usual service by October.

BK, SaSo – Three Chaplains are still on the ground in Ukraine and are continuing to support seafarers although there is still no access to the ports. The fund for small Ukrainian crisis grants was very popular and had to be paused whilst more funding was sought. SaSo continues to engage with seafarers on their helpline and peer support groups continue to be hosted. In Glasgow and Leith a couple of cruise ships are hosting Ukrainian refugees. SaSo Chaplains were invited onboard in Glasgow but there have been issues with access in Leith.

IH, MNA – The Remembrance Service held in Trinity Gardens on Sunday was a great success. Branches are all starting to meet face to face.

ME, TFM – There is concern over what is yet to come in terms of billing from energy suppliers. Starting to see additional pressure on retired clients and a number of active fishermen who have not been able to put away as much money as they might have done over the spring/summer due to the cost of fuel for their boats. TFM is determining its response to ensure that clients are directed to use all available government support and support from energy suppliers themselves. Support will be focused on other elements of their clients' lifestyle and cost of living; a lot of this will depend on the government's announcement tomorrow.

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](https://www.mnwb.org.uk) and P&O Ferries : Merchant Navy Welfare Board ([mnwb.org](https://www.mnwb.org)) Meeting format to remain flexible.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 5th October at 11:00.