



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 23RD MARCH 2022

PRESENT: Capt Andrew Cassels (Chair)	MNWB Chair
Revd Ijeoma Ajibade (IA)	Mission to Seafarers
Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
Ms Lynette Crossley (LC)	Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA)
Cdre David Dickens (DD)	The Fishermen's Mission
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Mr Ben Gibbons (BG)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr Simon Grainge (SG)	Int'l Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN)
Mr David Hammond (DH)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
Mr Graham Hockley (GH)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
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)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
Mrs Catherine Spencer (CS)	The Seafarers' Charity (TSC)
Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)

The meeting opened at 11.00am. The Chair reported that the Covid-19 Seafarers' Welfare Working Group had been renamed the Seafarers' Welfare – Crisis WG and would meet fortnightly. The WG 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)

Members noted that today was a National Day of Reflection which was organised by Marie Curie and provided a chance for reflection for those who had lost loved ones to Covid over the last two years. This would be DD's last meeting and members joined the Chair in thanking him for his many years of service to FM and his support to this WG. John Cousley had given his apologies and had asked for any questions for DfT to be sent to him via MNWB. Stuart Rivers had also given his apologies for the meeting.

The Chair reported that the Board had set up a £5K Ukrainian Seafarers Emergency Communication Fund to fund the purchase of SIM cards for Ukrainian seafarers to contact home. He thanked TH for matching this by also awarding £5K. To date the fund had received 13 applications and £2,725 had been awarded. Members provided crisis specific updates on their respective organisations as follows:

TS, UK CoS – Continuing to be involved in discussions with ICS and other industry associations, TS also chairs weekly ECSA (European Community Shipowners' Association) meetings to assess the latest position with regard to Ukrainian seafarers. In the last 24 hours, it has become apparent that the Ukrainian banking system is functioning quite well; the amounts of cash that can be withdrawn from ATMs in Ukraine has been increased threefold. This suggests that cash cards being issued to Ukrainian seafarers and their families will likely be the most effective way for receiving salaries. Also of concern is how Russian seafarers are affected if paid in dollars in cash; at the border they are required to convert this immediately to rubles. This is not ideal considering the plummeting exchange rate for rubles. Cash payments are therefore not the preferred option for crewing agents and shipping companies. TS attends the ILO legal committee where the Ukrainian crisis is dominating. Every national delegation, except two, have voiced strong support for Ukraine and issued strong messages of condemnation aimed at the Russian government for

their aggression in Ukraine. A working group has been established to assess insurance with regard to Russian ships in particular. If unable to get insurance, any accidents, oil spills or crew injuries might not be covered. TS received a message this morning from a crewing agency in the UK, set up by a Ukrainian, calling for the Chamber's support in boycotting Russian seafarers; the Chamber does not encourage this stance. All anecdotal evidence shows that relations between Russian and Ukrainian crew members onboard the same ship remain normal, with one exception being an unconfirmed incident in Spain. The Chamber has expressed strong support for Ukrainian seafarers through their Union who reported very eloquently at discussions with ICS held yesterday.

DA, NI – The situation with P&O is taking up most of NI's time. With regard to the situation in Ukraine, DA supports TS's comments to ensure that all seafarers are supported. The recent sanctions are not only affecting Russian seafarers but also yacht members working on vessels that have been or could be seized or whose owners are no longer able to pay salaries. MCA have issued MIN 674 which sets out the position for seafarers, particularly Ukrainian seafarers, with regard to repatriation or expired certificates. NI will attend this afternoon's MCG Redundancy & Retraining Fund meeting although NI is still fighting P&O's initial actions rather than looking at what happens next.

GL, MCA – MCA is continuing to conduct surveys and inspections on UK and foreign fishing and merchant vessels. There are currently 41 seafarers who have been onboard for over 11 months. MCA has issued MIN 674 – Guidance for shipowners regarding seafarers affected by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This gives detail on extending contracts and CoCs, and guidance on MLC implications. For seafarers entering a war zone, the guidance defines an area designated as a war zone and guidance for other seafarers affected by the conflict in general. With regard to Russian ships and Russian seafarers, MCA is following the sanction guidelines. MCA is monitoring the situation with some Russian seafarers who are still in the UK. MCA can't comment on the actions P&O have taken but has been invited to attend the vessels that were affected by the redundancies. MCA will be conducting inspections before the vessels re-enter service to ensure they comply with safe manning operations and emergency procedures, and will be looking at SEAs. The Chair asked if the Russian sanctions created any welfare issues for seafarers. MCA reported that one issue to do with repatriation was being dealt with. On the question of whether there were any exemptions on health & safety grounds (ie a seafarer needing urgent medical treatment) and the banning of Russian vessels entering UK ports, TS reported that in the regulations issued, an exception would be granted for any seafarer, irrespective of nationality, needing immediate medical attention and serving on a Russian ship subject to sanctions. A seafarer wanting to come ashore for a Covid job would not count as in need of immediate medical treatment in this situation.

BG, MCG – The MCG Redundancy & Retraining Bursary Fund had been due to close at the end of the month. Further to the situation with P&O, a meeting with funders was scheduled for this afternoon to discuss options. Enquiries had already been received from seafarers made redundant or affected by P&O. The situation would be monitored to see how to best respond to the needs of seafarers affected. Once a decision on the fund is made, there will be an announcement on the MCG website and the news will be shared with members.

DD, FM – The situation in Ukraine is relatively modest for UK fishing. According to FM's records, there are two Ukrainians who are either estranged or do not have any family in Ukraine; and four Russians. Most Ukrainian fishing crew were lost due to Brexit. There are a number of significant challenges for young and old in fishing communities; red diesel costs, exclusion areas for fishing and post-Brexit trade. Encouraged members to get in touch if FM could support those affected by the P&O situation, with caseworking assistance, or if they could assist Ukrainian MN personnel. FM would consider what support they might offer. DD's last working day before retirement is 30th March and he gave a huge thank you to this WG which he considered to have been massively effective during Covid and now moving into this latest crisis. He thanked members for their ongoing good work. The new Chief Executive, Marc Evans, would be attending MNWB's Older Seafarers & Families WG next week.

MF, SM – Busy across multiple fronts. With regard to P&O, SM had been in touch with the ITF and SM was available should any affected seafarers require support. Strongly supports TS's comments on the need to also support Russian seafarers many of whom were deeply embarrassed by what was happening in Ukraine. SM is providing assistance with free communications for Ukrainian seafarers to allow them to contact family and friends. It was proving increasingly difficult for many of them to connect. A Ukrainian seafarer had reportedly been unable to contact family in Mariupol for four days. Thanked DD for all he had done to encourage collaboration between ICMA members, particularly SM, and FM.

CS, TSC – Thanked DD for his work at FM, his work with TSC, and congratulated him on his work on the SeaFit project which delivered healthcare to fishers. The Seafarers' International Relief Fund (SIRF), originally set up to deal with Covid, was set up in a structure that would allow it to remain open and refocus. It had refocused to Ukraine and had already received pledges of £75K which had been added to the \$1.1 million raised originally. Expecting to work in a staged way moving forward in supporting any seafarer and their family, Ukrainian or Russian, affected by the Ukraine crisis. The support would be for anybody needing help but predominantly Ukrainians. Funding has been approved for two hardship funds. ISWAN would be managing a hardship fund on behalf of the SIRF fund, thanked SG for this. Families would be able to access up to \$500 to support initial setting up costs; transport or rent. The same amount had been given to MORTTRANS, the Ukrainian Maritime Workers Union. As TSC understands what is needed, they will develop more projects. Some ideas of what could be developed are already being considered. For those leaving Ukraine, their first point of contact might be the Red Cross or the DEC. TSC could offer support after that. There will also be plenty of reconstruction activities that TSC could support. Thanked all those in the maritime charity sector for helping TSC understand what could be developed. SM, MtS and SaSo were also carrying out incredible work during the ongoing crisis in Ukraine. P&O – TSC has repurposed the UK Maritime Anchor Fund which was set up last year to support UK seafarers affected by Covid. P&O seafarers facing redundancy can contact SAIL and will be able to apply for grants from SHS. On this call they will also be informed about the Redundancy & Retraining Fund. Encouraged MCG and MS to let people know that the Maritime Anchor Fund was also open to applications. This is a holistic package covering financial hardship, relationship counselling and mental health counselling. Thanked all those who TSC were working with to deliver this support.

CR, MS – Will be attending this afternoon's MCG meeting to discuss how the Redundancy & Retraining Fund could move forward in light of the P&O redundancies. A few applications have been received this week from P&O crew. MS will promote the Maritime Anchor Fund to those who make enquiries to MS. MS continuing to manage its Coming Ashore programme which supports those who are considering finding shore side roles. Apprenticeships and Learn@Sea courses are ongoing as well as general advice and guidance offered to seafarers. MS also routinely refers seafarers to other maritime welfare charities for support.

BK, SaSo – Ship visiting continues. Chaplains are reporting a rise in SIM card requests, particularly in the UK. Thanked MNWB for the Ukrainian Seafarers Emergency Communication Fund. Four of SaSo's Ukrainian Port Chaplains are still in the Ukraine; one in his home port city where he is helping seafarers and their families who are known to him. The other three remain in Ukraine but are displaced; they are also helping seafarers and their families with transport and crisis grants. SaSo continues to offer those grants to people on the ground. The banking system is easing up and funds can now be transferred to Ukraine. SaSo's helplines are still available and being offered as are the peer to peer support groups.

JO, SMS – As a British Isles focused charity, the Ukrainian situation is likely to have less impact on SMS. P&O – SMS intends to continue with regular grant type support at this stage for anyone who is struggling. As the situation becomes clearer and settlement agreements are understood, SMS may set up a specific fund, similar to during Covid, to be able to respond according to the level of distress.

VM, TH – TH was pleased to match fund MNWB for the Ukrainian Seafarers Emergency Communication Fund. TH will also be attending this afternoon's Redundancy & Retraining Fund meeting to see what support TH could offer those affected by the P&O redundancies.

DH, HRAS – Thanked DD for all his work with HRAS. Recently returned from four days in Odesa; all the reporting is available on the HRAS website. If the situation becomes similar to Mariupol, incredible loss of life and damage to property and infrastructure can be expected. Odesa is locked down, even the Unions cannot get in. The team there including SM are carrying out very courageous work. HRAS's focus is on war crimes, working with OECD and OSCE (The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) and submission to the ICC. Ongoing investigations are continuing including a very large investigation involving young cadets in the superyacht industry, with serious human and labour rights abuses. This is now subject to pre-litigation and trial and is at state level in Europe. The House of Lords UNCLOS report is out and makes clear that human rights at sea is not adequately covered by UNCLOS. There is now a clear focus from DfT and FCDO on the wider issue of human rights at sea as opposed to the necessary ongoing labour rights requirements under MLC and ILO188.

LC, MPHA – Visiting a lot more ships, targeting those with Ukrainian crew and handing out SIM cards. Would be helpful to collate a list of useful welfare contacts for Ukrainian and/or Russian seafarers in need of assistance. It would be helpful to circulate this information through the Association of Port Health Authorities so that anybody boarding ships to carry out sanitation certificates etc could have this information to hand. There have been reports of friction on the ship canal between Russian and Ukrainian crew onboard adjacent ships in port. The Russian ship was graffitied as was some of the dockside equipment. This was dealt with quickly and quietly. CS reported that ISWAN was a good first point of contact for Ukrainian/Russian seafarers.

SG, ISWAN – The Ukraine Crisis Support Fund is being managed by ISWAN on behalf of SIRF. and provides cash grants for any seafarers and their families who are directly affected by the conflict. This will be run in the same way as the Seafarers' Emergency Fund but it is a separate fund. The details are on the website and there is an online application form. A couple of applications have already been received. Members were encouraged to spread this news. The fund may be adapted as necessary according to demand. It is also unknown what problems there may be getting the funds out to seafarers. ISWAN has asked that any seafarer related organisation makes the application on behalf of a seafarer in order to verify that the applicant is a seafarer and is in need. Trying to keep the application process as simple as possible.

Closing Remark - Members to forward any links, extra information and note amendments to Celia 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)

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 6th April at 11:00.