



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE SEAFARERS' WELFARE – CRISIS WORKING GROUP VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 25TH MAY 2022

PRESENT: Mr Stuart Rivers (Chair)	MNWB
Revd Ijeoma Ajibade (IA)	The Mission to Seafarers (MtS)
Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
Mr Alexander Campbell (ACL)	QVSR/London Tilbury
Ms Lynette Crossley (LC)	Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA)
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Mr Ben Gibbons (BG)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Mrs Deborah Layde (DL)	The Seafarers' Charity (TSC)
Ms Jess Liston (JL)	Defence Medical Welfare Service (DMWS)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)

The meeting opened at 11.00am. The Chair reported that the University of Nottingham Rights Lab report into the abuse of migrant fishers had recently been published and encouraged members to read the report available in MNWB's press release: [Damning report into treatment of migrant fishers : Merchant Navy Welfare Board \(mnwb.org\)](#) Members were encouraged to share the report and the Chair thanked TSC for instigating the work. The Chair thanked front-line providers for providing information on welfare facilities to the Board which was recently sent to the MCA to inform its Article 22 report to the ILO. The Chair was also pleased to report that the Board had launched a £2 million grant fund to support front-line welfare providers and to invest in skills in the maritime sector: [MNWB launches multimillion pound grant scheme : Merchant Navy Welfare Board](#) The grants platform for online applications would be launched on 1st June but was anticipated to go live on Monday. Members also noted that over 120 charities and agencies providing support to seafarers were listed on www.seafarer.support.org Members provided crisis specific updates on their respective organisations as follows:

TS, UK CoS – At the recent special tripartite committee in Geneva (this was a hybrid meeting), 8 amends to the MLC had been agreed out of 12 proposed amends. It was hoped this would make a positive difference to seafarers and ensure that governments who had not been fulfilling their responsibilities to seafarers with regard to repatriations and medical care ashore would now have their minds concentrated and that these issues could be overcome. There will be more reporting on the changes to the MLC in due course; TS will be presenting on the subject to Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers in a couple of weeks. Ukraine – Last Friday, TS had attended a briefing session for Chamber members. The issue of difficulties for Russian seafarers to receive payment of wages had been raised. This was due to sanctions on various Russian banks. The Russian seafarers' union has since provided TS with helpful information on banks not subject to sanctions and where seafarers' salaries can be securely paid. (*This information is attached with the minutes*).

DA, NI – Many cadets have been unable to get sea time since Covid. Some companies, mostly those based in Asia, are refusing to take cadets and are therefore not honouring their agreements. Ukraine – Members in the yachting industry with Russian owners are contacting NI regarding difficulties with payment of wages. DfT have clarified that any individual seafarer working on a Russian yacht was not committing an offence. However, crewing agencies are not placing UK seafarers on Russian yachts to ensure they (the crewing agencies) are not subject to sanctions for providing services to Russian vessels.

GL, MCA – MCA is continuing to carry out surveys and inspections on a full range of merchant and fishing vessels and overseas travel has resumed. SEA extensions – MCA is aware of four

seafarers that are currently onboard over their contracts. Shore leave is being raised more often as an issue; there have been a couple of queries on what the rules are and one complaint. It is not mandatory for shore leave to be granted but there should not be a blanket denial. If the MCA is made aware of a shore leave issue on a UK vessel, they will contact the company and discuss this with them. For foreign flag vessels the issue will be raised with the vessel's foreign flag state. Ukraine – Russia has been suspended from the Paris MoUs (the Northern Europe agreement for the inspection of foreign vessels coming into UK ports). There is an expectation that there will be rigorous inspections of Paris MoU member vessels in Russian ports. P&O – MCA is working through the inspections of vessels. There are issues regarding the belongings of some former P&O staff; the Unions are involved with this. TS has received reports from Chamber members regarding the attitude of Border Force to shore leave for Ukrainians. In Scotland, Ukrainian seafarers are being allowed as much time as they need ashore to make arrangements to meet family members outside of Ukraine. In England, Ukrainian seafarers are not being allowed ashore for more than a few hours at a time as they do not have valid visas. TS has raised the issue directly with the Home Office. GL will also raise the matter internally.

LC, MPHA – Following Monday's AGM, new Board members have been appointed. John Wilson, Liverpool Seafarers' Centre, spoke about seafarers and the problems they encounter nowadays. The lack of certification for Covid vaccinations was an issue raised. A decision was taken to raise the issue with public health and CCG for every local authority along the ship canal in order to find a local or regional solution and raise the profile of the problem. The Chair reported that MNWB had provided DfT with numbers of vaccinations given to seafarers in ports around the UK in order to help 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. This remained an outstanding issue.

BG, MCG - The Redundancy & Retraining Fund, administered by MS, was extended at the end of March. BG thanked MNWB, TH and the Nautilus Slater Fund for their continued support on this. Since the P&O crisis, 100% of successful applications to refresh certificates in order to continue working or to seek new work have been from former P&O staff. Members were encouraged to share information on the fund <https://www.marine-society.org/redundancy-fund> on social media or other routes to get the message across to seafarers, whether P&O staff or not. The scheme is available for those who have lost their job or been made redundant as a result of Covid.

DL, TSC – The UK Maritime Anchor Fund supports P&O staff who have lost their jobs. The fund gives financial grants, assessment needs analysis, free Relate relationship counselling (funded by TSC) and mental health support via Seafarers Hospital Society. BG and DL to discuss a joint press release to encourage P&O staff needing help to get in touch. The SIRF relief fund, focusing on Ukraine, has been overwhelmed by applications via ISWAN. 10 requests per day (70 a week) are being received from Russian and Ukrainian seafarers via the ISWAN helpline. Almost 800 applications have been received and the fund has been temporarily paused as funds have run out. TSC trustees will meet next Wednesday to discuss releasing some of TSC's own funds into this fund. At least £100-150K worth of requests to Ukrainian seafarers are in the pipeline that cannot be fulfilled. Members are encouraged to contact TSC with fundraising ideas. Thanked MNWB, SM and others for the Fairness in Fishing work, about preventing labour abuses and exploitative practices. TSC is keen to engage with others who support migrant fishers in the UK; members are encouraged to contact DL or MF if they hear of any cases of concern. One incident of abuse is too many. Due to loopholes in the transit visa, the onus in the past has been put on migrants; they have been deported if they complain of abuse. The system is changing and DL thanked DfT and the MCA for their work on this. Members noted that TSC and MNWB would be running a Money Champions webinar on 22nd June for those who work with serving and retired UK MN seafarers. To register, please visit:

https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_1se2CcPfrj6PkaZO3vpzwa

ACL, QVSR/Tilbury SC - A lot of work is carried out supporting Chaplains dealing with tensions which can arise amongst mixed Ukrainian/Russian crews. QVSR recently attended a new vessel

launch to be crewed by a Russian Captain and Ukrainian crew. QVSR will soon be welcoming a Chief Officer to their accommodation, once his contract finishes, to allow him time to find somewhere more settled. This offer of practical support is available to others and is an example of joined up services offered to seafarers, particularly those from Ukraine.

MF, SM – MF commended the research carried out by the University of Nottingham and the report from the ITF: <https://www.itfglobal.org/en/reports-publications/one-way-ticket-labour-exploitation>. MF presented yesterday at the Seafish Ethics Common Language group. There has been some pushback on the research but there was consensus on the issue of transit visas. These visas render the fishermen invisible and more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. A concerted effort is needed for the reform of the visa regime for migrant fishermen. Ukraine – SM colleagues in Ukraine have been working with ISWAN to process a large proportion of applications to SIRF. Most of these applications are from unemployed seafarers and there are around 20 enquiries every day; the need is still there and likely to be for some time. Discussions are needed on how to facilitate a return to work for some of these seafarers who are desperate to work. There are also Ukrainian seafarers elsewhere in Europe and around the world who might be able to secure employment given the appropriate help.

IA, MtS – Chaplains are providing pastoral care to Ukrainian and Russian seafarers. The SIM cards provided by MNWB have been well received. Covid – Work protocols for the centres are being reviewed and MtS is considering how to make the centres Covid safe for the winter. Seeing an increase in the number of seafarers taking shore leave. All centres are open and ship visiting continues as it has throughout the pandemic. The MtS Scouts badge was launched at the beginning of May at the Welsh Senedd: <https://badges.scoutscymru.org.uk/cy/badge/the-mission-to-seafarers/> MtS published a report on Women seafarers last week. This is a discussion document for the charity and other maritime welfare provider and considers the unique challenges faced by women seafarers and how they can be supported: <https://www.missiontoseafarers.org/news/celebrating-the-inaugural-international-women-in-maritime-day-the-mission-to-seafarers-publishes-women-seafarers-report> The report can be accessed here: <https://www.missiontoseafarers.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Mission-to-Seafarers-Women-Seafarers-Report-2022.pdf>

CR, MS – There was a take up for the Redundancy & Retraining fund mostly from P&O crew in March/April but this petered out somewhat in May. An increase in applications which had been expected once NI and RMT reached out to their members who were P&O crew, had not materialised. Members were encouraged to use their channels to publicise availability of the fund. On 1st April, the Green Skills Bursary was launched to help seafarers interested in finding work in the growing offshore & renewables sector and to help those already in the sector to progress. CR thanked TH for their generous donation towards funding of the bursary. MS has been inundated with applications for the bursary, has stopped the funding and has reached out for more funding support. The Coming Ashore programme continues to support seafarers who are interested in transitioning into a shore side role within the maritime sector. A work experience placement programme will soon be launched for shipping and maritime organisations shore side to offer work experience placements for seafarers who are interested in coming ashore.

JL, DMWS – DMWS continues to provide medical welfare support to those who require assistance. Support includes finance, housing, emotional support and getting people linked in to mental health services. There have been 10 referrals over the past few months and DMWS is ready to respond to those in need of support.

MNWB – The Chair reported that MNWB originally asked Vodafone for 8,000 SIM cards. To date the Board has issued 4,856 SIM cards. As these have a six month validity, an initial surge in demand was expected which would then drop off. As the Board nears giving away 8,000 SIMs, front-line providers will be contacted to understand what demand is likely to be going forward to

ensure those resources are available. Vodafone is keen to continue to support Ukrainian seafarers with this project.

Closing Remark - Members to forward any links, extra information and note amendments to Celia celia@mnwb.org 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. Members content to continue meeting on a fortnightly basis.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 8th June at 11:00.

DRAFT