



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 20TH APRIL 2022

PRESENT: Mr Stuart Rivers (Chair)	MNWB
Mr Richard Ballantyne (RB)	British Ports Association (BPA)
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Ms Hannah Gilbert (HG)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Mr Simon Grainge (SG)	ISWAN
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
Mrs Deanne Thomas (DT)	Sailors' Children's Society (SCS)

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) Members provided crisis specific updates on their respective organisations as follows:

GL, MCA – MCA is continuing to carry out surveys and inspections on a full range of merchant and fishing vessels. Covid – MCA is now able to board and inspect almost every vessel. If there is Covid onboard this is dealt with on a case by case basis. MCA has been notified this week of 38 seafarers requiring SEA extensions to stay onboard. 33 of these have already worked beyond 11 months. Not seen as significant an increase as expected due to the Shanghai lockdown which has had an effect on those who were due to leave. This lockdown could potentially lead to a backlog, as has been seen before. Ukraine – MCA is continuing to work in accordance with all relevant sanctions. Unless they are a 'designated person', seafarers are not included in these sanctions. P&O – MCA is continuing to conduct inspections of the vessels before they re-enter passenger service. Two P&O ferries are currently under detention, both in the Dover area.

HG, UK CoS – The Chamber is aware of ships still trapped in the Port of Odessa, with skeleton crew. The main focus is to help those crews to get out safely. Members are asked to contact HG hgilbert@ukchamberofshipping.com if they have any specific questions. **Post-meeting update:** UK CoS has reached out to Border Force to enquire whether flexibility may be considered in the treatment of Ukrainian seafarers to allow them to stay in the UK for longer periods than usual given the current dire circumstances.

SG, ISWAN – SG attended yesterday's ILO meeting; it was hoped that the Ukrainian government would make a decision as to whether Ukrainian seafarers would be given essential worker status, which was a sensitive issue. 30% Ukrainian seafarers were estimated to be in Ukraine at the moment. The number of seafarers of all nationalities stuck on ships in Ukrainian ports has been reduced to about 500; a good number have been evacuated or repatriated. There are concerns for the safety and wellbeing of those remaining seafarers. ISWAN is running a hardship fund on behalf of SIFR for any seafarers affected by the crisis in Ukraine. There are around 250 applications to be processed. ISWAN is currently reviewing the eligibility for the fund and this will be announced in the next few days. There will not be enough money to support all applicants so the criteria will be narrowed down to support those most in need. ISWAN is working closely with MTWTU, the ITF affiliated union in Ukraine, who have their own fund which is being used for their union members and their families. Anyone coming to their attention who is not a union member is being referred to ISWAN for support. SIFR gave an initial £50K to ISWAN which has been expended and a further £50K has since been agreed. This is all expected to be used by the applications which are in process. TSC is expected to launch a press release today to encourage

the industry to contribute more as not as much money as anticipated has been received. £250K is needed for SIRF to meet the applications coming into ISWAN and other maritime welfare organisations. When the fund was first launched for the India Covid campaign it went up to just over \$1 million quite quickly, but it has not gained the same momentum this time.

RB, BPA – Ports are being impacted by increased fuel costs and operating costs which has been challenging. Russian sanctions for vessels are getting more complicated but less vessels which would be affected are coming in. For example, an LNG carrier with Russian links is scheduled for routine works at a UK shipyard; the port in question does not run the shipyard and is seeking help from DfT on how best to advise the shipyard.

CR, MS – The Redundancy & Retraining Fund, administered by MS, was extended at the end of March. Applications have been received from P&O ferry crew who have been made redundant and are being processed to help seafarers to refresh their STCW and other courses in order to find other jobs within the sector. This is capped at £500 per applicant. 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.

DT, SCS – SCS, SHS and SMS have not seen any applications from those affected by the P&O redundancies but are ready and waiting.

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.

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 4th May at 11:00.