



NOTES OF THE SEAFARERS' WELFARE – CRISIS WORKING GROUP VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 2nd NOVEMBER 2022

PRESENT: Ms Sharon Coveney (Chair)	MNWB
Mr Richard Ballantyne (RB)	British Ports Association (BPA)
Ms Tina Barnes (TB)	The Seafarers' Charity (SC)
Ms Lynette Crossley (LC)	Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA)
Mr Ben Gibbons (BG)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr Andrew Jones (AJ)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
Ms Barbara Kidd (BK)	Sailors' Society (SaSo)
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCGA)
Ms Vikki Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society & Sea Cadets (MSSC)

The meeting opened at 11.05am. The Chair reported that to date, over 10,500 Vodafone SIM cards had been distributed to the welfare charities. Following the 'Cost of Living Crisis' session held in September by MNWB, The Seafarers' Charity and Trinity House, a Cost of Living Crisis category has been added to the Boards Seafarer Support website: <https://merchantnavy.zendesk.com/hc/en-gb>. Members were then invited to give crisis specific updates from their respective organisations as follows:

GL, MCA – Nothing significant to report with regards to P&O and the Russian/Ukrainian situation, although they are aware of some ongoing issues. Regarding the seafarers' agreement extension, currently none are reported to have been onboard UK ships for more than 11 months. GL wished to remind people that MCA does continue to discuss with other regulators, welfare charities and ITF, how to address some of the issues raised in recent reports, such as with fishers' visas and welfare. **Post Meeting Note:** GL wished to clarify the situation regards transit visas and said that 'the current "big issue" is probably the visa requirements changing. Transit visas for migrant workers working inside the 12 nautical mile limit will no longer be valid and Tier 2 Skilled Worker Visas (SWV) will be the most suitable legitimate way of bringing migrant workers to the UK to work in UK fishing industry. The main issue with the SWV is that the areas where migrant workers are currently sourced from (Ghana etc.) are unlikely to have good enough English to pass the English language requirements to gain a SWV. There may be a shift to where industry sources their migrant workers from.

RB, BPA – Nothing much to add, no updates on the P&O situation other than numbers are down but they are operating as they were. Trade with the EU is down around 12 %. No issues raised with regards to Russian/Ukrainian situation. TB asked for clarification in relation to status the P&O Govt. consultation and the expectation that ports would have to enforce UK minimum wages for seafarers. RB said that whilst BPA didn't feel it was the role of the ports to enforce, he was fully supportive of minimum wage legislation. Following the consultation, the Govt. has introduced the Seafarers' Wages Bill which was going through the House of Lords just before the summer recess. Following a number of amendments requested by the BPA; the Bill is expected to be passed as it is, however, it is expected to be challenged by other flag states. RB suggested inviting someone from the DfT Bill team to the next meeting to provide a briefing on the amendments.

LC, MPHA – LC handed over to Andrea Smith who gave an update on vaccination certification; MPHA have been pushing forward the issue of proof of vaccination and working with one of the directors of health locally who is keen to take this forward. QR codes are also being looked at as a way of proving vaccination.

BG, MCA – BG apologised for missing previous meetings and thanked those for attending the recent conference - all resources and videos are now on the MCG website. An announcement would be made this week regarding the closure of the Redundancy and Retraining Fund which closed in September. Over 55% of people who applied were able to stay within seafaring as a result.

TB, TSC – TB recalled that the Seafarers International Relief fund carried out a survey of need which identified that hardship grants were still needed by seafarers' families in Ukraine. Their Impact Committee trustees met two weeks ago and awarded a grant of around £58k to the Marine Transport Workers' Trade Union of Ukraine.

BK, SaSo – BK reported that there are now two Ukrainian chaplains on the ground, one having returned home. They are continuing to provide virtual support for seafarers in the Ukraine through their helplines and chaplains. Christmas gifts for the UK have been wrapped and are ready to be distributed to UK ports. In general chaplaincy there has been reported a notable relaxation of shore leave restrictions. Online cadet conferences are continuing in India, Africa and the Philippines, focussing on wellness and equipping cadets with everything they need to look after their mental health during their career.

CR, MSSC – CR referred to the Redundancy & Retraining Fund and reported that 105 bursaries have been awarded, amounting to around £48k. Around 50% went on refreshing skills to find new work, 30% went on those looking to upskill. There was a mix of grades and ages who applied, with the majority in the 35-44 yr age range.

VM, TH – VM said their final grant application window is in January 2023 with the closing date 16th December. They also visited the seafarers centre in Tilbury last week and managed to wrap over 1200 parcels.

AJ, NWF – AJ reported more caseworkers are persistently seeing more cases where people are looking for assistance with their food and energy costs. The park's energy costs are fixed until April 2024 although they are looking to see whether they can get a purchase power agreement to install solar panels without any capital outlay - hopefully resulting in reduced energy costs. Another issue they have is lack of funding for two NWF caseworkers. He was working with The Seafarers' Charity and MNWB to see if they can assist with funding. NWF is also looking at how to promote more interaction with those who live at Mariners Park. The waiting list is not as strong as was but enough room to justify the new build development plans. The website is being updated so that caseworkers can direct people interested in the park to the website as well as being able to apply electronically.

Closing Remark – The Chair thanked everyone for attending. Members to forward any links, extra information and note amendments to Nicky Cantello at nicky@mnwb.org.uk. Notes from the meeting will be uploaded on the MNWB website: <https://www.mnwb.org/working-groups/>. Meeting format to remain flexible. The meeting closed at 11:30am.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 30 November at 11:00.