MNWB
MERCHANT NAVY
WELFARE BOARD



Improving the lives of seafarers and fishers by raising welfare standards in collaboration with our members and stakeholders

2025 ANNUAL REVIEW

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Who's who

Patron:
HRH The Princess Royal (appointed January 2025)

President:
Captain Sir Ian McNaught

Vice President:
Robert Courts

Chairman:
Captain Andrew Cassels

Vice Chairman:
David Appleton (appointed January 2025)

Chief Executive: Stuart Rivers

Deputy Chief Executive:
Sharon Coveney

Head of Marketing and Communications (formerly Communications and Media Manager until September 2025): Joel Holt

Digital Marketing Officer:
Gemma Watton (from January 2025; on maternity leave from July 2025)

Digital Marketing Officer:
Nick Curtis (started maternity leave cover August 2025)

Business Sustainability Lead:
Johnny Dowling (started August 2025)

Port Welfare Committee Manager: Sarah Edward

Port Welfare Committee Manager: Alex Houghton

Welfare & Training Manager:
Helen van Gass

Projects & Welfare Coordinator:
Aiden Harvey

Executive Assistant:
Hollie Harbinson (started January 2025)

About us

The Merchant Navy Welfare Board (MNWB) is a registered charity formed by the UK Government out of the 'Seamen's Welfare Board' in 1948 following the end of the Second World War. Based in Southampton, MNWB is the UK association of maritime welfare charities. Our Council of Management has an equal number of trustees representing ship owners, maritime trade unions and voluntary organisations.

Our 47 charity members provide a plethora of services that support the welfare of seafarers, fishers and their dependants. Additionally, we have 15 Port Welfare Committees (PWCs) within the UK, and a Seafarers' Welfare Board (SWB) in Gibraltar. As appointed by the Maritime Coastguard Agency in 2021, the Board is the UK's National Seafarers' Welfare Board. We also provide grants, training, welfare support, projects and digital support for our supporters to enhance the lives of seafarers, fishers and their families.



CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Driving change for sector

By Chairman, Captain Andrew Cassels

It's a real privilege, on behalf of the trustees, to present the Merchant Navy Welfare Board's Annual Review for 2025.

This year has once again shown just how important our work is and how much can be achieved when organisations come together with a shared purpose. Supporting seafarers, fishers and their families remains at the heart of everything we do, and the strength of our collaborative approach continues to set us apart.

As you'll see in the pages that follow, Stuart and his team have driven real progress across the sector. But this is not work done in isolation. It reflects the commitment and dedication of our member charities, Port Welfare Committees and partners across the UK, all working together to make a meaningful difference where it matters most.

One of the highlights of the year was the appointment of HRH The Princess Royal as our Patron. This is a significant moment for MNWB, bringing greater visibility to seafarers' welfare and recognising the vital work happening across our network every day.

Our strength also comes from our Council, whose experience and insight continues to guide MNWB with a clear focus on long-term stability, strong partnerships and high standards. Over the past year, we have further strengthened our role at the centre of the maritime welfare sector — working closely with charities, industry, government and ports to deliver joined-up support.

There has also been important progress at a national level. The renewed Memorandum of Understanding with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency reinforces our role as the UK's National Seafarers' Welfare Board and provides greater clarity around how welfare is coordinated across the country.

Our strength also comes from our Council, whose experience and insight continues to guide MNWB

We are also seeing positive steps towards securing the future of welfare services, including the expansion of the welfare levy to more ports. This is a crucial development, helping to ensure organisations on the ground have the funding they need to respond to the growing and changing challenges faced by today's maritime workforce.

I would like to thank everyone who has played a part in our work this year — our members, partners, trustees, staff, volunteers and supporters. MNWB's impact depends on this shared commitment and willingness to work together.

Finally, my thanks to Stuart and his team for their leadership, professionalism and drive. The achievements in this report are a direct result of their hard work and dedication.



Andrew Cassels with Sailors' Children's Society CEO - Natasha Barley



CEO'S INTRODUCTION

Seafarers' welfare on the national stage

By Chief Executive Officer Stuart Rivers

This year has been one of momentum, visibility and renewed purpose for the Merchant Navy Welfare Board (MNWB).

At the heart of it all is our unique strength: a national network of 47 member charities and 15 Port Welfare Committees, working together to improve the lives of the seafarers and fishers who keep the UK supplied, connected and moving.

In 2025, that collective effort gained fresh energy. A landmark moment was the appointment of Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal as our Patron – the first royal patronage in MNWB's history. This significant honour has helped shine a brighter spotlight on maritime welfare and the extraordinary people delivering it every day.

we have strengthened welfare services where they matter most... ...in ports and on the front line.

We continued to bring the sector together, most notably at our Seafarers' Welfare Conference in Southampton. Leaders from government, industry and the charity sector came together to address key challenges, including sustainable funding, the responsible use of technology, and maintaining welfare standards in a changing maritime landscape. The focus throughout was on collaboration, practical action and outcomes that make a real difference to seafarers and fishers.

Our voice was also heard on the international stage. As an official charity partner at London International Shipping Week, alongside contributions to parliamentary discussions and strengthened partnerships with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, MNWB helped ensure that the welfare of seafarers and fishers remains central to the future of shipping. These engagements reinforce the importance of a strong, coordinated national approach.

At the same time, we continued to deliver practical support. From new awareness and training resources to funding programmes such as our Vehicle Replacement Programme and MiFi connectivity projects, we have strengthened welfare services where they matter most – supporting seafarers and fishers directly in ports and on the front line. The expansion of port welfare funding across the UK is another important step towards long-term sustainability.

We also recognised the dedication across our network, including national recognition for Deputy CEO Sharon Coveney, awarded the Merchant Navy Medal for Meritorious Service for her contribution to safety and welfare.

Looking ahead, our priority is clear: to build on what works, deepen collaboration and ensure that the voices and needs of seafarers and fishers are heard and acted upon.

To all who support MNWB – trustees, staff, volunteers, members, funders and partners – thank you. Together, you are making a lasting difference.





2025 AT A GLANCE

A year in review

By Joel Holt

£182,664
Awarded in grants to strengthen maritime welfare services.

128,000+
Seafarers and fishers supported through funded projects.

£23,000 Invested in member training and development.

489,000
Miles travelled by welfare vehicles

45,000+
Hours of video calls enabled

650
MP's engaged

300+
Seafarer Support referrals

47 member charities working together to improve welfare outcomes.

15,000
Social media followers

200
Press mentions

60
PWC and Forum meetings arranged/facilitated in 2025

First royal patron secured in MNWB's 77-year history
A landmark moment for the organisation in 2025



ANNUAL AWARDS FOR SERVICES TO SEAFARERS' WELFARE

Award-winning heroes recognised by royalty

By Joel Holt





From pioneering innovation and transformative healthcare initiatives to decades of dedicated voluntary service, the 2025 MNWB Annual Awards for Services to Seafarers' Welfare celebrated the people and organisations making a lasting difference to the lives of seafarers and fishers across the UK.

With a record number of nominations following the relaunch of the awards, six exceptional winners were honoured at Trinity House by HRH The Princess Royal, Patron of the MNWB.

Her Royal Highness' presence underscored the significance of the contributions recognised on the day and the vital importance of welfare support across the maritime community.

Six deserving recipients were honoured across five categories, each recognising excellence in innovation, collaboration, lifelong commitment, frontline welfare delivery and voluntary service. The awards reflected the diversity of roles and dedication within the maritime welfare network.

The Innovation Award was presented to Queen Victoria Seafarers Rest (QVSR) for its remarkable ability to modernise and expand its services while maintaining more than 180 years of heritage. Under the long-serving leadership of CEO Alexander Campbell OBE, QVSR has transformed accommodation services in East London and taken responsibility for seafarers' centres in Immingham, Bristol and Felixstowe. The organisation's 24 hour centres, purpose-built wellbeing spaces and high quality recreational facilities demonstrate QVSR's continued commitment to putting "seafarers first" and responding to the needs of today's maritime workforce.

The Lifetime Achievement Award was awarded to Sandra Welch, CEO of the Seafarers Hospital Society, in recognition of her exceptional and sustained impact on seafarers' health and wellbeing. Since 2020, Sandra has overseen nationwide enhancements to physiotherapy provision, strengthened mental health support and spearheaded pioneering gender-responsive initiatives, including the Feminine Hygiene Project, which has provided more than 1,000 discreet hygiene kits to women seafarers. Her leadership in collaborative programmes such as SeaFit and her work supporting neurodivergent seafarers have contributed significantly to sector-wide progress and improved access to essential healthcare.

The Department for Transport (DfT) was recognised as the **Most Collaborative Organisation**, reflecting its outstanding leadership in uniting government, industry, unions and welfare charities. The department has ensured meaningful consultation and strengthened support for frontline welfare providers. Key initiatives include funding for the MNWB's Vehicle Replacement Programme and MiFi Mobile Broadband project, as well as a major £2.1 million post Covid recovery grant that has ensured continuity and stability for essential maritime welfare services.

Two individuals were honoured as **Team Member of the Year.**

Iain Lindsay of Nautilus International was recognised for his compassionate, hands on support for seafarers throughout both active service and retirement—from securing grants and arranging rehousing to offering personal and practical assistance. His leadership in the creation of the new Merchant Navy memorial plaque on the Govan Partick bridge in Glasgow, commemorating the 55,000 Merchant Navy personnel lost during the Second World War, highlights his deep commitment to remembrance and community.

Vikki Muir, Head of Charitable Giving at Trinity House, was also celebrated for her strong collaborative leadership and unwavering commitment to improving welfare outcomes. Her work overseeing charitable grants, combined with her significant role in the Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Pilot Project, has strengthened partnerships and fostered greater cohesion across the maritime welfare sector. Her professionalism, insight and dedication has positively shaped how support is delivered.

The Volunteer of the Year Award went to Peter Wells of the Seafarers' Christian Friend Society for more than a decade of outstanding voluntary service as a ship visiting chaplain. Now in his late 70s, Peter continues to grow and mentor volunteer teams in Portsmouth, Lisbon and Malta. His commitment was particularly evident during the Covid 19 pandemic, when he was the only person permitted to continue onboard ship visits, providing seafarers with SIM cards, warm clothing, literature and vital companionship at a time of extreme isolation.



Stuart Rivers, Chief Executive of the MNWB which is the UK association of maritime welfare charities, said:

"The people we are honouring are the driving force behind real, lasting change in seafarers' welfare. Their work touches thousands of lives, offering support, dignity and hope to those who spend months away from home keeping global trade moving.

"Their dedication is not only heartwarming - it is transformative. These individuals and organisations embody the highest standards of service and leadership, and their collective impact on the maritime community is immense.

"I would like to thank ABP, our generous sponsors, for their continued support of this occasion and of our shared mission."

QUOTES FROM THE 2025 WINNERS



Alexander Campbell OBE, Chief Executive at QVSR, said:

"QVSR is delighted to receive the MNWB Award for innovation; having taken over the operation of the seafarers' centres at Immingham, Tilbury (cruise), Bristol and Felixstowe in June 2023, our ambition was to modernise them and make them into fantastic welfare spaces for the 50,000 seafarers who visit them each year. The use of technology, and inspirational interiors has allowed the visiting seafarers to relax and enjoy their shore leave. These refurbishment works were funded by the DfT (Department for Transport) and underline the UK's commitment to provide the very best welfare facilities for our seafarers."



Sandra Welch, Chief Executive at Seafarers Hospital Society, said:

"As Chief Executive of the Seafarers Hospital Society, I have the privilege of leading an organisation whose mission has remained unchanged for 205 years. I have worked across numerous pioneering projects alongside dedicated, inspiring colleagues, and feel incredibly proud of the demonstrable impact these are having on the lives of seafarers across the UK. I am humbled to be receiving this year's Lifetime Achievement Award and feel honoured to have been acknowledged among so many inspiring maritime professionals."

John Cousley, from the Department for Transport, spoke at the Annual Awards for Services to Seafarers' Welfare, and said:

"I am delighted that the Department has been recognised for its collaboration with the charities.



The third sector has always been hugely important in the maritime sector – some charities are large and go back more than two centuries, many are small and don't have the same exposure, but they all play a vital role supporting our future, current and retired workforce and their families."

Iain Lindsay, Welfare Officer at Nautilus International, said:



"I would like to thank those who voted for me. Also, my team members whose collaboration and support have made this journey not only successful but enjoyable. This award is testament to our collective hard work and dedication to supporting seafarers nationwide. I am truly humbled by this award and will continue to strive in everything I do. Once again thank you for this incredible recognition."

Vikki Muir, Head of Charitable Giving at Trinity House, said:



"I am honoured and a little overwhelmed to receive this award. I have not received an award since Silver Brownie in a year that I am not going to admit to! What makes it even more special, is that it comes from my peers for doing a job that I love, supporting seafarers and their families who are the real unsung heroes in our society. Thank you."

Peter Wells, Volunteer Port Chaplain at Seafarers' Christian Friend Society, said:



"I am extremely grateful for this award; not that I deserve it, but it recognises the amazing SCFS Solent team of eight volunteers of which I am a part. There is also a whole army of ladies who knit hats, gloves, slippers and neck warmers which are greatly appreciated on board. To adequately care for the physical, mental and spiritual needs of the seafarers takes time, patience and opportunity and I pray that God will continue to give me just that."





MEMBERS' CONFERENCE

Partnership key to success of welfare sector

By Joel Holt and Alex Houghton

Members, trustees, Port Welfare Committee chairs, ambassadors and partners from across the maritime charity sector came together for an action packed Seafarers' Welfare Conference in November.

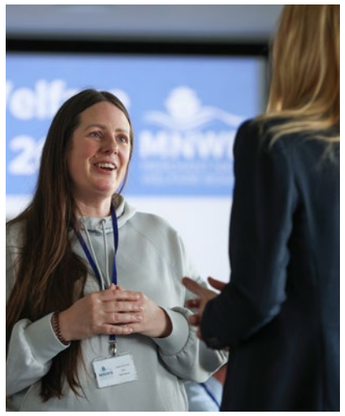
Held on 25 and 26 November, the conference brought charities together at a time of real pressure on seafarer welfare services. It gave delegates the chance to talk openly about what's working, what isn't, and what needs to change if the sector is to keep meeting growing need.

Day One focused on the realities charities are facing on the ground. Sessions looked at funding, long-term survival and new ways of working. Many organisations spoke openly about rising staff, accommodation and care costs, alongside increasing demand for support. Short term funding was a major concern, with strong agreement that it no longer matches the scale of the challenges welfare charities face. There was a clear call for longer term funding that supports everyday work as well as new ideas. One message came through loud and clear: working together and learning from each other matters more than ever.

Members' voices were a central part of the conference, with short video clips from charities shown throughout both days. In these videos, members shared what they see as their biggest challenges and their greatest strengths. They brought real experiences into the room and sparked discussion.

Innovation was a key theme on Day One, including a practical session on the responsible use of artificial intelligence in charities, led by George Knight from the Directory of Social Change. The interactive session showed how AI can help charities save time, cut down on admin and support better decision making, especially for small teams. It also tackled important risks such as data protection, accuracy and oversight. This impactful session captured the imagination and gave everyone something to think about.

After the conference, more than 150 members signed up for further AI training, paid for by MNWB, showing both the appetite for new skills and MNWB's commitment to investing in the sector's future.





















Day Two turned to accommodation, leadership and how the sector works together. Member charities shared powerful case studies showing how emergency accommodation, supported housing and specialist care stop people becoming homeless and give seafarers stability, dignity and a sense of community later in life. These discussions made clear that housing and care pressures were growing, even though there is a widespread belief that fewer seafarers need support.

The day also included honest conversations about leadership in the sector, particularly what life looks like for new chief executives. Members spoke about leading charities through rising costs, tighter regulation, staffing challenges and growing expectations. These discussions highlighted the value of peer support and the role MNWB plays in bringing leaders together.

The conference concluded with a facilitated workshop that drew together learning from both days. This included a presentation from MNWB's Joel Holt, Sharon Coveney and Stuart Rivers, who provided an update on current projects and outlined how MNWB's strategy was developing in response to member feedback and emerging needs. Members were invited to shape priorities going forward, and feedback from the session was clear and consistent. MNWB was widely viewed as the association body for the welfare sector and the primary route into government engagement. Participants reaffirmed the importance of MNWB acting as a coordinating voice, strengthening collaboration, improving referral pathways, building stronger data and leading consistent public messaging to address ongoing "sea blindness".

Overall, the conference brought energy, clarity and direction. It showed what the sector can achieve when it comes together and, crucially, reinforced MNWB's role as the National Seafarers' Welfare Board and the umbrella charity for the sector.





PORT WELFARE COMMITTEES

Progress through partnership: port welfare in 2025

By Sarah Edward and Alex Houghton

Throughout 2025, our network of 15 Port Welfare Committees (PWCs) and a Seafarers' Welfare Board in Gibraltar, continued to play a central role in raising and addressing welfare concerns for seafarers and fishers across the UK.

The year highlighted ongoing pressures around safety, fatigue, access to healthcare and transport, but it also showed where progress is possible when ports, welfare organisations, regulators and industry work together. Below are six key areas that shaped the year:

1. Seafarer wellbeing and working conditions

Fatigue remained one of the most serious welfare concerns raised in 2025. Discussions at PWC meetings reflected reports suggesting widespread breaches of rest hour requirements and concerns that records do not always reflect actual working hours. Commercial pressures and minimal crewing levels continue to drive unsafe practices, with fatigue increasingly recognised as a factor in maritime incidents. These working pressures were also linked to increasing reports of mental health and self-harm. With stress and exhaustion exacerbated by limited shore leave and restricted access to services. These challenges underline the importance of visible, accessible port based welfare provision.

There were also repeated concerns about crew carrying out high risk tasks without sufficient training, particularly during cargo operations such as lashing.

While these issues remain deeply concerning, there is growing recognition across the sector that change is needed. Increased scrutiny from bodies such as the ITF and MCA, alongside more open discussion at port level, is helping to bring wellbeing concerns and working conditions into focus. Recent high profile incidents have reinforced the need for stronger enforcement and a cultural shift that places safety ahead of operational pressure.

2. Safe access, port infrastructure and operational safety

Unsafe access to vessels continued to be raised across many ports, including issues with substandard gangways, restricted access routes and the inappropriate use of pilot ladders. New operational developments, such as the introduction of autonomous vehicles in ports including Felixstowe, have added further complexity to port safety management.

Encouragingly, there have been some practical improvements. In South Wales, long standing access issues at key berths have been resolved. In Bristol, plans are underway to introduce dedicated safe walkways between berths and port facilities. Great Yarmouth has introduced new requirements for certified pilot ladders, demonstrating a more proactive approach to safety.

Although progress remains uneven, these examples show that collaboration between ports, regulators and welfare organisations can lead to meaningful change. Continued investment and consistent standards will be essential to maintain safer working environments.

3. Access to healthcare, welfare services and living conditions

Access to healthcare remained a significant challenge for many seafarers. Difficulties obtaining GP or dental appointments were









common, and confusion over who was responsible for costs — whether agents, masters or insurers — continued to delay treatment and discourage crews from seeking help.

PWCs also raised concerns about onboard living conditions, including poor provisioning, lack of potable water and ongoing risks such as legionella and pest infestations. Connectivity remained a major issue, with some crews still receiving very limited internet access despite updated MLC expectations.

At the same time, 2025 saw continued investment in welfare facilities. Refurbishments at seafarer centres in ports including Plymouth, Sheerness and Hull, alongside plans for new facilities in Dover and Avonmouth, are improving access to welfare support. Increased staffing levels, including additional chaplaincy roles, are strengthening frontline services and capacity.

4. Protecting and supporting vulnerable seafarers

Concerns around seafarer abandonment and exploitation were issues that continued to rise, with migrant workers and cadets identified as particularly vulnerable. Issues raised included unpaid wages, poor treatment and unsafe conditions. Female seafarers continue to face specific challenges, including inadequate or unsuitable PPE.

In response, welfare organisations have expanded and adapted their support. In Southampton, a dedicated chaplain has been appointed to support female cruise ship crew, while expanded regional coverage in the North East has improved access to welfare services. These developments reflect a growing focus on inclusive and responsive welfare support.

5. Port operations and transport

Transport remained a persistent barrier to seafarer welfare. In ports such as Liverpool and London Gateway, restrictive or inadequate transport arrangements continued to limit shore leave and access to services. Welfare centres often stepped in to fill these gaps, placing additional strain on limited resources.

Some progress has been made. In Liverpool, improved access arrangements and enhanced safety training for drivers have begun to address long standing concerns. More widely, there was an increasing recognition that transport was a core welfare issue that required coordinated, port wide solutions.

The ABP Port Welfare Levy, now in place across 21 ports, represented an important step towards sustainable funding for welfare services. While uptake has been lower than hoped and further engagement with agents is needed, the levy is already generating funding to support frontline provision.

6. Fishing sector: safety and welfare under pressure

The fishing sector continues to face complex and ongoing challenges. PWCs reported concerns around recruitment practices, migrant worker protections and safety standards, highlighted by serious incidents in ports such as Brixham. Confusion around visa regulations and employment rights continues to impact both workers and operators.

Alongside these pressures, there have been positive developments. The Fishermen's Mission has expanded support services, including new facilities in Newlyn and safety focused initiatives delivered with Seafish. Training programmes such as man overboard and Naloxone training are improving awareness and emergency response, and the distribution of defibrillators to vessels has strengthened emergency preparedness at sea.

Looking ahead

The issues raised through PWCs in 2025 reflect a sector under sustained pressure, but they also show where progress is possible. Through continued collaboration, targeted investment and persistent advocacy, Port Welfare Committees remain central to improving welfare standards and ensuring that seafarers and fishers are supported, protected and heard.





PROJECTS

Advancing seafarers' welfare through vital projects

By Sharon Coveney and Aiden Harvey

The following project review summarises the key initiatives and achievements of the MNWB during 2025.

Driving Welfare: Vehicle Replacement Programme (VRP)

The VRP continued to provide essential support to frontline welfare providers through continued funding from the Department for Transport. In 2025, the programme distributed **£72,000 in grants** to replace five vehicles for Stella Maris and The Mission to Seafarers, specifically one minibus, one MPV, and three cars.

The total VRP fleet now stands at **62 vehicles**. During 2025, these vehicles covered an estimated **489,000 miles** - a distance equivalent to travelling around the world approximately 20 times.

62
vehicles in fleet

489,000
miles covered

20
global circumnavigations



Strengthening Ties: The Ambassador Programme

To enhance the connection between the MNWB and its member organisations, the projects team developed comprehensive briefing documents for our Ambassadors. These documents provided detailed background on each member, including history of grants and training received.

In the autumn of 2025, five Ambassadors were officially allocated their member organisations. Initial visits have already commenced, including engagements with Safer Waves and QVSR. These visits serve to showcase MNWB services and provide a collaborative platform to help members overcome specific challenges.







Digital Connectivity: The MiFi Project

Reliable internet access remains a priority for seafarers. Supported by a grant from the Department for Transport, the MiFi project is now fully funded until Summer 2027. The Board maintains 35 mobile hotspots utilised by port chaplains and ship visitors to help seafarers contact loved ones, download entertainment, or play games while in port. The impact of this project is significant; in 2025 alone, these devices consumed over 68TB of data, which is equivalent to over 45,000 hours of high-definition video calling, facilitating vital face-to-face connections between seafarers and their families.



68TB
Data consumed

35
MiFi Hotspots

45,000+
Hours of HD video calls

Informed Seafarers: Port Information Leaflets

The MNWB now offers a catalogue of **47 leaflets** providing vital local information for seafarers visiting UK ports, ranging from welfare services to local transport and shopping.

- **2025 Updates:** 10 different leaflets were updated and published.
- **Distribution:** 24,000 physical copies were distributed across all four UK countries.
- **Access:** All leaflets remain available online via a central QR code.

47
Bespoke Leaflets

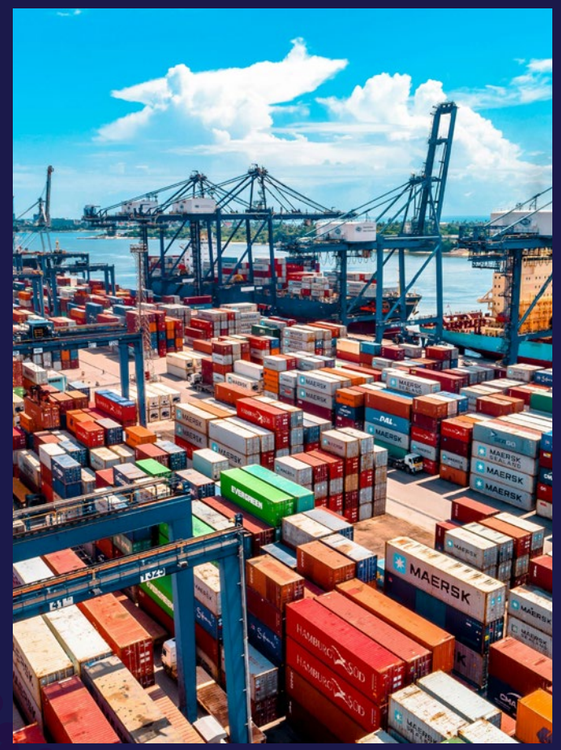
10
updated in 2025

24,000
Copies distributed

Raising Standards: Port Welfare Accreditation

Progress continued on the Port Welfare Accreditation Project, a voluntary self-assessment system designed to help ports exceed the minimum requirements of the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC, 2006).

Throughout 2025, the Board refined surveys and online dashboards based on feedback from working group members. This tool focuses on shared learning and improvement rather than port-to-port comparison, with active port participation scheduled to begin in Spring 2026.



Looking Ahead: future initiatives

Building on 2025's momentum, the MNWB is currently developing two major projects for the year ahead:

- **The Seafarer Pledge**: A project aimed at raising awareness of the vital economic role played by the Merchant Navy. Stakeholder feedback is currently being gathered for an official launch in **Summer 2026**.
- **MLC User Guide 2026**: Following the success of the 2023 'Working in Fishing' guide, a new publication is being drafted to help seafarers understand their rights under the **Maritime Labour Convention (MLC)**.



TRAINING AND WELFARE

Strengthening support for seafarers

By Helen van Gass

TRAINING

In 2025, MNWB invested nearly £23,000 in member training, ensuring welfare workers across the sector have access to the knowledge, tools and confidence needed to respond to increasingly complex challenges.

One of the year's key achievements was the creation of a new Ship Welfare Visitors' Course, developed from the lived experiences of welfare visitors and designed to reflect the realities of frontline welfare work. Alongside our Merchant Navy Awareness training, this new programme will provide a practical, accessible foundation for those supporting seafarers and their families when it launches in early 2026.

Throughout the year, members also benefited from specialist learning in mental health, suicide prevention, bereavement, safeguarding and cultural awareness. These are not simply training topics. They are essential skills that help welfare workers provide compassionate and effective support when it matters most.

Innovation was also a theme of 2025. Following introductory AI training for staff, our members' interest surged after a presentation at the MNWB Conference by George Knight at the Directory of Social Change, creating strong momentum for a wider programme of AI learning in 2026.



The appetite for learning remains strong. Members completed 746 courses through iHasco during 2025, demonstrating a continued commitment to professional development and high-quality welfare support.

WELFARE

Our welfare work continued to provide practical, timely support to seafarers and their families when they needed it most.

While overall contact levels were lower than in some previous years, the complexity of many cases remained high. People often came to us facing several challenges at once, including financial hardship, housing difficulties, health concerns, bereavement and emotional distress. Many situations could not be resolved through a single intervention and required ongoing support over an extended period.

Requests for help reached our welfare team through Seafarer Support, direct contact with MNWB, and referrals from partner organisations. Behind every enquiry was a person or family trying to navigate a difficult period in their lives.

Seafarer SUPPORT
0800 121 4765
www.seafarersupport.org

Those we supported included working-age seafarers experiencing sudden financial crisis, older and retired seafarers living on limited incomes, and widows, partners and family members adjusting to life after bereavement. Some people returned to us more than once during the year, reflecting the reality that hardship is often ongoing rather than a one-off event.

Across the country, the picture was remarkably consistent. Rising living costs continued to place pressure on household finances, while health and mobility issues, housing insecurity, bereavement and funeral expenses all featured prominently in requests for support. These challenges are a reminder that welfare need within the Merchant Navy community remains real and enduring.

Emergency financial assistance remained an important part of our response. Through the Merchant Navy Emergency Fund, we were able to provide immediate help with essentials such as food, travel, household goods, funeral costs and urgent living expenses. In many cases, these grants provided breathing space while longer-term solutions were explored with partner organisations.

Throughout the year, our focus remained the same: providing accessible, responsive and compassionate support that recognises the realities people face. Whether helping someone through an immediate crisis or supporting them over a longer period, our aim is always to help individuals and families find greater stability, confidence and wellbeing.



GRANTS PROGRAMME

At the heart of supporting our members

By Hollie Harbinson

The Merchant Navy Welfare Board (MNWB) grants programme is a cornerstone of welfare across the UK maritime sector. By funding member organisations, not individuals, it enables a trusted network of charities to deliver vital, frontline support to seafarers, fishers, and their families, both at sea and ashore.

Each year, MNWB supports projects that improve wellbeing, safety, and access to services. From modernising seafarer centres and accommodation to expanding mental health support and digital connectivity, these grants make a tangible difference where it is needed most.

Case Study: Beneficiary Window Replacement Programme 2025 (Care Ashore)





A grant of £25,000 enabled the replacement of ageing windows with modern double glazing, improving comfort, energy efficiency, and everyday wellbeing.

Care Ashore replaced all windows across its beneficiary accommodation to address long-standing issues caused by decades of underinvestment. The original windows were beyond their serviceable life, with residents experiencing draughts, poor insulation, broken mechanisms, condensation, damp, and mould, particularly concerning for an older population with respiratory conditions.

In response, modern uPVC double-glazed windows were installed, improving thermal efficiency, ventilation, security, and overall comfort. This work forms part of a wider refurbishment programme to create safe, comfortable homes residents can be proud of.

Case Study: Plymouth Port Seafarers' Centre refurbishment (Stella Maris – Plymouth)

A grant of £12,300 supported essential roof repairs and refurbishment, protecting a vital seafarers' centre serving visiting crews.

Located on Victoria Wharf, the Centre had deteriorated due to prolonged exposure to harsh weather. A leaking roof had caused damp, damaged interiors, and an unwelcoming environment. Repairs were carried out alongside internal redecoration and new furniture and carpets, creating a dry, comfortable space.

As the only facility of its kind in the port, the improved Centre now provides a vital place of rest and support for around 700 seafarers and fishers each year, while strengthening outreach to thousands more crew members visiting the port.





Lasting Impact

MNWB funding delivers both immediate and long-term benefits, creating safe, welcoming port environments, improving access to health and wellbeing services, and supporting innovations such as digital libraries and onboard connectivity.

These interventions help reduce isolation, strengthen mental health, and keep seafarers connected with loved ones. By prioritising collaboration and sustainability, MNWB continues to strengthen the UK's maritime welfare network, building resilience and raising standards across the sector.

IMPACT IN 2025

£182,664 awarded in grants

128,000+ seafarers and fishermen supported

21 projects funded across

13 member organisations

To read more on grants, visit mnwb.org/grant-funding/



MEDIA AND MARKETING AND LOBBYING

Leading voice in maritime welfare

By Joel Holt, Gemma Watton and Nick Curtis

If 2025 proved anything, it was that MNWB's voice is being heard louder and further than ever before.


Welfare Watch

Welcome back to our newsletter!

Welcome to the seventh edition of Welfare Watch!

Each month, I'm proud to bring you the latest updates from the Merchant Navy Welfare Board — celebrating achievements, recognising milestones, and shining a light on the invaluable work of our members across the industry.

September was a particularly exciting month, marked by London International Shipping Week (LISW20), where we had the honour of being one of four official charity partners. As part of our involvement, we organised a powerful panel discussion alongside the International Maritime Rescue Federation (IMRF), Project Connect, and the Sir Thomas Lipton Foundation.

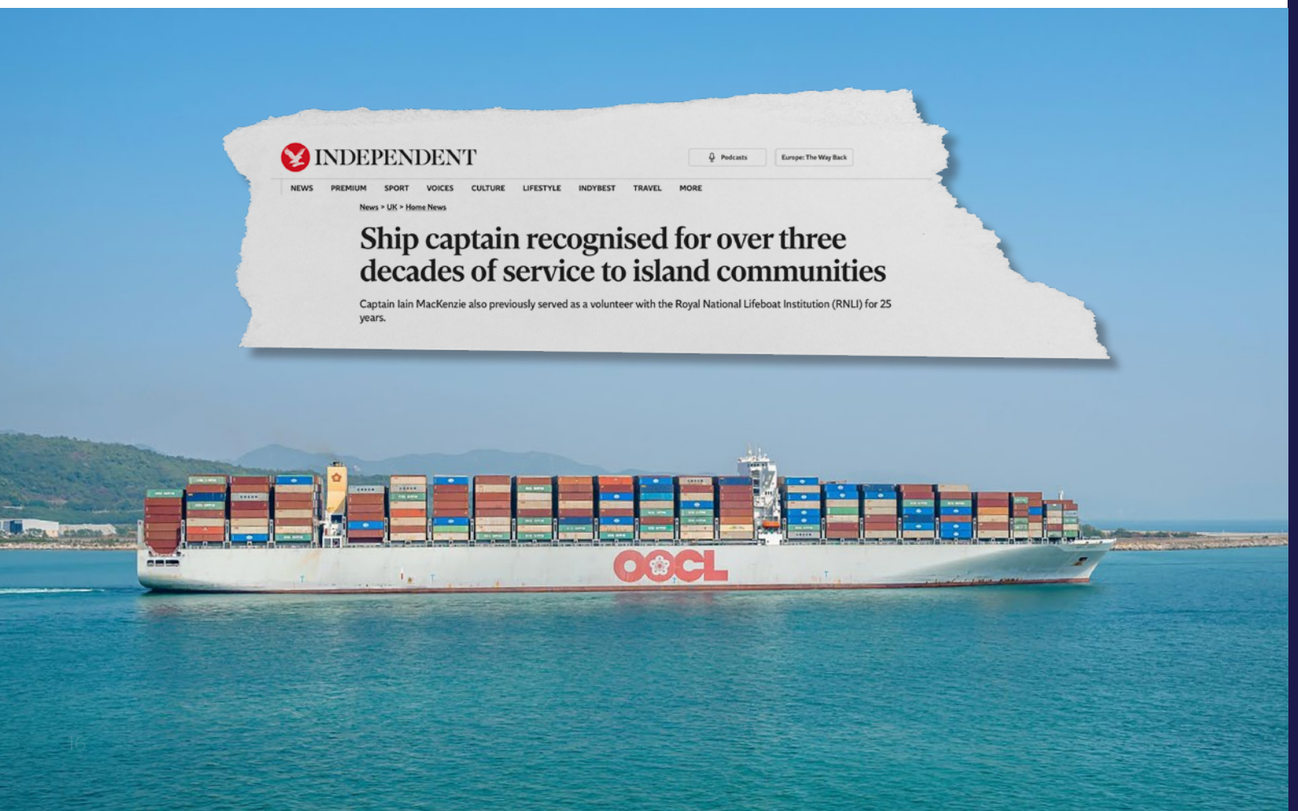
One of the year's biggest successes was the launch of Welfare Watch, our new stakeholder newsletter. Sent to nearly 600 subscribers, it quickly established itself as a valuable source of news and insight from across the maritime welfare sector. Open rates consistently hovered around 60%, well above industry averages, while feedback from members and stakeholders has been overwhelmingly positive.

The first edition landed as the maritime industry reacted to the collision between an oil tanker and cargo vessel in the North Sea. As the story developed, MNWB became a go-to source for national and regional media. CEO Stuart Rivers appeared on BBC News, ITV, LBC News, BBC Radio Solent, Wave 105 and in maritime trade publications, helping to ensure the welfare needs of seafarers remained part of the national conversation.

September brought another landmark moment when MNWB was selected as an official charity partner for London International Shipping Week 2025 alongside Project Connect, the Sir Thomas Lipton Foundation and the International Maritime Rescue Federation. During the week, MNWB hosted a welfare conference at Norton Rose Fulbright attended by more than 70 delegates from government, industry and the charitable sector. The partnership concluded with £6,000 being raised for charity.

Our media profile continued to grow throughout the second half of the year. MNWB featured in the Department for Transport's Merchant Navy Medal announcement, with Stuart Rivers' comments appearing across national, regional and maritime media, including the Daily Express and The Independent. The story became one of our most successful Merchant Navy Day social media posts and helped raise awareness of the contribution made by seafarers past and present.

New relationships also opened doors to fresh opportunities, including participation in an international webinar for World Maritime Day and increased collaboration with communications partners across the maritime sector.





Beyond media and marketing, MNWB strengthened its role as an advocate for maritime welfare. Following letters sent to every Member of Parliament, interest was received from parliamentarians keen to learn more about ship welfare and MNWB's role as the UK's umbrella charity for maritime welfare organisations. MNWB's work was also recognised in Westminster, with the organisation highlighted during a Westminster Hall debate on seafarers' welfare. MPs acknowledged the vital contribution of welfare charities supporting seafarers, while the Maritime Minister referenced Government support programmes delivered through MNWB and the organisation's role in strengthening coordination between Government and the welfare sector.

Work also progressed on a potential partnership with Prostate Cancer UK, aimed at encouraging PSA blood testing among seafarers and improving early diagnosis within the maritime community. In addition, MNWB continued to engage with policymakers and industry stakeholders on welfare issues affecting seafarers and fishers, further reinforcing its position as a trusted voice for maritime welfare.

From national media appearances and ministerial engagement to London International Shipping Week and digital innovation, 2025 was a year in which MNWB continued to raise its profile, strengthen its influence and champion the vital work of its member organisations.

AT A GLANCE: 2025

Lobbying & Influence

650 **MPs briefed** on the welfare needs of seafarers & maritime families

50 **industry events** attended across the UK maritime sector

Media & Communications

8 **editions of Welfare Watch** delivered to stakeholders

60% **average open rate** for Welfare Watch

Coverage secured in:

BBC News,
ITV,
LBC,
Daily Telegraph,
Daily Express and
The Independent

200 **press mentions** generated across national, regional and maritime media

500 **social media posts** published

Marketing & Digital





BUILDING SUSTAINABILITY

Building connections to strengthen the sector

By Johnny Dowling

A key focus of my first few months at MNWB was preparing for London International Shipping Week and building on the work that followed.

As an LISW charity partner, our aim was not only to raise the profile of MNWB and our member charities, but also to strengthen relationships with shipowners, port authorities, potential funders and the wider industry.

These moments matter because they open the door to collaboration and shared problem-solving. Conversations at networking events often grow into practical partnerships, reinforcing MNWB's role as a trusted connector across the sector. They have also helped secure discounted services from sector partners, a valuable benefit of being part of a collective rather than acting alone.

MNWB is helping charities adapt, modernise and demonstrate their impact with confidence.

Engagement with our member charities is central to building long-term sustainability across the sector. Through regular check-ins, advisory meetings, informal calls, introductions and training, we aim to offer practical, responsive support. Increasingly, these conversations have focused not just on immediate challenges, but on helping charities plan for the future — whether that means strengthening funding resilience, measuring impact more clearly or adapting to a more complex fundraising landscape.

A core part of MNWB's sustainability plan is helping members build their own resilience. This means encouraging collaboration rather than competition, and giving charities access to expertise and training at no cost, so more of their funds can go directly to frontline work. At a time when funders and partners are asking tougher questions, MNWB is helping charities adapt, modernise and demonstrate their impact with confidence. Our role now goes beyond grant funding alone. By connecting people and funders, building confidence and creating frameworks for joint working, we are helping to create lasting support for seafarers and fishers in the years ahead.

If you would like to discuss ideas or upcoming support needs, please get in touch to arrange a meeting.

Contact Johnny Dowling on 02380 337799 or johnny@mnwb.org.uk









LONDON SHIPPING WEEK

Making our mark at LISW25

By Joel Holt

What a week!

London International Shipping Week 2025 (LISW25) was a landmark occasion for MNWB as we were selected as an official charity partner for the first time alongside *Project Connect, the Sir Thomas Lipton Foundation and the International Maritime Rescue Federation.*

The week in September provided a fantastic opportunity to raise awareness of seafarer welfare and highlight the work of maritime charities in front of a global shipping audience. It was also our busiest and most visible presence at the event to date.

MNWB took the lead in organising a joint charity event on the opening day at Norton Rose Fulbright. Entitled *Serving a Purpose: The Vital Role of Maritime Charities for the Shipping Industry*, the discussion brought together more than 70 delegates from across the maritime sector to explore the challenges facing seafarers and the support available through charities.



The panel featured representatives from all four charity partners and was supported by Department for Transport Director for Maritime Lola Fadina and MNWB President Captain Sir Ian McNaught. Headline speaker Captain Kuba Szymanski, Secretary General at *InterManager*, delivered a thought-provoking address on the importance of listening to seafarers and understanding the challenges they face both at sea and ashore.

His message struck a chord with the audience as he challenged the industry to engage more directly with those working at sea, asking what more could be done to support their welfare and wellbeing. The discussion generated plenty of debate and demonstrated the important role maritime charities continue to play across the shipping sector.

Feedback from the event was extremely positive and it provided an excellent platform to showcase the work carried out by all four organisations.



More importantly, it reinforced the need for continued collaboration between charities, industry and government to support seafarers around the world.

Away from the panel event, MNWB maintained a strong presence throughout the week, attending more than 30 events across London. These included the LISW Golf Day, the headline conference and the gala dinner, as well as a wide range of receptions, networking events and industry gatherings.



The scale of LISW25 meant there were opportunities every day to meet maritime professionals, strengthen existing relationships and introduce new audiences to the work of the charity. Throughout the week we distributed information about MNWB, displayed promotional materials and spoke with stakeholders from across the industry about the importance of seafarer welfare.

As one of the official charity partners, MNWB was able to ensure seafarer welfare remained part of the wider conversation taking place during one of the industry's most influential events. The week helped raise awareness of the challenges many seafarers continue to face while also highlighting the practical support available through maritime charities.

The week concluded on a high with more than £6,000 raised collectively for the four charity partners, with the funds shared equally between the organisations.



MERCHANT NAVY MEDAL

‘Humbling’ moment to receive maritime medal honour

By Sharon Coveney

Receiving the Merchant Navy Medal for Meritorious Service was an extraordinary and deeply humbling moment for me. While the medal itself bears my name, it represents something far greater than a personal milestone. It stands for the collective effort of so many individuals and organisations who work tirelessly to ensure that seafarers are respected, supported and cared for throughout their careers and beyond.

Having begun my own career at sea in 1993, following in the footsteps of my parents and brother, I have always understood both the pride and the sacrifice that comes with life in the Merchant Navy. My early years sailing with P&O Cruises shaped my deep respect for the resilience and professionalism of those who work at sea.

I am acutely aware that everything we achieve at MNWB is rooted in collaboration. I value more than anything the opportunity to support maritime charities and welfare organisations that dedicate themselves to helping both serving and retired seafarers, often quietly and without recognition. This award is not mine alone, but a reflection of the incredible colleagues and partners I have had the privilege to work alongside since joining MNWB in 2013.

This year’s recipients collectively represent the very best of the UK maritime community. I am honoured to be named alongside Captain Philippa Bowden, Marine Pilot and Master Mariner James Charles, Captain Phillip Day, Claire Guy, Andrew Hair, Captain Ian Love, Captain Iain MacKenzie, Captain Christopher Phillips, Captain Hywel Jones Pugh, Julian Seaman and Captain Martin Willis. Together, these individuals reflect extraordinary bravery, leadership and lifelong service, from heroic rescue efforts at sea to trailblazing professional achievements and sustained commitments that strengthen our industry. Their stories are a powerful reminder of the vital contribution the Merchant Navy has made to global trade, national security and maritime excellence for nearly 190 years.

As we mark 20 years since the Merchant Navy Medal was founded, and 10 years since it was brought into the UK Honours system, it feels especially important to look to the future and I am genuinely excited about what lies ahead for MNWB and for the wider welfare sector. Receiving the Merchant Navy Medal has strengthened my determination to continue giving back to the maritime charity sector that has given so much to me and my family, and to work with others to ensure the world’s 1.9 million seafarers are properly supported, now and in the years to come.







2025 FESTIVAL OF REMEMBRANCE

Merchant Navy out in force at Festival of Remembrance

By Joel Holt

Five cadets and five serving officers had the honour of representing the Merchant Navy at the Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall.

The annual event brought together members of the Armed Forces and wider service community to remember those who served their country and pay tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice. For the Merchant Navy contingent, it was a proud opportunity to represent the service on a national stage.

Preparations began several days before the event, with the team taking part in rehearsals covering drill movements, timings, formations and ceremony procedures. The intensive programme ensured everyone was fully prepared for the precision required during the performances and helped build a strong sense of teamwork among the group.

Over the course of the weekend, the representatives took part in performances in front of thousands of audience members at the Royal Albert Hall, as well as millions more watching on television. Standing alongside personnel from across the Armed Forces community, they played their part in one of the country's most significant annual acts of remembrance.

For those involved, the experience provided an opportunity not only to represent today's Merchant Navy, but also to reflect on the contribution made by generations of merchant seafarers during times of war and peace.

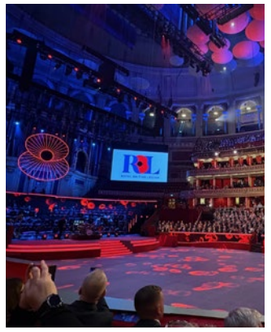
Representing the Merchant Navy were Chief Engineer Phillip Howarth (Trinity House), Second Officer William Bradstreet (Scenic Eclipse Cruises), Third Officer Chae Gohill (P&O Cruises), Third Officer Claire MacDonald (Holland America Line) and Third Officer Alice Wells.

They were joined by cadets Anthony Cullen and Tabitha Maguire (both Trinity House), Sam Bennett (Royal Fleet Auxiliary), Jack Atkinson (BP) and Beau Denton (Conway Merchant Navy Trust).

Supporting the group throughout the weekend was James Charles MNM, Master Mariner, Younger Brother of Trinity House and Freeman of the Honourable Company of Master Mariners.

The weekend for the Merchant Navy representatives, funded and planned months in advance by MNWB, proved to be a memorable one. As the nation came together to honour those who served, the Merchant Navy contingent was proud to play its part in an occasion that recognised their legacy and ensured their sacrifices were not forgotten.









YEAR ENDING 31ST DECEMBER 2025

Financial summary

TOTAL INCOME: £808,097
(2024: £3,980,539)



Donations, Legacies & Grants: £439,634

(2024: £3,633,797* This was due to a single legacy received from the estate of Ronald Stanley Camp).

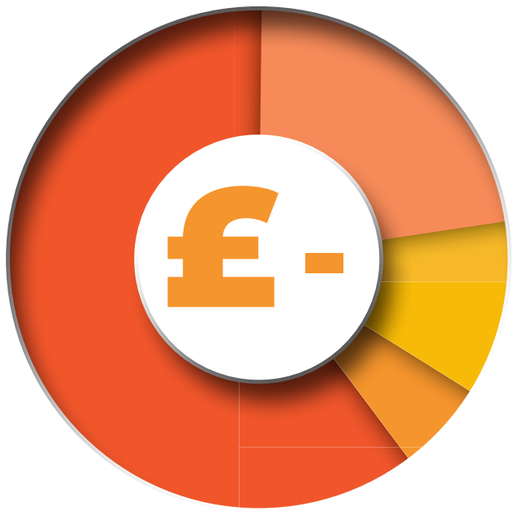
Investments: £356,392

(2024: £312,170)

Other income: £12,071

(2024: £34,572)

TOTAL EXPENDITURE: £1,264,956
(2024: £1,173,294)



Support to promote welfare activities: £764,895

(2024: £682,881)

Support services to Members: £281,873

(2024: £358,505)

Grants to support the work of Members: £142,940

(2024: £93,815)

Raising funds: £75,248

(2024: £38,093)

WORKING TOGETHER

Member charities

Aged Merchant Seamen's Homes and Sunderland Distressed Mariners' Fund

ALABARÉ

BROUGHTON HOUSE VETERAN CARE VILLAGE

Care Ashore

DMWS

ERSKINE

THE FISHERMEN'S MISSION

Grimsby Sailing and Fishing Charity

Guild of Benevolence

The Honourable Company of Master Mariners

LIGHTHOUSE SEAFARERS MISSION

LIVERPOOL SEAFARERS CENTRE

Lowestoft Fishermen's and Seafarers' Benevolent Society

MSSC

mna The Merchant Navy Association

THE MISSION TO SEAFARERS

NAUTILUS WELFARE FUND

NAVAL & MILITARY BIBLE SOCIETY

NeurodiversAtSea.org

QVSR SEAFARERS CENTRES

QVSR EST 1843

RLSOI

RMNEF THE ROYAL MERCHANT NAVY EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Royal Alfred SEAFARERS' SOCIETY

Safer Waves

SAIL

Sailors' Children's Society

Sailors' Society

SCFS

SCOTTISH VETERANS RESIDENCES

SEAFARERS HOSPITAL SOCIETY 18 21

Seafarers' Welfare Fund

SCOTTISH NAUTICAL WELFARE SOCIETY

The Sailors' Orphan Society of Scotland

ssafa the Armed Forces charity

STELLA MARIS

the seafarers' charity

TRINITY HOUSE

Tyne Mariners' Benevolent Institution Established 1897

Veterans Aid

VECTOR24 MORE THAN A JOURNEY

Veterans Outreach Support

Willie Seager Memorial Trust (Cardiff)

Wilson's Mariners' Homes

Whitby Merchant Seaman's Hospital Houses



Guests gather at the Utilita Bowl for the Seafarers' Welfare Conference 2025

MNWB
MERCHANT NAVY
WELFARE BOARD

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