



Bulletin 31 - 01/98 - Custom Fines - Abidjan/San Pedro (Ivory Coast)

Over the last few months an increasing number of vessels calling at Abidjan and San Pedro have been subjected to heavy fines imposed by the Customs authorities. This extra vigilance by the authorities appears to be the result of a renewed government incentive and fines have started to be inflicted when Masters have failed to make declarations of bonded stores, paints, oils and in some cases bunkers and navigation equipment such as binoculars. In addition, fines are imposed when crew members are caught selling or bartering personal effects or ship's stores with local people. There appears to be a network of informers who quickly pass on news to the Customs of any smuggling seen taking place. Crew are then caught red-handed, often by very senior Customs officials, thus making it difficult to negotiate a reasonable settlement.

The Customs authorities have wide-reaching powers, and fines and other penalties can be extremely severe. Some Masters have been tempted to offer cigarettes or cash to settle the matter unofficially, but such bribes are often refused and the attempt written in the official Customs Statement.

We recommend that Masters take great care to accurately declare all stores and that the crew pay strict attention to their own personal declarations. The crew should not engage in any kind of trading, bartering or otherwise disposing of any items of the ship whilst in the waters or ports of the Ivory Coast. Any difficulties experienced with the involvement of the Customs authorities should immediately be reported to the correspondent and the local agent.

Source of information: Jeremy Barrett A1