



Ship Type: All

Trade Area: West Africa

Bulletin 101 - 07/99 - Pollution Fines in International Waters - Guinea Bissau

We have recently been made aware of a disturbing incident in international waters off Guinea Bissau. A small bitumen carrier, on passage from Abidjan to Nouakchott, was detained by military force in position Lat 10 32 N Long 16 51 W for alleged pollution.

The vessel was proceeding on normal passage when, on the night of incident, it was noted on radar that the vessel was being followed. At about midnight, the vessel, a small launch, approached from astern demanding the ship be stopped. The Master, concerned due to the absence of any uniforms initially refused to comply. A large gun was then uncovered on the afterdeck of the launch. The vessel was boarded and forced to sail into Bissau where the Master was accused of pollution.

A commission was set up consisting of several high ranking ministers to deal with the problem and after one week it was decided the vessel was to be fined **USD 1 million**. During this week the master was denied access to the Club's correspondent and the ship was not allowed to replenish its supply of fresh water.

As no pollution had occurred the demand was strongly challenged by owners. Unfortunately due to the lack of bunkers and the fact that the bitumen cargo needed to be kept heated to 150 degrees to prevent it solidifying, owners were not in a position to be able to stay in Bissau to defend their position for any length of time. Eventually the fine was reduced to \$150,000 and the ship allowed to sail.

We understand there is increased activity offshore by the military in Guinea Bissau who are trying to apprehend small tankers which are thought to be carrying out fraudulent deliveries of gas oil to unofficial traders in the area. The fact that an innocent third party has become involved and been made to pay a spurious fine gives rise to grave concern.

Owners trading in the area are recommended to proceed with every caution in the vicinity.

Source of information :- Helene Courties through Sobia Akram (L4)