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2 November 2011

**To: Shipowners, Ship Managers, Ship Masters and Classification Societies**

Dear Sir/Madam,

### **Discharging of Cargo Hold Bilge Water**

In mid November 2010, while a Hong Kong registered bulk carrier was navigating in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) off the French coast, discoloured sea water trace at the trail of the vessel was observed by a French patrol airplane. The relevant French Authorities suspected that the vessel violated the French marine pollution regulations and MARPOL 73/78 and ordered the vessel to divert to a nearby French port for investigation.

Based on the evidences obtained and investigations carried out by the French Authorities, the Master of the vessel was accused for discharging of polluting substances (hydrocarbon) in the EEZ off the French coast. The Master of the vessel was summoned at the District Court in France, and requested to appear at the hearing in June 2011.

Upon completion of the hearing, the Master of the vessel was finally released from any prosecution. According to a statement from the Court, the judge believed that there was neither logical reason for the vessel to discharge oil, nor irrefutable evidence demonstrating that the discharge observed was oil. Although the Court concludes that the Master is brought into an acquittal, there is a lesson learnt.

Based on the investigation carried out by this Department, as well as evidences collected from parties concerned, it was believed that, at the time of the incident, the vessel was pumping out cargo hold bilge water derived from coal cargo with very high moisture contents. This operation may cause the discolouring effect of the sea water at the trail of the vessel.

It is also noted that one of the main reasons leading to the favourable court adjudication was that the vessel's PSC inspection reports revealed no major deficiencies in the nearby French port. The engine room was clean, and oil record book entries were found consistence with the vessel's operation. There was no trace observed onboard showing improper oil discharge, defective oily water separating system, or alteration of pipes, etc.

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To avoid similar incidents and the consequent impacts, ship Masters on your fleet are reminded and requested to ensure that all shipboard discharging activities shall be closely monitored, handled with extreme caution and strictly in accordance with the local legislations and MARPOL requirements. Good house keeping and cleanliness of the engine room shall also be maintained.

We would reiterate that, maintaining a good reputation of Hong Kong registered ships requires continuous efforts of all stakeholders. We should continue working closely and in cooperation to achieve our common goal.

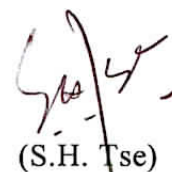
Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Senior Surveyor/Cargo Ships Safety Section at

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Yours faithfully,



(S.H. Tse)

Senior Surveyor  
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for Director of Marine