



Disposal of dry bulk cargo residues in Australian Waters

Introduction

Shipping is the life-blood of the Australian economy. The movement of dry bulk cargoes in Australia's export trades, as well as around its coastline, is crucial to the economic well-being of the country.

Australia is a party to the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships 1973/78 (MARPOL 73/78), and strictly enforces the regulations of the Convention in Australia's exclusive economic zone.

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) urges ship operators, masters and crew, of whatever nationality, to act on the contents of this notice in the correct disposal of cargo residues. This will help achieve two important objectives: **the continuation of Australia's vital dry bulk shipping trades in an environmentally responsible manner and the protection of our marine environment.**

Dry Bulk Cargo Residues

How are dry bulk cargo residues related to the MARPOL Convention and what are their effects on the environment when washed down or discharged?

Annex V of MARPOL 73/78 sets out regulations for the prevention of pollution by garbage from ships. The disposal of plastic waste at sea is totally prohibited, while the disposal of other types of garbage is permitted only when the ship is a specified distance from land.

"Garbage" as defined by the Convention includes a broad range of operational waste from ships, including cargo residues from loading excess, unloading residue and spillage.

This means that under the terms of MARPOL 73/78, the discharge of cargo residues through deck and hold washing cannot occur less than twelve nautical miles from the nearest land.

While many dry bulk cargoes may be considered harmless to the marine environment, a chief concern is

the potential impact on ocean sediments and bottom-dwelling inhabitants of a build-up of materials, especially in ports and relatively shallow shipping lanes.

The message is clear that the discharge of cargo residues, except in limited safety circumstances, is prohibited until the ship is more than twelve nautical miles from the nearest land.

All ships of 400 gross tons and over are required to have an approved Garbage Management Plan and [Garbage Record Book](#). Minimisation of cargo residue wash down and discharge should form part of the ship's Garbage Management Plan and all residue discharges should be recorded as garbage category "4". Discharges of cargo residues also require start and stop positions to be recorded. Remember, port State control officers may check these records.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) also recommends that wherever possible cargo residues should be completely cleaned up prior to sailing and either delivered to the intended cargo space or to a port reception facility. Shipboard areas where spillage is most common should be protected to enable residues to be easily recovered.

Cargo materials contained in the cargo hold bilge water is not treated as cargo residues provided that the cargo material is not classified as a marine pollutant in the IMDG Code and the bilge water is discharged from a loaded hold through the vessel's fixed piping bilge drainage system.

The Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef is of particular significance to Australians, and has been declared a World Heritage Area and Particularly Sensitive Sea Area.

The MARPOL Convention has designated the Great Barrier Reef as an area in which no discharges of pollutants are permitted. This area is between the Queensland coastline and "nearest land" defined as a

line drawn between coordinates on the outer edge of the Reef. Specific distances are then measured seaward of that line.

This means that ships must be at least twelve nautical miles outside the Great Barrier Reef before undertaking a discharge. The MARPOL Convention should be consulted to determine the exact position of lines defining "nearest land" in this area (regulation V/1(2)).



Exceptions

It is understood that dry cargo residues are washed down by ships' crews for not only operational reasons but safety reasons as well. The safety of the ship, its crew and others involved in working the ship is of vital importance. Therefore, MARPOL provides exceptions from the discharge restrictions where there is a threat to the safety of the ship and to those on board.

In accordance with MARPOL regulation V/6(a), AMSA and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority will accept the cleaning of cargo residues from a vessel within the twelve nautical mile limit in the following circumstances:

- to ensure the safe operation of a helicopter (for taking on board a pilot or other such purpose). This exception applies only to the helicopter landing area and its immediate vicinity to avoid dust being raised by the down-draft of the helicopter rotors and does not extend to the systematic wash down of the entire vessel. (For additional information on helicopter operations, a copy of the Australian Code of Practice for Ship-Helicopter Transfers may be obtained from any AMSA office);
- where there is a need to avoid navigational hazards like dust being blown onto areas such as the wheelhouse or bridge wings; and
- where residues cause a serious safety hazard to personnel if spillages are not cleaned from deck areas, adjacent walkways and working areas.

Penalties

There are substantial penalties for breaches of the MARPOL restrictions on discharge contained in the *Protection of the Sea (Prevention of Pollution from Ships) Act 1983* and the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975*.

Additional Information

Information on the proper disposal of dry bulk cargo residues and associated wastes can be found in Chapter 5 of the volume *Bulk Carrier Practice* published by the Nautical Institute, and in *Bulk Carriers: Guidance and Information to Shipowners and Operators* published by the International Association of Classification Societies (IACS).

The booklet *Guidelines for the Preparation of Garbage Management Plans* produced by the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) also provides useful guidance.

For further information on Australian regulations contact:

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