

Intercargo issues stark warning on liquefaction risk

Shipowners' association believes another dry bulk liquefaction tragedy is imminent unless charterers, shippers and flag states face up to the problem

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It is just a matter of time before the next bulker is lost due to cargo liquefaction unless shippers and charterers get their act together to deal with the problem, shipowners' association Intercargo said in an unusually stark warning this week.

"We do expect another casualty, we do expect another ship loss, so it [the problem] has to be addressed soonest," Intercargo chairman John Platsidakis told reporters.

Nine ships have sunk due to liquefaction since 2010, causing the death of 111 seamen.

"Although this looks like a bad mark for dry cargo shipping, it is not," Platsidakis said after a meeting of Intercargo's technical and executive committees in Athens.

"We want to face the problem but, unfortunately, we don't have the co-operation of other people; we expect charterers and shippers to do their work," he said, urging them to adopt all necessary safety standards and procedures.

Flag states also came in for criticism. They often do not submit accident reports at all, unless loss of life is involved and when they do, they are sometimes submitted up



► **INTERCARGO COMMITTEE:** (From left) Dimitris Fafalios, John Platsidakis, Nicky Pappadakis and David Tongue.

Photo: HARRY PAPACHRISTOU

to 30 months after the accident, Intercargo officials claim.

"By then, it's history for most people — nobody's that much interested anymore," Platsidakis said.

The loss of the 56,000-dwt Bahamas-flag *Bulk Jupiter* (2006) earlier this year, however, seems to have focused minds. The Bahamas Maritime Authority (BMA) has issued a timely report into the accident.

"It's an excellent piece of work," Platsidakis said.

The Bahamas probe concluded that liquefaction was the likely cause of the tragedy, which claimed 18 lives in January off the coast of Vietnam. However, the vessel's operator, Winning Shipping, has challenged the findings.

Malaysia has also taken steps towards setting up a competent authority to verify cargo-storing procedures following the accident.

"We've seen progress in Malaysia [and] Sierra Leone has done very well," said Intercargo secretary general David Tongue.

"We expect other countries in the Far East to come forward."

Ballast-water management and environmental regulation also feature high on Intercargo's agenda, as does corruption in port-state control (PSC).

"The problem of corruption is the elephant in the room," said the association's previous chairman, Nicky Pappadakis, recalling a pro-forma estimate of port charges he once saw that included a \$6,000 estimate "to avoid PSC difficulties".

"Some port officials feel that graft is part of their salary," Tongue said.

Intercargo membership could be useful for small owners wishing to discreetly report incidents and avoid retaliation by corrupt officials, he adds.

"People get blacklisted — it's a fact of life," Tongue said.

Intercargo represents over 150 bulker owners and operators, nearly half of which come from Greece and Hong Kong. And the dry bulk market blues do not seem to have dented membership.

"We haven't lost members," Platsidakis said.