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MARINE DEPARTMENT

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17 October 2017

To: Shipowners, Ship Managers, Ship Operators, Masters and Officers

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Carrying Nickel Ore in Bulk

A Hong Kong registered bulk carrier, loaded with about 55,000 metric tons of nickel ore cargo, sank in the waters East of the Philippines on 13 October 2017, with 10 of the 26 crewmembers missing. Investigation into the incident is being carried out.

There have been cases of ships sank due to the liquefaction of nickel ore cargoes resulting in listing and sinking of ships. Your attention is drawn to the importance of adhering to the provisions in the International Maritime Solid Bulk Cargoes Code (IMSBC Code) for the safety precautions on loading nickel ore cargoes which are prone to liquefaction if not handle properly.

In accordance with IMSBC Code, nickel ore is classified as Group A cargo, which may liquefy if shipped at a moisture content in excess of its Transportable Moisture Limit (TML). In this regard, safety measures required to limit the moisture content of the cargo must be taken. Such as, but not limited to the followings:

- 1) The shipper must provide the valid certificate of the TML and certificate or declaration of the moisture content issued by an entity recognized by the competent authority of the port of loading in advance. The declaration of moisture content shall contain the average moisture content of the cargo at the time the declaration is presented to the master;
- 2) The master may carry out complementary test for determining the possibility of liquefaction in accordance with section 8.4 of the IMSBC Code before accepting for loading;

- 3) All measures shall be taken during loading operation and throughout the voyage to avoid an increase in moisture content of the cargo;
- 4) The cargo shall not be handled during precipitation unless appropriate measures to be taken;
- 5) Non-working hatches of the cargo space should be closed; and
- 6) The appearance of the cargo shall be check regularly during voyage. If free water above the cargo or fluid state of the cargo is observed during voyage, the master shall take appropriate actions to prevent cargo shifting and potential capsized of the ship, and give consideration to seeking emergency entry into a place of refuge.

Nickel ore is regarded as a very dangerous cargo due to the liquefaction property. Shipping nickel ore from Indonesia to China is known to be particularly risky. P&I Clubs around the world have issued circulars and notices to alert the industry. As nickel ore liquefaction had resulted in sinking of many vessels in the recent years, including a Hong Kong registered bulk carrier, a Hong Kong Merchant Shipping Information Note (MSIN No. 46/2015) was issued in 2015 to draw the attentions of parties concerned to this issue. All parties concerned are reminded to read these documents and take appropriate safety measures while carrying nickel ore in bulk.

Please feel free to contact the undersigned at tel. No. (852) 2852 4510 if you have any query in respect of the above matter.

Yours faithfully,



(K. F. KWAN)
Senior Surveyor of Ship /
Cargo Ships Safety Section
for Director of Marine