

TITLE	BUNKERING AT SINGAPORE OPL	DATE	18/02/2010
CATEGORY:	OPERATIONS	AREA:	ASIA

We would like to advise our Members that recently the MPA had a meeting with local P&I clubs and their correspondents. The purpose of the meeting was for the MPA to illustrate the concentration of vessels anchored at Outer Port Limit (OPL) Singapore and the encroachment of those ships into areas such as port approaches, traffic separation schemes and the "Buffer Zones" in the Singapore Straits.

Presently there are two OPL anchorages off Singapore. On the western approaches to Singapore, proximate to the Port of Tanjung Pelepas, we have the Western OPL Anchorage and to the east, the area east of Johore Shoal Buoy and the entrance to the Johore Strait form the Eastern OPL Anchorage.

While many ships have remained unhampered at these anchorages for considerable periods of time, there has been a recent increase in investigations by the Malaysian Marine Department (MMD), particularly into those vessels engaged in bunkering activities. There have been many cases of alleged illegal fuel transferring and smuggling. There were over 20 vessels detained in the first half of 2009 and over 42 crew members held for questioning for various offences under the Merchant Shipping Ordinance and Environment Quality Act. As Malaysian regulations allow the MMD to investigate vessels involved operations such as in bunkering, ship to ship transfers etc, Members should take caution when carrying out such operations in areas they believe to be international waters. In the areas in question, due to the proximity of other countries, it is widely accepted that in the lieu of territorial waters (12 miles) as per UNCLOS, the Port Limits (3 miles) is used as the limit of territorial boundaries. However, there are a number of instances where 12 miles have been claimed by the local authorities to enable bunker and STS operations to fall under their control. Members are advised to exercise necessary caution as these misinterpretations can lead to costly and time consuming investigations, detentions and fines.

Source of information: Our Singapore correspondent – Spica Services (S) Pte Ltd