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Circular for P & I Clubs

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Pilotage services at the Orinoco River

In the last weeks an important issue related to the official pilotage at the Orinoco River has developed due the refusal by the official pilots to board the ship at the sea buoy of mile 0.1 (river's entrance) as has been customary throughout the years, this situation resulting from differences between pilots and the aquatic authority (INEA) due to introduction of new legal provisions.

According to Presidential Decree N° 2,033 published in Official Gazette No. 34,877 dated 8 January 1992, it is clear that all foreign vessels must take up and drop off the official pilot at mile 27.7 of the Orinoco River, the article 5 of the decree reads as follows: *Article 5°.- Vessels already in the channel which are required to take an official pilot, must wait for it at anchorage or heaving as close as possible to the buoy G-7, located on mile 27.7 of the Orinoco River on Lat. 8° 36'00" North and Long. 60° 30'40" West (Bearing 90° and 9.260 meters or five (5) nautical miles distance from the former Punta Barima lighthouse).* Therefore according to the strict wording of the Decree, all foreign vessels entering upstream to the river must sail up to mile 27.7 to wait and pick up the official pilot.

Despite the former and as the result of several groundings within the passage from the Orinoco sea buoy (mile 0.1) and mile 27.7 years ago, the Orinoco River Pilot Association with the local Harbor Master decided to extend their services to sea buoy 0.1 for all vessel over 150 mtrs. LOA, at Masters/Owners request, making it compulsory for vessels over 200mtrs. LOA; since then vessels have been paying the extra costs for the use of a helicopter for transporting the pilot and to pilots themselves for the extended service. This became a customary practice along the years.

More recently as a result of the differences between the INEA and the pilots, the Official Board of Pilots decided to suspend their extended service restricting their assistance to what is actually established in the decree. Due to this refusal, and the safety issues arising from it, a sort of “intermediate” scheme was set up by using retired pilots to continue the extended service from mile 0.1 up to mile 27.7 as advisors, arrangements made through ship agents. The outcome of the events is that the extended pilot service by retired pilots has been suspended although verbally, while the Harbor Master through communication INEA/CARSK/No. 000473 dated 20 February 2015 has reminded to the shipping community the content of the 1992 regulations. It follows that ships must transit the passage between mile 0.1 up to 27.7 without any pilot onboard. Official pilots are boarding vessels at mile 27.7 where the official pilot station is located.

The above, of course, is leaving the Members with the responsibility to make the passage between the sea buoy up to the mile 27.7 at their risk. Therefore, it is advisable for them to keep in close contact with agents and Correspondents to be guided by the official information about the river’s draft issued by local authorities.

Should you need any assistance or further information regarding the topic stated above, please feel free to contact:

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