

News 21 Aug, 2019

Stowaways in South Africa

With immediate effect, no stowaways will be permitted to be landed in South Africa. Members must not allow any person to board their vessel if that person is not in possession of a TNPA (Transnet National Port's Authority) port permit.

We are grateful to our representatives in South Africa P&I Associates (Pty) Ltd for this warning about potential action by the authorities over stowaways:

It is common knowledge that South African ports have stowaway problems. The ruling by South African Immigration was that if any unlawful person gained access to a vessel he was immediately declared to be a stowaway unless the vessel had hard evidence to show that the person boarded the vessel in a South African port. Hard evidence, according to Immigration officials, is video footage from security cameras or evidence from port security guards and any document issued by the Department of Home Affairs. If such evidence was available, the person was removed from the vessel as a trespasser.

If the person was treated as a stowaway, we urgently arranged a travel document and we were able to remove the person off the vessel either in port, or off port limits, and repatriate him.

The authorities in South Africa appear to believe that stowaways are being brought into South Africa and dumped in the ports by ships only for them to stowaway again on other ships. They fail to see and hear that the stowaways are coming into the country through our porous borders and then gaining access to the ports and to ships far too easily.

On Monday evening we were advised telephonically by the Senior Immigration Officer in Durban that as of immediate effect, no stowaways would be permitted to be landed in South Africa. The Immigration Authorities have called for a meeting next week Tuesday in Durban with local Stakeholders to discuss this new policy decision. We will be attending the meeting. Obviously, this policy shift has huge ramifications for South Africa and ship owners. South Africa has always dealt with stowaways in a positive manner. We were given no warning of this policy shift by the Immigration Authorities and the impact was immediate. We urgently had to make alternative arrangements in respect of stowaways on board two vessels.

We have not received any written communication from Immigration nor do we know the rationale behind this policy change. We are of course awaiting the formal written communication, but the policy is already in place. Once we have ascertained the reasons for this new policy approach, we can approach then Department of Home Affairs in Pretoria and can discuss the policy in depth with them and make the necessary representations.

*In order for all your members to be protected whilst in South African ports, we urge those members to follow our previous advice on stowaways in South African ports and they **MUST** not allow any person to board their vessel if that person is not in possession of a TNPA (Transnet National Port's Authority) port permit. Private security should be arranged to check permits at the bottom of the gangway to prevent stowaways running past the security desk, and two guards should be stationed on the quayside on the fore and aft mooring ropes.*

*We will still assist with Stowaways from East and West Africa by removing the same off Mozambique, Mauritius and Namibia but at the moment, **NO** stowaways will be permitted to be landed in South Africa. Any person declared as a stowaway in a South African port will have to sail with the vessel and removed on route or at the next port of call.*