

“VINCENZO FLORIO” 29.05.2009
FIRE ON BOARD – GENERAL AVERAGE - SALVAGE



On 29th May 2009, passenger Ro/Ro vessel “Vincenzo Florio” caught fire about 40 miles off Ustica Isle, Italy. The vessel was travelling from Naples to Palermo when the blaze started.

About 500 passengers on board vessel were evacuated in lifeboats, assisted by the local Maritime Authority. Initial fire fighting and boundary cooling was started, indeed without any success. The day after the event the vessel was towed in port of Palermo and safely berthed.

Owners contracted a specific salvage. The salvage team started to fight the fire, which was mainly located on the upper car deck of the vessel. High temperatures and poor visibility made the fire fighting a difficult task. Over a period of 10 days the team worked to get the fire under control, meanwhile ensuring the ship’s stability. Many trucks with various cargo were on fire, making the fire fighting even more complicated. Several techniques, including the use of foam, and the use of the high-pressure system were used to extinguish the fire. On 10th June 2009, the fire was extinguished.

Owners declared General Average requesting security from cargo interests. In view to collect securities from cargo interests, riots broke out. As a result, Public Authority forced Owners to deliver cargo, barring same to collect securities. The decision of the Public Prosecutor in Palermo preventing the collection of average guarantees has been the subject of extensive discussion by Italian doctrine and maritime reviews.

Passenger luggage left on board before disembarking operations were listed and gave back to same. Cargo cataloguing was needed to unload same from vessel. Heavy vehicles and cars have been unloaded, identified and delivered to own owners. Scrapping procedures have been arranged for vehicles completely burnt in the casualty.

Cargo unloading operations started after the summer with very severe troubles in terms of sanitary conditions. Disinfestations and special measures have been regularly taken to arrange cargo disposal.

Various salvage claims have been mounted against Owners on M/v "Vincenzo Florio" by part of the entities which took part to salvage operations.

We have been instructed to act on behalf of P&I Club and H&M Underwriters to investigate the casualty before Maritime Authority Inquiry and Criminal and Civil proceedings as well as to handle all cargo claims and personal injury claims mounted against the sea carrier. Legal assistance was also needed during unloading and scrapping cargo operations.

On H&M Underwriters side, besides the assistance rendered in General Average declared by Owners, we also faced various ship arrest applications mounted by entities who took part of salvage operations.

Vessel is still under final repairs awarded by an Italian shipyard after an international bidding. To this aim, our assistance was given to arrange final contract with the shipyard.