

Dali's owners deny responsibility for Baltimore bridge accident



The M/V Dali is shown with the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge on March 30, 2024, in Baltimore.

A Singaporean ship owner and a ship manager that operated the vessel that struck and destroyed Baltimore's Francis Scott Key bridge have filed a petition seeking court protection from liability.

Nick Savvides | Apr 03, 2024

Grace Ocean, the owners of the 10,000 teu ship and ship manager Synergy Marine, through their lawyers Duane Morris and Blank Rome, alleged that they are not responsible for the accident.

The petition also aims to consolidate all litigation in Baltimore's federal court, and asks the court to impose a 24 September filing deadline for claims.

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"The Casualty was not due to any fault, neglect, or want of care on the part of [the] Petitioners [Grace Ocean and [Synergy Marine](#)], the Vessel, or any persons or entities for whose acts Petitioners may be responsible," read the filing.

Additionally, the companies asked that if the Maryland District Court did find the vessel owner and operator liable, that any liability should be capped at the value of the vessel and the freight due from its cargo owners.

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Dali's owner and operator vessel submitted the filing under the Limitation of Liability Act of 1851, legislation that enables vessel owners to limit liability for certain claims to the value of the vessel and its cargo at the end of its journey.

Limitation of liability will only be afforded if the owner and manager can show that the accident occurred without their "privity or knowledge" and that future litigation is expected to focus on whether the owner and manager had any prior knowledge of factors that caused the accident.

Insurance cover had been renewed the vessel's hull and machinery just three days before the accident, and the policy valued the vessel at \$90 million. However, with vessel repairs estimated to be "at least \$28 million," and salvage costs expected to reach \$19.5 million the value was eroded.

Court documents reveal, the estimated value of the ship was \$42.5 million, while its income from the curtailed voyage, amounted \$1.17 million giving a combined total \$43.67 million.

According to the court filing the companies "are aware of potential demands or claims against them and/or the Vessel arising out of the Casualty."

In what is expected to signal a long and drawn-out court battle the companies asked for “exoneration” for the losses suffered as a result of the accident and “allege that they have valid defenses to any and all such claims”.

CBS News in the US reported that the credit rating agency Morning Star estimates the cost of the accident could surpass that of the Costa Concordia and become the most expensive in history at between \$2 and \$4 billion.

Costs of the salvage are being complicated by the tangled steel sitting on the bottom of the river and the fact that sonar shows that the Dali itself is resting on the riverbed.

Court documents also shed some light on the last minutes of Dali’s voyage, in the events that led to the collapse of the bridge costing the lives of six maintenance workers repairing the road at the time of the accident.

Dali set sail at 00:44 with a tug aft and another at the bow, and with a pilot on board. Both tugs had cast off their lines by the time the vessel entered the shipping channel at around 01:08am.

Around 10 minutes later the vessel lost power and propulsion and crew efforts to restore power were achieved for a short period before the vessel again lost all power and was adrift in the channel.

At this point the vessel dropped anchor in an effort to avert the drifting vessel from causing an accident, but the crew could not prevent the ship colliding with a bridge support at around 01:28am.