MSIG
SPECIALTY MARINE

POLLUTION FINES IN TURKISH WATERS

CIRCULAR

The Turkish Ministry of Treasury and Finance has released its annual update on inflation-based adjustments to administrative penalties for marine pollution. As published in the Official Gazette on 27 November 2025, the adjustment rate for 2026 has been fixed at 25.49%.

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This means that, from 1 January 2026, all pollution-related fines in Turkey will rise by 25.49% compared to the amounts in force during 2025. **Under Turkish practice, even the smallest spill – no matter how minor – is subject to a fine and is penalized in the same manner as a large spill.** Ship operators calling at Turkish ports or navigating through Turkish waters should therefore expect significantly higher financial exposure in the event of a pollution incident.

In Turkey, allegations of marine pollution typically result in the vessel being detained while an investigation gets underway. Authorities will board the vessel to obtain crew statements and determine whether sampling is required. When sampling is carried out, specimens may be taken from the ship, the affected area, and clean seawater for comparison. If the source of pollution is unclear, TÜBİTAK undertakes laboratory analysis and penalties are issued only after confirmation. However, when the pollutant or its origin is obvious, fines may be imposed immediately without waiting for test results.

To secure the ship's release during these proceedings, owners must provide financial security, either by way of a P&I Letter of Undertaking (LoU) or a Turkish bank guarantee. The LoU must conform strictly to the wording demanded by the authorities, including a commitment to settle any fine within 30 days. Early involvement of a local P&I correspondent is advisable to facilitate communication with officials and protect the vessel's position throughout the investigation.

Key Points and Guidance

- **Appeals**:
  Owners may lodge appeals within the permitted time limits. However, an appeal does not lift the vessel's arrest. Payment made promptly during the appeal period is eligible for a 25% reduction.
- **Payment Requirements:**
  The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) often requires fines to be settled in cash, with limited alternatives available. Release may be granted against a P&I Club or recognized insurer's Letter of Undertaking.
- **Port-Level Fines:**
  Harbour Masters can impose additional fines ranging from TL 500 to TL 20,000 for breaches of port regulations. In cases involving emergencies that lead to pollution or environmental harm, penalties may rise as high as TL 5,000,000.

Operational Recommendations

- Hatch cover and deck-cleaning activities should be suspended, and no hose testing of hatch covers or hydrostatic testing of deck pipelines, hoses, or related equipment is to be carried out.
- De-ballasting should only take place if the ballast water has been inspected and verified to be free from contaminants. All overboard discharge valves must remain closed, secured, and properly sealed. Deck scuppers are to be fully plugged, and any openings in the fish plate around the deck must be tightly sealed.

- Treated sewage and grey water must be routed to a designated holding tank and retained onboard until the vessel has cleared Turkish territorial waters. Disposal of cargo residues, hold-cleaning waste, garbage, or any other substances into Turkish waters is strictly prohibited.
- The vessel's hull must not be scraped, chipped, or painted while berthed or at anchor. Additionally, when the vessel is in a shipyard or dry dock, it may still be held vicariously liable for pollution incidents—even if such incidents arise from the negligence of the shipyard, its workers, or agents. For this reason, crew members must remain vigilant and promptly issue written protests to the shipyard if they suspect any pollution has occurred.

Compliance and Best Practice

Vessels trading in Turkish waters must be alert to evolving environmental rules. Shipowners and operators are strongly encouraged to follow best practices, maintain awareness of regulatory changes, and seek prompt support from local P&I correspondents if a fine or detention occurs.

Please do not hesitate to contact our Loss Prevention Services team at LPS@msigspecialtymarine.com in case of any questions or comments.

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