

The Ponus weighing system in Australia

Tom Jensen of the FTA takes a closer look at safety, costs and accountability in container shipping

THE DEPLOYMENT OF THE PONUS

weighing system in recent years by major Australian port operators represented a pivotal development in the realm of maritime safety and compliance.

Initiated to reinforce adherence to the International Maritime Organization's Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) regulations, the system has heralded significant improvements in safety protocols. However, it also brings to light the complex interplay between ensuring maritime safety and managing the financial implications for importers, particularly concerning the verification of container weights.

PONUS AND MARITIME SAFETY

Central to the Ponus initiative is a commitment to maritime safety. The SOLAS regulations, specifically chapter VI, regulation 2, which came into effect on 1 July 2016, underscore the critical need for precise weight declarations. These regulations require shippers to accurately verify and declare the gross mass of containers, facilitating their safe stowage aboard vessels and thereby enhancing overall maritime safety.

To uphold these standards, terminal operators have employed the Ponus stand, which is a calibrated weighing apparatus. When a container's weight diverges significantly from its declared weight, a fee is levied. This procedure evidences the maritime industry's dedication to averting the potential hazards arising from weight misdeclarations, and the paramount importance of safety in sea transport.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND THE BURDEN ON IMPORTERS

Despite the undeniable safety advantages, the financial repercussions of the Ponus system for importers have sparked considerable debate. The introduction of fees for significant weight discrepancies imposes an additional financial burden,

initially borne by transport carriers but ultimately affecting importers. This has led to discussions on the fairness of such charges, particularly in light of expectations that container weights be accurately verified before export.

The crux of the issue lies in determining responsibility for weight discrepancies. The contention stems from disputes over weights, leading to misdeclaration fees and ensuing confusion over who in the supply chain should be liable, given that the verified gross mass is required at the origin prior to export. This requirement should ostensibly remove any doubt regarding the accuracy of weights upon import. Yet,

dialogue concerning its economic impact on importers underlines the need for a harmonised approach that considers both the imperatives of maritime safety and the economic realities of international trade.

Prospective discussions could pave the way for revising fee structures or redefining the allocation of financial responsibilities. Such reforms would aim to maintain the integrity of safety protocols while alleviating the economic strain on importers. Achieving a consensus on these issues is critical to ensuring that the safety benefits of accurate weight verification do not disproportionately impact any party within the shipping ecosystem.

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when discrepancies arise, the question of liability becomes pertinent: Who should be held accountable?

NAVIGATING DISCREPANCIES AND SEEKING ACCOUNTABILITY

The debates surrounding the Ponus system and its financial implications necessitate a clear understanding and adherence to international regulations.

The disputes relating to weight verifications highlight a need for clarity in the supply chain, particularly regarding the responsibility for inaccuracies detected upon a container's arrival in Australia. There exists a pressing need for practices that not only align with SOLAS regulations but also ensure that the repercussions of safety measures are equitably distributed across all stakeholders.

STRIVING FOR BALANCE

The implementation of the Ponus system signifies Australia's commitment to global compliance standards. However, the

The Ponus weighing system stands as an advancement in maritime safety within Australian waters, but the journey towards its full realisation is intertwined with ongoing discussions that seek to harmonise safety protocols with the economic considerations of international trade. As the industry continues to navigate the complexities of financial responsibilities and safety obligations, a question emerges: How can stakeholders collaboratively refine this system to ensure that it not only enhances maritime safety but also respects the financial realities faced by importers and the broader shipping community? ■



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