



John Seow

Director, Head of Litigation

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John Seow started his career as a marine engineer, sailing with the then national carrier, Neptune Orient Lines, onboard their freedom-class vessels. He also spent some years as an engineer on shore in the Oil & Gas Industry before deciding to pursue a career in law. John was called to the English Bar as a barrister by the Middle Temple in 1995 (non-practising).

John's engineering background provides him with a distinct competence when dealing with briefs that are highly technical in nature.

John's areas of specialisation include shipping and international trade law. His experience in shipping matters includes wet work such as collision and salvage, ship repair and construction, engine related claims, marine insurance matters and carriage/charterparty disputes. He also has extensive experience in offshore mining/production facilities and its related services such as the expertise, equipment and operational support necessary for the industry and advising/litigating disputes when things do not go as planned. His background in engineering provides him with a unique competence to take on briefs of a highly technical nature. As such, he has a particular interest and expertise in wet shipping work.

John also has a vibrant practice with extensive experience in advisory and advocacy work in commercial litigation and arbitration. In particular, he has advised and appeared as counsel in sale of goods disputes covering commodities such as oil, coal, iron ore and grains as well as trade finance matters.

John regularly represents international oil and commodities traders, shipyards, Japanese MNCs, shipowners, charterers and P&I Clubs as well as some of the world's leading and preeminent oil and gas and oilfield support service companies.

In addition to his work as counsel, John has been appointed as arbitrator across a range of institutional and ad hoc cases.

In recent times, John has been recognised by Best Lawyers 2022, 2023 and 2024 in the area of Shipping and Maritime Law.

Highlight Matters

Matters handled prior to joining the Firm:

- Successfully represented the appellant in the Court of Appeal in overturning the lower court decision in refusing to enforce an arbitration award which the appellant had successfully obtained against the respondent. The case involved a novel point of law in which the Court of Appeal decided that in the situation of a mere misnomer where the correct party had merely been incorrectly named, it would have the power to enforce an award in favour of a party not expressly named in the award. The case also establishes the test for identifying a true misnomer.

- Represented the insured in a claim under a valued marine cargo policy in respect of a shipment of steel plates and machinery loaded on a barge towed from Singapore to Sibul, East Malaysia. The shipment was lost in the seas during the voyage. The case defines the scope of the damage to goods attributable to “washing overboard” under the Institute Cargo Clauses in Marine Cargo Insurance.
- Represented the defendant shipowner in a claim by the owner of a slop tanker that sank following receipt of chemical slops received from the chemical tanker owned/operated by the defendant. The case centred on whether the defendant shipowner had been negligent when it contracted with the slop tanker owner to receive the chemical slops. The defendant also argued that even if it were liable it was entitled to limit its liability for the loss pursuant to section 136 of the Merchant Shipping Act (giving legislative effect to the Limitation of Owners of Sea-Going Ships 1957 (the “1957 Convention”). The High Court decided in favour of the plaintiff and the defendant shipowner appealed to the Court of Appeal. In a landmark decision, the Court of Appeal upheld the lower court decision in a split 2-1 majority decision by the coram of 3 Justices of Appeal. The remarks by the dissenting Justice of Appeal subsequently led to the legislative enactment of the Convention on Limitation of Liability for Maritime Claims 1976.
- Successfully defended an international MNC oilfield/offshore supply company in an arbitration brought by a local major shipyard/oilrig builder in a claim for alleged defective design/supply of a multimillion-dollar shipboard equipment for an FPSO built by the latter. The case was fought on and won by the defendant on issues which were largely technical in nature.
- Successfully represented a local oilfield/offshore supply company in an arbitration brought against the defendant manufacturer/supplier (of high-performance pipes and fittings for offshore vessels) for repudiatory breach of contract. The respondent’s repudiatory breach had resulted in a claim for damages by the head contractor (which designs, builds, installs and operates offshore floating facilities for the offshore energy industry) against the client which sought to recover these damages from the respondent in the arbitration.
- Successfully defended the respondent, an international oil field services company, in a claim brought by an MNC engineering contractor (in a construction project for an oil refinery in Singapore) in an arbitration for damages arising from property damage caused by a pigging operation undertaken by the respondent.
- Successfully represented the appellant in the Court of Appeal in overturning the lower court decision in awarding a multimillion-dollar residential property owned by the appellant company to the respondent on the ground of common intention constructive trust. The Court of Appeal rejected the Respondent’s case that a common intention constructive trust existed on the facts of the case.
- Represented a shipowner in a claim brought by it in the High Court of Singapore following the collision of its vessel with another in the Malacca Straits (by the arrest of the other vessel in Singapore). The defendant shipowner had also instituted an action in the Malaysian admiralty court by arresting the client’s vessel in Malaysia. The matter before the Singapore court concerned the appropriate jurisdiction in which to adjudicate the claims arising from the said collision.
- Successfully represented the shipper/owner of an oil cargo against the vessel owner for cargo contamination. A key preliminary issue was whether the shipper/owner of the cargo had title to sue at the time the Writ was issued. Although an indorsee of the bill of lading, it was not in possession of the bill of lading at the time the Writ was issued. However, the High Court accepted that there was a ship’s delivery order which conferred on the shipper/owner the right to sue in contract pursuant to section 2(1)(c) of the Bills of Lading Act.

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- Acted for the owner of a vessel (and its P&I Club) which grounded at a remote island in the Banda Seas off Indonesia enroute from Australia to Thailand. Attended onboard the stranded vessel onsite to record evidence and investigate into the cause of the grounding, and advising shipowner/Club on recovery action against cargo interests for GA contributions arising from the grounding incident.

Education

LLB (Hons), University of London

Professional Associations and Memberships

Senior Accredited Specialist, Maritime and Shipping Law

Fellow, the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators

Member, Law Society of Singapore

Member, Singapore Academy of Law

Member, Singapore Chamber of Maritime Arbitration

Language

English