



International Oil Pollution
Compensation Funds

Agenda item 3	IOPC/NOV25/3/13	
Date	6 October 2025	
Original	English	
1992 Fund Assembly	92A30	
1992 Fund Executive Committee	92EC85	●
Supplementary Fund Assembly	SA22	

INCIDENTS INVOLVING THE IOPC FUNDS—1992 FUND

GULFSTREAM

Note by the Secretariat

**Objective of
document:**

To inform the 1992 Fund Executive Committee of the latest developments regarding this incident.

Summary:

In early February 2024, the articulated tank barge *Gulfstream* (IMO Number 1518444, 4 925 GRT, built in 1974), towed by the tug *Solo Creed* (IMO Number 7505994, 538 GRT, built in 1976), capsized, sank, and began to spill oil approximately 16 km off Tobago, before coming to rest 150 to 200 metres off Canoe Bay, on the southernmost tip of Tobago.

It is believed that the vessel was on a voyage from Pozuelo's Bay, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, to Guyana. No emergency calls were transmitted by the tug. Searches for the owner of the tug and barge by the authorities in Trinidad and Tobago have been inconclusive but are continuing.

The Tobago Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) activated the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan to manage the response to the spill which polluted some 15 km of the coastline of Tobago, including rocky shores, beaches and mangroves. The 1992 Fund sent experts to assist and provide advice in relation to the clean-up operations, to collect samples of oil for testing, and to assist the local authorities responding to the incident.

Remnants of the oil slick traversed some 830 km across the Caribbean Sea. On 26 February 2024 some traces of oil and tar balls washed up on the east coast of Bonaire (Kingdom of the Netherlands).

In early March 2024, the Deputy Director/Head of Claims Department and a Claims Manager visited Trinidad and Tobago to gather facts and meet with representatives from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries (MEEI). In May 2024, the Director and the Claims Manager visited for further meetings with the authorities. The Claims Manager has since visited several times to discuss matters with the authorities and the staff at the focal point office (FPO) established in Trinidad.

By 11 March 2024, the response was scaled down, concentrating on the areas of mangroves which required manual clean-up operations to be conducted, and on the removal of oil from the capsized barge.

Two salvage and environmental companies were retained to remove any further oil which remained inside the wreck. The barge was then towed to Trinidad and sold for scrap, the value of which has been deducted from one of the claims submitted by the Trinidadian authorities.

The authorities in Trinidad and Tobago commenced a search for the missing tug, *Solo Creed*, requesting the assistance of a number of neighbouring States.

Solo Creed

In early May 2024, the *Solo Creed* tug was arrested in Angola for breaching the boundaries of a number of oil field exclusion zones. The vessel was placed under arrest by the Angolan authorities and remained at anchor in Luanda Bay, Angola.

Subsequently, the authorities in Trinidad and Tobago received communication from the Government of Tanzania that the owner of the *Solo Creed* at the time of registration was a company based in Guyana, but no information was provided regarding the insurers. In response, the Trinidad and Tobago authorities instructed lawyers to initiate arrest proceedings against the owners of the *Solo Creed* and/or its crew. An arrest application was granted in Luanda and the tug was placed under arrest with guards onboard. However, just before the November 2024 sessions of the IOPC Funds' governing bodies, the authorities in Trinidad and Tobago were notified that the tug had escaped arrest. Despite hiring a company for satellite surveillance to track its whereabouts, the tug remains untraced. Efforts to trace the tug continue, both through diplomatic measures and by tracing the crew members onboard the tug at the time of arrest.

Recent developments: *Claims*

The 1992 Fund's FPO, established in Trinidad in June 2024, has so far received 357 claims, totalling USD 48.5 million. These claims relate to clean-up operations undertaken in Tobago, and to fisheries. Interviews with those who submitted fisheries claims commenced in March 2025 and a large number of the 177 claims submitted in the fisheries sector have been assessed. Claims for surveillance and clean-up operations conducted in Bonaire, where oil was found following the incident, have also been received and paid.

Oil removal from the Gulfstream

Following the conclusion of the onshore clean-up operations, efforts concentrated on the oil removal operation from the barge. By August 2024, salvors had removed 32 675 barrels of oil. On 19 August 2024, they refloated the barge and towed it to Trinidad arriving on 22 August 2024. The oil onboard was advertised for sale by auction, but due to the unknown origin of the oil, only one potential buyer was willing to purchase the oil. The value of the oil when sold will be deducted from one of the claims submitted by the Trinidadian authorities.

Action to be taken: 1992 Fund Executive Committee

Information to be noted.

1 **Summary of incident**

Ship	Articulated barge <i>Gulfstream</i>
Date of incident	5/6 February 2024
Place of incident	Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago
Cause of incident	Sinking and capsizing
Quantity of oil spilled	Estimated 4 652 mt of persistent fuel oil
Area affected	Tobago and coast of Bonaire, Kingdom of the Netherlands
Flag State of ship	Unknown
Gross tonnage	4 925 GRT
P&I insurer	None
CLC limit	SDR 4.51 million
STOPIA/TOPIA applicable	N/A
CLC + Fund limit	SDR 203 million
Legal proceedings	None at present

2 **Background information**

- 2.1 In early February 2024, the 1992 Fund became aware of an oil spill incident off the coast of Trinidad and Tobago. The articulated tank barge^{<1>} *Gulfstream* (IMO Number 1518444, 4 925 GRT, built in 1974), towed by the tug *Solo Creed* (IMO Number 7505994, 538 GRT, built in 1976), capsized, sank, and began to spill oil approximately 16 km off Tobago, before coming to rest 150 to 200 metres offshore of Canoe Bay, on the southernmost tip of Tobago.
- 2.2 Full details of the incident can be found in the [Gulfstream online report](#).
- 2.3 **Ownership, registration and classification of the tug and barge pre-incident**
- 2.3.1 Initial information regarding the ownership, registration and classification of the tug and barge prior to the incident is detailed in document [IOPC/APR24/3/6](#). Ownership of the barge *Gulfstream* has been difficult to establish as sales of barges are often not recorded on any international registry or are often only linked to the sale of an accompanying barge.
- 2.3.2 That document reported that, although the vessel was registered in Tanzania, there was no clear evidence of the ownership, or of any insurance being in place for the barge laden with oil, due to a number of incomplete or falsified registration documents which had been provided to the authorities. A subsequent claim made by an individual, asserting ownership of the barge, is believed to be an attempt to lay a false trail away from the true owners of the barge and tug.
- 2.4 **Further searches to ascertain the true ownership of the tug and barge post-incident**
- 2.4.1 The authorities in Trinidad and Tobago were notified by the authorities in Tanzania that the registered owner listed on their registry at the time of the incident was an individual residing in (but not a citizen of) Panama. The authorities in Trinidad and Tobago have liaised with the authorities in Panama for further information. Subsequently, a new registration document was provided by the authorities in Tanzania, stating that the owner was a company located in Guyana. No such company is listed in the Guyana Commercial Registry.

<1>

An articulated tank barge consists of a tank vessel (barge) and a large, powerful tug that is positioned in a notch in the stern of the barge, with an articulated or hinged connection system between the tug and barge, which enables the tug to propel and manoeuvre the barge.

2.4.2 Further efforts to trace the tug through employing the services of a satellite company have proved unsuccessful, but efforts are continuing both through diplomatic channels, and latterly through attempting to gain information from the crew members on the tug when it was arrested in Angola.

2.5 The movement of the tug and barge prior to the incident

2.5.1 The history of the auction sale of the barge, its movements from being laid up on a beach in Panama, its serious maintenance issues, lack of survey data or insurance, and appearance in satellite footage in the region of Pozuelo's Bay, Venezuela (a major petroleum port) are detailed in document [IOPC/APR24/3/6](#).

2.5.2 That document also stated that on 3 February 2024, after leaving Pozuelo's Bay, satellite imagery shows the tug and barge heading in a north-easterly direction, with the barge on a long tow. Notably, the satellite images of the barge show that it was already leaking an oily substance, leaving behind a slick that stretched for at least 40 km. As no such trail was spotted beforehand, it is believed that the *Gulfstream* took on a cargo from Venezuela while in Pozuelo's Bay, possibly via a ship-to-ship transfer. It is not possible to verify this information because satellite imagery is not available for all of the days.

2.5.3 On 6 February 2024, satellite imagery showed the barge *Gulfstream* capsized surrounded by a large oil spill, approximately 16 km southeast of Tobago.

2.6 The intended destination of the tug and barge tow

According to a document purportedly showing a request to book a pilot for the tug *Solo Creed* and its barge tow *Culie Boy*, the barge was destined for the Vreed en Hoop terminal of Guyana Power and Light, Guyana's state-owned electric utility in fulfilment of a tender process for a number of shipments. That document has not been verified and the identity of *Culie Boy* is unknown, but it may be another name for the *Gulfstream*. The named customs agents in the document, did not respond to a request for comment and Guyana Power and Light has denied any involvement with the incident. The Trinidad and Tobago authorities are continuing their investigations and therefore it has not been possible to ascertain the ultimate destination of the cargo, or its owner.

2.7 Search for the tug, its ownership, registration and classification post-incident

Arrest of vessel

2.7.1 The details of the search for the tug, its arrest in Angola and its escape from arrest are detailed in document [IOPC/APR25/3/6](#). As at 24 September 2025, the vessel has not been detected. There remains a lack of any definitive information regarding the true ownership of the barge *Gulfstream* at the time of the incident, due in part to the submission of unverified documentation to the registry.

2.7.2 Details of the purported ownership of the tug at the time of the incident, based on the ship registration documents^{<2>} provided by the Zanzibar Maritime Authority, both at the time of the incident and subsequently, were provided in document [IOPC/NOV24/3/14](#). Enquiries by the Trinidad and Tobago authorities are continuing.

<2> Dated incorrectly as 30 November 2022, but confirmed subsequently by the Zanzibar Maritime Authority to relate to 30 November 2023.

3 Response operations

- 3.1 Full details of the response operations undertaken, were provided in document [IOPC/NOV24/3/14](#). The main issue that remains to be resolved is the management of the oily waste collected and stored in Tobago. The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago, acting on behalf of the MEEI, put out a Request for Proposals (RFP) to treat the oily waste stored at a municipal tip at Studley Park, Tobago. The RFP closed in December 2024.
- 3.2 As at 26 September 2025, a Review Committee is assessing the eight submissions that were made.
- 3.3 Oil removal from barge
- 3.3.1 Oil removal operations were undertaken by the salvors engaged by the authorities in Trinidad and Tobago, with pipelines rigged from the capsized barge to the shoreline. Once collected, the oil was taken by road tankers to a waiting oil tanker for discharge at a refinery in Trinidad.
- 3.3.2 A total of 32 675 barrels of oil was removed and delivered to the refinery and is currently stored at Paria Fuel Trading Company Limited (Paria). That company, in their attempts to dispose of the oil, have obtained certification to assist with the sale of the oil on the international market.
- 3.3.3 However, as the origin of the oil still cannot be determined, only one international buyer was willing to bid for the oil. When the sale process is concluded, the value of the sold oil will be used to defray the costs incurred by the authorities and thus reduce their claim against the 1992 Fund.

4 Applicability of the Conventions

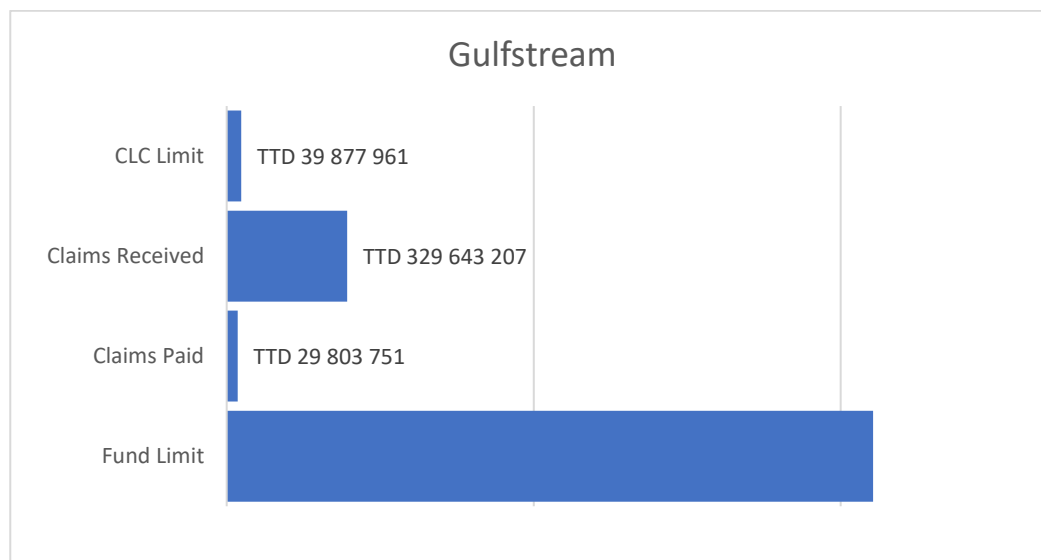
- 4.1 At the time of the incident, Trinidad and Tobago was Party to the 1992 Civil Liability Convention (1992 CLC) and the 1992 Fund Convention.
- 4.2 Following the incident, the oil was tested and proven to be persistent as required pursuant to Article 1(5) of the 1992 CLC. The barge complies with the definition of 'ship' pursuant to Article I(1) of the 1992 CLC, so the 1992 Civil Liability and Fund Conventions apply to this incident. The limit of liability of the owner of the barge is estimated to be SDR 4.51 million.
- 4.3 Regrettably, at the time of the incident, neither the 1992 CLC nor the 1992 Fund Convention were implemented into domestic legislation in Trinidad and Tobago. The Secretariat has been engaging with the State Attorney's office in Trinidad and Tobago to discuss the proper implementation of the Conventions into domestic law.

5 Claims for compensation

- 5.1 As at 26 September 2025, 357 claims for compensation in the fisheries and clean-up sectors totalling USD 48.5 million, covering some of the clean-up operations undertaken in Tobago, and clean-up operations in Bonaire, have been submitted to the FPO. These claims are being assessed by the 1992 Fund's experts. As at 26 September 2025, 236 claims have been assessed, and payments totalling TTD 29 803 751 have been made.
- 5.2 The Secretariat is engaging with potential claimants and the authorities in Trinidad and Tobago to ascertain the extent of their losses.

5.3 Summary of compensation^{<3>}

	Incident currency	GBP
1992 Fund Convention limit (SDR 203 million)	TTD 1 794 950 360	GBP 213 797 570
Claims received	TTD 329 643 207	GBP 39 263 992
Claims approved	TTD 32 493 544	GBP 3 870 324
Claims paid	TTD 29 803 751	GBP 3 549 941

**6 Limitation proceedings**

As at 23 September 2025, no limitation proceedings have been commenced by the registered owner of the barge, who is yet to be identified.

7 Civil proceedings

As at 23 September 2025, no legal proceedings have been commenced against the 1992 Fund.

8 Director's considerations

- 8.1 The Director is pleased to note that the clean-up operations have been concluded in Tobago and that compensation payments are now being made.
- 8.2 The Director is, however, concerned that this incident involves a barge which appears to have no insurance, was in poor condition and for which no registered owner has yet been identified. The Director encourages the authorities in Trinidad and Tobago to pursue all available avenues to identify the true owner(s) of the barge and tug at the time of the incident, and to use all available resources to hold the owners accountable for the pollution and expenses incurred.

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With the exception of claims paid, currency conversions are indicative only and intended to assist the reader. Currency conversions are calculated using the FX rates applicable as at 1 May 2024 when the Director was authorised to pay compensation in respect of this incident. SDR 1 = TTD 8.842120 and SDR 1 = GBP 1.053190. Figures are subject to change due to fluctuations in the exchange rates and intervening events.

- 8.3 The Director also notes that the compensation regime works effectively when each of the parties involved, namely, the shipowner, insurer, State and IOPC Funds, cooperate to ensure they comply with and fulfil their obligations and responsibilities.
- 8.4 It appears that there are a number of questions still to be answered regarding the certification, ownership and registration of the barge *Gulfstream* and its lack of insurance, as well as the legality of its cargo.
- 8.5 The Director looks forward to continuing to work closely with the authorities in Trinidad and Tobago and is confident he will have their full cooperation in order to take all necessary and reasonable legal remedies to identify and pursue those liable for this incident.

9 Action to be taken

1992 Fund Executive Committee

The 1992 Fund Executive Committee is invited to:

- (a) take note of the information contained in this document; and
 - (b) give the Director such instructions in respect of the handling of this incident as it may deem appropriate.
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