KENNA

Maritime Practice Unit

H1 2026 Newsletter

A half-year review of the legislative, regulatory, judicial and commercial developments shaping Nigeria's maritime landscape in the first half of 2026.

Editor's Note

Nigeria's maritime sector continues to evolve rapidly. Regulatory reforms, judicial pronouncements, and shifting commercial dynamics are steadily redefining how stakeholders' rights and obligations are assessed within the blue economy. As government agencies, shipowners, operators, and investors respond to changing trade patterns, international standards, and infrastructure demands, staying abreast of these developments is critical for effective compliance and sound commercial decision-making across the industry.

This edition of the KENNA Maritime Practice Unit H1 2026 newsletter brings together the key developments that have shaped Nigeria's maritime landscape in the first half of 2026. We highlight major regulatory milestones, including Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency's (NIMASA) enforcement drive under "Operation Zero Tolerance for Non-Compliance," the incorporation of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and International Labour Organization (ILO) international wage scale into seafarers' conditions of service, and the coming into force of new rules of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) rules under the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL), and the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW). We also examine notable commercial and diplomatic developments, from MSC Group's 45-year Snake Island terminal concession to strategic partnerships with AD Ports Group and the Ghana Maritime Authority, as well as the Federal Government's ₦286,000,000,000.00 (Two Hundred and Eighty-Six Billion Naira) commitment to maritime infrastructure and safety.

> *"Anticipate regulatory change, navigate the interaction between domestic and international frameworks, and make informed decisions in an increasingly dynamic maritime industry."*

The newsletter also examines the evolving international legal framework affecting Nigeria's admiralty practice, including the European Union's approval of the Beijing Convention on the Judicial Sale of Ships and its implications for vessel arrest and enforcement. It further analyses the Nigerian Supreme Court's recent guidance on jurisdictional issues in disputes involving federal maritime regulators, as well as the tax implications of Nigeria's new freight tax regime for shipping companies, cargo owners and other industry stakeholders.

Audience

Shipowners, operators, financiers, insurers, in-house counsel, regulators and policy stakeholders across Nigeria's maritime ecosystem.

As always, our objective is to go beyond reporting developments. This publication is designed to help stakeholders anticipate regulatory change, navigate the interaction between domestic and international legal frameworks, and make informed decisions in an increasingly dynamic maritime industry. We trust this edition will be a valuable resource for shipowners, operators, financiers, insurers, in-house counsel, and other industry stakeholders in Nigeria's maritime sector.

Thank you for your continued engagement with the Maritime Practice Unit. We look forward to sharing more insights with you in future editions.

Emeka Opara

Partner, Maritime Practice Unit

Introduction

The first half of 2026 has been a defining period for Nigeria's maritime sector.

The first half of 2026 has been a defining period for Nigeria's maritime sector, with regulatory reform and strategic infrastructure investment reshaping the country's trade and shipping landscape. This edition covers the legal, regulatory, and commercial developments that have shaped the industry to date, grouped into regulatory and enforcement developments, commercial and infrastructure investments, international legal frameworks and judicial guidance, and fiscal and tax changes.

The European Union has approved the United Nations Convention on the International Effects of Judicial Sales of Ships, with implications for vessel arrest and enforcement. Closer to home, the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) launched "Operation Zero Tolerance for Non-Compliance," a nationwide enforcement campaign targeting breaches of vessel registration, Cabotage requirements, statutory certifications, and levy payments. Nigerian seafarers have also seen labour and welfare reforms, including a notable wage increase aligned with international standards. Together, these developments show a Nigerian maritime industry that continues to undergo rapid legal, regulatory, and operational transformation.

Collectively, these developments underscore Nigeria's continued commitment to strengthening its maritime sector and point to stricter enforcement of domestic maritime requirements alongside closer alignment with international standards.

Four theme areas

01

Regulatory & enforcement

NIMASA drive, IMO rules, seafarer welfare.

02

Commercial & investments

Concessions, MoUs, port infrastructure.

03

International frameworks

Beijing Convention, EU approvals, admiralty practice.

04

Fiscal & tax

Freight tax regime, port access, cargo owners.

News Updates

Federal Government *(FG digitises fish import licences)*

On February 3, 2026, the Federal Government approved digitising Nigeria's fish-import licensing process as part of broader efforts to modernise fisheries administration and strengthen domestic aquaculture. The Minister of Marine and Blue Economy, Adegboyega Oyetola, approved the initiative and directed the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture to expedite the implementation of a digital platform to replace the existing manual licensing system and improve transparency, efficiency, and regulatory oversight.[1]

The reform is expected to streamline licence applications, reduce administrative delays, minimise human intervention, and provide real-time data on fish imports to support evidence-based policymaking. The initiative is also expected to strengthen regulatory compliance by ensuring that import licences are issued only to registered, eligible importers,[2] while helping to curb illegal and unregulated fish imports.

According to the Ministry, the digitisation initiative is part of the Federal Government's efforts to reduce Nigeria's dependence on imported fish, protect local producers from unfair competition, and create an enabling environment for investment in domestic fish production. By improving regulatory processes and supporting local aquaculture, the policy aims to strengthen food security, create jobs, and support the long-term sustainability of Nigeria's fisheries sector.[3]

For fish importers, the immediate priority is to prepare for the anticipated transition to electronic licensing. Importers should ensure that their registration and eligibility records are up to date and monitor announcements from the Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy and the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture for confirmation of the platform's commencement date, application requirements and any transitional arrangements.

For local fish producers and prospective investors, the initiative signals the Federal Government's broader commitment to strengthening domestic aquaculture and reducing reliance on imported fish. However, the extent to which the reform will create new investment opportunities, affect import procedures or alter compliance obligations will depend on the platform's implementation framework and any subsequent regulatory directives. Businesses operating in the sector should therefore monitor further announcements to assess the reform's practical implications for their operations.

Nigerian Government approves N286 Billion for Maritime Infrastructure, Safety Projects

On June 29, 2026, the Federal Executive Council (FEC) approved approximately ₦286,000,000,000 (Two Hundred and Eighty-Six Billion Naira Only) for four maritime infrastructure and safety projects aimed at modernising Nigeria's ports, strengthening navigational safety and protecting the marine environment. The approved projects include procuring two marine pollution control vessels at approximately ₦59,050,000,000 (Fifty-nine billion, fifty million Naira Only), six pilot cutter boats valued at ₦80,030,000,000 (Eighty Billion, Thirty Million Naira Only), and two firefighting boats costing approximately ₦34,060,000,000 (Thirty-Four Billion, Sixty Million Naira Only). The Council also approved ₦112,850,000,000 (One Hundred and Twelve Billion, Eight Hundred and Fifty Million Naira Only) for the capital and maintenance dredging of the Escravos Channel under a public-private partnership involving the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) and private-sector operators.[4]

The investment is expected to modernise maritime operations, enhance emergency response capabilities, strengthen navigational safety, and support more efficient port services. For maritime operators and port users, the key issue will be the timely completion of these projects and the extent to which they improve vessel movements, emergency response and access to Nigerian ports and waterways.

Federal commitment

₦286 Billion approved maritime infrastructure

The Federal Executive Council approved approximately ₦286,000,000,000 on June 29, 2026, for four maritime projects covering marine-pollution control vessels, pilot cutters, firefighting boats and the dredging of the Escravos Channel under a public-private partnership with the Nigerian Ports Authority.

Nigeria and AD Ports Group Sign Memorandum of Understanding on Maritime Development

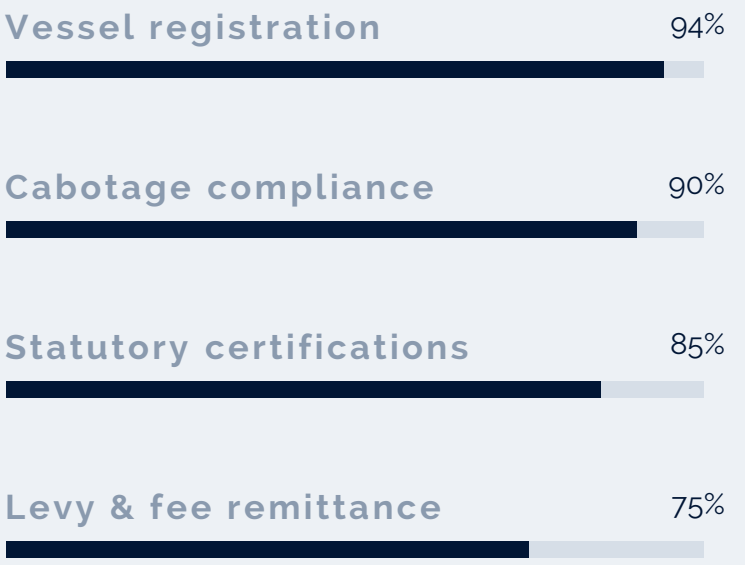
Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Marine and Blue Economy signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with AD Ports Group, a UAE-based ports and logistics infrastructure developer, to explore collaboration opportunities in port development, logistics, maritime services, and digital trade infrastructure.

The Honourable Minister of Marine and Blue Economy, Adegboyega Oyetola, led the Nigerian delegation, while the Chairman of AD Ports Group, Mohamed Hassan Alsuwaidi, led the Group's management team on the sidelines of Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week, held from January 11 – 15, 2026. The partnership is intended to provide a framework for exploring initiatives to enhance port efficiency, improve logistics connectivity, strengthen maritime services, and advance Nigeria's digital trade infrastructure.

According to the Ministry, the collaboration supports implementing its 10-year marine and blue economy agenda and leverages AD Ports Group's international expertise in integrated ports, logistics, and digital trade solutions. AD Ports Group also noted that the partnership reflects a shared ambition to identify long-term development opportunities that can support Nigeria's trade competitiveness, economic growth, and job creation as AD Ports Group expands its footprint across Africa.[5]

Compliance priority areas

Where NIMASA will focus enforcement and inspections in H1 2026.



Illustrative weight: which areas NIMASA's inspections will lean into during the campaign.

MSC Group Secures 45-Year concession for Nigeria's Snake Island port terminal with Nigerdock and agrees EPC contract with ITB and DEME for development

MSC Group, the parent company of the world's largest shipping line, Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC), has signed a landmark 45-year concession agreement with Nigerdock to develop, operate, and maintain a state-of-the-art container terminal within Snake Island Port (SIP) in Lagos.[6]

The agreement, announced on March 11, 2026, forms part of MSC Group's broader commitment to Nigeria's infrastructure and logistics sector, with investments exceeding USD $1,000,000,000 (One Billion United States Dollars). Alongside the concession, MSC has finalised an Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) contract with ITB Nigeria Ltd. and DEME Group to develop the terminal. The facility is expected to be completed by 2028.

The project is expected to ease congestion at Lagos ports, boost foreign direct investment, create jobs, and strengthen Nigeria's maritime capabilities. Snake Island Port, an 85-hectare facility operated by Nigerdock, already includes multiple terminals serving the broader Lagos port complex.

The project forms part of MSC Group's wider investment of over US$1,000,000,000 (One Billion United States Dollars) in Nigeria's infrastructure and logistics sector. It is expected to expand container-handling capacity at Snake Island Port, improve port operations, and strengthen Nigeria's capacity to handle regional and international maritime traffic.[7]

European Union approves the United Nations Convention on the International Effects of Judicial Sales of Ships[8]

The European Union has approved the United Nations Convention on the International Effects of Judicial Sales of Ships, also known as the "Beijing Convention on the Judicial Sale of Ships". The approval was effected on June 18, 2026, and, in doing so, the European Union reaffirmed the declaration it had made upon signing the Convention on March 14, 2024, pursuant to Article 18(2), specifying the matters covered by the Convention over which its Member States have transferred competence to the EU.

The United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) developed the Convention, which the United Nations General Assembly adopted on December 7, 2022, and which establishes a framework for recognising judicial sales of ships across participating jurisdictions. Under the Convention, a judicial sale that confers clean title on a purchaser under the law of the State where the sale takes place will have the same effect in other States Parties. This is intended to provide greater certainty for purchasers and creditors involved in cross-border ship sales, potentially improving sale prices and the recovery of outstanding maritime debts.[9]

For Nigeria, the Convention raises important considerations for ship financing, enforcing maritime claims, and selling vessels pursuant to court proceedings. Although Nigeria is not currently a party to the Convention, accession could help secure international recognition for qualifying judicial sales conducted in Nigeria, potentially broadening the pool of prospective buyers and improving creditors' prospects of recovery. The EU's approval therefore provides a useful reference point for considering whether Nigeria should take steps towards accession and the domestic legal adjustments that may be required.

Regulatory Updates

NIMASA Secures 150% Wage Increase for Nigerian Seafarers

During the 2026 Day of the Seafarer celebration in Lagos on June 25, 2026, NIMASA Director-General, Dr Dayo Mobereola, announced that the National Joint Industrial Council (NJIC) has incorporated the International Transport Workers' Federation/ International Labour Organisation (ITF/ILO) International Wage Scale into the conditions of service for Nigerian seafarers, raising their earnings by over 150%.[10] The announcement was accompanied by the launch of a digitised Seafarers' Discharge Book platform as part of NIMASA's broader digital transformation programme. However, the President of the Nigeria Merchant Navy Officers and Water Transport Senior Staff Association cautioned that over 70% of Nigerian shipping companies lack a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), meaning not all seafarers may benefit unless the government ensures all companies adopt the NJIC agreement.[11]

The revised wage scales are expected to apply to shipping companies covered by the NJIC agreement. For companies without existing Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs), extending the revised rates may require further engagement with seafarers' unions. At the same time, pressure from industry stakeholders may encourage wider adoption across the sector.

Seafarer wage reform

150%

Increase incorporated into seafarers' conditions of service after the NJIC aligned with the ITF/ILO International Wage Scale, announced on the 2026 Day of the Seafarer in Lagos.

New IMO Rules take effect January 1, 2026

Several amendments to key International Maritime Organisation (IMO) instruments took effect on January 1, 2026. These included amendments to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) and the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL), introducing mandatory reporting of lost freight containers, as well as amendments to the Seafarers' Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) Code introducing mandatory basic training on preventing and responding to bullying, harassment and sexual assault at sea.[12] Nigeria gives effect to applicable IMO instruments through its domestic maritime legislation, including the Merchant Shipping Act 2007, and the regulatory framework administered by NIMASA. Accordingly, the 2026 amendments affect Nigerian shipowners and operators, as well as maritime training institutions, depending on the requirements applicable to their vessels and operations.

Under the SOLAS amendments, which came into force on 1 January 2026, the master of a ship involved in the loss of freight containers is required to report the incident without delay, to the extent possible, to ships in the vicinity, the nearest coastal State and the flag State. The flag State must subsequently report the incident to the IMO. If a ship has been abandoned, or the master cannot submit a report, the company assumes the reporting obligation, to the extent possible.[13]

Beyond the new reporting obligations, amendments to the STCW Code also introduced mandatory minimum training requirements for seafarers on preventing and responding to violence and harassment, including bullying, harassment and assault,[14] which may require Nigerian STCW-approved institutions to review their relevant curricula in light of the updated minimum training requirements.

Separately, amendments to SOLAS Chapter II-2 took effect, requiring ships carrying oil fuel to obtain, before bunkering, a declaration signed and certified by the fuel oil supplier's representative confirming that the fuel complies with the applicable flashpoint requirements and identifying the test method used to determine its flashpoint. At the same time, Amendment 42-24 to the 2024 Edition of the International Maritime Dangerous Goods (IMDG) became mandatory, introducing updated classification and handling rules relevant to port operations nationwide. Vessels above specified tonnage thresholds and qualifying newbuilds also became subject to new ECDIS and electronic inclinometer requirements.[15]

Three IMO instruments amended at once

SOLAS

Mandatory reporting of lost containers

The master of any ship involved in the loss of freight containers must report the incident without delay to ships in the vicinity, the nearest coastal State and the flag State.

STCW Code

Training on harassment & assault at sea

Mandatory minimum training on preventing and responding to bullying, harassment, sexual assault and other violence at sea.

MARPOL & IMDG

Bunker fuel, dangerous goods & ECDIS

Oil-fuel flashpoint declarations before bunkering; Amendment 42-24 to the IMDG Code; new ECDIS and electronic inclinometer requirements for specified tonnage.

NIMASA Commences "OPERATION ZERO TOLERANCE" for Non-Compliance in Maritime Domain

NIMASA announced the commencement of Operation Zero Tolerance for Non-Compliance on 6 January 2026, with a 30-day window for self-audit and voluntary compliance beginning on 5 January 2026.[16] Under the operation, ship and vessel owners, operators and managers; international and national oil companies; masters and officers of merchant ships; shipping companies and agents; charterers; offshore installation and platform operators; vessel operators in free trade zones (FTZs); and other maritime stakeholders operating or intending to operate within Nigerian waters are required to ensure full compliance with applicable statutory requirements.

According to a statement by NIMASA Deputy Director/Head of Public Relations, Osagie Edward, these requirements include proper vessel registration, valid certifications, and updated ownership documentation under the Coastal and Inland Shipping (Cabotage) Act 2003.[17] The notice also emphasised the importance of timely payment and remittance of all statutory levies and fees as prescribed by law.

As part of the enforcement process, NIMASA will conduct random and targeted vessel inspections, verify documentation against its databases, and carry out physical and documentary compliance assessments at ports, terminals, and offshore locations. Operators will also be required to present proof of payment of all applicable levies and fees upon request. To allow stakeholders to regularise their operations, NIMASA granted a 30-day window, effective from January 5, 2026, to conduct self-audits and rectify identified deficiencies without penalty. However, outstanding financial levies remain subject to applicable interest.[18]

The agency warned that failure to comply after the grace period expires will trigger enforcement actions, including vessel detention, monetary penalties, withdrawal of waivers or operational licences, and denial of port clearance until full compliance is achieved.[19]

Enforcement actions available

01

Vessel detention

Vessels may be physically detained pending remediation, until full compliance is achieved across registration and documentation.

02

Monetary penalties

Outstanding levies remain subject to applicable interest, with monetary fines imposed for documented breaches.

03

Waivers & clearance

Withdrawal of operational licences or waivers, and denial of port clearance until compliance is verified.

Judicial Updates

A landmark constitutional decision

ATTORNEY-GENERAL OF LAGOS STATE v ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE FEDERATION & 35 ORS

(SC/CV/541/2025) (2026) 7 CLRN

At a glance

Court
Supreme Court of Nigeria

Subject
Federal vs. State control of waterfront lands

Co-plaintiffs
13 States joined Lagos State

> *"Federal authority does not extend to the ownership, administration, or development control of waterfront land."*

Background

Lagos State instituted an action against the Attorney-General of the Federation and other defendants, challenging the Federal Government's assertion of control over waterfront properties and adjoining lands through the National Inland Waterways Authority (NIWA) and the Federal Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. The challenge arose from federal notices requiring waterfront property owners to obtain relevant federal documentation. Thirteen other States: Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Ogun, Cross River, Kaduna, Enugu, Ebonyi, Ekiti, Benue, Rivers, Osun, Oyo and Anambra, joined Lagos State as co-plaintiffs in the constitutional challenge.[20] In the consolidated proceedings, the Attorney-General of Lagos State also challenged a press statement the Office of the Surveyor-General of the Federation issued on 2 July 2025. The statement asserted federal authority to enforce setbacks along shorelines, coastal roads, and lagoons; declared existing approvals within the affected setbacks revoked; and directed that approvals granted on or before 2 July 2025 be submitted to the federal office for verification and harmonisation.[21] The Attorney General of Lagos State contended that these actions unconstitutionally encroached on state territorial and land administration powers under the Land Use Act, since the National Assembly's legislative competence over inland waterways under Item 36(b) of the Exclusive Legislative List is confined to waterways it has formally designated as international or inter-state waterways.

Decision of the Supreme Court

The Supreme Court held that the National Assembly's power to legislate on inland waterways is conditional: designation as an international or inter-state waterway is a condition precedent to competence, except for the River Niger and its affluents, over which federal competence is unrestricted. However, the Court found that the "declaration" made under Section 10 of the NIWA Act effectively satisfies this designation requirement, meaning all navigable waterways in Lagos State listed in the Act's Second Schedule are validly covered as federal navigable waterways, and Section 11 (vesting management of these waterways in NIWA) is valid. Critically, the Court declared Sections 12 and 13 of the NIWA Act unconstitutional and void to the extent that they empower the Federal Government or NIWA to regulate or control adjoining lands for purposes unrelated to navigation, maritime activities and fishing. It affirmed that State Governments retain authority over adjoining lands for non-navigational land administration and development control, while federal powers relating to navigation, maritime activities and fishing remain intact. Applying the severability doctrine, the Court limited the declaration of invalidity to the constitutionally inconsistent aspects of Sections 12 and 13, leaving the remainder of the Act in force. On the consolidated suit, the Court also declared the Surveyor-General's July 2025 publication unconstitutional, invalid and void in its entirety.

Practical Implications for the Maritime Industry

The Supreme Court's decision provides important regulatory clarity for stakeholders operating within Nigeria's maritime and waterfront sectors. While the judgment preserves the Nigerian Inland Waterways Authority's (NIWA) authority to regulate navigation and related maritime activities on federally declared inland waterways, it significantly narrows the scope of federal control over adjoining waterfront land.

For maritime operators, vessel owners, terminal operators, and other users of inland waterways, compliance with NIWA's navigational and operational regulations remains mandatory on waterways validly declared under federal law. However, the Court has confirmed that federal authority does not extend to the ownership, administration, or development control of waterfront land, which falls within the constitutional competence of the respective State Governments.

The practical effect is that waterfront property owners, developers, port and terminal operators, and investors are expected to obtain land-use and physical development approvals from the relevant State planning and land administration authorities where their activities relate solely to non-navigational purposes. Federal approvals may still be required for activities affecting navigation, maritime safety, fishing or other matters within federal legislative competence. In particular, the decision effectively removes the legal basis for the Surveyor-General of the Federation's 2025 directive requiring federal approval for waterfront developments.[22]

From a commercial perspective, the judgment could reduce regulatory overlap, lower compliance costs, and minimise disputes arising from conflicting federal and State approval processes. These benefits will depend on how effectively the relevant authorities implement the decision and coordinate their respective responsibilities for navigation, environmental regulation, physical planning and land administration. It also provides greater certainty for investors and developers undertaking waterfront projects. Nevertheless, industry participants should remain attentive to any legislative response from the National Assembly, particularly any attempt to amend the statutory framework governing inland waterways or to redefine the scope of federally regulated waterways in a manner consistent with the constitutional principles affirmed by the Supreme Court.

Practical implications

For operators & investors

Compliance focus depends on the activity

Navigation and maritime safety remain federally regulated; non-navigational land matters now sit cleanly with State Governments. Investors should expect dual-track approvals where activities straddle both.

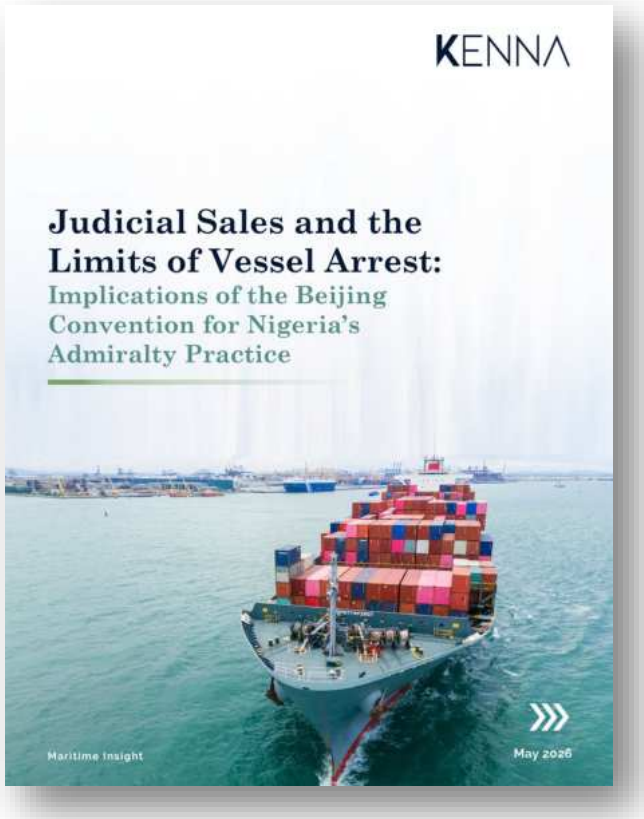
For waterfront developers

Reduced regulatory overlap expected

The decision removes the legal basis for the Surveyor-General's 2025 directive requiring federal approvals, with potential to lower compliance costs and reduce disagreement between federal and State processes.

Publications

Judicial Sales and the Limits of Vessel Arrest: Implications of the Beijing Convention for Nigeria's Admiralty Practice

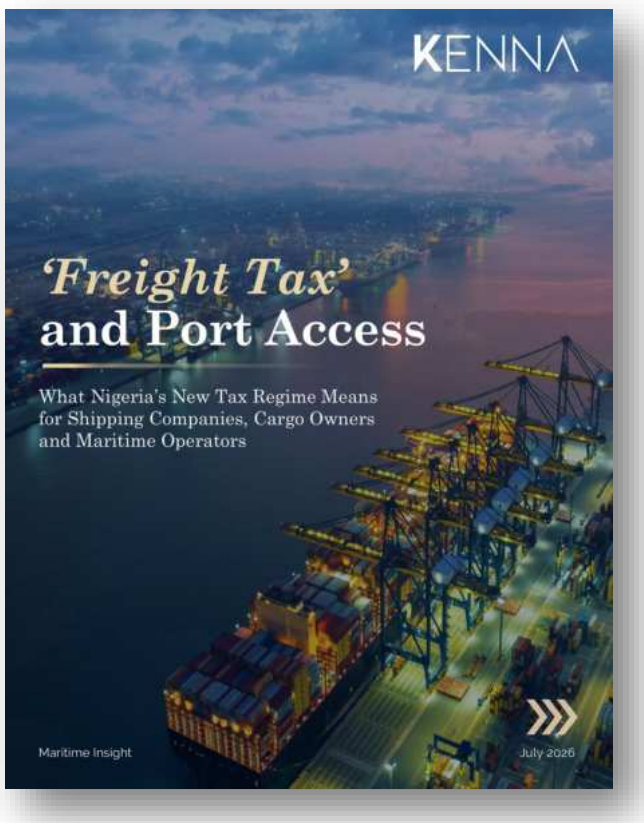


Ship arrest remains an important mechanism for securing maritime claims in Nigeria under the Admiralty Jurisdiction Act 1991, which governs admiralty proceedings before the Federal High Court and permits claims to be brought in rem against a vessel. However, the limited cross-border recognition of judicial sales has meant that vessels purchased through court-ordered sales may still face arrest abroad over claims arising before the sale. This uncertainty can discourage prospective buyers, depress vessel values and increase financing risks.

The United Nations Convention on the International Effects of Judicial Sales of Ships (the Beijing Convention on the Judicial Sale of Ships) entered into force on 17 February 2026, establishing a framework for recognising judicial sales across participating jurisdictions. For purchasers, creditors and financiers, this offers greater certainty regarding title to vessels sold through judicial proceedings and the enforcement of maritime claims

Read the full article on the **KENNA website**

Freight Tax and Port Access: What Nigeria's new tax regime means for shipping companies, cargo owners and maritime operators



For shipping companies, cargo owners, and maritime operators, the cost of doing business in Nigeria is no longer just a question of freight rates, port dues, terminal charges, or maritime levies. The tax treatment of freight-related income has become a direct compliance and transaction issue. Under the Nigeria Tax Act, 2025, a non-resident person engaged in transport by sea or air may be chargeable to tax in Nigeria where a ship or aircraft owned, leased or chartered by it calls at a Nigerian port and profits arise from the carriage of passengers, mails, livestock or goods shipped from, or loaded into, an aircraft or ship in Nigeria.

Although the statutory provision applies to both shipping and air transport, this article focuses on the maritime implications. Freight tax compliance is no longer solely a back-office matter for tax teams. It now affects documentation, port access, regulatory approvals, contract allocation of tax risk, shipping agency processes and the timing of cargo movement.

Read the full article on the **KENNA website**

Contributors

Emeka Opara
Partner, Maritime Practice Unit

Wisdom Green
Associate, Maritime Practice Unit

Bruno Ibegbunam
Associate, Maritime Practice Unit

For further information on the issues discussed in this article, contact our legal team at counsel@kennalp.com

Endnotes

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CONTACT

LAGOS
Kenna Place
8, Ogunyemi Road, Palace Way, Oniru PO Box 73002, Victoria Island,
Lagos

ABUJA
1st Floor, Novare Central,
Plot 502 Dalaba Street,
Wuse Zone 5, FCT 900285,
Abuja

ENUGU
Michael Place
3, Emmanuel Ngwu Street,
Thinker Corner, 400211
Enugu State.

+234 811 395 1052, +234 811 395 1053 | counsel@kennalp.com | www.kennalp.com