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Top 10 maritime lawyers 2022

Lloyd's List assesses those pulling the strings in the legal sector ahead of our annual ranking of the shipping industry's most influential people later this week. Legal professionals — both barristers and solicitors — form an integral part of the maritime industries, specialising in a challenging area of the law, spanning everything from the rules for the carriage of cargoes to piracy cases

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by Lloyd's List |

Use of English law and London arbitration makes the UK a natural centre for shipping law, though the US and Asia also play leading roles



BRIGHT: MAINTAINED HIS REPUTATION AS ONE OF ENGLISH LAW'S HEAVYWEIGHT SHIPPING BARRISTERS.

01 / Robert Bright, KC, 7KBW

7KBW's Robert Bright, KC maintained his reputation as one of English law's heavyweight shipping barristers with a resounding Court of Appeal win for Oaktree Capital Management.

The US asset management firm faced a case brought by three companies linked to a sanctions-designated Syrian businessman, following an earlier ruling that allowed Oaktree to terminate bareboat charters on two bulk carriers.

A scathing verdict from Lord Justice Males — agreed by Lord Justice Underhill and Lord Justice Newey — dismissed the companies' contention that they were no longer associated with their alleged principal as dishonest, and thus fatal to their case against forfeiture.

Mr Bright practices primarily as an advocate and case leader, with experience in a broad range of commercial litigation.



02 / Julian Clark, Ince

Full-time shipping lawyer; part-time rock n roll star. Former professional musician Julian Clark manages to combine a high-profile legal specialism in mediation, arbitration and litigation with regular fundraising gigs for shipping causes, including Stella Maris, the Mission to Seafarers and the Sailors' Society.

He has acted on prominent maritime cases, recently including the *Tresta Star* grounding, and was instrumental in securing Office of Foreign Assets Control sanctions delisting for PB Tankers.

He has also worked pro bono on a salvage agreement for the *Empire Windrush* wreck and is chair of the Comité Maritime International working group on cyber crime.



03 / Christine Ezcutari, Norton Rose Fulbright

Norton Rose has diversified well beyond its original shipping roots, but still sees shipping as its historic core and something to focus on, according to head of transport Christine Ezcutari.

Ms Ezcutari — who took over from her eminent predecessor Harry Theochari in 2019 — is a French national of Basque extraction and a company lifer, joining NRF's forerunner at its Paris office as a young lawyer in 1996.

Her practice centres on ship finance, especially the kind of tax-lease transactions that were a mainstay of French ship finance until they fell out of favour in the wake of the global financial crisis.

Outside of work, she loves theatre, travelling and music, including 1980s pop and classical. She also reads extensively, with a penchant for detective fiction from Agatha Christie to Scandi noir, as well as classic French authors such as Balzac.

04 / Leigh Hansson, Reed Smith

Leigh Hansson is a US-qualified lawyer who is primarily based in London, where she leads Reed Smith's sanctions team. Obviously, that is a specialism that is hugely in demand right now.



Her practice focuses on complex international trade matters, and she routinely represents big name shipping clients in high-profile sanctions matters involving the Office of Foreign Assets Control, the Directorate of Defense Trade Controls, the Bureau of Industry and Security, US Customs and Border Protection and other federal government agencies.

In 2022, Ms Hansson and her team have had their work cut out, advising on sanctions imposed against Russia and Belarus after February's incursion into Ukraine, which has had a major impact on the industry. Indeed, they have handled more than 2,800 maritime-specific matters since the tanks rolled over the border.

She has been widely quoted in the media, including in Lloyd's List and its sister publication Insurance Day, as well as the Financial Times.



05 / Jean Koh, HFW

Jean Koh is head of dry shipping for HFW, and specialises in contentious litigation, handling contractual disputes related to charterparties, bills of lading, cargo claims, commodities, trade disputes, memoranda of understanding, bunkers and shipbuilding.

While she works out of London, Ms Koh has a particular focus on the Japanese market. She is also fluent in Mandarin.

Ms Koh is dual qualified in England and Wales and in Singapore; she has also worked for the prominent law firm in its Shanghai and Piraeus offices.

She has also written for Lloyd's List, displaying her expertise in a recent 'explainer' article detailing how war cancellation clauses can be powerful negotiating tools for owners who wish to refuse to call at Ukrainian or Russian ports, or even get out of an unprofitable charterparty.



06 / Gina Lee-Wan, Allen & Gledhill

Gina Lee-Wan is one of the most highly regarded lawyers in Singapore's maritime world.

The co-head of Allen & Gledhill's maritime and aviation practice regularly acts for major multinational lenders and shipowners on shipping and offshore finance, and high-value restructurings.

She also brings a wealth of experience in sale and purchase agreements and ship leasing.

Ms Lee-Wan was ranked as a 'star individual' in the Chambers Asia-Pacific 2022 awards. A client was quoted as saying that she provides "excellent" service and has earned their "complete confidence".

She is also consistently ranked in the top tier of leading individuals in shipping by Chambers Global, Chambers Asia-Pacific and The Legal 500 Asia Pacific.

Ms Lee-Wan has been actively engaged with the local shipping community, wearing many hats including a director of Edge Insurance Brokers (Singapore) and John Swire & Sons (Southeast Asia), as well as the chairman of the Singapore Shipping Association's Legal and Insurance Committee.



07 / John Russell, KC, Quadrant Chambers

Quadrant Chambers' John Russell, KC is probably best known in shipping law circles for his successful appearances in two landmark Supreme Court cases, *Volcafe v CSAV* and *CMA CGM Libra*.

He is a past Shipping Silk of the Year in both the Legal 500 UK Awards and the Chambers & Partners Bar Awards, and is ranked for both shipping and commodities in both directories.

Educated at Campbell College Belfast and Oxford, Mr Russell was called to the Bar in 2003. He was appointed KC in 2014.



08 / Brian Devine, Norton Rose

Brian Devine is a partner at Norton Rose Fulbright, where he heads the transportation practice in the US.

He primarily represents financial institutions and borrowers, specialising in maritime-related assets.

A member of the Maritime Law Association of the US, he counsels domestic and international clients on finance and security arrangements; mergers, acquisitions, and divestitures; sale and purchase; and more.

His lengthy experience includes counselling Global Ship Lease in its all-stock merger with Poseidon Containers and K&T Marine in 2018, which resulted in a containership fleet worth \$1.3bn. He also participated in the \$280m refinancing of Eagle Bulk's fleet in 2017, where he counselled banks.

Mr Devine has been recognised by Chambers Global, Asia-Pacific and USA.



09 / Michael Kim, Stephenson Harwood

Michael Kim is the managing partner at Stephenson Harwood's Seoul office.

As an expert in litigation, including alternative dispute resolution, Mr Kim's transactional work includes advising on shipbuilding and offshore contracts, ship finance and outward investment from Korea to Europe and Central Asia.

2022's upsurge in newbuilding orders — particularly for large liquefied natural gas carriers and dual-fuel ships — at South Korean yards, as well the Russia-related sanctions must have kept him busy.

Mr Kim's clients include major shipowners, shipbuilders, insurers, traders, securities houses, banks and P&I clubs in London and Hong Kong.

He has been ranked by Chambers and Partners as a leading individual in the 'Shipping International Firms' category in South Korea for eight consecutive years since the foundation of the law firm's Seoul office.



10 / Lauren Wilgus, Blank Rome

Blank Rome's New York-based partner Lauren Wilgus has more than 20 years' experience in the field of international and maritime litigation and alternate dispute resolution.

She has been singled out by a prominent directory of US lawyers as one of the leading women in business law, and is ranked in the US editions of both

Chambers and Legal 500.

A graduate of Rutgers Law School, her early career saw her work as a claims associate in the US office of MOL and as an account executive with Thomas Miller (Americas).

The Top 10 maritime lawyers list is compiled by the Lloyd's List editorial team in conjunction with our colleagues at Lloyd's Law Reports

Sources: Lloyd's Law Reports, Lloyd's List

***Our colleagues at Lloyd's Law Reports can benchmark activity and results in shipping litigation and are finalising data for the 2022 legal year; contact yvonne.knock@informa.com to inquire**

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Lloyd's List's Top 10 for the various shipping sectors will be published daily in the lead-up to One Hundred People 2022 — our annual ranking of the most influential players shaping shipping — which will be revealed on Thursday December 1