

Evergreen ponders offloading Ever Given's cargo within Suez Canal

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The charterer of ULCV Eber Given, Evergreen, was reported to be mulling the possibility of offloading the cargo on board the detained ULCV Ever Given, in order to deliver the vessel's cargo to its customers.

Evergreen said last week that it was looking at the possibility of getting the cargo of the Ever Given and the vessel itself to be treated as separate entities in legal terms, which could open the door to the cargo being released while the vessel remained detained.

Ever Given has been stranded in the Great Bitter Lake for inspections and then under a court order detention ever since it was removed from the southern end of the Suez Canal on March 29th. The Suez Canal Authority is seeking \$916m in damages from Ever Given's owner, Japan-based Shoei Kisen.

All other parties consider the demand excessive, and there is unhappiness that the SCA and Egypt have not adopted the normal procedure of permitting the owner or insurer to post a bond, which frees up the vessel while the, often drawn-out over several years, legal differences proceed. The detention of the vessel, without any prospect of release, leaves the container owners, and Evergreen, somewhat "in the middle".

Evergreen has joined Shoei Kisen and Technical Manager Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement in saying that SCA's demand is unjustified. The estimated direct cost to the SCA has been estimated at between \$100m and \$200m. The demand for \$300m for "loss of reputation" and another \$300m for a "salvage bonus" (which does not include the cost payable to the salvors, which would normally fall to the hull insurers rather than to the liability insurers).

It is not just the cargo that has the appearance of being held as collateral damage. The crew too, apart from two who have been allowed to return home, are also stuck on board.

They have reportedly been denied permission to disembark for a crew change or to take shore leave.

General Average has been declared, but owners would be understandably reluctant to fork out cash when there is no guarantee that so doing will lead to the release of their containers.

Citing an unnamed individual involved in the process the *Wall Street Journal* said that Evergreen was considering the option of moving the containers to other ships and delivering them to the clients in Europe. Empty container vessels could be chartered to make special-purpose voyages to pick up the cargo. That would appear more likely than buying empty slots on other container ships operating on routes to Europe that are passing through the Canal – not least because there are not all that many empty slots currently available.

However, either transfer option would require Ever Given to berth at a terminal equipped with STS cranes large enough to handle the ULCV's tall and wide stacks.