

SHIPS & PORTS (NIGERIA MARITIME) · NIGERIA

NIMASA Detains Four Ships Over Cabotage Violations

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Nigeria's maritime regulator NIMASA has detained four vessels — MT Holmes, MT Fujairah Energy, JS Gratitude, and MT Bora — in an enforcement crackdown on violations of the country's Cabotage Act. The detentions signal a stepped-up regulatory posture from NIMASA toward foreign-flagged or non-compliant tonnage operating in Nigerian coastal and inland waters.

The Cabotage Act restricts coastal trade in Nigerian waters to vessels that are Nigerian-owned, Nigerian-crewed, Nigerian-built, and Nigerian-flagged, with waivers available under defined conditions. NIMASA's enforcement action against four named vessels simultaneously suggests the agency is moving beyond periodic warnings toward consequential detention as its primary compliance tool. The article does not specify the nature of each vessel's violation, their operators, or the cargo or trade routes involved.

For Norwegian service companies and vessel operators active in Nigerian waters, this development carries direct operational significance. Nigeria remains one of the busiest offshore energy markets in sub-Saharan Africa, and the waters off the Niger Delta host a dense concentration of support vessels, platform supply vessels, anchor handlers, and specialist service craft — all of which fall within the Cabotage Act's scope. Non-compliance with crewing, ownership, or flagging requirements exposes operators to detention, financial penalties, and reputational damage with the Nigerian National Petroleum Company and international operators who rely on regulatory clearance as a condition of contract.

The timing is notable. NIMASA has periodically intensified Cabotage enforcement ahead of policy reviews or in response to pressure from domestic shipping interests seeking to protect market share from foreign competition. Norwegian companies operating PSVs, subsea support vessels, or specialist well-services craft in Nigerian waters should treat this crackdown as a signal to audit their current vessel documentation, waiver status, and crewing compliance before the next port call or contract renewal.

More broadly, the detentions reflect a wider pattern across West African coastal states of tightening local-content and maritime-access rules as a tool of economic nationalism. Companies planning vessel mobilisations to Nigeria for upcoming offshore campaigns — whether for drilling support, FPSO hook-up, or pipeline work — should factor in extended pre-mobilisation compliance checks and engage Lagos-based maritime legal counsel early. The cost of a NIMASA detention in terms of day-rate losses, demurrage, and contract penalties can rapidly exceed the cost of upfront compliance advisory.

Why this matters to partners and clients of Saga

Norwegian companies with vessels operating in Nigerian waters should immediately review Cabotage Act waiver status, crewing documentation, and flagging compliance in light of NIMASA's active enforcement posture. This is a monitoring and compliance issue, not a procurement opportunity — no contract or tender is open. Relationship-building with Nigerian maritime legal advisors and local shipping partners who hold valid cabotage credentials is the recommended near-term action.

PARTNER ANGLES

- **Subsea/FPSO:** Operators mobilising subsea support or FPSO hook-up vessels to Nigeria must verify cabotage waiver approvals are in place before arrival to avoid costly detention.
- **Drilling:** Drilling contractors using foreign-flagged supply or anchor-handling vessels offshore Nigeria should audit crewing ratios and ownership structures against current NIMASA requirements.

- **Service:** Well-services companies with specialist craft in Nigerian waters should engage Lagos maritime counsel to confirm compliance ahead of any upcoming offshore campaign.
- **Pipeline:** Pipeline lay and inspection vessel operators planning Niger Delta work should factor extended pre-mobilisation compliance checks into project schedules and budgets.

[Original source: Ships & Ports \(Nigeria maritime\) →](#)

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