

# KNOCKING AT AN OPEN DOOR

The English law approach  
to mutual indemnities in the  
offshore oil and gas sector

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## Contents

Executive summary.....	1
Introduction – from “Piper Alpha” to “Deepwater Horizon” .....	2
Issue 1 – The Extent of Groups.....	5
Issue 2 – Dealing with Negligence.....	6
Issue 3 – Application in the Case of Breach .....	9
Issue 4 – Wilful Misconduct.....	11
Issue 5 – Addressing Consequential Losses.....	13
Future Trends.....	20
About Haynes Boone CDG .....	23



### Executive Summary

The ability of an offshore contractor to survive a major offshore disaster often hinges on whether the risks of loss and damage have been appropriately allocated under its offshore contract. It is for this reason that so-called “knock for knock” indemnity clauses attract the most attention both at the drafting stages of an offshore contract and following a major incident during offshore operations.

This guide provides a summary of key issues relating to the drafting of knock for knock indemnity clauses and considers the evolution of the interpretation of these provisions by the English courts.

## Introduction – from “Piper Alpha” to “Deepwater Horizon”

Over the course of the last 35 years, the offshore oil and gas industry has witnessed a series of catastrophic accidents that resulted in loss of life and wide-spread pollution. The lessons learnt have not only led to improvements in safety and technology but have helped to mold the way in which parties contractually allocate the risks of offshore oil and gas activities between themselves.

The deadliest offshore disaster in history was the series of explosions and fires on the “Piper Alpha” platform on 6 July 1988, which resulted in the deaths of 167 men, injuries to 61 survivors and the total destruction of the platform – which at that time accounted for approximately 10 percent of UK North Sea oil and gas production.

The operators of the platform, Caledonia North Sea Ltd (formerly Occidental Petroleum (Caledonia) Ltd), its co-venturers and insurers settled the fatal accident and personal injury claims between themselves within months of the disaster. They then

brought proceedings to enforce contractual indemnities given by the 24 contractors concerned, which had employed 189 of the men killed or injured.

The trial of this action became the longest civil trial in British legal history, lasting almost three and a half years. The House of Lords held<sup>1</sup> that Caledonia and its insurers were able to recover under the so-called “knock for knock” indemnities provided to Caledonia by its contractors under their respective contracts. In the judgment, the House of Lords also gave express recognition to the industry practice of knock for knock indemnities in the offshore sector.

More recently, the Macondo disaster of 20 April 2010 dominated news around the world for weeks; an uncontrollable expulsion of oil followed a blow-out from a well being drilled for BP by Transocean’s “Deepwater Horizon” drilling rig. 11 workers died, 17 others were seriously injured, and a reported 3.2 million barrels of oil spilled into the Gulf of Mexico over 87 days, making

it one of the largest environmental disasters in US history. The accident had far-reaching effects on the lives of tens of thousands of people, from the families of those killed and injured to those whose livelihoods depend on the Gulf of Mexico, as well as the broader oil and gas industry. In July 2015, BP reached a settlement with the US federal and state entities. BP agreed to be liable for US\$5.5 billion in fines under the Clean Water Act, US\$8 billion in clean-up costs and more than US\$6 billion in damages to nearly 65,000 claimants and to 400 local government entities affected by the spill.

Transocean and BP engaged in significant litigation to determine the extent of their respective liabilities to each other and the enforceability of the drilling contract indemnities in protecting Transocean from third party claimants affected by pollution damage. The drilling contract between them was governed by US federal maritime law. In keeping with usual practice, the contract included an indemnity from BP to Transocean for pollution risks below the surface of the water and stated that each of the indemnities given under the contract would equally apply in the case of the indemnified party’s “gross negligence.”

**“The trial of this action became the longest civil trial in British legal history, lasting almost three and a half years.”**

<sup>1</sup>*Caledonia North Sea Limited v British Telecommunications Plc (Scotland) and Others [2002] UKHL4*

In considering the enforceability of such indemnities, the United States Eastern District of Louisiana District Court held that:

- a) BP was required to indemnify Transocean for compensatory damage claims asserted by third parties against Transocean, even if the claims had resulted from the latter’s “gross negligence”;
- b) BP was not required to indemnify Transocean for any punitive damages awarded to third parties; and
- c) BP was not required to indemnify Transocean for civil penalties assessed against Transocean for breach of its statutory and regulatory liabilities under the US Clean Water Act; notably the court also expressly indicated that it would hold similarly concerning penalties assessed for breach of statutory and regulatory obligations under the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act.

Specifically, the federal court considered that the “public policy” purpose behind punitive damages and civil penalties levied as deterrents under the Clean Water Act (which is to discourage defendants from conducting themselves unreasonably and to reduce the risk of future pollution incidents) and the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (which governs leasing and lease activities

on federal oil and gas lands in the offshore areas of the US and thus regulates ongoing compliance with all aspects of operations, not just upset or pollution events, and provides for criminal penalties in addition to civil) would be defeated if liability could be passed to another party by means of a contractual indemnity.

Accordingly, Transocean could not rely on the contractual indemnities to recover the punitive damages or regulatory penalties assessed against it following the disaster.

There is no concept of punitive damages in English contract law and although punitive damages are not therefore claimable as a matter of principle in a direct action, a contractual indemnity, properly drafted, can effectively encompass liability incurred for punitive damages. The ability under English law to allocate knock for knock indemnities regardless of the degree of default is hugely advantageous for offshore contractors.

While knock for knock indemnities and pollution indemnities are well established in the offshore oil and gas industry, their scope and interpretation are often far from straightforward. We therefore explore some of the key issues that arise in drafting effective knock for knock indemnities in offshore contracts.

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## ISSUE 1 – THE EXTENT OF GROUPS

One of the main purposes of knock for knock indemnities is to limit the substantial risks involved in any significant offshore project to a level acceptable to the Contractor and to avoid the need for multiple and overlapping layers of insurance. This is achieved by permitting the field operator (the “Company”) and the various contractors to carry insurance covering their own equipment and personnel rather than the damage this equipment and personnel can cause to others.

Any significant offshore development will, however, involve numerous contractors and subcontractors and the knock for knock indemnities will usually be extended to all members of each party’s group. Consequently, the Contractor and the Company indemnify each other against any claims arising in connection with damage to property or injury to personnel of any member of their respective groups, including, if they fall within the Company group, the Company’s other contractors and their subcontractors.

Thus, if the Contractor is held liable for damage caused to property belonging to a member of the Company’s Group, the Company will be obliged to indemnify the Contractor against this liability. The Company Group member may be entitled

to bring its claim against the Contractor, but will, where it is operating under a parallel indemnity scheme with the Company, be obliged to indemnify the Company against its liability to the Contractor, thereby rendering the process circular.

The ambit of the Company and Contractor Groups can, however, be the subject of considerable disagreement, with some of the larger oil companies in particular being reluctant to extend their indemnities to cover damage and injury caused to all of their other contractors and subcontractors and their property and personnel. This reluctance reflects the administration required, the extent of the risk involved in obtaining and enforcing “back-to-back” indemnities from these other contractors and the complexity of field ownership structures.

### DRAFTING NOTE

To the extent that a Contractor is not able to extend the definition of Company Group to include all of the Company’s other contractors, then it should consider entering into mutual hold harmless agreements with each of these contractors on an individual basis and should aim to ensure consistency of terms as much as possible.

## ISSUE 2 — DEALING WITH NEGLIGENCE

### (a) “Simple” negligence

In *Canada Steamship Lines Ltd v The King*<sup>2</sup>, a fire caused as a result of negligence of the Crown’s employees gave rise to a claim by Canada Steamship against the Crown for damages. The Privy Council held that since the fire had been caused by the negligence of the Crown’s employees, it was not exempted from liability or entitled to an indemnity under the terms of the contract. Lord Morton, sitting on the Privy Council, formulated the following three-stage approach to guide the interpretation of clauses purporting to exclude liability for negligence altogether:

- 1) If the clause contains language which expressly exempts [the defendant] from the consequence of the negligence of his own servants, effect must be given to that provision;
- 2) If there is no express reference to negligence, the court must consider whether the words used are wide enough, in their ordinary meaning, to cover negligence on the part of the servants of the [defendant];
- 3) If the words used are wide enough for the above purpose, the court must then consider whether the exclusion clause is capable of applying to negligent and non-negligent breaches, which are not fanciful. If it is, then one should approach the exclusion clause on the basis that it was not intended to exclude liability for negligence unless the clause makes such an intention clear.

Although the *Canada Steamship* case was cited with approval by both the Court of Appeal and the House of Lords in subsequent years, in the case of *HIH Casualty and General Insurance Ltd v Chase Manhattan Bank*<sup>3</sup>, Lord Bingham commented on Lord Morton of Henryton’s statement in *Canada Steamship*, as follows:

In recent years the English courts have softened their approach to exemption clauses<sup>4</sup> and indemnity causes and have increasingly moved away from any strict application of the *Canada Steamship* guidelines.

*“Lord Morton was giving helpful guidance on the proper approach to interpretation and not laying down a code. The passage does not provide a litmus test which, applied to the terms of the contract, yields a certain and predictable result. The Court’s task of ascertaining what the parties intended, in their particular commercial context, remains.”*

In a case involving an indemnity clause contained in a share purchase agreement, the Court of Appeal in *Capita (Banstead 2011) Ltd v RFIB Group Ltd*<sup>5</sup> quoted with approval the following passage from *Capita (Banstead 2011) Ltd v RFIB Group Ltd*<sup>6</sup> (where Popplewell J summarised the principles to be gleaned from the authorities in this area at the time):

#### DRAFTING NOTE

The simplest way of ensuring that the indemnities apply notwithstanding negligence (if that is the parties’ intention) is to state so expressly in the indemnity provisions. But see our comments below on “gross” negligence and wilful misconduct.



*“1. A clear intention must appear from the words used before the Court will reach the conclusion that one party has agreed to exempt the other from the consequences of his own negligence or indemnify him against losses so caused. [The underlying rationale is that clear words are needed because it is inherently improbable that one party should agree to assume responsibility for the consequences of the other’s negligence: Smith at p. 168D-E; Ailsa Craig at p.970; HIH at [11], [63]; Lictor at [36].*

*2. The Canada Steamship principles are not to be applied mechanistically and ought to be considered as no more than guidelines; the task is always to ascertain what the parties intended in their particular commercial context in accordance with the established principles of construction: ....They nevertheless form a useful guide to the approach where the commercial context makes it improbable that in the absence of clear words one party would have agreed to assume responsibility for the relevant negligence of the other.*

*3. These principles apply with even greater force to dishonest wrongdoing, because of the inherent improbability of one party assuming responsibility for the consequences of dishonest wrongdoing by the other. [The law, on public policy grounds, does not permit a party to exclude liability for the consequences of his own fraud; and if the consequences of fraudulent or dishonest misrepresentation or deceit by his agent are to be excluded, such intention must be expressed in clear and unmistakable terms on the face of the contract. General words will not serve. The language must be such as will alert a commercial party to the extraordinary bargain he is invited to make because in the absence of words which expressly refer to dishonesty the common assumption is that the parties will act honestly: HIH at [16], [68]-[75], [97].”*

<sup>2</sup>[1952] A.C. 192

<sup>3</sup>[2003] UKHL 6

This three-stage approach was discussed in *Persimmon Homes Ltd v Ove Arup & Partners Ltd*<sup>7</sup>, where Jackson LJ commented:

*“Over the last 66 years there has been a long running debate about the effect of that passage [in the Canada Steamship case] and the extent to which it is still good law. In hindsight we can see that it is not satisfactory to deal with exemption clauses and indemnity clauses in one single compendious passage. It is one thing to agree that A is not liable to B for the consequences of A’s negligence. It is quite another thing to agree that B must compensate A for the consequences of A’s own negligence...my impression is that, at any rate in commercial contracts, the Canada Steamship principles (insofar as they survive) are now more relevant to indemnity clauses than to exemption clauses”.*

<sup>4</sup>Please also note the paper on “Limiting Your Liability – Drafting Effective Limitation Clauses in Offshore Drilling Contracts” by Glenn Kangisser, Partner.

<sup>5</sup>[2015] EWCA Civ 1310

<sup>6</sup>[2014] EWHC 2197 (Comm)

<sup>7</sup>[2017] EWCA Civ 373

**(b) “Gross” negligence<sup>7</sup>**

Judge Carl Barbier issued a hugely significant ruling in September 2014 in the litigation resulting from the Macondo blow-out. The finding that this “was the result of gross negligence and wilful misconduct” on the (b) “Gross” negligence<sup>8</sup>

Judge Carl Barbier issued a hugely significant ruling in September 2014 in the litigation resulting from the Macondo blow-out. The finding that this “*was the result of gross negligence and wilful misconduct*” on the part of BP made it possible for courts to impose penalties of up to US\$18 billion under the US Clean Water Act. The finding of gross negligence and wilful misconduct is clearly very significant in terms of the level of damages payable by BP, but what is the approach of the English courts to “simple” and “gross” negligence?

While gross negligence has an established meaning under English criminal law, under English civil law, courts have historically held that gross negligence is not distinct from simple negligence.

In 1997, Lord Justice Millett in the Court of Appeal in *Armitage v Nurse*<sup>9</sup> said that “*It would be very surprising if our law drew the line between liability for ordinary negligence and liability for gross negligence. In this respect, English law differs from civil law systems, for it has always drawn a sharp distinction between negligence, however gross, on the one hand and fraud, bad faith and wilful misconduct on the other*”. He did refer to it being a difference “*merely one of degree*.”

However, if commercial parties use the term “gross negligence” in indemnity and limitation of liability provisions in a contract governed by English law, the English courts now appear willing to give meaning to “gross negligence” as being something beyond simple negligence. In *Camerata Property Inc. v Credit Suisse Securities (Europe) Ltd*<sup>10</sup>, Mr Justice Andrew Smith said that, when interpreting references to “gross negligence” in a modern contract, the correct question “*is not whether generally gross negligence is a familiar concept in English civil law, but the meaning of the expression*” in the contract.

Since the expressions “negligence” and “gross negligence” were both used in the contract, he could not accept that the parties intended the term “gross negligence” to mean mere negligence. The Judge stated that the distinction between gross negligence and negligence is one of degree and not of kind and as such “*it is not easy to define or even to describe with any precision ...*” While there is still no accepted definition of gross negligence under English law, if the term is to be used in an English law contract without being specifically defined, the courts will seek to interpret the phrase in the context of the contract as a whole.

**DRAFTING NOTE**

In order to avoid such uncertainty, if the parties to a contract wish to make no distinction between gross and simple negligence, the parties should refer in their contracts only to “negligence” or, alternatively, “negligence (in any form).” If, however, the parties wish to provide that the indemnities and limitations in the contract will apply in the case of simple negligence, but not in the case of gross negligence, then they should include a specific definition of “gross negligence” in the contract and also clarify whose gross negligence is to be carved out from the indemnities and limitations in the contract, so the lines of demarcation are clearly drawn.

<sup>8</sup> This topic is addressed in more detail in Haynes and Boone CDG, LLP’s Briefing Note “The US\$18 billion question – is there a distinction between “gross” negligence and “simple” negligence under English law? By Glenn Kangisser and Teena Grewal

<sup>9</sup> [1997] EWCA Civ 1279

<sup>10</sup> [2011] EWHC 479 (Comm)

**ISSUE 3 — APPLICATION IN THE CASE OF BREACH**

While the practice that mutual knock for knock indemnities are expressed to apply irrespective of negligence is well established, less consideration is often given at the drafting stage to the extent to which the indemnities should also apply where the damage is caused by breach of contract or breach of statutory duty:

**(a) Breach of contract**

In the *Super Scorpio II (1998)*<sup>11</sup>, the Contractor and the Company exchanged knock for knock indemnities, with the Company (Elf Exploration) agreeing to indemnify the Contractor (Smedvig) against all claims in respect of or in connection with damage to Company’s Items. Smedvig undertook to “*take all necessary care of Company’s Items as required by good oil and gas industry practice and to return them to the Company in their original condition*” and “*to ensure the storage, safekeeping, protection and the general maintenance by its personnel of Company’s Items*.”

During offshore operations, a Company Item, the “Super Scorpio II,” a remotely operated vehicle (ROV), was damaged by the negligence of one of Smedvig’s employees. The owners of the “Super Scorpio II” obtained damages from Smedvig for the cost of repairing the ROV, and Smedvig in turn sought an indemnity from the Company against this liability.

Elf accepted that the ROV was a Company Item but contended that the Company’s obligation to

indemnify the Contractor in respect of any damage done to a Company Item did not apply where the act which gave rise to the claim was itself a breach by the Contractor of its obligation under the contract to take all necessary care of the Company’s Item. The Court held that the allocation of risk in the contractual indemnities was clear. The Contractor remained obliged to take care of any Company Item entrusted to it, but the financial consequences of any damage to property caused by lack of care were nonetheless dealt with under the knock for knock indemnity regime.

**(b) Breach of statutory duty**

In *EE Caledonia Ltd v Orbit Valve*<sup>12</sup>, the defendant engineers agreed to supply one of their service engineers to work on the “Piper Alpha” which was jointly owned and operated by the claimants. Under the contract, each agreed to indemnify “*the other ... from and against any claim ... or liability (including the cost of litigation) arising by reason of any injury to or death of an employee ... of the indemnifying party, resulting from or in any way connected with the performance of this Order*.”

The service engineer was killed in the explosion and fire on the rig whilst off duty and his dependants successfully sued the claimants for negligence and breach of statutory duty. They, in turn, started proceedings under the indemnity clause in their contract with the engineer’s employers, the defendants.

<sup>11</sup> [1998] 2 Lloyd’s Rep. 659

<sup>12</sup> [1994] 1 W.L.R. 1515



The main issue was whether the party, whose negligence, combined with breach of statutory duty, had caused the death of the other's employee, could claim an indemnity under this clause. The claimants argued that the clause aimed to make an employer liable for injury to or death of his employee even where that had been caused by the other party's negligence or negligence combined with a breach of statutory duty.

The Court of Appeal held that while the wording of the indemnity was potentially wide

enough to include death and personal injury caused by negligence, an alternative cause of action, namely for losses caused by breach of statutory duty, potentially also fell within its framework. Since the alternative cause of action was not fanciful or remote, applying the Canada Steamship principles, the Court held that the possibility of that other cause of action meant that the claimants could not rely upon the indemnity given to it since their own negligence and breach of statutory duty had together caused the death of the defendant's employee.

#### DRAFTING NOTE

In order to address the issues referred to above, it is advisable to provide that the indemnities apply both in the case of negligence and breach of duty (contractual, statutory or otherwise) - if this is what the parties intend.

## ISSUE 4 – WILFUL MISCONDUCT

Although it is common to provide that indemnities apply regardless of the indemnified party's negligence, the issue of whether such indemnities apply in the event of the indemnified party's wilful misconduct is much more controversial. The approach of the English courts to wilful misconduct is summarised in the following cases:

*In National Semiconductors (UK) Ltd v UPS Ltd*<sup>12</sup>, a valuable cargo of semiconductors belonging to the claimant was to be delivered by the defendant to Milan.

The driver of the vehicle carrying the semiconductors parked in a street while waiting for the time when the vehicle could be unloaded. He avoided an area where he knew it was unsafe to park and chose a well lit street, then went to eat at a restaurant from which he could not see the vehicle, against company instructions. Upon his return, the

vehicle had vanished. The claimant sought to recover the full value of the cargo on the grounds of the wilful misconduct of the driver.

Mr Justice Longmore reviewed previous authorities, and summarised that in order for wilful misconduct to be proved, there must be either:

- (i) an intention to do something which the person knows to be wrong; or
- (ii) a reckless act in the sense that the person is aware that loss may result from his act and yet does not care whether loss will result or not. Recklessness involved somebody taking a risk which he knew he ought not to take.

On the facts, the Judge held that the claimant had not established wilful misconduct since there was no conscious taking of risk by the driver.

<sup>12</sup> [1996] 2 Lloyd's Rep 212

#### DRAFTING NOTE

In order to avoid uncertainty as to whether or not an indemnity or an exclusion or limitation of liability clause applies in the event of a party's wilful misconduct, the parties should specify in the contract whether the indemnities, exclusion and limitation of liability clauses are to apply in the event of wilful misconduct and define what conduct constitutes wilful misconduct.



In deciding that the clause was enforceable and covered the damage in question, the Court said that, notwithstanding the apparently wide wording used in the clause when considered in light of the purpose of the contract as a whole, it would not cover loss and damage caused by dishonesty or arbitrary refusal to ship the goods.

*Mitsubishi Corp v Eastwind Transport Ltd and others*<sup>13</sup> related to the applicability of an exclusion clause in a contract of carriage to damage to goods caused during the voyage. The exclusion clause provided that the shipowner “shall not be responsible for loss or damage to or in connection with the Goods of any kind whatsoever (including deterioration, delay or loss of market) however caused (whether by unseaworthiness or unfitness of the vessel...or by faults, errors or negligence, or otherwise howsoever).”

In deciding that the clause was enforceable and covered the damage in question, the Court said that, notwithstanding the apparently wide wording used in the clause when considered in light of the purpose of the contract as a whole, it would not cover loss and damage caused by dishonesty; it would not be strong enough to relieve the carrier from liability for loss or for damage to the goods caused by it arbitrarily refusing to ship them to the port of discharge at all.

<sup>13</sup> [2004] EWHC 2924

## ISSUE 5 — ADDRESSING CONSEQUENTIAL LOSSES

Most offshore oil and gas contracts will also exclude the liability of either party for its, and its group’s, own “consequential loss.” The term “consequential loss” will normally be broadly defined in a contract so as to include, among other things, any loss or deferral of production, loss of product, loss of revenue and loss of profit, and the parties will usually also agree to indemnify each other and the members of their respective groups against such loss.

Under English law, losses for breach of contract are recoverable if the two-limbed test of remoteness in *Hadley v Baxendale*<sup>14</sup> is satisfied.

The first limb allows the recovery of losses which arise directly and naturally from the breach of contract and which are reasonably foreseeable in the ordinary course of events. These are known as direct losses. The second limb allows the recovery of losses which arise from a special circumstance of the case and which may reasonably be supposed to have been in the contemplation of the parties at the time that they made the contract, as a probable result of the breach of contract. Losses under the second limb are known as indirect or consequential losses.

Under English law, various losses typically included in the definition of consequential loss in contracts, e.g, loss of profit, loss of revenues and loss of savings can be either a direct or an indirect loss, depending upon whether the specific loss satisfies the first or second limb of *Hadley v Baxendale*.

A number of decisions of the English courts have established that contractual exclusions for “consequential and indirect losses” will be limited to losses which fall within “limb

two”. For instance, in *British Sugar plc v NEI Power Projects Ltd*<sup>15</sup> the Court of Appeal referred to the decisions in several cases, including *Croudace Construction Limited v Cawoods Concrete Products Limited*<sup>16</sup> which established that the word “consequential” did not cover losses which occur naturally or directly (i.e “limb one” of *Hadley v Baxendale*).

The following cases illustrate the need to be careful when drafting clauses excluding liability for “consequential” losses.

In *Markerstudy Insurance Company Limited v Endsleigh Insurance Services Limited*<sup>17</sup>, a clause excluded liability for “any indirect loss or consequential loss (including but not limited to loss of goodwill, loss of business, loss of anticipated profits or savings and all other pure economic loss).”

Mr Justice Steel construed this clause as only excluding liability for indirect or consequential losses. He stated that the use of the phrase “including but not limited to” is a strong pointer that the specified heads of loss are but examples of excluded indirect loss. Therefore, to the extent that any loss of goodwill, loss of business, loss of anticipated profits or savings claimed represented direct losses (i.e., they arose naturally from the breach in question), liability for those losses was not excluded under this clause.

Another clause in the contract excluded liability for “any indirect or consequential loss or loss of profit or loss of business.” Mr Justice Steel acknowledged that the specified forms of loss are freestanding and inclusive of both direct and indirect loss. However, he held that the introductory phrase “any indirect or consequential loss”

<sup>14</sup> [1854] EWHC Exch J70

<sup>15</sup>[1997] EWCA Civ 2438

<sup>16</sup>[1978] 2 Lloyd’s Rep 55

<sup>17</sup>[2010] EWHC 281 (Comm)



governed and defined the scope of the specified forms of loss. Therefore, to the extent that the loss of profits or loss of business claimed was a direct loss under English law, it was not excluded by this clause.

By comparison, in *Star Polaris LLC v HHIC-PHIL Inc*<sup>18</sup>, the High Court was asked to consider the effect of an exclusion clause and in particular the meaning of the term “consequential losses”. The court rejected the contention that the term must be given the meaning attributed to it in a number of previous court decisions (namely, that it merely covered losses falling within the second limb of *Hadley v Baxendale*), as the parties would have contracted against the background of these previous decisions. The Court gave the term (and therefore, the exclusion of liability clause) a broader meaning so that it excluded all losses that were factually caused by a breach of contract, save as otherwise expressly permitted by the terms of the contract.

The underlying dispute concerned the purchase of a ship by Star Polaris (“the Buyer”) from HHIC-PHIL (the “Seller”). Following delivery, the ship suffered a serious engine failure and was towed to Korea for repairs. Star Polaris sought damages. The contract provided that:

*“Except as expressly provided in this Paragraph, in no circumstances and on no ground whatsoever shall the BUILDER [Seller] have any responsibility or liability whatsoever or howsoever arising in respect of or in connection with the VESSEL or this CONTRACT after the delivery of the VESSEL. Further, but without in any way limiting the generality of the foregoing, the BUILDER [Seller] shall have no liability or responsibility whatsoever or howsoever arising for or in connection with any consequential or special losses, damages or expenses unless otherwise stated herein.”*

<sup>18</sup> [2016] EWHC 2941 (Comm)

The Buyer contended that its claims (including for diminution in value of the vessel) were recoverable. The arbitral tribunal allowed the Buyer to claim the cost of repairing the vessel but held that the Seller’s liability to the Buyer for all other losses (such as the claim for diminution in value) was excluded as they constituted “consequential and special losses.” The Buyer appealed that finding to the Court.

The Court considered whether the term “consequential losses” worked to exclude all losses that were caused by a breach of contract (as the Seller contended) or whether the term merely sought to exclude liability for losses that fell within the second limb of *Hadley v Baxendale*.

The Court pointed out that the meaning given to the term “consequential losses” had to be interpreted in the context of the contract in question. As the contract:

- imposed a liability on the Seller for defects and all repair and replacement costs;
- expressly provided for the Buyer to be responsible for the removal costs to the Seller’s shipyard or other port; and
- stated that the buyer would have no responsibility or liability for breach of contract after delivery of the vessel, save as [expressly] provided by the terms of the contract.

The contract provided a complete code for contractual liability. As the particular losses for which the Seller would be responsible were listed in the contract, and as there was no express provision allowing the Buyer to make a claim for financial loss or diminution in value, the claim for diminution in value

was not recoverable.

In those circumstances, the Court agreed with the Tribunal’s decision that the term “consequential losses” was used in a cause-and-effect sense. It excluded liability for all financial losses that were caused by a breach of contract, save for the cost of replacement and repair, and not merely those losses that fell within the second limb of *Hadley v Baxendale*. The claim for diminution in value of the vessel was therefore excluded.

The Court pointed out that the wording in the contract must be given its ordinary meaning. In reaching its decision, the Court also considered that it was of fundamental importance in considering this clause that the contract provided a complete code for determining liability. The Court noted that *“It is not therefore a question of simply determining what liability is excluded, but ascertaining what liability is undertaken.”*

The Buyer had relied on a series of authorities which lay down the principle of interpretation that a clause which excludes liability for consequential loss excludes liability only for damages falling within the second limb of the rule. Chitty on Contracts (31<sup>st</sup> Ed). Summarizes the position: *“The exclusion of liability for “consequential loss or damage” will not cover loss which directly and naturally results in the ordinary course of events from the breach, but only loss which is less direct or more remote.”*

The Court agreed with the Tribunal that while the meaning of “consequential loss” in an exemption clause usually meant the exclusion of losses falling within the second limb of *Hadley v Baxendale*, unless the particular exclusion clause which they were considering in this contract had been the

subject of specific judicial consideration, they were not bound to follow any such decisions. The Court emphasized that any particular clause fell to be construed on its own wording in the context of the particular agreement as a whole and its particular factual background. The Court agreed with the Tribunal that in the context in which the words “consequential loss” were used in the contract, the word “consequential” was used in a cause and effect sense.

By comparison, in April 2020, the Technology and Construction Court upheld the traditionally narrow interpretation of indirect and consequential loss exclusion clauses in *2 Entertain Video Ltd & Ors v Sony DADC Europe Ltd*<sup>19</sup>. The judgment also highlights the well-established legal principles of contract construction whereby a court’s task is to ascertain the objective meaning of the language that parties have chosen to express their agreement, having regard to the meaning of the relevant words in their documentary, factual and commercial context.

The claim arose out of an arson attack on Sony’s warehouse in North London during the riots that occurred across London and other cities following the shooting of Mark Duggan. On the night of 8 August 2011, the defendant’s warehouse was burned down by a gang of rioters carrying petrol bombs, destroying the warehouse and all of its contents.

The claimants were commercial divisions of the BBC and publish, market and sell pre-recorded Blu-ray discs, DVDs, CDs and other home entertainment media. The defendant, Sony, provides logistics services, including warehouse storage and distribution of home entertainment media. The claimants and the defendant entered into a logistics services

agreement under which the defendant agreed to provide logistics services for the claimants, including storage and distribution facilities at the warehouse.

At the time of the fire, the claimants had stock with a sales value of approximately £40 million stored at Sony’s warehouse. The court held that Sony should have taken more steps to prevent the fire. In particular, the Agreement required Sony to ensure that adequate security measures were in place and that the goods were kept in a secure location. However, the warehouse security was insufficient and the court held that the primary cause of damage was negligence on the part of Sony, rather than the fire.

The claimants were compensated for the value of the loss of their stock by the defendant’s insurers but commenced proceedings to pursue further claims, such as loss of profits and business interruption losses. One legal issue that the case raised related to the meaning and effect of the following exclusion clause:

*“Neither party shall be liable under this Agreement in connection with the supply of or failure to supply the Logistics Services for any indirect or consequential loss or damage including (to the extent only that such are indirect or consequential loss or damage only) but not limited to loss of profits, loss of sales, loss of revenue, damage to reputation, loss or waste of management or staff time or interruption of business.”*

As discussed above, under English law, loss of profits, sales or revenue can either be a direct or an indirect loss, depending upon whether the specific loss satisfies “limb one” or “limb two” of *Hadley v Baxendale*.

The defendants argued that the claimants’ claim fell within “limb two” of *Hadley*

*v Baxendale* and therefore could not be pursued or recovered as they would be excluded by the above exclusion clause.

In addition to referring to the traditional line of authority, the court also made reference to the recent line of authority that challenges the traditional approach of categorizing losses. In *Transocean Drilling UK Limited v Providence Resources plc*<sup>20</sup>, the Court of Appeal noted that courts “are more willing to recognise that words take their meaning from their particular context and that the same word or phrase may mean different things in different documents.” Similarly, in the *Star Polaris* case discussed above, the court stated that “although the meaning of “consequential loss” in an exemption clause usually meant the exclusion of losses falling within the second limb of *Hadley v Baxendale*, in the absence of judicial consideration of the clause in question, it should be construed on its own wording in the context of the particular agreement as a whole and its particular factual background.”

However, the court ultimately reached the same conclusion in this case as the traditional approach and decided that the direct and natural result of the fire was the destruction of the goods and the warehouse, causing lost profits and business interruption losses to the claimants. The court reached this decision in particular due to the (highlighted) words “any indirect or consequential loss or damage **including (to the extent only that such are indirect or consequential loss or damage only)** but not limited to loss of profits...” in the exclusion clause covered by such exclusion.

In the recent case of *Transocean Drilling UK Limited v Providence Resources Plc*, the Court of Appeal<sup>21</sup>, reversing the High Court’s decision<sup>22</sup>, held that the consequential loss clause in the drilling contract between

Providence and Transocean prevented Providence from recovering spread costs incurred during downtime caused by Transocean<sup>23</sup>.

The dispute between Transocean and Providence arose in respect of delays which occurred during the drilling of a well by Transocean’s semisubmersible rig, “Arctic III,” offshore Ireland.

Providence claimed approximately US\$10 million in respect of alleged wasted marine spread costs incurred during the period of delay, which was found to have been caused by Transocean’s failure to maintain the rig.

Transocean challenged Providence’s claim on the basis that the spread costs were excluded by the consequential loss clause in the contract. This clause excluded the parties’ liability for (among other things):

*“...loss of use (including, without limitation, loss of use or the cost of use of property, equipment, materials and services including, without limitation, those provided by contractors or subcontractors of every tier or third parties)...”* At first instance, the High Court held in favour of Providence, finding that this clause did not preclude Providence’s claim for wasted marine spread costs incurred during the period of delay.

The High Court’s decision caused huge consternation for offshore contractors, who until that point, had generally understood that their liability for an operator’s spread costs would be excluded by the consequential loss provisions typically employed in offshore oil and gas contracts.

Transocean appealed this aspect of the High Court’s decision, arguing that the wasted spread costs fell within the meaning of “loss of use” in the consequential loss clause. The

<sup>20</sup> [2016] EWCA Civ 372

<sup>21</sup> [2016] EWCA Civ. 372

<sup>22</sup> [2014] EWHC 4260 (Comm)

<sup>23</sup> The High Court’s decision is discussed in the Haynes and Boone CDG, LLP Briefing Note “The High Court lays down the law – “no special treatment” for offshore contractors” dated 6 January 2015 by Simon Curtis, Glenn Kangisser and William Cecil.

<sup>19</sup> [2020] EWHC 972 (TCC)

Court of Appeal agreed. The Court of Appeal found that the High Court Judge erred in the interpretation of the consequential loss clause. In reaching their decision, the Lord Justices of Appeal held that:

1. The “starting point” in construing the consequential loss clause must be the language of the clause itself. In this case, the parties had used clear language to explain what they meant by “loss of use.” This language was “plainly apt” to include the wasted spread costs.

2. The Judge at first instance had misused the *ejusdem generis* principle<sup>24</sup>. The inclusive examples in brackets that followed the phrase “loss of use” were expressed to be “without limitation” and were used to explain and expand on this phrase, not to limit its scope.

3. The Judge at first instance had misapplied the *contra proferentem* principle. It had no part to play in this case because the clause was unambiguous and did not favour one party over the other.

4. The consequential loss clause was an integral part of the broader scheme set out in the contract for apportioning loss; it was not a simple clause of the kind that might otherwise be construed restrictively. It contained bespoke mutual undertakings where each party had deliberately and clearly intended to give up some of their rights in the event of the other’s breach.

5. The consequential loss clause did not render the contract “devoid of legal content” simply because the parties had agreed not to be liable to the other for consequential loss.

The Court of Appeal’s decision reaffirms a key principle of English law that parties in commercial contracts remain free to allocate responsibility for losses as they see fit, provided their contracts contain

clear language to this effect.

It is relevant to note that the Court of Appeal’s interpretation of “loss of use” was guided by the additional inclusive wording that followed in brackets. On this basis, it remains to be seen whether the expression “loss of use” on its own will, in future, be interpreted to cover wasted spread costs; this will depend on the particular wording used in the contract and the overall context of each dispute.

In the 2022 case of *Soteria Insurance Limited v IBM United Kingdom Limited*<sup>25</sup>, the Court of Appeal, reversing the High Court’s decision on this point, held that the consequential loss clause in the contract between the parties did not exclude liability for wasted expenditure.

The underlying dispute in that case concerned the provision of an IT system by IBM to Soteria which was delayed and not finally delivered. IBM terminated the contract for non-payment of an invoice submitted by it. Soteria claimed that such payment was not due as it had not received the IT system and IBM had wrongfully repudiated the contract.

Soteria brought a claim against IBM for its wasted expenditure following IBM’s repudiation of the contract. IBM argued that the consequential loss clause in the contract excluded liability for such claims.

The consequential loss in the contract excluded claims for “..indirect or consequential losses, or for loss of profit, revenue, savings (including anticipated savings), data (save as set out in clause 24.4 (d), goodwill, reputation (in all cases whether direct or indirect)”.

<sup>24</sup> This is a principle of construction by which general words may be given a limited meaning when they follow a list of specific matters which can be seen to be of a similar kind

<sup>25</sup> [2022] EWCA Civ 440



The Court of Appeal considered whether the words “loss of profit, revenue, savings” also excluded claims for “wasted expenditure” and held that they did not.

Coulson LJ, delivering the judgement on behalf of the Court of Appeal, started by referring to these general principles: the consequential loss clause should be construed by reference to what a reasonable person having all the background information which would have been available to the parties would have understood it to mean. If there are two possible constructions of the clause, the court is entitled to prefer the construction which is consistent with business common sense. This was balanced against the need to consider that clear express words must be used to exclude remedies which would ordinarily arise by operation of law.

In Coulson LJ’s view, in respect of claims for wasted expenditure following repudiation, the “parties cannot be taken to have excluded this obvious and common type of damages in circumstances where they have not made any reference in the relevant clause to wasted expenditure at all”. The consequential loss clause in the contract “does not begin to suggest that the parties intended that the costs actually incurred and then wasted because of IBM’s repudiation of the contract were to be excluded.”

In his view, the “more valuable the right, the clearer the language of any exclusion clause will need to be; the more extreme the consequences, the more stringent the court must be before construing the clause in a way which allows the contract-breaker to avoid liability for what may be his catastrophic non-performance.”

#### DRAFTING NOTE

It remains, in our view, good practice to clearly define consequential loss to include a specific reference to “spread costs.”

In view of the Markerstudy case, it is important to make clear that the Consequential Loss clause applies to direct and indirect losses falling within the clause.



## FUTURE TRENDS

The Macondo incident clearly emphasised the importance of well-drafted knock for knock indemnities.

The dramatic collapse in the oil price in recent years together with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic led (among other things) to a very significant reduction in demand for offshore vessels and the resultant over-supply considerably reduced the bargaining power of offshore contractors. The consequence of this was that offshore contractors were unlikely to achieve all of the key protections previously available by way of indemnity and limitation of liability provisions. However, largely as a result of the international energy crisis and the easing of the impact of COVID-19, this tide has turned. Offshore contractors now have a significantly greater

prospect of achieving the key protections they need with the assistance of appropriate legal advice on the drafting of their indemnity and limitation provisions.

Where the relevant risks cannot adequately be addressed by the terms of the contract, the Contractor should seek as far as possible to mitigate such risks by appropriate insurance coverage.

As outlined, what may appear to be a standard knock for knock indemnity, can on closer analysis prove inadequate to cover the potential liabilities that may arise on a complex offshore project.

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Glenn Kangisser handles projects and disputes for clients in the offshore, oil and gas, and shipping industries, with a focus on upstream exploration and production and the transportation of oil and gas. A leader in the offshore drilling sector, Glenn brings substantial depth of experience and market knowledge to his projects. Clients appreciate his ability to be involved in all aspects in the lifecycle of a drilling unit, from the design and construction phase through operations and maintenance, to disposition, conversion, or recycling.

Adept at both negotiating contracts and handling disputes, Glenn helps clients find commercial solutions either to minimize the risk of potential disputes or, where these can't be avoided, to help them achieve the best possible commercial outcome. He regularly advises clients on disputes in the English High Court, as well as in arbitrations under the LCIA, LMAA, and ICC rules. With a truly international practice, Glenn has also negotiated contracts for the construction, sale, operation, and employment of drilling units in the UKCS, U.S. Gulf of Mexico, West Africa, Brazil, the Middle East, and the Far East.

Glenn is regularly involved in cases of exceptional size and significance. Recently, he led his team in the largest arbitration ever handled by the firm, obtaining a London arbitration award in excess of US \$400 million for a European drilling contractor client in proceedings against a South Korean shipyard. This arose out of the disputed termination of a drilling rig construction contract. Glenn was also involved in a major force majeure case under English law, securing for Seadrill Ghana Operations Ltd. an English High Court judgment worth in excess of US \$270 million, plus interest and expenses. The case related to the disputed termination of a drilling contract for alleged force majeure. Glenn has also been involved in some of the largest and most significant offshore drilling projects over the last decade.

Glenn is recommended by The Legal 500, 2022 (Legalease), where clients commented "Glenn Kangisser is a fantastic lead for the company" and note that Glenn leads a "very strong team specialising in offshore drilling contracts and shipbuilding contracts," are "experts in their field," and the team is "pleasant to deal with and go the extra mile."

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Teena Grewal offers clients practical legal advice on projects and contracts related to oil and gas exploration and production. She has advised on many projects for floating production storage and offloading units (FPSOs) in the UK Continental Shelf, Brazil, Australia, South America, and West Africa and has also worked on many drilling contracts.

Clients appreciate Teena's understanding of the particularities of FPSO project contracts and the political sensitivities of projects in various jurisdictions. She handles all aspects of her clients' transactions, from big-picture strategy to the smallest contract details. Teena works closely with clients on lengthy, complex, high-value projects, many of which are valued in the billions of dollars.

Teena's clients benefit from her prior work as in-house legal counsel for a major international oil and gas company, mainly in the upstream sector. She advised extensively on a project to build and operate an offshore pipeline system and develop offshore oil and gas fields in the UK Continental Shelf and also counseled on a range of procurement contracts. Teena also advised on acquisitions and disposals of shares and assets and joint ventures while working both in private practice and as in-house legal counsel for an independent power producer.

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Mette is primarily focused on risk avoidance/mitigation. Her transactional work is informed by extensive dispute resolution experience and sound knowledge of where problems typically arise. Mette is at all times focused on helping clients to achieve the best commercial solutions.

Where disputes could not be avoided or resolved at an early stage, Mette has handled heavyweight international proceedings, most recently in the offshore construction and floating production sectors. She has experience of arbitrations under the major rules (LCIA/ ICC/ LMAA/ UNCITRAL) and litigation in the English High Court (Commercial Court/ TCC).

Prior to joining Haynes Boone, Mette was a Managing Associate in the Energy & Infrastructure Group of another large international law firm.

## About Haynes Boone

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Founded in 1996, CDG built a significant reputation serving the shipbuilding and offshore oil and gas sectors globally. Ship building clients consist of shipowners, charterers and shipyards covering the entire spectrum of commercial shipping, including the international superyacht sector. On the offshore side, clients include major oil and gas companies with worldwide development interests, smaller independents, offshore contractors providing a range of exploration and production services, and specialist suppliers of oilfield services and equipment, including shipyards. The office provides clients with substantially enhanced English law capabilities, including an experienced litigation and international arbitration team that has handled numerous claims in the English High Court and before major arbitral bodies. The office also includes

partners with decades of experience handling international business and projects transactions, providing clients with an important and unique bridge between the interconnected energy and energy finance related markets of London, New York, Houston, Shanghai, and Mexico City. The firm's deep relationships and capabilities in this sector provide our clients with an unprecedented ability to make direct connections and access resources in some of the world's largest energy markets.

Our firm's progressive, entrepreneurial spirit is the impetus for our unrelenting commitment to remain forward-thinking and continually evolve to address the dynamically changing world of business law. It is this fortitude that allows us to serve clients in global business transactions and dispute resolutions around the world, including 20 percent of US Fortune 500 companies. We have long served clients' global business activities by building cross-border practice capabilities, strategically adding international legal experience and establishing working relationships with leading law firms throughout the world. We have assisted clients in more than 100 countries with lawyers who are fluent in 17 languages.

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