US-based cash buyer takes punt on Greenpeace-listed ship

A leading cash buyer of ships has bought an aframax tanker for demolition that ranks among those on environmental group Greenpeace's 50-vessel hit list.

US-based Global Marketing Systems (GMS) is said to have acquired Tsakos Shipping & Trading's Atlantida.

Sources say cash buyers normally avoid bidding for demolition candidates on the list. Very few have managed to find buyers in the past few years.

It is claimed that GMS was the only one stepping forward for the Atlantida, a 87,500-dwt Liberian-flag oil tanker built in 1980. Sources close to GMS insist it was not alone in competing.

The vessel went for a reported $501 per ldt "as is" in the outer port limits of Singapore, which equals about $7.7m. Tsakos bought the vessel in 1997 for $12m. There are indications it may go to Pakistan.

One broker says the Atlantida's inclusion on the Greenpeace list had prevented anyone from "touching" the vessel. The broker had a potential buyer until the Greenpeace link was disclosed.

Greenpeace identified some time ago 50 ships it expects to be scrapped in the foreseeable future, the most high-profile being the 76,000-gt cruiseship Blue Lady (ex- Norway, built 1961), which GMS began negotiating for but then withdrew. It has since been beached in India amid huge controversy.

The environmental pressure group has called on owners of targeted ships to decontaminate them of hazardous materials and waste prior to scrapping in Asia.

One cash buyer told TradeWinds: "The Atlantida was circulated by a lot of brokers a couple of months ago and we backed down because it was on the Greenpeace list and we didn't want to stick our necks out."

The source claims GMS has broken ranks with other cash buyers.

GMS (USA) president Dr Anil Sharma says he cannot comment on specific vessels because of confidentiality clauses but indicates that a deal involving a ship on the Greenpeace list is pending.

"No one wants to break any laws here. We want to do the right thing. There is no question about that," he said.

He says that if anything "out of the ordinary" is found on a vessel, it would be "addressed". In the case of a Greenpeace-listed ship, a qualified inspector would be sent to check whether hazardous materials are present.

"They will issue a report and we will evaluate it further," said Sharma.

He claims GMS is the only cash buyer working with an environmental-engineering company for surveys.

GMS says it pulled out of a deal for the Blue Lady, which contains large qualities of asbestos, when it was unable to resolve various issues. Sharma says there were reasons for the ship's inclusion on the Greenpeace list but in general it was an "arbitrary" naming of vessels and not based on inspections or documented data relating to whether they had carried or contained hazardous materials. He says he carefully "evaluated" the list, which in one instance named one ship but not its three sisters.

Others say this may be because they operated in different trades. No one at Greenpeace was available to explain the Atlantida's inclusion on its list and its recent sale for demolition.

By Geoff Garfield, London

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