



Everything New Orleans

Policy Jury Association wants National Association of Counties to get involved in debate over Maritime law

By Kimberly Quillen, The Times-Picayune

March 14, 2010, 5:09AM

The Police Jury Association of Louisiana is urging a national group to get involved in the debate over the interpretation of a decades-old maritime law.

"We did adopt a resolution that we will be sending to the National Association of Counties requesting that they make it part of their national agenda to urge Congress to support a more strict enforcement of the Jones Act," said Dan Garrett, general counsel of the Police Jury Association, an association of Louisiana parishes.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection has been interpreting the Jones Act, which aims to protect the domestic maritime industry, in a manner that allows foreign vessels to transport oilfield cargo and equipment. **But last summer, the agency proposed adopting a stricter interpretation of the Jones Act that would limit the role of foreign vessels to installing equipment offshore, not transporting it.**

The U.S. offshore marine industry, which has a significant presence in Louisiana, applauded the move because they believe lower-cost foreign vessels have an unfair competitive advantage. But the American Petroleum Institute and others opposed the move to more strictly enforce the act, saying the energy industry relies on foreign vessels and that limiting their role could hamper oil and gas production.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security is now reviewing the situation and will eventually be accepting public comment on the issue.

Garrett said his group is concerned that domestic vessels are disadvantaged when competing with foreign fleets because they are required to purchase workers' compensation insurance and provide additional benefits to employees.

"A number of parishes in Louisiana have ports," Garrett said. "All of the vessels in those ports need to be operating under the same rules. You would not want foreign vessels to be able to operate out of (a local port) without having to provide the same benefits as their U.S. competitors have to provide."

Kimberly Quillen can be reached at kquillen@timespicayune.com or 504.826.3416.

© 2010 NOLA.com. All rights reserved.