



Crew of Pangaea Logistics Solutions vessel Bulk Freedom prepare to take onboard 14 migrants off the Cayman Islands on 5 April. **Photo:** contributed

Rescue at sea turns into Hollywood drama for Pangaea Logistics bulker

Captain forced to navigate tense standoff between Cuban refugees and Cayman Islands authorities

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What began as an act of compassion and service by the captain and crew of a Pangaea Logistics Solution bulker earlier this month turned into a hairy standoff between a group of Cuban migrants and Cayman Islands officials.

The tense confrontation had a happy solution as the 14 refugees disembarked at Grand Cayman after a three-day impasse, allowing Pangea's 52,500-dwt Bulk Freedom (built 2005) to get on with its carriage of iron from Texas to China.



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Officials of New York-listed Pangaea shared details of the intervention with TradeWinds this week after the successful resolution — the second open-sea rescue carried out by a company bulker in four years.

Missing Craft

Bulk Freedom was en-route from Corpus Christi when it received word from the Coast Guard on 5 April of a missing craft.

The bulker was able to locate 14 people aboard the stranded skip boat some 70 nautical miles off Grand Cayman at roughly 19:45 local time on 5 April. The boat had run out of fuel and the passengers were adrift for two days in heavy seas.

But that was when the rescue began to take on elements of a Hollywood film script.

According to accounts from Pangaea and Cayman authorities, the migrants — all Cuban save for one Dominican woman and an infant with Cayman papers — refused to disembark when Bulk Freedom arrived in Grand Cayman on 6 April.

BULKERS

Thus, began a "prolonged negotiation process" over the next two days.

The impasse escalated when the infant reportedly took ill, and her parents rebuffed efforts to provide medical care ashore.



Migrants rescued by
Pangaea Logistics
Bulk Freedom off the
Cayman Islands.
Photo: contributed

Authorities obtained a court order and performed "a brief tactical intervention" on 8 April, removing the child to hospital. Her father sustained "minor head injuries" after resisting the efforts and also required medical treatment, according to Cayman officials.

The remaining migrants then relented and agreed to come ashore, where they were admitted to a government-run Covid-19 quarantine facility.

Welfare and Safety

Cayman authorities say they "maintained close contact with the captain of the Bulk Freedom and thanked him and his crew for their support in bringing this situation to a positive closure. Likewise, the welfare and safety of the crew were kept in mind at all times."

Local law enforcement said the migrants were known to police and apparently had been in the Caymans for about a year while seeking asylum. The group apparently had hoped to reach the US on the boat that became disabled.

One local press account indicates the migrants had unsuccessfully pressed the bulker's captain to take them to a different port.

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Bulk Freedom was able to depart for the Panama Canal in the late hours of 8 April. It is under the commercial and technical management of Phoenix Bulk Carriers and Seamar Management, both Pangaea subsidiaries.

The Right Thing To Do

It is not the first time a Pangaea bulker has been involved in a rescue. Its Bulk Beothuk saved nine passengers aboard a capsized speed boat off the Bahamas in December 2017. The master and crew received a special rescue award from the International Propeller Club of the US.

Pangaea chief executive Ed Coll told TradeWinds this week that such service is part of the company's culture.

"I think this is simply human," Coll said. "We have an obligation to one another which is instilled in the guys on board. This will cost us money, but it is the right thing to do.

"Unfortunately, I do not think all shipowners see it that way and some will look away." [\(Copyright\)](#)

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