



Gard Alert: Groundings in the Parana River after loading at San Lorenzo Argentina

Exceptional drought conditions have resulted in reduced water levels in the Parana River, requiring extra vigilance to avoid grounding, particularly in the San Lorenzo area.

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Members and clients will no doubt be aware of the regular reports of groundings at the Parana River, Argentina in the recent years. In May 2015 alone, four shipowners experienced groundings involving loaded bulk carriers transiting the Paso Abajo Los Ratones channel at San Lorenzo on the Parana River. According to the Argentine National Institute of Water one important contributing factor to the reduced water levels – two feet below the May average, is a dry-spell in neighbouring Brazil.

The Parana River is a fresh water river with a soft mud bottom. At San Lorenzo, the Paso Abajo Los Ratones channel in particular is narrow with restricted depths and sharp turns at each end. The river current in the channel averages about 2.5 knots but varies depending on the channel depth. Arrival at and departure from the San Lorenzo terminals are without tug assistance.

Members and clients should take note of the above and follow the following recommendations to minimise the risk of grounding:

- Request local agents to provide the most up to date information about channel depths and recommendations from the local authorities.
- Check the permissible sailing draft issued daily by the Coast Guard and the two foot minimum under keel clearance for safe passage.
- Pay particular attention to the possible impact on draft of squat and local weather conditions.
- Every effort should be made to avoid an excessive difference between forward and aft draughts.
- Before commencing pilotage, Master and Pilot should discuss and plan the passage well. This will give the Master advance awareness of important points on the river and the Pilot will be well briefed about particular characteristics of the vessel. Monitor the Pilot's instructions whilst keeping in mind that the ultimate safety of the vessel rests with the Master.
- Vessels navigating the Paso Abajo Los Ratones, between Isla Diablo and Isla Del Medio (Km 287 and Km 290), must remain within the dredged channel identified in the official chart.

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[1] The Argentinian Coastguard's webpage; <http://www.prefectura naval.gov.ar/web/es/html/portada.php> . "Estadios de los Rios" states the condition of the river at certain ports – and "Avisos a los Navegantes" is navigational warning (In Spanish only).

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