Licensing of bunker suppliers

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The Maritime and Port Authority and its powers

Bunkering in the port is regulated by the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore. The MPA was established on 2 February 1996 under the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore Act 1996 by merging the Marine Department, the National Maritime Board and the regulatory departments of the former Port of Singapore Authority.[1] The commercial terminals passed to PSA, which became a corporate operator, while the MPA kept the functions of port authority, regulator and promoter of Singapore as an international maritime centre. The separation of regulation from terminal operation gave the MPA the independence that a licensing authority needs.

The MPA licenses every participant in the physical supply chain. A company that supplies bunkers in the port under its own delivery documents must hold a bunkering licence as bunker supplier. It must also commit to holding a bunker craft operator licence for the tankers that make the deliveries.[2] The tankers themselves are harbour craft subject to the general harbour craft licensing rules. Since 1 January 2017 bunker surveying companies have also required a licence. The statutory basis lies in the MPA Act and the regulations made under it, which prohibit the provision

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of port services and facilities without a licence and allow the MPA to attach conditions to the licences it grants.[3] The licence conditions, more than the statute, contain the detailed obligations that govern bunkering.

The bunker supplier licence

The conditions for a bunker supplier licence are demanding. An applicant must have a minimum paid-up capital of S$500,000 and must maintain it at each annual renewal.[4] It must submit a business plan covering its storage facilities, three-year sales projections, investment in bunker tankers, sources of fuel and track record in other ports, together with the profiles of its shareholders and directors. It should preferably own or lease storage facilities in Singapore. Most significantly for the energy transition, it must own and operate at least two new bunker tankers that are fully electric, capable of using B100 biofuel or compatible with net-zero fuels such as hydrogen.[5]

These conditions have kept the number of licensees limited. The MPA's list of licensed bunker suppliers of conventional fuels, as at 4 September 2026, contained 39 names.[6] They include the oil majors, the trading arms of Chinese, Indonesian, Korean and Japanese energy groups, the bunker subsidiaries of global trading houses and a group of independent Singapore companies, several of them family-owned firms that began as operators of a few tankers. The licence has a scarcity value. It gives access to a market of more than fifty million tonnes a year, but it can be lost through one serious breach of its conditions.

Accreditation, quality management and the points system

A licensed supplier must also maintain a certified quality management system for the bunker supply chain, based on the Singapore Standard SS 524:2021 and certified by a body accredited by the Singapore Accreditation Council. An audit report must be submitted to the MPA every year before the licence expires.[7] The standard requires the supplier to control the whole chain from the purchase of fuel and its storage to the loading of the tanker and the delivery to the ship.

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The MPA supervises performance through a points system. Each supplier starts with 100 points in each of three performance indicators at licence approval and at each renewal. It must keep a weighted score of at least 75 to remain accredited. The most heavily weighted indicator, with 70 per cent, covers bunker supply records and compliance with the standards on bunkering procedures and mass flow metering. Each serious non-compliance costs 40 points and each moderate one 20 points. The other two indicators cover craft operations, including collisions and pollution, as well as customer feedback, which the supplier must collect from the receiving ship for every delivery and enter in the MPA's DigitalPORT@SG system.[8] The system turns each delivery into a data point, which allows the MPA to identify suppliers whose performance deteriorates before a single incident becomes a scandal.

Bunker tankers, operators and surveyors

The bunker tanker fleet is the physical infrastructure of the market. The MPA's list of bunker tankers updated on 16 October 2026 contained 222 tankers fitted with mass flow meters and four small tankers using positive displacement meters.[9] Their size ranges from small craft of about one hundred deadweight tonnes to tankers of almost 10,000 tonnes. The MPA has used licensing to renew the fleet. Under a gate system, bunker tankers of 600 deadweight tonnes and above had to be less than ten years old from 1 January 2012, while tankers aged thirty years or more were barred from operating in port from 1 January 2014.[10] Separate MPA standards apply to port limit bunker tankers, methanol bunker tankers and LNG bunker vessels.

Bunker surveyors complete the picture. A surveyor appointed by the buyer, and sometimes also by the seller, attends the delivery, checks the tanks of the bunker tanker before and after delivery, witnesses the meter readings and the drawing of samples and reports any discrepancy. Their independence matters, since a surveyor who colludes with the supplier can defeat the controls that the system relies on. The MPA's decision to license surveying companies from 2017 brought them inside the regulatory perimeter. The case of Grandeur Trading and Services, discussed below, had shown fifteen years earlier that the risk of collusion between surveyors and suppliers was real.

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Suspension and revocation

The MPA's ultimate sanction, the suspension or revocation of a licence, has been used regularly. In September 2002 the MPA suspended the licences of Grandeur Trading and Services after a bunker surveyor was convicted of accepting bribes from the company, which then returned its licences.[11] The same company appears again on the list of licensed suppliers of 2026, which shows that the loss of a licence need not be permanent. In May 2019 the MPA revoked the bunker supplier licence of Southernpec (Singapore) after an enforcement check found that its employees had used magnets to interfere with the mass flow meter during bunkering operations and that its cargo officers had recorded bunkering information inaccurately.[12]

Revocation also follows insolvency. In October 2019 the MPA revoked the bunker craft operator licence of Inter-Pacific Petroleum for bunkering malpractices. In December 2019 it revoked the company's supplier licence after Inter-Pacific had been placed under judicial management and could no longer meet the licence conditions.[13] In October 2020 the MPA announced the suspension of the licences of Ocean Bunkering Services, the bunkering arm of Hin Leong. The company had been the third largest bunker supplier in Singapore by volume in 2019, with an estimated three to four million tonnes of sales and fourteen bunker tankers, but had stopped deliveries in April 2020 when lenders withdrew their credit lines from its parent.[14] The collapse of Hin Leong, examined in Chapter II of Part H, thus removed one of the largest suppliers from the market within weeks. The market absorbed the loss without disruption, which says something about its depth.

Notes

1. Wikipedia, "Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore" (accessed November 2026): established on 2 February 1996 under the MPA Act 1996 through the merger of the Marine Department, the National Maritime Board and the regulatory departments of the former Port of Singapore Authority. ↩
2. MPA, "Bunkering Licence Application Guidelines" (mpa.gov.sg, accessed November 2026): a valid Bunkering Licence (Bunker Supplier) is required to

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supply bunkers in the Port of Singapore using the company's own delivery documents; applicants must commit to holding both a bunker supplier licence and a bunker craft operator licence; bunker tankers are subject to harbour craft licensing; licensing of bunker surveying companies applies since 1 January 2017. ↩

3. Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore Act 1996 (2020 Revised Edition), provisions on the licensing of port services and facilities, and the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (Port) Regulations. ↩
4. MPA, "Bunkering Licence Application Guidelines" (n above): minimum paid-up capital of S$500,000, to be maintained at renewal; licences are renewed annually. ↩
5. MPA, "Bunkering Licence Application Guidelines" (n above): business plan requirements; storage preferably owned or leased in Singapore; applicants must own and operate at least two new bunker tankers that are fully electric, capable of using B100 biofuel or compatible with net-zero fuels such as hydrogen. ↩
6. MPA, "List of licensed bunker suppliers in the Port of Singapore", correct as at 4 September 2026 (PDF, mpa.gov.sg, accessed November 2026): 39 licensed suppliers, among them BP, Chevron, ExxonMobil, Glencore, PetroChina, Shell, Sinopec, TotalEnergies and Vitol Bunkers, as well as independent Singapore suppliers; Global Energy Trading, Golden Island and PetroChina listed for methanol in addition to conventional fuels. ↩
7. MPA, "Bunkering Licence Application Guidelines" (n above): certified Quality Management System for the Bunker Supply Chain (QMBS) based on SS 524:2021, certified by a body accredited by the Singapore Accreditation Council, with an annual audit report to be submitted before the licence expires. ↩
8. MPA, "Bunkering Licence Application Guidelines" (n above): KPI points system with 100 points per KPI at approval and renewal; minimum total weighted score of 75; Bunker Supply Records (SS 600 and SS 648 compliance) weighted 70 per cent, with demerits of 40 points per serious and 20 points

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per moderate non-compliance; Craft Operations Records and Customer Feedback Records weighted 15 per cent each; customer feedback on every bunkering operation rated from 1 to 5 and entered through DigitalPORT@SG. ↩

9. MPA, "Bunker Tanker List", updated on 16 October 2026 (PDF, mpa.gov.sg, accessed November 2026): 222 bunker tankers with mass flow metering systems, listed with their deadweight (from 99 to 9,948 DWT) and approved fuels, and four bunker tankers of 104 to 127 DWT using positive displacement meters. ↩
10. MPA, "Bunkering Standards" (mpa.gov.sg, accessed November 2026), section on the gate system: from 1 January 2012 bunker tankers of 600 DWT and above to be less than 10 years old; from 1 January 2014 bunker tankers of 30 years and older not permitted to operate in port. ↩
11. MPA, "MPA Suspends Licenses of Grandeur Trading and Services Pte Ltd" (media release, 11 September 2002): suspension with effect from 10 September 2002 after one surveyor was convicted of accepting bribes from Grandeur; Grandeur surrendered its bunkering licences. MPA, "List of licensed bunker suppliers", 4 September 2026 (n above): Grandeur Trading & Services Pte Ltd listed as a licensed bunker supplier. ↩
12. MPA, "Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore Revokes Southernpec (Singapore) Pte Ltd's Bunker Supplier Licence" (media release, 29 May 2019): revocation effective 29 May 2019; employees used "magnets to interfere with the mass flow meter during bunkering operations"; cargo officers "did not record the information in the bunkering documents accurately". ↩
13. MPA, "Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore Revokes Inter-Pacific Petroleum Pte Ltd's Bunker Supplier Licence" (media release, 9 December 2019): Bunker Craft Operator Licence revoked on 15 October 2019 for bunkering malpractices; Bunker Supplier Licence revoked effective 9 December 2019 after the appointment of a judicial manager, the company having failed to meet the licence terms. ↩

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14. gCaptain (Reuters), “Singapore suspends bunker supply licences of Hin Leong unit”, 19 October 2020 (accessed November 2026): OBS was the third largest bunker supplier by volume in 2019, with an estimated 3–4 million tonnes and 14 licensed bunker barges; it stopped operations in April 2020 and “has not been able to fulfil its licensing commitment to date”; Hin Leong owed creditors US$3.85 billion. ↩

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