

CML Port Side
‘Contracts, Acquisitions and Piracy
All in a day’s work for an in-house maritime lawyer’

Friday, 24 April 2026
Centre for Maritime Law

10 College Ave West, Saga Level 1, Singapore 138529



CML organised its third Port Side event for 2026 to mark the end of the academic year for students studying maritime law at NUS. This was an early evening talk by Mr Nicholas Fell (Executive Vice President, Corporate Services & General Counsel, BW Group). He shared his experience as an in-house maritime lawyer with the students.

Many practising maritime lawyers do get tempted to ‘go in-house’ from time to time, leading them to ponder about ‘what might happen’ after switching jobs. Mr Fell sought to answer that question in the context of an in-house lawyer working for a large shipping company. He first introduced the various companies under BW Group and their different specialisations. In-house lawyers working for large shipping companies can expect to deal with more than just the shipping sector, as many such companies have their own green-energy arms or other spinoffs.

Next, Mr Fell emphasised that the in-house maritime lawyer must have a broad skill set to handle a wide portfolio of work. The in-house lawyer operates at the intersection of law and business and must apply commercial acumen alongside legal skills. There are routine transactions and normal negotiations with counterparties to avoid acrimonious litigation or arbitration. These are to be juggled with large transactions (eg, acquisitions of ships or other companies, joint ventures), handling a wide variety of contracts (such as shipbuilding, insurance, and software contracts), regulatory compliance, advising the company's Board on corporate governance matters, and educating colleagues. Mr Fell pointed out that the salaried in-house lawyer should treat and treasure its internal clients—such as colleagues from the Human Resources, Information Technology, Insurance, and Tax departments—as if they were external clients.

Finally, in a question-and-answer session, Mr Fell concluded that the in-house lawyer is closer to the action (compared to the practising lawyer) and suggested that the in-house maritime lawyer cannot expect to have a full work-life balance because shipping is in the '24 hours' business. Participants thereafter adjourned for a dinner reception, where they could network with other NUS maritime law alumni who had arrived after the end of their working day.

CML Port Side is an initiative to provide opportunities for students and young alumni members to engage with the local maritime law community and, by doing so, increase the visibility of the career opportunities this industry offers.