

**Pirates make \$1.5m ransom demand;
Latest demand from Somali pirates holding Danica White**

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SOMALI pirates holding a Danish-owned general cargoship hijacked last month are now demanding a \$1.5m ransom for the release of the vessel and its crew.

Danica White ndash; with five seafarers on board ndash; was seized on June 2 about 240 nautical miles off the Somali coast.

The vessel was on route to Mombasa in Kenya, laden with around 1,000 tonnes of construction material.

Andrew Mwangura of the Seafarers' Assistance Programme in Mombasa told Agence France Presse at the weekend that a demand for \$1.5m had been received.

In London, sources at the International Maritime Bureau ndash; an industry antipiracy watchdog ndash; indicated that negotiations have been going on for some weeks.

But representatives of the Danica White's management company, Copenhagen-based H Folmer & Co, were yesterday unavailable for comment.

Somali pirates are known to be holding two South Korean-owned and one Taiwanese-owned vessels, while a Panama-flagged vessel was recently reported missing in Somali waters.

IMB statistics show there were 15 attacks on vessels in or near Somalia between January and June this year, already exceeding the total 10 seen in the whole of 2006.

Most of the pirate gangs are linked to local warlords and hold ships and crews to ransom to raise finance for their associated militias.

Moreover, the violence appears to be worsening, with one Taiwanese seafarer murdered last month after the owners of his ship refused to meet pirates' demands.

An IMB spokesman said: "We are very concerned about the general situation. There have been a number of reports of suspicious craft very far out to sea, which would not be typical in the monsoon season."

Masters are advised to be careful and to report all suspicious sightings.

Links: Folmer & Co <http://www.folmer.dk>, IMB piracy report
<http://www.icc-ccs.org/prc/piracyreport.php>.