

# USTR is existential threat to island nation

A \$1.5 million charge on Chinese vessels calling at US ports would end the lifeline that supports the 60,000 people of Bermuda, according to the shipping line that supplies the island.

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April 1, 2025



View of BermudaCredit: Public Domain

John Wight, the Chairman of Bermuda Container Line (BCL), which operates three container ships operating between US ports and Bermuda gave evidence to the US Trade Representative's investigation into Chinese dominance of maritime trade and its significance to US trade.

He called for exemptions for small island states such as Bermuda, whose population of 60,000 people, including 8,000 US citizens, depend on the container trade with the US as do the New Jersey businesses that export to Bermuda.

Wight told the hearing that the cost of the charge would be roughly double the company's current revenue and would certainly mean an end to the trade.

According to BCL the [US](#) is Bermuda's primary trading partner trading goods including food, medical supplies and consumer products imported from the US primarily Port Elizabeth at the Port of New York & New Jersey.

"We are highly dependent on maritime trade to sustain our population and our businesses," said Wight, "Our economic lifeline is importing goods from the US."

BCL's largest container vessel, the 450 teu Oleander, is a Chinese built, shallow draught vessel, which is able to access Bermuda's main port at Hamilton, which has an annual volume throughput of 15,000 teu and 135,495 tonnes of general cargo with a quay of under 800m and a draught of 7.9m.

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In his testimony Wight said the \$1.5 million charge per port call for Chinese built vessels to Bermuda would be “catastrophic to our company, and to our island”.

“Weekly US port calls would cost BCL \$76 million per year. To put this in a context, BCL's total annual revenues are only about \$30 million per year... In any given year we earn about \$1 million,” added Wight.