



ICLG

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General Chapters:

1	Cartel Updates: Recent Trends in Fine Calculations and Cartel Liability – Elvira Aliende Rodriguez & Geert Goeteyn, Shearman & Sterling LLP	1
2	The Proposed Whistleblowers Directive – Ingrid Vandenborre & Thorsten Goetz, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP	6
3	Navigating the Tensions Between Leniency Cooperation and the Risk of Private Follow-On Damage Claims in Cartel Cases – Niels Ersbøll & Jane Wessel, Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer LLP	12
4	Disincentives to Leniency: Expect Fewer Golden Eggs if You Harass the Goose – Frédéric Louis, Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP	18

Country Question and Answer Chapters:

5	Australia	King & Wood Mallesons: Sharon Henrick & Wayne Leach	23
6	Austria	Preslmayr Rechtsanwälte OG: Dieter Hauck	33
7	Belgium	Crowell & Moring: Thomas De Meese	40
8	Canada	Cassels Brock & Blackwell LLP: W. Michael G. Osborne & Chris Hersh	46
9	China	King & Wood Mallesons: Susan Ning & Kate Peng	53
10	Ecuador	ML Abogados: María Teresa Lara & Ricardo Montalvo	62
11	European Union	Shearman & Sterling LLP: Elvira Aliende Rodriguez & Geert Goeteyn	70
12	Finland	Borenus Attorneys Ltd: Ilkka Aalto-Setälä & Henrik Koivuniemi	80
13	France	Aramis: Aurélien Condomines & Pierre Galmiche	87
14	Germany	Shearman & Sterling LLP: Mathias Stöcker	94
15	Hungary	Bán, S. Szabó & Partners: Chrysta Bán & Álmos Papp	102
16	India	Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas: Avaantika Kakkar & Bharat Budholia	109
17	Italy	Shearman & Sterling LLP: Paolisa Nebbia	116
18	Japan	Nagashima Ohno & Tsunematsu: Yusuke Kaeriyama & Takayuki Nakata	123
19	Macedonia	Debarliev Dameski & Kelesoska, Attorneys at Law: Dragan Dameski & Jasmina Ilieva Jovanovik	128
20	Malaysia	Rahmat Lim & Partners: Raymond Yong & Penny Wong	136
21	Malta	Mamo TCV Advocates: Annalies Muscat & Laura Spiteri	142
22	Netherlands	AKD: Joost Houdijk & Robbert Jaspers	150
23	New Zealand	MinterEllisonRuddWatts: Jennifer Hambleton & Alisaundre van Ammers	157
24	Portugal	Morais Leitão, Galvão Teles, Soares da Silva & Associados, R. L.: Luís do Nascimento Ferreira & Inês Gouveia	164
25	Singapore	Drew & Napier LLC: Chong Kin Lim & Dr. Corinne Chew	176
26	Spain	King & Wood Mallesons: Ramón García-Gallardo	183
27	Sweden	Hannes Snellman: Peter Forsberg & Haris Catovic	199
28	Switzerland	AGON PARTNERS: Patrick L. Krauskopf & Fabio Babey	206
29	Turkey	ELIG Gürkaynak Attorneys-at-Law: Gönenç Gürkaynak & Öznur İnanlır	212
30	United Kingdom	Shearman & Sterling LLP: Matthew Readings & Ruba Noorali	221
31	USA	Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP: Charles F. (Rick) Rule & Joseph J. Bial	229

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Malaysia



Raymond Yong



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1 The Legislative Framework of the Cartel Prohibition

1.1 What is the legal basis and general nature of the cartel prohibition, e.g. is it civil and/or criminal?

Cartel conduct in Malaysia is governed under the Competition Act 2010 (“**Competition Act**”).

Cartels are considered as “hardcore restrictions” and are deemed to have the object of significantly preventing, restricting or distorting competition. There are currently no criminal sanctions for an individual who is involved in cartel conduct. The offences for breaching the cartel prohibition are civil in nature. However, there are criminal offences relating to, for example, an obstruction of an investigation by the regulators. Please see question 2.8.

1.2 What are the specific substantive provisions for the cartel prohibition?

Section 4(2) of the Competition Act prohibits horizontal agreements which have the object of:

- (a) fixing, directly or indirectly, a purchase or selling price or any other trading conditions;
- (b) sharing market or sources of supply;
- (c) limiting or controlling:
 - (i) production;
 - (ii) market outlets or market access;
 - (iii) technical or technological development; or
 - (iv) investment; or
- (d) bid-rigging.

The abovementioned conduct is deemed to have the object of significantly preventing, restricting or distorting competition in any market for goods or services.

1.3 Who enforces the cartel prohibition?

The statutory body which oversees all competition issues (save for those that are expressly exempted under the Competition Act) is the Malaysia Competition Commission (“**MyCC**”).

There are also cartel prohibitions under sector-specific legislation which fall under the purview of the relevant governmental authority:

- (a) cartel offences under the telecommunications sector fall under the purview of the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission;

- (b) cartel offences under the aviation sector fall under the purview of the Malaysian Aviation Commission; and
- (c) cartel offences under the energy sector fall under the purview of the Energy Commission.

1.4 What are the basic procedural steps between the opening of an investigation and the imposition of sanctions?

Under the Competition Act, the MyCC may commence an investigation if:

- (a) the MyCC has reason to suspect that a particular enterprise has infringed or is infringing any prohibition under the Competition Act; or
- (b) the MyCC receives a complaint by a person.

In the course of conducting an investigation, the MyCC has been conferred wide powers under the Competition Act, akin to that of a police officer in relation to a police investigation in seizable cases, including, but not limited to, requiring the enterprise to provide the MyCC with any information or document which is deemed relevant to the investigation and to enter any premises with or without a warrant.

Upon completion of the investigation, a proposed decision will be issued to the enterprise setting out, amongst others, the grounds for the MyCC’s decision and the sanctions imposed. The enterprise will then have an opportunity to provide a written and/or oral representation before the MyCC. After receiving the enterprise’s written and/or oral representation, the MyCC will then make a finding of an infringement or non-infringement. If an infringement finding is made, the MyCC can:

- (a) require the infringement to be ceased immediately;
- (b) specify the steps to be taken by the enterprise;
- (c) impose a financial penalty not exceeding 10% of the worldwide turnover of the enterprise during the infringement period; or
- (d) issue any other direction as it deems appropriate.

1.5 Are there any sector-specific offences or exemptions?

Any commercial activity regulated under the following legislation will be exempted from the Competition Act:

- (a) the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998;
- (b) the Energy Commission Act 2001;
- (c) the Petroleum Development Act 1974 (although this is limited to upstream activities only); and
- (d) the Malaysian Aviation Commission Act 2015.

Liner shipping agreements in Malaysia in respect of vessel sharing agreements and voluntary discussion agreements have been granted a block exemption by the MyCC. Upon its expiry, the exemption was extended for a further two years, effective 7 July 2017.

1.6 Is cartel conduct outside your jurisdiction covered by the prohibition?

Yes, cartel activities which take place outside of Malaysia will be subject to the Competition Act if there is an impact on any market in Malaysia.

2 Investigative Powers

2.1 Summary of general investigatory powers.

Table of General Investigatory Powers

Investigatory Power	Civil/Administrative	Criminal
Order the production of specific documents or information	Yes	N/A
Carry out compulsory interviews with individuals	Yes	N/A
Carry out an unannounced search of business premises	Yes	N/A
Carry out an unannounced search of residential premises	Yes	N/A
■ Right to 'image' computer hard drives using forensic IT tools	Yes	N/A
■ Right to retain original documents	Yes	N/A
■ Right to require an explanation of documents or information supplied	Yes	N/A
■ Right to secure premises overnight (e.g. by seal)	Yes	N/A

Please Note: * indicates that the investigatory measure requires the authorisation by a court or another body independent of the competition authority.

2.2 Please list specific or unusual features of the investigatory powers referred to in the summary table.

The MyCC has the power to search and seize, amongst others, any document or item without a warrant if it is satisfied, upon the information received, that it has reasonable cause to believe that the investigation will be adversely affected or the evidence will be tampered with or removed should there be a delay in obtaining the search warrant from the courts.

2.3 Are there general surveillance powers (e.g. bugging)?

No, the MyCC does not have surveillance powers under the Competition Act.

2.4 Are there any other significant powers of investigation?

No, there are no other significant powers of investigation.

2.5 Who will carry out searches of business and/or residential premises and will they wait for legal advisors to arrive?

An officer from the MyCC will be responsible for carrying out the searches at the business and/or residential premises with or without a warrant. Although there is no statutory obligation for the MyCC officers to halt the search pending the arrival of the enterprise's legal advisors, it is unlikely that such request will be refused if it is made by the enterprise in good faith.

2.6 Is in-house legal advice protected by the rules of privilege?

No, in-house legal advice is not protected under legal professional privilege and will have to be disclosed to the MyCC upon request.

2.7 Please list other material limitations of the investigatory powers to safeguard the rights of defence of companies and/or individuals under investigation.

There does not appear to be any material limitations on the MyCC's investigatory powers as it has similar powers to a police officer in a seizable case. However, any communication between the company and its external legal advisor is protected by legal professional privilege and will not have to be disclosed to the MyCC during its investigation.

2.8 Are there sanctions for the obstruction of investigations? If so, have these ever been used? Has the authorities' approach to this changed, e.g. become stricter, recently?

Under the Competition Act, it is a criminal offence to obstruct the investigation of the MyCC. This includes:

- (a) refusing the MyCC's officer access to any premises or records;
- (b) assaulting, obstructing, hindering or delaying the MyCC officer from effecting entry into the premises;
- (c) giving false or misleading information, evidence or documents;
- (d) destructing, concealing, mutilating or altering any records or documents relevant to the MyCC's investigation; or
- (e) tipping off any other person of the MyCC's investigation.

If found liable, the following penalties can be imposed:

- (a) if such person is a body corporate, a fine not exceeding RM5 million and for a second or subsequent offence, a fine not exceeding RM10 million; or
- (b) if such person is not a body corporate, a fine not exceeding RM1 million or imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years, or both, and for a second or subsequent offence, a fine not exceeding RM2 million or imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years, or both.

To date, no criminal offence has been found to have been committed by any body corporate or individual under the Competition Act.

3 Sanctions on Companies and Individuals

3.1 What are the sanctions for companies?

Companies that are involved in cartel conduct will be liable to a financial penalty not exceeding 10% of the worldwide turnover of the company during the period of infringement.

Apart from financial penalties, the MyCC may also:

- (a) require the infringement to be ceased immediately;
- (b) specify steps to be taken by the enterprise; or
- (c) issue any other direction as it deems appropriate.

3.2 What are the sanctions for individuals (e.g. criminal sanctions, director disqualification)?

There are currently no criminal sanctions under the Competition Act for individuals who have been involved in cartel conduct save for the offences mentioned in question 2.8.

3.3 Can fines be reduced on the basis of 'financial hardship' or 'inability to pay' grounds? If so, by how much?

There are currently no precedents on whether "financial hardship" or "inability to pay" are grounds for a reduction in the fines imposed.

In computing the financial penalties, the MyCC will take into consideration whether there are any mitigating and/or aggravating factors including but not limited to the following:

- (a) seriousness of the infringement;
- (b) turnover of the market involved;
- (c) duration of the infringement;
- (d) impact of the infringement;
- (e) degree of fault;
- (f) role of the enterprise in the infringement;
- (g) recidivism;
- (h) existence of a compliance programme; and
- (i) level of financial penalties imposed in similar cases.

3.4 What are the applicable limitation periods?

There is no limitation period as to the MyCC's enforcement and/or investigation powers under the Competition Act.

3.5 Can a company pay the legal costs and/or financial penalties imposed on a former or current employee?

As there are currently no criminal sanctions imposed on individuals save for those set out in question 2.8, this is not applicable.

3.6 Can an implicated employee be held liable by his/her employer for the legal costs and/or financial penalties imposed on the employer?

As there are currently no criminal sanctions imposed on individuals save for those set out in question 2.8, this is not applicable.

3.7 Can a parent company be held liable for cartel conduct of a subsidiary even if it is not itself involved in the cartel?

Yes. For purposes of the Competition Act, a parent company and its subsidiary can be considered as a single enterprise if the subsidiaries do not enjoy real autonomy in determining their actions on the market.

4 Leniency for Companies

4.1 Is there a leniency programme for companies? If so, please provide brief details.

Yes, there is a leniency regime under Section 41 of the Competition Act where a reduction up to a maximum of 100% of the penalties imposed can be granted to an enterprise which has:

- (a) admitted its involvement in an infringement of any cartel conduct, i.e. any prohibition under Section 4(2) of the Competition Act; and
- (b) provided information or other forms of cooperation to the MyCC which significantly assisted in the identification or investigation of an infringement finding of other enterprises.

The percentage of reduction granted to the enterprise depends on several factors, including:

- (a) whether the enterprise was the first person to alert the MyCC of the infringement; or
- (b) the stage of the investigation at which the enterprise admitted its involvement or at which the information was provided to the MyCC.

4.2 Is there a 'marker' system and, if so, what is required to obtain a marker?

Yes. A company can make an application to the MyCC to request for a "marker" to preserve its priority in receiving leniency. In applying for a "marker", the applicant shall provide the name of the enterprise that will be covered by the leniency and sufficient details for the MyCC to identify the infringement.

4.3 Can applications be made orally (to minimise any subsequent disclosure risks in the context of civil damages follow-on litigation)?

The leniency application has to be submitted in writing and signed by an authorised senior officer of the applicant, unless otherwise directed by the MyCC. The Leniency Application Form is available on the MyCC's website and can be submitted via email or post.

4.4 To what extent will a leniency application be treated confidentially and for how long? To what extent will documents provided by leniency applicants be disclosed to private litigants?

A leniency application will be treated confidentially in accordance with Section 21 of the Competition Act. "Confidential information" means trade, business or industrial information that belongs to any person, has economic value and is not generally available or known by others.

However, the documents may be disclosed to private litigants provided that the disclosure is:

- (a) made with the consent of the person from whom the information was obtained;
- (b) necessary for the performance of the functions or powers of the MyCC;
- (c) is reasonably made during any proceedings under the Competition Act provided that it is not against any direction of the MyCC or the Competition Appeal Tribunal;
- (d) is made in connection with an investigation of an infringement or an offence under the Competition Act; or
- (e) is made with the authorisation of the MyCC to any competition authority of another country.

4.5 At what point does the 'continuous cooperation' requirement cease to apply?

The Guidelines on the Leniency Regime do not specify the period in which the "continuous cooperation" provided by the applicant should cease to apply.

4.6 Is there a 'leniency plus' or 'penalty plus' policy?

A leniency applicant can receive a reduction in the financial penalties by providing information of other cartel conduct and/or prohibition although it is unclear whether the reduction will be greater compared to a situation in which the information provided is only in relation to the cartel in which the applicant is involved in.

5 Whistle-blowing Procedures for Individuals

5.1 Are there procedures for individuals to report cartel conduct independently of their employer? If so, please specify.

No, there are currently no statutory procedures for individuals to report cartel conduct to their employers.

6 Plea Bargaining Arrangements

6.1 Are there any early resolution, settlement or plea bargaining procedures (other than leniency)? Has the competition authorities' approach to settlements changed in recent years?

No, there are currently no plea bargaining or early settlement procedures under the Competition Act. However, the MyCC has the power to accept an undertaking from the company to do or to refrain from doing something and if such undertaking is accepted, the MyCC will close its investigation without making an infringement finding.

7 Appeal Process

7.1 What is the appeal process?

An appeal against the decision of the MyCC can be made to the Competition Appeal Tribunal by submitting a notice of appeal

in writing within 30 days from the date of the MyCC's decision, followed by a statement in reply which sets out, amongst others, a succinct argument of fact or law to support the appellant's case. Parties will also be directed to submit its supporting documents including an agreed bundle of documents and their written submissions. A public hearing will then be conducted before the Competition Appeal Tribunal.

7.2 Does an appeal suspend a company's requirement to pay the fine?

No, an appeal does not suspend a company's requirement to pay the financial penalty imposed. However, the company can apply for a stay of the MyCC's decision (which may include payment of the financial penalties) pending the appeal hearing. Such application shall be made in writing to the Competition Appeal Tribunal.

7.3 Does the appeal process allow for the cross-examination of witnesses?

Yes, the Competition (Appeal Tribunal) Regulations 2017 allow the Competition Appeal Tribunal to issue a direction for the examination of witnesses.

8 Damages Actions

8.1 What are the procedures for civil damages actions for loss suffered as a result of cartel conduct? Is the position different (e.g. easier) for 'follow on' actions as opposed to 'stand alone' actions?

The Competition Act does provide for a right of private action to be commenced by anyone who has suffered loss or damages directly as a result of cartel conduct. The procedure to commence such action is similar to the procedure involved in carrying out a civil proceeding in the Malaysian courts. Although the MyCC has indicated that the private action can be carried out in parallel with its investigation, it is likely that a "follow-on" action is easier compared to a "stand-alone" action due to an infringement finding already being made by the MyCC in a "follow-on" action. In any event, this position has yet to be tested in the Malaysian courts.

8.2 Do your procedural rules allow for class-action or representative claims?

Class-action claims are allowed under Order 15 rule 4 of the Rules of Court 2012.

8.3 What are the applicable limitation periods?

No limitation period has been prescribed under the Competition Act for a right of private action to be commenced. However, under the Limitation Act 1953, the statutory limitation period for an action to be brought in tort or contract is six years from the date on which the cause of action accrued.

8.4 Does the law recognise a "passing on" defence in civil damages claims?

There is currently no guidance on whether such defence will be recognised in Malaysia.

8.5 What are the cost rules for civil damages follow-on claims in cartel cases?

There are currently no such rules under the Competition Act.

8.6 Have there been any successful follow-on or stand alone civil damages claims for cartel conduct? If there have not been many cases decided in court, have there been any substantial out of court settlements?

There have not been any follow-on civil damages claims for cartel conduct to date. There is also no publicly available information on out-of-court settlements with the MyCC.

9 Miscellaneous

9.1 Please provide brief details of significant, recent or imminent statutory or other developments in the field of cartels, leniency and/or cartel damages claims.

There have not been any changes to Section 4 of the Competition Act in relation to cartel claims or Section 41 of the Competition Act on the leniency regime.

9.2 Please mention any other issues of particular interest in your jurisdiction not covered by the above.

There has not been much development in the competition regime in Malaysia with regards to cartel conduct save for the proposed decision issued by the MyCC against seven tuition and day care centres for allegedly fixing and standardising the fees charged for tuition and day care centres in a particular area in Selangor, i.e. SS19 Subang Jaya. A financial penalty of RM33,068.85 was proposed to be imposed on all seven tuition and day care centres. The parties are also required to repudiate the price fixing agreement with immediate effect and to complete the MyCC's e-learning course on Competition Compliance for Small and Medium Enterprises.

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Apart from practising competition law, she has also been actively involved in various personal data protection compliance programmes for clients and providing practical business advice on personal data protection-related matters including advising on the requirements for setting up a data centre in Malaysia, usage of cloud computing services and the data protection aspects in a co-branding agreement. She has also provided data protection trainings to her clients across multiple industries on compliance with the data protection laws in Malaysia.

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