

## SCOTUS Opinion: Seamen Are Not Entitled To Punitive Damages Under Claims Of Unseaworthiness

24 Jun 2019

In [Dutra Group v. Batterton](#), a sailor was injured when a hatch blew open. He sued the vessel's owner claiming unseaworthiness, seeking compensatory and punitive damages. The owner moved to strike the punitive damages claim, which was denied by the district court and affirmed by the Ninth Circuit. The Court, in a 6-3 opinion by Justice Alito, reversed and remanded, holding that punitive damages are not available for unseaworthiness claims. The Court noted that the historical evidence did not show any basis for punitive damages being available under that tort, and declined to permit such a "novel remedy" that was not uniform with existing federal admiralty law, noting that adopting such relief would create bizarre results by, for example, making an owner of a vessel subject to punitive damages when the ship's master or operator would not be, even though the latter would likely bear more culpability. Justice Ginsburg, joined by Justices Breyer and Sotomayor, dissented, arguing that unseaworthiness claims are sufficiently similar to other claims entitled to punitive damages awards. A link to the opinion is [here](#).

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**TAGGED:** scotus, SCOTUS opinons, Punitive Damages, Unseaworthiness, Dutra Group v. Batterton, admiralty law