

HMD CIRCULAR NO. 1/2013

Pleadings Issues at Case Management Conferences (HMG Circular No. 1/2013, dated 20 September 2013)

This circular sets out the Registrar's practice in relation to pleadings issues at Case Management Conferences (CMCs) that are conducted after the close of pleadings.

Generally, the Registrar will adopt one of the following three approaches to various pleading issues:

1. Require rectification by necessary amendment of the pleadings
2. Require clarification, but no need for amendment
3. Raise for parties' information, with a caution on cost implications

These pleadings issues may be addressed in the presence of the parties at the CMC or in writing.

The sections referred to in the examples in this circular are sections from the Trade Marks Act (Cap 332, 2005 Rev Ed). The rules referred to in the examples in this circular are rules from the Trade Marks Rules (Cap 332, 2008 Rev Ed).

A. REQUIRE RECTIFICATION BY NECESSARY AMENDMENT OF THE PLEADINGS

Where certain mandatory requirements specified in legislation are not complied with, the Registrar may require amendment of the pleadings and make the appropriate directions and orders, including orders as to costs.

Examples include the following scenarios:

(i) Rule 30(2)

The opponent / applicant for invalidation, if relying on an earlier trade mark in its case, must provide the stipulated information on such earlier trade mark.

(ii) Rule 30(3)

The opponent / applicant for invalidation, if relying on an earlier trade mark which is well known, must provide the stipulated information on such well known earlier trade mark.

Information on use and promotion such as information relating to duration, geographical area of the use and promotion of the well known mark; registrations / applications for the well known mark worldwide etc. will be acceptable for compliance with Rule 30(3), see HMD Circular 1/2010 dated 20 August 2010.

B. REQUIRE CLARIFICATION OF GROUND, BUT NO NEED FOR AMENDMENT

The Registrar will require clarification where the opponent / applicant for invalidation or revocation has cited the correct section of legislation but did not specify the respective paragraph; or has cited the correct main section and paragraph but did not specify the respective sub-paragraph. The claims accompanying the cited section or paragraph sometimes indicate which paragraph or sub-paragraph is in view. However, since the cited main section or paragraph is general, the opponent / applicant for invalidation or revocation is not precluded from relying on any other or all paragraphs or sub- paragraphs, besides

that specifically described in the claim. This poses some uncertainty over the grounds on which the opponent / applicant for invalidation or revocation relies.

It would be acceptable for the opponent / applicant for invalidation or revocation to clarify, either verbally at the CMC or in writing after the CMC, the paragraph(s) or sub-paragraph(s) of the section on which he relies. Such clarifications will be recorded so that the grounds relied on will be clear to all the parties and the Registrar. However, the Registrar will not require any amendments to the pleadings as a matter of necessity. If the opponent / applicant for invalidation or revocation were to make amendments to other aspects of the pleadings, the Registrar may suggest that such amendments specifying the paragraph(s) or sub-paragraph(s) of the section on which he relies be made at the same time since other amendments will be made in any case.

Examples include the following scenarios:

(i) Section 8(2) pleaded

The opponent / applicant for invalidation should clarify whether he intends to proceed on Section 8(2)(a) or (b) or both.

(ii) Section 8(4) pleaded

The opponent / applicant for invalidation should clarify whether he intends to proceed on Section 8(4)(b)(i), Section 8(4)(b)(ii)(A), Section 8(4)(b)(ii)(B) or a combination of some or all the three limbs under Section 8(4).

(iii) Section 8(7) pleaded

The opponent / applicant for invalidation should clarify whether he intends to proceed on Section 8(7)(a) or (b) or both.

(iv) Section 22(1) pleaded

The applicant for revocation should clarify whether he intends to proceed on Section 22(1) (a), (b), (c) or (d) or a combination of some or all of the sub-paragraphs under Section 22(1).

C. RAISE FOR PARTIES' INFORMATION, WITH A CAUTION ON COST IMPLICATIONS

In most of the following scenarios, the opponent / applicant for invalidation has pleaded certain grounds erroneously. The Registrar will raise the issue for the parties' information, with a general caution on cost implications should a successful opponent / applicant for invalidation or revocation fail on that particular ground, having been alerted to the issue at this early stage.

The opponent / applicant for invalidation or revocation is not required to amend the pleadings. However, the opponent / applicant for invalidation or revocation may on his own accord apply to amend the pleadings by removing or rectifying the pleading.

Examples include the following scenarios:

1. Pleading an absolute ground of objection where the substance of the objection is relative to an earlier right, and not absolute in nature

(i) Section 7(1)(a),(b),(c)

The opponent / applicant for invalidation pleads that the application mark / registered mark is so similar to his earlier trade mark that it is not capable of distinguishing the applicant's goods; or is devoid of any distinctive character; or directly describes the applicant's goods as emanating from the opponent / applicant for invalidation.

However, Section 7(1)(a),(b),(c) objections are based on absolute grounds and not founded on a claim of similarity of marks nor made with reference to an earlier trade mark.

(ii) Section 7(4)(b)

The opponent / applicant for invalidation pleads that the application mark / registered mark is so similar to his earlier trade mark that it will deceive the public that the applicant's goods emanate from the opponent / applicant for invalidation.

However, deceptiveness under Section 7(4)(b) is an absolute ground and not founded on a claim of similarity with an earlier trade mark.

(iii) Section 7(5)

The opponent / applicant for invalidation makes a claim of passing off and cites Section 7(5) instead of or in addition to Section 8(7)(a).

However, Section 7(5) is inapplicable to passing off as it is an absolute ground. Section 8(7)(a) specifically refers to the law of passing off and is the correct ground to plead where passing off is alleged.

2. Pleading an erroneous ground

(i) Section 4(1), Section 5(2)(e)

The opponent / applicant for invalidation makes a claim of bad faith under Section 4(1) and/or Section 5(2)(e) instead of or in addition to Section 7(6).

However, Section 4(1) and Section 5(2)(e) are not applicable grounds for the purpose of opposition or invalidation. Section 7(6) specifically refers to bad faith and is the correct ground to plead where bad faith is alleged.

(ii) Section 55

The opponent / applicant for invalidation relies on an earlier well known mark but pleads Section 55 instead of or in addition to Section 8(4).

However, Section 55 can only be invoked before the courts as it relates to the issuance of an injunction against a mark that conflicts with a well known mark and the Registrar has no powers to order an injunction. Section 8(4) governs the registrability of trade marks in relation to earlier well known marks and is the correct ground to plead in this scenario.

(iii) Article 6*bis* of Paris Convention

The opponent / applicant for invalidation relies on an earlier well known mark but pleads Article 6*bis* instead of or in addition to Section 8(4).

However, Article 6*bis* is inapplicable as the Registrar does not have the power to apply an international obligation as such. The Registrar can only apply national legislation that implements Singapore's international obligations. Section 8(4) governs the registrability of trade marks in relation to earlier well known marks and is the correct ground to plead in this scenario.

(iv) Section 8(3)

The opponent / applicant for invalidation pleads Section 8(3) which applies to an application filed before 1 July 2004. However, the opposed application is filed on or after 1 July 2004.

Therefore, Section 8(3) has been erroneously pleaded. Section 8(4) is the correct ground to plead in this scenario.

3. Kitchen sink pleading

Rule 30(1) and Rule 57(2) require the Notice of Opposition and Application for Invalidation respectively to contain a statement of the grounds on which the action is proceeding.

A kitchen sink pleading purports to reserve the right to plead all or any other grounds not expressly pleaded.

If the statement of grounds contains a kitchen sink pleading, the Registrar will inform parties that such pleading will not be given effect.

Circular issued on 20 September 2013 by the Registrar of Trade Marks.