

Welcome to *The Good Oil*, an e-newsletter designed to keep people in touch with what's happening in the oil spill response area of Maritime New Zealand (MNZ). Contributions and/or feedback are welcome and can be emailed to sophie.hazelhurst@maritimenz.govt.nz.

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Greetings,

It's been a very busy time since the last edition of *The Good Oil*. The Marine Pollution Response Service (MPRS) has been involved in two international oil spill responses, has hosted the annual regional council workshop in Auckland, and has also convened a workshop for the media and community relations professionals we will be calling on in the event of a Tier 3 oil spill in New Zealand.

As the recent two Australian oil spills – one in Queensland in March and the recent spill from the Montara well head near Darwin – have shown, big spills are still happening and we will be called upon to respond.

Maritime New Zealand (MNZ) has sent two staff members to assist with the Montara response – they will be involved in a unique spill response and gain a huge amount of experience and knowledge from this spill.

The oft-quoted adage that “spills don't happen that frequently” seems to be becoming a thing of the past.

We continue to appreciate your efforts in the regions to ensure New Zealand has an effective and exercised oil spill response system in place.

As many of you will already be aware, to underpin and support the national and regional activities, we are conducting a 2009 marine oil spill risk assessment similar to the 2004 risk assessment.

Following on from this, a capability review of the New Zealand response system will be undertaken – with the ultimate aim of crafting a strategic document to take the response system further in terms of capability.

Forum Samoa II

On 3 September, four National Response Team (NRT) members and a Maritime New Zealand (MNZ) nautical expert flew by Hercules C 140 to Samoa to respond to an oil spill threat in Apia Harbour.

The container vessel **Forum Samoa II** was grounded on a reef at the entrance to the harbour with 356 metric tonnes of intermediate fuel oil and 38 metric tonnes of diesel on board. Reports indicated the vessel was damaged, with the threat of a large-scale oil spill very real.

Following a request for assistance from the Samoan Government, MNZ activated its Maritime Incident Response Team, called out MPRS, and within hours a Hercules was airborne with people and equipment onboard.



The team gets cosy with the oil spill response equipment

On board were MPRS operations manager Neil Rowarth, response planning officer Dayne Maxwell, equipment technician Mark Cavanagh, MNZ environmental advisor Alison Lane and MNZ principal auditor Paul Hudson.

The Hercules was also carrying 11 tonnes of oil spill response equipment. This included booms, skimmers, temporary storage and

sorbent material (to help control and recover any released oil), and two viscous oil transfer pumps.

This was enough to get the team started, although it was recognised that should there be a large release of oil then more equipment would be required.

Neil says the team's involvement escalated rapidly from being an interested party to an active player.



Royal New Zealand Air Force Hercules – not luxury travel

“Many agencies came together quickly on the Wednesday afternoon (2 September), and at 8.00pm we were promised a Hercules C 140 for the next morning,” he says.

By 8.30am on the morning of 3 September, just over 12 hours after the initial call, the group had cleared customs and was ready to go.

“A Hercules is not luxury travel, but where else do you get to stand in the cockpit behind the pilot while taking off just to have a look! But the novelty faded as the noise and vibration took over from the adrenalin.”

The group was briefed on arrival in Apia by the New Zealand High Commission and the agent from the shipping company that owns the vessel. The agent was not hopeful of a quick resolution to the problem and promised a detailed brief from the salvage company Svitzers the next morning. The vessel had been stuck on the reef for 6 days at this point, with several attempts to shift her proving unsuccessful.

However, the next morning revealed a welcome, albeit surprising sight – the **Forum Samoa II** was off the reef.

“It seemed that the movement of the vessel on the reef had ground down the reef enough so she came off at the high tide,” says Neil

Damage to the vessel at that stage was to three fuel tanks and the duct keel.

There was also internal damage – pressing on two water ballast tanks resulted in heavy fuel oil shot out of the breathers and into the sea.

It is thought that more fuel came out this way, via the ballast tanks, than out of the splits in the bottom of the tanks.



Forum Samoa II aground on the reef

“This first morning was very productive, and when she came alongside we were able to position our boom all the way around the vessel and so catch any fuel that came out.

“There was an oil sheen visible inside the boom but this was from the oil on the decks washing off in the rain,” says Neil.

Meanwhile, Alison had worked with a team from the Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environment Program to survey the reefs and lagoon in the vicinity of the grounded ship for signs of oil or other debris from the grounded vessel.

As soon as the ship arrived in port Alison was also able to conduct tests on the oil type in the tanks to determine whether it would be possible to use chemical dispersants if there was a large release of oil from the ship.



Boom laid out in readiness for booming around the vessel

Alison says the reef was already fairly degraded as a result of cyclones and human impacts.

“This means it is very vulnerable to further disturbance and intense pollution would potentially have been very damaging. The ability of the reef to recover would have been less than for a healthy reef system.”

The reef was very heavily used for subsistence fishing by the local population. Other sensitive areas nearby included eastern Polynesia's largest mangrove area and a small coral lagoon promoted as a tourist attraction.

Over the next few days, as Svitzers started to get a better idea of the damage and where the remaining fuel oil was on board, the need for the team's presence slowly got less, and so after a few days numbers were slowly reduced, with Paul and Alison away first, then Dayne and Mark, and Neil finally flying home after 10 nights away (Air New Zealand this time!).

"While we were away support from New Zealand was great, as was support from the locals in Apia. And the enthusiasm and professionalism of our team on the ground was great, tolerating long hours in the alternating heat and torrential rain without complaint. Thanks very much to all involved," says Neil.

* The latest news from the agent in Samoa is that Svitzers have removed all the oil that they can find from the damaged tanks. A Classification Society has recommended a short duration tow to a dry dock.

Montara well head spill

On 1 October, for the second time in several weeks, MNZ was asked to provide support to an international oil spill event.

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) asked for MPRS assistance in the response to a spill resulting from a blowout at the Montara well head platform (West Atlas rig) in the Timor Sea, approximately 300 nautical miles from Darwin.



Montara well head platform

Credit AMSA

MPRS planning and training manager Rob Service (attending in a planning function) and MNZ safety auditor Christiaan Moss (assisting with logistics) departed New Zealand shores for 34 degree heat and an incident command centre located in Darwin.

The oil spill resulted from a blowout at the well head, positioned on the seabed, in late August.

Tens of cubic metres of gas and condensate per day have been released and AMSA undertook a massive dispersant operation with Oil Spill Response (OSR – formally East Asia Response Limited) to disperse the crude oil at sea and keep the oil from reaching the Australian coastline.

That operation has now reached the point where an alternate rig has been positioned alongside the West Atlas, which will

drill a relief well to reduce and then eliminate the free flow of oil and gas from the Montara well head.



A Hercules spraying dispersant over the spill

Credit: AMSA

This is undertaken by injecting heavy mud into the well bore to stop the leak. A team can then go on-board the West Atlas rig and further secure the leak by plugging the well bore.

This operation is hoped to be completed this week, which then changes the spill clean-up operation to an "on water" recovery operation. Latest reports describe oil as thick as 150mm floating in 10 m x 10 m lines around 70–80 nautical miles from the rig.

This oil is emulsified, and special ways of recovering the oil to support vessels will be investigated. The sea state has been around 1 m and the wind generally less than 3 knots in the general vicinity.



Skimming oil contained near the Montara well head

Credit AMSA

Rob, who also assisted with the Queensland oil spill clean-up earlier this year, says he hopes to gain some valuable insights from the experience.

"This request is ideal for adding more experience and knowledge of offshore oil spills into the New Zealand response system," Rob says.

Christiaan left his role as deputy harbourmaster at Auckland Regional Council to join MNZ in July.

"Having not been in MNZ for very long, it's great to be part of a team involved with a wide ranging level of maritime involvement," Christiaan says.

Regional council workshop

Around 50 people attended the annual regional council workshop, held this year in Auckland on 18 and 19 August.

Attendees came from regional councils stretching from the Chatham Islands to Whangarei. Also in attendance were representatives from the oil and salvage industries.

As always, there was a good range of discussion with many topics covered. A presentation from Drew Shannon, of salvage company Svitzer on the grounding of the **Pasha Bulker** on Nobbys Beach, Newcastle, in 2007 was well received.

MNZ Director Catherine Taylor also addressed the conference, acknowledging the hard work and enthusiasm the regional responders brought to New Zealand's oil spill response system.

Regional representatives gave presentations on oil spills and exercises from around the country, providing plenty of interest and lessons to think about.

MPRS group manager Nick Quinn says the workshops were always a useful tool for sharing ideas and concerns.

Some of the key topics of discussion at the conference included:

- Smaller regions expressing concern that they may not have enough responders to cope with a large Tier 2 spill. Discussion around exploring options of involving neighbouring regions and developing exercise relationships between regions.
- MNZ is due to launch a capability review of New Zealand's entire oil spill response late this year or early next year. Regions said they wanted to be kept informed and involved.
- Revalidation of responders – there was interest in the idea of revalidation through exercises, or using log books as a method of revalidation.
- Tier 1 site audits were discussed, with a request for more support for the regions from MPRS.

Harbour Buster

MPRS has recently taken delivery of its newest piece of oil spill recovery equipment.



MPRS Operations manager Neil Rowarth and Equipment Technician Scott Read inspect the Harbour Buster with manufacturer's rep Russ Baron.

The Harbour Buster is a collection boom designed to collect, separate and store oil.

It can be successfully deployed in faster water (0.5 – 3.0 knots) than traditional booms.

The system funnels and collects oil in a specially designed separator and storage tank from which it is removed by a skimmer.

The system includes a boom vane which is a device that can be deployed to tow one end of the boom. It therefore requires just one vessel to deploy and tow the system.

This makes it easier to manoeuvre and control.

MPRS plan to conduct trials in the near future before completing training for the NRT.

Around the regions

Auckland

Auckland's harbourmaster's team held an oil response training exercise in August with the **Awanuia**, New Zealand's newest and largest refuelling tanker.



Participants in the exercise on board the fuel tanker **Awanuia**

The **Awanuia** was put through the August exercise to make sure as many oil spill scenarios as possible are covered, and everyone knows what to do should something go wrong.

The tanker can hold 4.2 million litres of oil, enough fuel to fill 5 cruise ships and 12 medium cargo ships.

The 3900-tonne fuel tanker replaces the single-hulled **Tolema** barge which is to be retired. The ship is owned by Seafuels, a joint venture company with Ports of Auckland and Pacific Basin Shipping.

The Turkish-built ship provides a new refuelling service for cruise ships and commercial vessels arriving into Auckland's port.

Mick Courtneil, Marine Pollution Response Co-ordinator with the harbourmaster's office, says the **Awanuia** has a double hull, so in that respect she's safer than the current, much smaller refuelling tanker.

"If something pierces the outer layer, the inner layer still offers protection. But if something does go wrong, it will be major and we'll be prepared to deal with the situation," he says.

Involved in the exercise was tanker crew, and staff from Ports of Auckland, MNZ and Northland Regional Council.

The harbourmaster's team is the first responder to an oil spill on the harbour. On average there are about six major spills in the harbour or further out in the gulf each year.



The harbourmaster's boat alongside the *Awanui* during the August exercise

"In the port area and marinas, we've reduced spills that occur during bunkering by having a really good audit process in place. So in those areas we are better placed to have some control in preventing spills," says Mick.

National Response Team media workshop

In September, a two-day workshop was held at MNZ in Wellington for the media and community relations members of the National Response Team (NRT).

The six regional council team members joined MNZ senior media advisors Sophie Hazelhurst and Ross Henderson for a workshop examining how prepared the NRT is for the intense media and community scrutiny that would accompany a large-scale spill.

AMSA public relations manager Tracey Jiggins gave a presentation on the experiences in Australia – dealing with the Queensland oil spill in March, and the ongoing Montara well head spill.



NRT media members (back row, left to right) Sophie Hazelhurst, Ross Henderson, Rusty Ritchie, Sara McBride-Steele, Michele Poole, Penny Bloomberg (front row) Drew Broadley, Jason Dawson

The group found much to be learnt from Tracey's experiences dealing with large-scale spills and Tracey continued to give advice and feedback over the next two days.

Following the workshop, Sophie is now preparing material to go into oil spill response media packs, which will be sent to all 16 regional councils. The packs will include information on oil spill response, contact details, release templates and other useful material. These should be circulated by the end of this year.

International news

- AMSA says the majority of oil spilt from the Montara well head platform remains within the vicinity of the platform, with light patchy sheen observed to about 60 kilometres east of the rig. Light patchy sheen has been sighted to within 160 kilometres of the Western Australian coast and 120 kilometres from the Indonesian coast. There have been no sightings of thicker oil closer to shorelines and still weather conditions and calm seas have meant the movement of sheen has been minimal. AMSA says the sheen poses no threat to shorelines but can be of concern to birdlife.

- The Mongolian bulk carrier **Black Rose** has been leaking oil since it sank at the Paradip anchorage off the Indian coast on 9 September. The vessel was carrying a cargo of iron ore and had 9,000 tonnes of oil on board. A company has been appointed to retrieve the oil, but progress is moving slowly due in part to hold ups over the ship's documentation. Greenpeace said the spill could have a devastating impact as the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary, home to the endangered Olive Ridley turtles, and the Bitharkanika National Park, which harbours India's second-largest mangrove eco-system, were not far from the accident site.



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