

Paper 23: HARBOURS OF REFUGE

Donald Brodie,
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The Working Group on the National Plan was asked to consider the question of safe havens or harbours of refuge for vessels which may be in difficulty and at the same time **pose a** potential pollution threat.

To date two instances come to mind in the Australian area, those of **PRINCESS ANNE MARIE** in 1975 and **FARID FARES** in 1980. When the former vessel suffered structural damage in the Indian Ocean, whilst en route Arabian Gulf to Kwinana fully laden with crude oil, sufficient time was available for the West Australian State Committee to decide on a course of action. First consideration was selection of a suitable haven. Fortunately the authorities at **Dampier** indicated a willingness to receive the vessel. The port offered appropriate shelter, deep water and availability of resources required for a transfer operation.

In the second case, that of **FARID FARES**, a livestock carrier en route from Tasmania to the Arabian Gulf, the situation was not so simple. The vessel was fully loaded with several thousand sheep and was **on fire**. Whilst oil 'fuel carried as bunkers posed a potential pollution problem, a more complex situation was posed by the thought of a derelict vessel laden with several thousand sheep carcasses threatening a coastline. It was fortunate that extensive **fire** damage caused the vessel to sink thus removing **the problem**.

Clearly in each case the facts of the incident need to be gathered and any intervention action considered with the minimum delay. To assist with the decision making process it is considered necessary to have a number of options available to support the overall contingency plan. Australia would appear to be placed in a better position than many maritime nations in that passing traffic, not calling at Australian ports, is minimal and that the State responsible authority may have sufficient jurisdiction over waters and areas of the coast which would lend themselves to selection of safe havens.

A number of criteria are suggested for selection of safe havens:

- sufficient depth of water
- good holding ground
- shelter from prevailing wind/swell conditions
- relatively unobstructed approach from seaward

- environmental classification of adjacent coastline and fisheries activity
- access to air transport facilities
- access to loading/unloading facilities for emergency equipment.

The above do not necessarily cover all requirements but are suggested as a basis for discussion.

Section 3.6 of the IMO Manual on Oil Pollution, Section III, Salvage, in discussing Harbours of Refuge states the following:

. . . Port authorities, mindful of the risks involved, may be reluctant to accept a distressed ship which may be leaking oil. However, it is rarely possible to deal satisfactorily and expeditiously with a casualty in open sea conditions and the longer a damaged ship is forced to remain at the mercy of the open sea, the greater is the risk of its condition deteriorating and thereby becoming a greater pollution hazard....

The provision of special sheltered areas as “harbours of refuge” should be carefully examined but if such areas cannot be determined, port authorities should be encouraged to permit (with all reasonable precautions, e.g. a requirement that the salvor could not disengage before the owner had complied with all required preventive measures and the posting of an adequate bond) a distressed vessel to enter its harbour to facilitate its salvage and minimise damage.

Whilst it is **recognised** that identification of harbours of refuge does not present an immediate solution to the problem it is a first step in the process. To flag the subject with State environmental agencies, local authorities and other interested organisations would probably result in lengthy and involved discussions and a request for environmental impact statements. It is felt that involvement to this degree would be unnecessary at this stage as considerable time and effort would be spent on discussions for a situation which would in all likelihood not arise. However some thought could be given by members to:

- firstly, identification of areas having the basic criteria outlined above, and
- secondly, the steps which would need to be taken in the decision making process should an incident occur.

It would be useful if an inventory of selected refuges could be included within the National Plan Operations and Procedures Manual and State supplements at a future date. This may however be too ambitious an aim to achieve.