



MARINE SHIPPING INCIDENT

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park - Douglas Shoal

INFORMATION SHEET 4

(to be read in conjunction with sheets 1-3)

Incident details

On Saturday 3 April 2010 the Chinese registered coal carrier *Shen Neng 1* ran aground in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The vessel was grounded on Douglas Shoal for approximately nine days. It is estimated that less than 10 tonnes of fuel oil was lost. The visible surface oil has been cleaned up. The *Shen Neng 1* was towed out of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park on 31 May 2010 and has returned to China.

Environmental assessment

Oil Spill:

A response to the grounding was initiated under the *National Plan to Combat Pollution of the Sea by Oil and other Noxious and Hazardous Substances*. Of the estimated less than 10 tonnes of fuel oil spilled from the vessel, some was recovered in pollution control equipment (oil containment booms and skimmers), some was dispersed both naturally and through application of oil dispersant agents and some was recovered from the shores of North West Island and nearby islands in the Capricorn Bunker Island Group. Since then all shorelines of the adjacent Capricorn Bunker Islands and mainland have been assessed by the Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management and declared clean.

Grounding:

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA), working with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, the Australian Institute of Marine Science and James Cook University, has assessed the physical and chemical impact of the grounding on Douglas Shoal. This is the most significant ship grounding impact ever assessed in the Marine Park, with extensive areas of severe physical damage to and destruction of the shoal habitats and considerable contamination by antifouling paint.

A preliminary report of a limited area of the grounding is complete and available on the GBRMPA website www.gbrmpa.gov.au. The preliminary assessment found spatially extensive and severe damage to the reef community on Douglas Shoal. The severely damaged areas were characterised by near-complete destruction of the ecological community, with the underlying reef substrate either scraped clear or covered in expanses of freshly created coral rubble. Particles of antifouling paint were observed amongst the rubble and smeared onto the reef substrate in some of the severely damaged areas. Coral reef communities suffering this type of damage can take substantially longer to recover compared to recovery from natural disturbances.

A full report on the site impact assessment is in preparation and will be available for release in future, likely in late

October 2010. Initial findings of that full report include that:

- Overall, it is estimated that 115,000 m² of the habitats of Douglas Shoal were severely damaged or destroyed, and patchy damage occurred over much of the 290,000 m² that the ship affected whilst grounded
- Contamination by Tributyltin, a highly toxic component of antifouling paint now banned for current use, was present, although highly patchy in its distribution
- The patterns of damage and contamination are strongly related to the path of the vessel during the grounding, with very little damaged seafloor or contamination recorded at sites distant from the path of the vessel

This incident is the subject of a range of investigations. Consequently the capacity for public release of reports and other information relating to the incident may be affected.

What is happening next?

When the full impact assessment report is finalised we will have a better picture of what damage has been done to the reef and how long recovery periods are likely to be. The ship's owners will be asked to undertake appropriate clean up and rehabilitation to improve the natural recovery rate of the damaged reef. It is important that action at the site be beneficial and not introduce additional impacts to the environment.

Investigations and legal actions:

The Australian Federal Police have charged the Master and the Officer-on-watch with a variety of offences for which the courts may impose penalties of up to three years in prison, or a fine of up to \$220 000. Two people have appeared in Gladstone Magistrates Court and have been granted bail, pending reappearance in court on 13 October 2010 at Gladstone.

Consideration is being given to other legal actions under the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* including for the recovery of costs if this proves necessary

Related information:

More information on the response to the grounding and salvage:

Maritime Safety Queensland: www.msq.qld.gov.au/About-us/Msq-headlines/Shen-Neng-1-grounding.aspx

Australian Maritime Safety Authority: www.amsa.gov.au/marine_environment_protection/shen_neng_1_grounding/index.asp

More information on Matters of National Environmental Significance under the *Environment and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* is available from the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities:

www.environment.gov.au/epbc/protect/index.html