
**National Plan to Combat Pollution of the Sea by
Oil and Other Noxious and Hazardous Substances**

"Exercise 2002"



**Torres Strait, Queensland
31 October 2002**

Acknowledgements

Robert Lea	Marine Safety and Environment Officer Transport New South Wales
Chris Priestly	Senior Maritime Officer, Marine Environment Protection Maritime Safety Queensland
John Wright	Principal Advisor, Marine Environment Protection Maritime Safety Queensland
Ray Lipscombe	Manager, Environment Protection and Response Australian Maritime Safety Authority

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For more information contact:

Marine Environment Protection Unit
Maritime Safety Queensland
GPO Box 2595 Brisbane Qld 4001
Tel: 07 3224 2620

www.msq.qld.gov.au

Foreword

Exercise 2002 was the fifth in a series of biennial oil spill response exercises conducted under the auspices of Australia's National Plan to Combat Pollution of the Sea by Oil and Other Noxious and Hazardous Substances. The exercise was initially programmed for 6 and 7 August 2002 but had to be postponed due to the grounding of the bulk carrier *MV Doric Chariot* in north Queensland waters on 29 July 2002. Exercise 2002 was eventually conducted on 31 October 2002.

A focal point of the rescheduled exercise was a hypothetical discussion based on a fictitious collision between an oil tanker and a bulk carrier in the Great North East Channel area of Torres Strait. This key component of the exercise took place in the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) boardroom on Thursday Island and included active participation by representatives from many of the Torres Strait Islands communities, government agencies with a role to play and other interested parties.

As the exercise scenario unfolded a number of hands-on components were also introduced. In response to these inputs, teams on Thursday, Horn and Yorke islands deployed a variety of response equipment in each location. These practical elements proved an outstanding success and provided an opportunity for people from each of the Torres Strait Islands communities to become involved in the exercise.

The exercise was successful in raising awareness of the many issues associated with ship sourced pollution and confirmed the extremely high value that the people of Torres Strait place on the protection of the region's marine environment.

Both Maritime Safety Queensland and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority would like to extend a special thank you to the two representatives from Papua New Guinea's Department of Transport who observed the exercise. Their participation provided a valuable opportunity to exercise the oil pollution preparedness and response arrangements that exist between our countries.

Thank you to the exercise planning committee for their efforts in bringing Exercise 2002 to fruition and the exercise coordination team for their efforts in making Exercise 2002 a success.



John Wright
Exercise Planning Committee (Chair)
Principal Advisor (Maritime)
Maritime Safety Queensland



Captain John Watkinson
State Marine Pollution Controller
General Manager
Maritime Safety Queensland

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Executive Summary

Exercise 2002 achieved its primary objective of raising awareness of cultural, environmental and jurisdictional issues within the Torres Strait and identifying improvements to the strategic and operational readiness to a major oil spill in the region.

The exercise planning team comprised of experienced oil spill responders from several agencies with a broad range of skills and experience. The team developed and planned the revised exercise as a hypothetical discussion exercise, based on a realistic event in the main shipping channel in the Torres Strait.

The exercise brought a variety of people from agencies responsible for oil spill response and stakeholder groups in the region. This allowed the exercise to test communication arrangements detailed in the Torres Strait Contingency Action Plan for cooperation between all agencies and stakeholders. This was particularly valuable for the Torres Strait community representatives who had the opportunity to voice local concerns and obtain a better understanding of responses to marine oil spills in the region.

The exercise identified seven recommendations aimed at improving Indigenous awareness of oil spill response prevention and response initiatives, and improving administrative and operational arrangements for the region.

The key outcome of Exercise 2002 was the evaluation of the recently revised Torres Strait Contingency Action Plan's (Torres Plan) arrangements and the integration of the Oil Spill Response Incident Control System by the combat agency.

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Maritime Safety Queensland consider developing educational material specifically for the Torres Strait community on prevention and response initiatives for marine oil spills in the region.
- 1.2 Maritime Safety Queensland consider holding regular discussion exercises with representatives of the Torres Strait community in areas of higher risk. For example those islands adjacent to the shipping channels.
- 1.3 Maritime Safety Queensland and the Environmental Protection Agency consider conducting a series of wildlife collection and rehabilitation training workshops to allow the Torres Strait community to assist with the rescue and rehabilitation of oiled wildlife in the event of an oil spill in the region.
- 1.4 Maritime Safety Queensland and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority to provide additional training and exercising in incident management for local personnel that could be required to fill key OSRICS positions during a response in the region.
- 1.5 Maritime Safety Queensland in consultation with the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service, develop a waste disposal strategy for oily wastes collected during a response in the Torres Strait.
- 1.6 Maritime Safety Queensland consider establishing an investigations protocol with other relevant agencies.
- 1.7 The Australian Maritime Safety Authority hold discussion with Papua New Guinea regarding the development of a regional plan for the Torres Strait area similar to Queensland's Torres Plan.

2. Introduction

Maritime Safety Queensland (MSQ) and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA), together with Torres Strait community and State agencies, conducted "Exercise 2002" on Thursday Island on 31 October 2002. It was a hypothetical discussion and equipment deployment exercise.

2.1 Scope of the Report

This report covers the hypothetical discussion exercise and includes summarised comments and observations received from the participants and observers.

2.1.1 Exercise Planning

Exercise 2002 Planning Committee consisted of:

John Wright (Chair)	Principal Advisor, Maritime Maritime Safety Queensland
Chris Priestly	Senior Maritime Officer, Marine Environment Protection Maritime Safety Queensland
Joe Buffone	Manager Oil Pollution Response Marine Safety Victoria
Shayne Wilde	Senior Operations Coordinator Australian Maritime Safety Authority
Don Blackmore	Manager Australian Marine Oil Spill Centre Pty Ltd
Robert Lea	Marine Safety and Environment Officer Transport New South Wales
Jon Sims	Marine Manager The Shell Company of Australia Limited
Wallace Macfarlane	Principal Conservation Officer, Coastal Management Queensland Environmental Protection Agency

2.2 Exercise Objectives

2.2.1 Aim

The aim of the exercise was to raise awareness of the cultural, environmental and jurisdictional issues and to improve operational and strategic readiness to a major marine oil spill in Torres Strait.

2.2.2 Objectives

- Exercise the arrangements outlined in Australia's National Plan to Combat Pollution of the Sea by Oil and Other Noxious and Hazardous Substances (National Plan) and in Torres Strait Contingency Action Plan (Torres Plan).
- Exercise the existing international protocols and mutual aid arrangements outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding between the Australian Government and the Government of Papua New Guinea on oil pollution preparedness and response.
- Raise awareness of the cultural, environmental and jurisdictional issues associated with responding to a major marine oil spill in Torres Strait.
- Evaluate the practical application of policies and procedures outlined in the Torres Plan and the Queensland Safe Haven Guidelines.
- Evaluate the integration of the Oil Spill Response Incident Control System (OSRICS) into Torres Plan and its implementation by the combat agency.

2.2.3 General Idea

The general idea was based on a collision between two vessels in Torres Strait, resulting in a discharge of oil.

On the morning of 6 August 2002 the crude oil tanker Asovin (draft 12.0m) is between Arden Islet and Rennel Island in Torres Strait on recommended track 029°T. The ship is approaching the pilot boarding ground off Marsden Island to disembark a pilot and intends to alter course to 044°T to follow the recommended track past Rennel Island.

At the same time the bulk carrier Northern Enterprise is following the recommended route to the west of Dalrymple Island on course 208°T.

Both ships are closing the 'alter course position' at the junction of the recommended tracks, arriving at the same time. Asovin alters course to starboard to 044°T. For some unknown reason the Northern Enterprise veers to port and hits Asovin in the vicinity of 1P Crude Oil Tank. The coordinates of the collision position are 9°48'S, 143°10.7'E.

Asovin sustains damage to shell plating at 1P with cracked plate extending to a depth of about 9m below the main deck. This damage causes an initial instantaneous loss of oil from the damaged tank. The collision also causes minor

fractures of the longitudinal bulkhead between 1P and 1C crude oil tanks. This additional damage allows oil to leak from 1C into 1P.

Asovin proceeds to anchor off Marsden Island in position 9°43'S, 143°19'E" and continues to leak oil.

2.2.4 Agencies Involved

The following organisations participated in Exercise 2002:

- Australian Federal Police (AFP)
- Australian Maritime Resources (AMR)
- Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA)
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)
- Department of Works and Transport – PNG
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA)
- Island Coordinating Council
- Ports Corporation of Queensland (PCQ)
- Queensland Environmental Protection Agency/Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service
- Maritime Safety Queensland (MSQ)
- Torres Shire Council (TSC)
- Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA)
- Tamwy, Rosehill, Aplin, Waiben, Quarantine Community Council
- Royal Australian Navy (RAN)
- Protection & Indemnity (P&I) Correspondent - White, Young and Williams
- State Emergency Service (SES)

3. Conduct and Content of the Exercise

This was the first exercise of this type held in the Torres Strait and all participants provided positive feedback on its usefulness. The conduct of the exercise was well managed and all the special ideas were addressed, however briefly.

3.1 Exercise Briefing

Prior to the exercise starting a combined briefing was held for both the hypothetical exercise participants and the equipment deployment participants. The Exercise Director introduced Exercise 2002, explaining its purpose and how it would be conducted. A safety briefing was provided for both the hypothetical and field components of the exercise. Participants in the hypothetical exercise were encouraged to ask questions and discuss issues as they arose. After a short break, the hypothetical exercise started at 09:00 and was completed by 13:20. A hot debrief followed the completion of the exercise.

3.2 Participant Feedback

Feed back from the participants on improving the conduct of future exercises, of this type, included:

- Providing more visual aids to explain the general idea and special ideas of the exercise as they develop. For example, a map showing positions of the vessels and slick and copies of important information be provided to all participants;
- There were too many special ideas for the time allowed, therefore limiting the time to discuss the issues. However this allowed for more issues to be identified;
- Allowing more time for the exercise;
- Using small groups to workshop some of the more important issues; this would have allowed some of the issues to be explored in more detail.
- The exercise covered both 'high management level' and 'operational level' aspects of a response. Some participants commented that it was very useful to gain an understanding of the complexity of the 'higher levels' of a response. However, more detailed discussion of the operational issues would have been advantageous. The converse was also true for some of the participants.
- A number of participants suggested that Maritime Safety Queensland consider holding further discussion type exercises on the outer islands in order to explore local issues.

4. Key Issues and Outcomes

The key issues identified during the exercises have been divided into local, State and Commonwealth groupings. Some issues cross these groupings.

4.1 Local Issues

The representatives for Torres Strait communities were greatly concerned about the impacts of an oil spill on the subsistence life style of the community. The most important issue for the Torres Strait community was the prevention of oil spills rather than the response to oil spills. This meant that the Torres Strait community wanted to see mechanisms to reduce the risk of oil spills in the region improved.

4.1.1 Communications and Liaison

The Torres Strait community use the waterways on a daily basis as a source of food and mode of transport. The Torres Strait community representatives raised the following issues:

- Time delays in initial notification of an oil spill;
- Being kept informed of developments during a response. This includes the location of the oil slick, restricted areas, and health warnings etc;
- Communicating with the local community in transit on treaty visits and providing up-to-date information to the local councils that issue the permits.

The exercise highlighted the need to keep the community informed in 'real time' during a response. This would ensure that the local community is not exposed to the on-water response operation, and allow the community to be active in responding to the oil spill.

During the exercise, the importance of educating the local community regarding response issues was raised a number of times. For example, the community has a negative perception regarding the use of dispersants. Given the usually small window of opportunity for using dispersants, spill responders would not have the luxury of time to discuss the dispersant option with the local community during a response.

Recommendation 1.1

Maritime Safety Queensland consider developing educational material specifically for the Torres Strait community on prevention and response initiatives for marine oil spills in the region.

The Torres Strait community representatives felt that the P&I Clubs did not understand the subsistence lifestyle of the community, the importance of the local waterways and the impact of an oil spill on the community. As a consequence, the Torres Strait community representatives felt that financial assistance may not be forthcoming.

The exercise identified that providing education and ongoing information to the island communities about spill response options and the impact of the options on the environment is important to the island communities.

Recommendation 1.2

Maritime Safety Queensland consider holding regular discussion exercises with representatives of the Torres Strait community in areas of higher risk. For example those islands adjacent to the shipping channels.

4.1.2 Equipment and Training

The Torres Strait communities have limited knowledge on oil spills and rely on the agencies responsible for responding to oil spills to prevent and respond to oil spills. The Torres Strait community representative said that this made the community feel powerless to prevent or clean up any spills. To allow the Torres Strait community to become active in the prevention and response to oil spills Maritime Safety Queensland could look at providing further training on how to respond to oil spills, as well as discussions on prevention and response methods.

Recommendation

Maritime Safety Queensland to provide regular training in the Torres Strait region to enhance the participation of representatives from Torres Strait Islands communities in future oil spill response operations and exercises.

It was suggested that additional equipment be stored ready for deployment in the Torres Strait region. This was acknowledged, however it is not feasible as specialist equipment operators are not available to deploy the equipment, and it is not possible to have equipment to cover every contingency. Maritime Safety Queensland regularly reviews the distribution and disposition of equipment throughout the State to ensure a high level of readiness to respond to an oil spill anywhere in Queensland and the Torres Strait.

The Torres Strait community expressed an interest in receiving training in the collection and rehabilitation of oiled wildlife. Currently the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service provides training to agency staff. The exercise identified this as a positive initiative that would improve the Torres Strait communities knowledge on oil spill response and allow the community to participate in the protection of their own environment.

Recommendation 1.3

Maritime Safety Queensland and the Environmental Protection Agency consider conducting a series of wildlife collection and rehabilitation training workshops to allow the Torres Strait Community to assist with the rescue and rehabilitation of oiled wildlife in the event of an oil spill in the region.

4.2 State Issues

4.2.1 Coordination with Commonwealth Agencies

The Australian Federal Police representative raised concerns regarding the lack of early involvement with regard to incident investigation. The exercise incident occurred in State waters and therefore did not require direct involvement of the Federal Police. For incidents that occur in Commonwealth waters, Australian Maritime Safety Authority, Australian Federal Police and the Australian Transport Safety Bureau have a memorandum of understanding in place for notification and investigation of breaches of the legislation.

The Australian Navy representative indicated that naval resources located in the region would be available to assist in an initial response, however, he was unsure of the naval role and the length of time the response could be supported.

Observation

Torres Plan does not specify the role of the Royal Australian Navy in a response to an oil spill. Given the scarcity of resources in the region it may be useful for Maritime Safety Queensland and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority to discuss possible roles for the Royal Australian Navy as Defence aid to the civil community, especially during the early stages of a response.

4.2.2 Environmental Issues

There were a number of environmental issues raised, however, the exercise did not have sufficient time to explore them in any detail.

Environmental issues were the highest priority for the Torres Strait community, however, the priority of government agencies may differ. The exercise showed that the remoteness of the area would present logistical difficulties in responding to an oil spill, therefore affecting the priorities of a response. As discussed in 4.2.1 above, it is important that the Torres Strait community understand the realistic and practical response options and their implications for their local environments.

The role of the Environment and Scientific Coordinator (ESC) was queried and some confusion over responsibilities and jurisdictions was noted. This has also been an issue in other States in the past and was discussed at a previous Environment and Scientific Coordinators Workshop in March 2002. The ESC network refrained from making formal recommendations at the workshop, with delegates agreeing to work within their jurisdictions to consolidate the recent developments in areas such as the Oil Spill Response Atlas and the Oil Spill Response Incident Control System.

4.2.3 Incident Management

On a number of occasions local participants seemed unsure about the correct use of the Oil Spill Response Incident Control System (OSRICS). In an actual incident this misunderstanding could lead to decisions being made without proper consultation and

discussion with the Incident Management Team and advisors. As a consequence any action plan is devalued and easily misunderstood or not followed.

During the exercise several acronyms were used which many of the participants were unfamiliar with and, given the large number of acronyms used in spill response, it would be useful if a list of the acronyms were added to the plans.

Recommendation 1.4

Maritime Safety Queensland and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority to provide additional training and exercising in the incident management for local personnel that could be required to fill key OSRICS positions during a response in the region.

4.2.4 Waste disposal

In the event of a significant oil spill in the Torres Strait region, waste disposal would be a major problem as there are few, if any disposal options in the Torres Strait. Wastes would have to be transported to the mainland for disposal. This raises many logistical and quarantine issues, several of which would be equally relevant to oily wastes collected in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

Recommendation 1.5

Maritime Safety Queensland in consultation with the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service, develop a waste disposal strategy for oily wastes collected during a response in the Torres Strait.

4.2.5 Legal and Jurisdictional Issues

The event of an oil spill could lead to a number of offences being committed, under a raft of different acts and regulations at local, State, Commonwealth and even international jurisdictions. Queensland has a unique situation, Maritime Safety Queensland has jurisdiction for ship discharges of pollutants into coastal waters, Australian Maritime Safety Authority has jurisdiction for ship discharges of pollutants into Commonwealth waters, and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has jurisdiction for discharges of pollutants into the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

The issue of investigations during a response was discussed vigorously throughout the exercise. There is a potential for conflict over jurisdictions and resource allocation for the investigation of offences. It was suggested that a memorandum of understanding or similar document between the relevant prosecuting agencies be developed to prevent the legal and jurisdictional issues affect a response.

Recommendation 1.6

Maritime Safety Queensland consider establishing an investigations protocol with other relevant agencies.

4.2.6 Shoreline Clean up

Although not specifically discussed during the exercise, any significant oil spill in the region would most likely involve a shoreline cleanup. It was noted that in Torres Plan this responsibility is not clearly defined.

4.3 Commonwealth/International Issues

Papua New Guinea does not have a regional plan for the Torres Strait area, only a National Plan that addresses policy and strategic issues. There were several issues identified in relation to the Torres Strait area including deployment of equipment, quarantine, and passport issues and insurance coverage for personnel working across international boundaries.

Recommendation 1.7

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority hold discussion with Papua New Guinea regarding the development of a regional plan for the Torres Strait area similar to Queensland's Torres Plan.

5. Conclusion

Exercise 2002 provided an opportunity to test the Torres Strait Contingency Action Plan and for the Torres Strait community representatives to gain an appreciation of the complexities of responding to a major oil spill in the region. The exercise highlighted the uniqueness of the Torres Strait region and the level of importance the Torres Strait community places on the regions waterways.

Participants of the exercise provided positive feedback on the value of the exercise. A number of participants requested further oil spill response training and more exercises to be conducted in the Torres Strait region. Some of the comments from participants were:

- A valuable learning experience;
- Valuable opportunity to interact with other agencies before the event;
- Torres Strait is a remote area and it is good to know that there is a team effort; and
- A good learning tool, continue the exercises.

Exercise 2002 again proved the benefit of the biennial exercises conducted under the auspices of the National Plan. The recommendations made in this report are designed to achieve constructive and positive outcomes. It is up to the responsible agencies to take action and implement any required changes.

Appendix 1 List of Attendees

Person	Position	Organisation
Ms Vonda Moar	Policy Officer	TSRA
Mr Francis Pearson	Chairperson	Coconut Island
Mr Don Mosby	Chairperson	Yorke Island
Mr Mika David	Representative	Warraber Island
Mr Buddy Ahmat	Representative	Torres Shire Council
Capt Allan Both	Incident Controller	MSQ
Mr Andrew Nolan	Representative	TRAWQ Council
Mr Chris Priestly	Exercise Director	MSQ
Mr Danny O'Brian	SES Officer	Horn Island
Mr Peter Cramp	Operations Officer	MSQ
Mr Edward Patching	Treaty Liaison Officer	DFAT
Mr Frank Botude	Western Province Representative	PNG Government
Mr Kapera Mitaharo	Port Mosby Representative	PNG Government
Mr Tycho Bunningh	Representative	PCQ
Mr Greg Kirk	Observer	PCQ
Mr Harry Mclean	Planning Officer	MSQ
Ms Angela Bullilo	Administration Officer	MSQ
Mr Keith Brown	Incident Safety Officer	AMSA
Mr Ray Lipscombe	Representative	AMSA
Mr Gary Chaston	Resident Agent	AFP
Mr Brynn Mathews	Environment Unit Coordinator	EPA
Lcdr George Graham	Naval Officer	RAN
Mr Mike Short	Wildlife Response	EPA
Mr Robert Lea	Report Writer	Transport NSW
Mr James Aston	GBRMPA Representative	GBRMPA
Ms Petrina Raitt	Observer	WA Transport
Ms Sasha Turloff	P & I Correspondent	White, Young and Williams
Mr Jamie Collins	Media Officer/Community Liaison	MSQ
Ms Kim Daly	Journalist	Torres News
Mr Wallace Macfarlane	Environment Officer	EPA-NPWS
Mr John Kavanagh	Legal Advisor	MSQ