

Senate Estimates Committee

20 October 2009

OPENING STATEMENT

AMSA CEO

Graham Peachey

- The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) is Australia's national maritime safety agency with responsibility for:
 - Maritime safety
 - Protection of the marine environment and
 - Aviation and marine search and rescue.
- We also have strong and influential role internationally. We are active in the IMO Council and the IMO Assembly as well as in its numerous subsidiary committees.
- Much of AMSA's current domestic focus is on the Montara wellhead oil leak.
- Our response to this has come under the National Plan to Combat Pollution of the Sea by Oil and Other Noxious and Hazardous Substances.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation
Committee

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DEPT OF INFRASTRUCTURE

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By: Mr Graham Peachey, AMSA

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- The Plan creates the capability for a nationally integrated government and industry response. It brings together a high level of commitment across all levels of government and industry.
- It has many parts including;
 - The National Marine Oil and Chemical Spill Contingency Plans;
 - Detailed state, local and industry contingency plans;
 - Strategically positioned response equipment; and
 - A comprehensive national training program, including the conduct of regular exercises.
- Response measures to the Montara wellhead incident have been in place since the uncontrolled release began on 21 August.
- We took the reins when the Company (PTTEP Australasia (Ashmore Cartier Pty Ltd) handed over responsibility on the first day - consistent with requirements under the National plan.

- Since then we have managed the ‘clean up’ operations and coordinated all activities associated with the oil leak.

- This has involved:
 - Daily contact with all relevant agencies across government involved;
 - Daily contact with the Company concerned;
 - Daily assessment of the situation, and the development and implementation of the daily tasking and operations that followed;
 - Publishing reports on our website every couple of days; and
 - Extensive media activity to ensure the public interest is addressed.

- Operations over the past two months have included:
 - Daily observation flights to monitor movement of the oil and to target vessel operations;
 - Spraying dispersants on heavier concentrations of oil by both aircraft and

- surface vessels to enhance the natural degradation process;
- Containment and recovery operations using booms and skimmers;
 - Testing the oil to establish the likely effectiveness of dispersants;
 - Using a fluorometer to verify the effectiveness of the dispersant (measures fluorescent light in the water column to assess whether the oil is effectively being dispersed);
 - Using an ultra violet infrared line scanner (on our Dornier) to identify oil on the surface that would not otherwise be visible to the naked eye;
 - Undertaking oil trajectory modelling;
 - Undertaking gas plume modelling to work out the safe area of operations;
 - Using satellite tracking buoys to track the oil;
 - Using satellite imagery to help verify the extent of the slick; and
 - Consulting with our international colleagues.
- We have taken a measured and a graduated response, proportionate to the risks:

- We initially brought in a Hercules aircraft from Singapore to apply dispersant to the oil;
 - We then used 'air tractor' aircraft – they are obviously smaller and far more agile, better able to target the oil as it broke up;
 - We then brought in vessels to spray the oil; and
 - This was followed by extensive containment and recovery operations from vessels in the vicinity of the spill.
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- Our initial response to the incident was timely and careful.

 - On the first day we;
 - Activated the National Oil Response Team;
 - Conducted our own in house oil trajectory modelling;
 - Dropped two satellite tracking buoys into the oil;
 - Held discussion with counterparts in other agencies to assess the availability of assets we would require;

- Activated our fixed wing aerial dispersant contractor and deployed two dispersant aircraft and a Manager to the closest aerodrome (Truscott);
 - Deployed AMSA personnel to Truscott and to Darwin;
 - Sought a liaison officer from the Company to work with us in Canberra;
 - Explored additional aerial dispersant aircraft from regional sources;
 - Held discussions with the Truscott aerodrome operator;
 - Briefed counterparts in WA;
 - Organised, with the Company, the deployment of a modified Hercules C-130 aircraft capable of high capacity dispersant operations from Singapore;
 - Established a working group to support our coordination activities across government; and
 - We placed a statement on our website.
- Throughout all this we have worked closely with other relevant Commonwealth and state agencies.

- We have had support from all States and the Northern Territory in providing trained and experience personnel to fill various roles, and they include:
 - Work on board response vessels;
 - Work on surveillance aircraft;
 - Logistics support; and
 - Incident management.

- They have done the ‘hard yards’. It has been done very well under extraordinary circumstances.
 - There have been long shifts for everyone;
 - Those on the vessels applying the dispersants (for example) have been working in 50 degree temperatures – while fully kitted out in their protective clothing;
 - It has been very taxing for all concerned.

- Dispersant and equipment has been brought in from several of AMSA major equipment stockpiles around the Australian coast.

- We have received strong support from the Australian Marine Oil Spill Centre, based in

Geelong, and the Oil Spill Response Company based in Singapore.

- Personnel from Maritime New Zealand have also provided assistance in management roles.
- To date:
 - some 17 vessels and 9 aircraft have been involved in these operations
 - there are currently around 300 people working offshore in the area affected and at the support bases at Truscott in the Kimberley and Darwin
- Also to date:
 - some 437,000 litres of oil/water mix has been recovered during the containment operations
 - of which an estimated 260,500 litres is oil.

- This is the first time we have had to respond to a significant oil spill this far off shore - and for this length of time.
- I believe it I the first time such an operation has been conducted anywhere.
- Our work has drawn international attention.

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