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Immediate Use

TANKER CHARGED FOLLOWING REEF OIL SPILL

Charges were laid today in the Mackay Magistrates Court against the owners and master of the Panamanian registered chemical tanker *Botany Trust* following an oil spill that occurred on 14 July 2000 north-east of Wigton Island in the Great Barrier Reef.

A helicopter operator first sighted the spill while flying out to sea to collect a marine pilot. The area was overflowed again and the spill confirmed as approximately 300 metres wide and three nautical miles long.

A clean-up was undertaken by the Queensland Department of Transport. The spill was closely monitored with most of the oil dispersing over several days.

An intensive investigation by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) identified five ships as possible suspects. Three of these ships were boarded in Australian ports and oil samples were obtained by AMSA surveyors from a number of tanks on each ship. Samples from two other ships were obtained through international cooperation with New Zealand and the Netherlands.

Fingerprinting analysis of the samples found the *Botany Trust* to be the source of the spill.

Several charges have been laid under the *Commonwealth Protection of the Sea (Prevention of Pollution from Ships) Act 1983*. This act gives effect to the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships 1973/78. The regulations apply in all Australian waters and establish stricter requirements for the Torres Strait and the Great Barrier Reef areas.

The Act provides for penalties up to \$1.1 million.

Further information:

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