



Australian Embassy, Jakarta

MEDIA RELEASE

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Indonesia: Montara Oil Spill

The Australian Government is focused on limiting the effects of the oil spill from the Montara Wellhead and has been keeping Indonesian authorities informed. The incident occurred on 21 August 2009 and light crude oil has been leaking into the Timor Sea since that date. The Australian Embassy in Jakarta notified Indonesia as soon as possible after satellite imagery showed on 1 September 2009 that small patches of weathered oil had crossed into Indonesia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). On 28 October 2009, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Garrett, spoke to the Indonesian State Minister for the Environment, Gusti Muhammed Hatta, regarding the Montara oil spill.

The priority is to minimise the impact of the spill on the environment. The vast majority of the oil is located in Australian waters in an area close to the Montara wellhead. A major clean-up exercise is occurring applying dispersants and conducting containment and recovery operations using booms and skimmers.

Australia has been monitoring the movement of patches of weathered oil and sheen through regular daily overflights, most recently on Tuesday 27 October. These overflights have indicated that isolated patches of weathered oil and sheen have remained within Indonesia's EEZ. The closest patch of weathered oil was observed on 21 September some 94 kilometres south-east of Roti Island. Overflights indicate primarily sheen within the Indonesian EEZ, with occasional small patches of weathered oil. The main part of the oil spill is now more than 248 kilometres from the Indonesian coastline.

The sheen is of a silver colour in appearance and is typically around 0.0001 mm in thickness. It poses no environmental hazard for shorelines but can be of concern to birdlife. The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) assesses that the type and amount of oil that has been observed in Indonesia's EEZ poses no significant threat to the marine environment. Australia continues to monitor the situation and keep Indonesia closely informed of the movement of oil and sheen, and of our extensive response efforts. We will coordinate closely with Indonesian authorities about their monitoring efforts.

As part of the ongoing response to the oil spill, two response vessels entered Indonesia's EEZ on 23 September 2009 to conduct containment and recovery operations, using a boom and oil spill skimmer, on heavier patches of oil that had been sighted by aircraft. This effort was supported by overflying aircraft to direct the vessels to the heavier patches of oil. Australia notified Indonesia of the vessels' presence and their activities in Indonesia's EEZ. These operations were completed within several days and the vessels have since returned to Australia's EEZ and are operating in the vicinity of the platform.

Indonesian officials visited Darwin from 30 September to 2 October to observe first-hand Australia's comprehensive response to the Montara wellhead oil and gas leak. These officials also undertook an overflight of the area.

Reports of positive tests for oil

We are aware of reports from East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) of positive tests for oil in coastal waters. Australia will be discussing these reports with the Government of Indonesia and seeking

to test the samples against samples from the Montara Oil or oil naturally present in Eastern Indonesian waters. Oil has a unique fingerprint, so it is relatively easy to verify whether or not the oil found in NTT was from the Montara spill. It is highly unlikely that any Montara oil would have come close to Indonesian coastal waters. Australia is discussing with Indonesia a possible visit by a team of Australian officials and company representatives to Jakarta in early November for discussions with Indonesian officials and to arrange testing of samples.

Reports of dead fish

We are aware of reports of dead fish in Indonesian waters. Australia has undertaken toxicity tests on fish collected in the vicinity of the oil spill in Australian waters, and results showed no oil contamination. The type and amount of oil observed in Indonesia's EEZ is considered to pose no significant threat to the marine environment. Nevertheless, Australia will offer to conduct further toxicology tests to resolve this issue.

Australian Response Efforts

AMSA is coordinating Australia's comprehensive response under Australia's National Plan to Combat Pollution of the Sea by Oil and other Noxious and Hazardous Substances. Operations to combat the spill have included: daily observation flights to monitor movement of the oil and for the purposes of targeting vessel operations. While there are patches of oil and sheen, the majority of ocean is unaffected. Dispersants have been sprayed on heavier concentrations of oil by both aircraft (in the first few days) and surface vessels to enhance the natural dispersion process. Containment and recovery operations using booms and skimmers have been very successful with over 780,000 litres of product (water and oil) removed from the surface of the water. AMSA estimates that almost 400,000 litres of this product is oil. A jack-up drill rig was mobilised from Batam, Indonesia, and in place near the leaking wellhead on 10 September. This rig is being used to stem the leak by drilling a relief well into the seabed to intercept the leaking well. Fire broke out on the Montara Wellhead after the leak was successfully intercepted on 1 November. 'Well kill' operations, involving the pumping of heavy mud into the well, were underway at the time, but have now been suspended. Current operations are focused on reducing the intensity of the fire.

Consistent with Australia's desire to cooperate with Indonesia to protect the marine environment, Australia has provided regular and detailed updates to Indonesian authorities in relation to the type, amount and nature of the oil present in Indonesia's EEZ and Australia's clean-up response efforts. Australia will discuss with Indonesia any concerns it has about the presence of oil in its EEZ. Australia will continue to act fully consistently with international law and our strong bilateral relationship in responding to this incident.

Background

At approximately 5.30am (WST) on 21 August 2009, an uncontrolled release of hydrocarbons occurred at the Montara Wellhead Platform of the West Atlas mobile drilling unit 140 nautical miles off the north Western Australian coast. As a result, light crude oil is escaping to the ocean surface and gaseous hydrocarbons into the atmosphere. Initial estimates were that 64 tons per day (400 barrels) were being lost. However, observation reports from vessels and aircraft involved in the response indicate a reduction in the amount of oil emanating from the platform since 7 September. The company has not been able to quantify how much oil has leaked from the platform.

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