

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

On behalf of the National Plan Management Committee (NPMC), I have pleasure in presenting the Annual Report of activities of the National Plan to Combat Pollution of the Sea by Oil and other Noxious and Hazardous Substances (National Plan).

The year has been a period of consolidation for the National Plan.

The Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) between Commonwealth, State and Northern Territory Governments formalising the national approach to oil and chemical spill preparedness and response and cooperation, is now well established.

The National Plan Management Committee, in which Commonwealth, State and Northern Territory authorities, shipping, oil and chemical industries and ports are represented, continued to meet its responsibilities and obligations through the provision of advice to the Australian Transport Council on strategic and policy direction and funding arrangements for the National Plan. The Committee met in September 2002 and February 2003.

Significant events occurring during the year included:

- commencement of oil spill equipment redistribution as outlined under the IGA;
- endorsement by the Australian Transport Council of the National Maritime Place of Refuge Risk Assessment Guidelines;
- Exercise 2002 which was designed to raise awareness of cultural, environmental and jurisdictional issues within the Torres Strait and identify improvements to the strategic and operational readiness to a major spill in the region; and
- the 10th biennial oil spill conference, Spillcon in Sydney, was attended by more than 250 oil spill response specialists.

Through the year, work also continued in implementing the recommendations of the 2000 National Plan Review Report. The NPMC has considered the recommendations arising from the 2000 National Plan Review. All of the recommendations have either been addressed to the Committee's satisfaction or have been brought within the ambit of the Committee's work program.

No major spills of oil or other substances occurred in Australian waters during the year. However, the National Plan was called upon to respond to 73 oil spill incidents as well as a number of groundings, notably *HMS Nottingham* on Wolf Rock near Lord Howe Island and *Doric Chariot* on Piper Reef in far north Queensland.

National Plan resources were utilised in two significant overseas deployments.

Following the sinking of the tanker *Prestige* on 19 November 2002, Spanish authorities sought international support to clean birds and other wildlife. The National Plan provided travel assistance for two specialist wildlife personnel from Sydney's Taronga Zoo to assist European clean up teams. This experience has helped to enhance Australia's own wildlife response arrangements. The Australian Marine Oil Spill Centre (AMOSOC) in Geelong financed a senior staff member to work alongside personnel from the UK based Oil Spill Response Limited during the clean up following the *Prestige* incident and this experience will also benefit our spill response capabilities.

National Plan personnel have also conducted oil spill equipment audits in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Kiribati on behalf of the South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP). These visits will assist in the development of an equipment strategy to highlight equipment types, quantities and training that would enable the South Pacific nations to stage a response to small scale spills that may occur in their waters.

Jim Starkey
Chairman
National Plan Management Committee