

POLLUTION INCIDENTS

Pollution Database

Accurate statistical data required for spill response strategic planning provides a valuable resource to assist in responding to an increasing number of queries from the media, interest groups and the general public. It also provides valuable input for risk assessment, to Government projects such as the State of the Marine Environment Report and is a measure of the effectiveness of the pollution prevention measures being progressively implemented.

AMSA uses the following definitions in maintaining the database:

‘Oil discharges’ refers to any discharges or suspected operational discharges of oil from (a) vessel(s) in excess of the permitted discharge rate under MARPOL 73/78 (generally 15 parts per million oil in water).

‘Oil spills’ refers to accidental spills resulting from incidents such as groundings or collisions as well as spills during bunkering resulting from overflow of tanks, burst hoses, etc.

AMSA’s pollution database currently contains over 6000 records. Information is entered from the following sources:

- Oil discharge reports received through AMSA’s Emergency Response (ER), which includes reports from aircraft (Coastwatch, RAAF and civilian) as well as from vessels at sea.
- Records of National Plan expenditure in responding to oil spills.
- Incident reports submitted by State/NT authorities.
- Other sources (e.g. Department of Industry, Tourism & Resources, industry, the general public).

At least 25 per cent of the reports received by AMSA are ultimately not entered onto the database. Reasons for not entering a reported pollution sighting include where the sighting is or is strongly suspected to be one of the following:

- Land sourced, including tank farms, road tanker accidents, drains or road runoff after heavy rain (unless some response activity is required and/or National Plan response costs are incurred);

- Coral spawn or marine algae or similar occurrence, taking into account the location of the report and the time of the year.
- Discoloured water with no sheen.
- Washings of coal dust from bulk carriers.
- Discharge from a sewage outfall.

Reports of maritime incidents where there is no reported pollution are not entered unless there are preventative measures taken by a National Plan authority, which incur costs.

The completeness of the information included in this database cannot be guaranteed, as only those incidents reported to AMSA are included. AMSA does, however, make every effort to ensure the data is as complete as possible.

Oil Pollution Statistics for 2002-2003

There were 300 oil discharge sightings and oil spills reported during 2002-2003. National Plan resources were involved in 77 oil spill incidents which required a response action under National Plan arrangements.

(Note that the criteria applied for 2002-2003 is different to previous Annual Reports in that it now includes all incidents where a response was undertaken regardless of whether direct costs were claimed from the National Plan.)

Figure 1 shows a break up of sources of reported oil spills during 2002-2003.

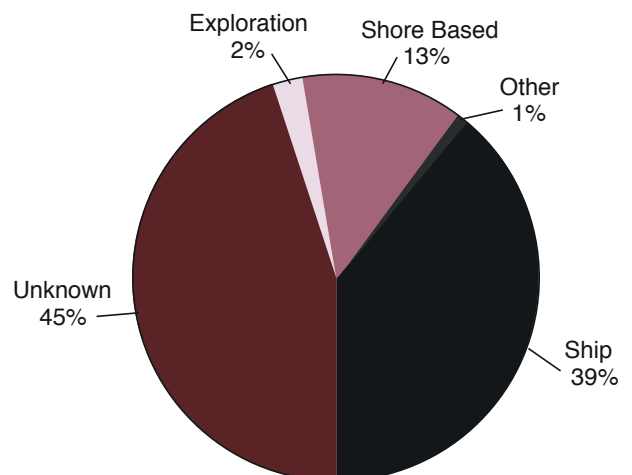


Figure 1 - Reported Oil Spills during 2002-2003

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Oil Pollution Sources

Figure 2 indicates the types of vessels from which discharges were reported during 2002-2003. Where a vessel type is not classified, this generally means that a vessel has been seen from the air but could not be identified.

The source of 117 sightings during the period was not identified, although the majority are assumed to be ship-sourced.

Chemical Pollution Statistics for 2002-2003

There were 3 shore based chemical spills reported during 2002-2003.

Incidents In Australian Waters 2002-2003

On 25 December 2002 an oil spill was reported approximately 7-10 nautical miles east of Border Island in the Whitsunday Islands in the Great

Barrier Reef Marine Park. Laboratory analysis identified the Panamanian container ship *Pacific Quest* as responsible for the spill. The Australian Federal Police arrested the Master and laid charges under the *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act 1975* and the *Protection of the Sea (Prevention of Pollution from Ships) Act 1983*. Charges on the owners were laid under the *Protection of the Sea (Prevention of Pollution from Ships) Act 1983*.

On 28 February 2003 an oil spill on Woolamai Beach, Phillip Island was reported. AMSA assisted the Victorian Environment Protection Authority (VIC EPA) in sampling ships in the area at the time of the spill. VIC EPA are investigating with a view to possible prosecution. Further information on this incident is detailed in the Victorian State activity report.

Details of further incidents in Australian waters are covered in the State and Northern Territory activity reports.

Figure 2 - Discharge Sources by Vessel Type

