



Australia's National Plan to Combat Pollution of the Sea by Oil and Other Noxious and Hazardous Substances

Australia's National Plan to Combat Pollution of the Sea by Oil and Other Noxious and Hazardous Substances (the National Plan) is a national integrated Government and industry organisational framework enabling effective response to marine pollution incidents. The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) manages the National Plan, working with State/Northern Territory (NT) governments and the shipping, oil, exploration and chemical industries, emergency services and fire brigades to maximise Australia's marine pollution response capability.

For information on how Australian authorities respond to oil and chemical spills in the marine environment under National Plan arrangements, see the fact sheet at: www.amsa.gov.au/Marine_Environment_Protection/National_plan/Reports-Fact_Sheets-Brochures/How_Australia_responds_to_oil_and_chemical_spills_fact_sheet.asp

The National Plan provides a national framework for responding promptly and efficiently to marine pollution incidents by designating competent national and local authorities, and maintaining:

- the National Marine Oil and Chemical Spill Contingency Plans;
- detailed state, local and industry contingency plans;
- an adequate level of strategically positioned response equipment; and
- a comprehensive national training program, including conducting regular exercises.

Divisions of Responsibility

The responsibilities of National Plan participants are clearly defined in the National Plan Inter- Governmental Agreement. This agreement provides the basis for access to equipment and dispersant stockpiles, equipment maintenance and storage, funding and joint use of resources. State, local and industry contingency

plans support the arrangements. Each State/NT has a National Plan State Committee, chaired by a senior member of the State/NT marine or environmental authority.

In summary, agencies responsible for responding to marine spills are:

- at oil or chemical terminals, oil exploration rigs, platforms and pipelines - the relevant oil or chemical company, with assistance from Government agencies, as required;
- in ports (other than terminals) and within the three nautical mile coastal waters limit - the responsible State/NT authority through the National Plan State Committee, with assistance from AMSA as required;
- beyond the three nautical mile coastal waters limit - the Commonwealth through AMSA, except in incidents when oil is likely to come ashore. In such circumstances, the State/NT, through the National Plan State Committee, will be the combat authority for protecting the coastline, while AMSA assumes responsibility for ship operational matters such as salvage;
- in the Great Barrier Reef - the Queensland government through the National Plan State Committee, with assistance from AMSA as required.

Management structure

The National Plan Management Committee (NPMC) provides strategic oversight of the Plan, including setting of broad policy directions, oversight of formal arrangements between stakeholders and provides advice to the Australian Transport Council on the collection and distribution of funds for the National Plan.

The National Plan Operations Group (NPOG) supports the Management Committee by addressing operational aspects for the National Plan, such as equipment, training, contingency planning and exercises. NPOG has established three working groups to attend to specific issues on oil, chemicals and the environment.

National Maritime Emergency Response Arrangements (NMEMA)

The National Plan is supported by the [National Maritime Emergency Response Arrangements \(NMEMA\)](#). NMEMA enhances preventative arrangements by ensuring the continuing provision of a minimum level of maritime emergency towage capability around the Australian coastline and the enhancement of the Emergency Response management framework, which includes the appointment of a single national decision maker to coordinate a response to a maritime casualty.

Key elements of the NMEMA are:

- A number of Emergency Towage Vessels (ETV's) are located in strategic Australian coastal regions to provide an appropriate level of emergency towage capability to deal with a significant, or potentially significant, threat to Australia’s marine environment. The ETV’s include a dedicated vessel, [Pacific Responder](#), based in Cairns and available for emergency tasking by AMSA should a maritime casualty occur. Other ETV’s are either vessels contracted by AMSA to be available to be called upon in the event of an incident or suitable vessels that are in the relevant area at the time of the incident that are used as “vessels of opportunity”.
- A Maritime Emergency Response Division Commander (MERCOCOM) is appointed by AMSA to act on behalf of the Authority during a shipping casualty. The MERCOCOM is responsible for the management of responses to shipping incidents, with intervention powers to take such measures as may be necessary to prevent, mitigate or eliminate a risk of significant pollution, including the power to direct a port to release a tug to provide emergency assistance to a vessel at risk or designate a place of refuge for a ship in emergency situations that present a risk of significant pollution. The MERCOCOM has appropriate statutory powers to enable effective decision-making consistent with the aim of the NMEMA.

Funding

Funding of Commonwealth responsibilities under the National Plan is based on the potential-polluter-pays principle. To achieve this, a levy is imposed on commercial shipping using Australian ports. This levy

provides funds for ongoing development, maintenance and administration of the National Plan, including the acquisition, storage and maintenance of the equipment and training programs. The levy also provides contingency funds to cover costs incurred in responding to incidents where the polluter cannot be identified and costs cannot be recovered.

Australian legislation also implements international conventions dealing with cost recovery following spills and pollution response activities (see: www.amsa.gov.au/Publications/Fact_sheets/National_Plan_Fact_Sheet.pdf).

It is important to note that States/NT, industry and ports also provide funding, both direct and indirect, to carry out National Plan functions.

Training

National Plan training conducted by AMSA currently focuses on an Incident Management Team (Core) Course. This course is designed for personnel who would be expected to respond in the event of a marine pollution incident.

Additionally, training courses are available in the areas of:

- Incident Controller;
- Planning;
- Operations;
- Logistics; and
- Finance and Administration.

This training is supported by exercises and various workshops delivered by AMSA, the States and the Northern Territory.

Further details of National Plan training can be located at: www.amsa.gov.au/Marine_Environment_Protection/National_plan/Training_Program/index.asp#framework.

Acceptance of new techniques

The National Plan continues to monitor new technological advances in response to marine spills. Products and techniques must be non-invasive and must not create any additional problems in the polluted area or in disposal methods. A Research, Development and Technology program is part of the National Plan arrangements.

The Australian Marine Oil Spill Centre

The Australian Marine Oil Spill Centre (AMOSC), a subsidiary of the Australian Institute of Petroleum, is an integral part of the National Plan. AMOSC, based in Geelong, Victoria, provides Australia’s central stockpile of oil spill response equipment. In an oil spill response AMOSC has, in addition to its own staff, access to personnel from the major oil companies. AMOSC also coordinates the industry’s mutual aid arrangements.

International Links

Australia was one of the first countries to adopt the International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation 1990 (OPRC Convention). Australia is also a party to the 2000 Protocol on Preparedness, Response and Co-operation to Pollution Incidents by Hazardous and Noxious Substances. A primary purpose of these instruments is to focus the world’s response capability on the problem so all nations will benefit.

This is done through:

- regional and national systems for preparedness and response (Australia has agreements in place with New Zealand, New Caledonia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea);
- facilitation of international cooperation and mutual assistance;
- information exchange;
- promotion of research and development;
- technical cooperation and training;
- oil pollution emergency plans for ships, offshore platforms and sea ports; and
- oil pollution reporting procedures.

The National Plan implements many of Australia’s obligations as a signatory to the convention. For a major oil spill Australia may need to call upon overseas assistance from international stockpiles at Singapore or Southampton (UK). Provision is made for the speedy entry of equipment and personnel from overseas.