



Maritime Casualty Management and Emergency Towing Capability

A casualty management system has been incorporated into the National Plan for Maritime Environmental Emergencies (National Plan), which helps prevent or minimise the release of marine pollution from a shipping incident.

Introduction

The casualty management system was jointly developed by the Australian Government and State and Northern Territory governments and relevant maritime industries. Underlying principles include the system being scalable and flexible to the demands of each incident, operations management of a maritime casualty resting with the commercial sector (i.e. towage and salvage contractors), and the role of Australian governments being one of overseeing the actions of the shipowner/shipmaster and towage and salvage contractors.

The system includes national arrangements for a minimum level of emergency towing capability around the Australian coastline and the appointment of a single national decision maker to coordinate the response to a maritime casualty where there is an actual or potential risk of significant pollution.

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) manages the national emergency towing capability and the position of the national decision maker, the Maritime Emergency Response Commander (MERCOTM).

Emergency Towing

Emergency towing is an important part of the casualty management system, as part of the initial response to assist a ship that is incapacitated and in danger of grounding, sinking or otherwise causing pollution.

A number of emergency towing vessels are strategically located along the Australian coastline within eleven designated regions (Figure 1). The emergency towing capability involves three levels of capability:



ETV Coral Knight

Level 1

The dedicated emergency towing and response vessel (ETV) the Coral Knight, is based in Cairns and provides emergency towing and first response capability in Far North Queensland and the Torres Strait.

Level 2

This involves an ongoing availability of emergency towing capability around the remainder of the Australian coastline. AMSA contracts suitable towage vessels and their crew to be available in the event of a shipping incident. These harbour tug operators are contracted by AMSA to ensure the availability of their vessels and maintain the training of their crews for emergency towing operations.

Level 3

This involves vessels of opportunity, such as offshore supply vessels or anchor handling vessels, that can be directed or contracted at the time of an incident to assist or supplement the Level 1 or 2 capabilities.

Maritime Emergency Response Commander (MERCOTM)

AMSA, as the single national decision maker under the National Plan, has appointed a Maritime Emergency Response Commander (MERCOTM).

The MERCOM is responsible for the management of responses to serious shipping incidents, with legislative powers to intervene and take such measures as may be necessary to prevent, mitigate or eliminate a risk of significant pollution.

A Maritime Casualty Control Unit (MCCU) is implemented for incidents where the MERCOM has assumed control. The MCCU will oversee and monitor intervention actions, review salvage and other response plans, and provide a platform for informing key stakeholders.

State and Northern Territory Governments retain powers to deal with lesser threats of pollution or other environmental damage within their respective jurisdictions, to the extent that they are available. The National Plan sets out the responsibilities of governments in different jurisdictions.

Who pays?

Costs associated with providing ongoing maritime emergency response arrangements are met by the shipping industry through the Protection of the Sea Levy (PSL). The PSL funds pollution prevention, response, and mitigation measures.

In an actual incident where action is taken to prevent widespread pollution, the principles of ‘potential polluter pays’ and ‘polluter pays’ will apply.

The costs of individual responses, including liabilities for compensation in the event of pollution or other damage, will be borne by the owner of the ship requiring assistance. For further information on ship liability refer to ‘Oil Spill from Ships – who pays?’ factsheet.

Further information

Rescue Coordination Centre Australia

Australian Maritime Safety Authority

Phone: 1800 641 792

Media

Australian Maritime Safety Authority

GPO Box 2181

Canberra ACT 2601

Phone: +61 2 6279 5098

Fax: +61 2 6279 5858

www.amsa.gov.au

National Plan website: www.amsa.gov.au/environment/maritime-environmental-emergencies/national-plan/

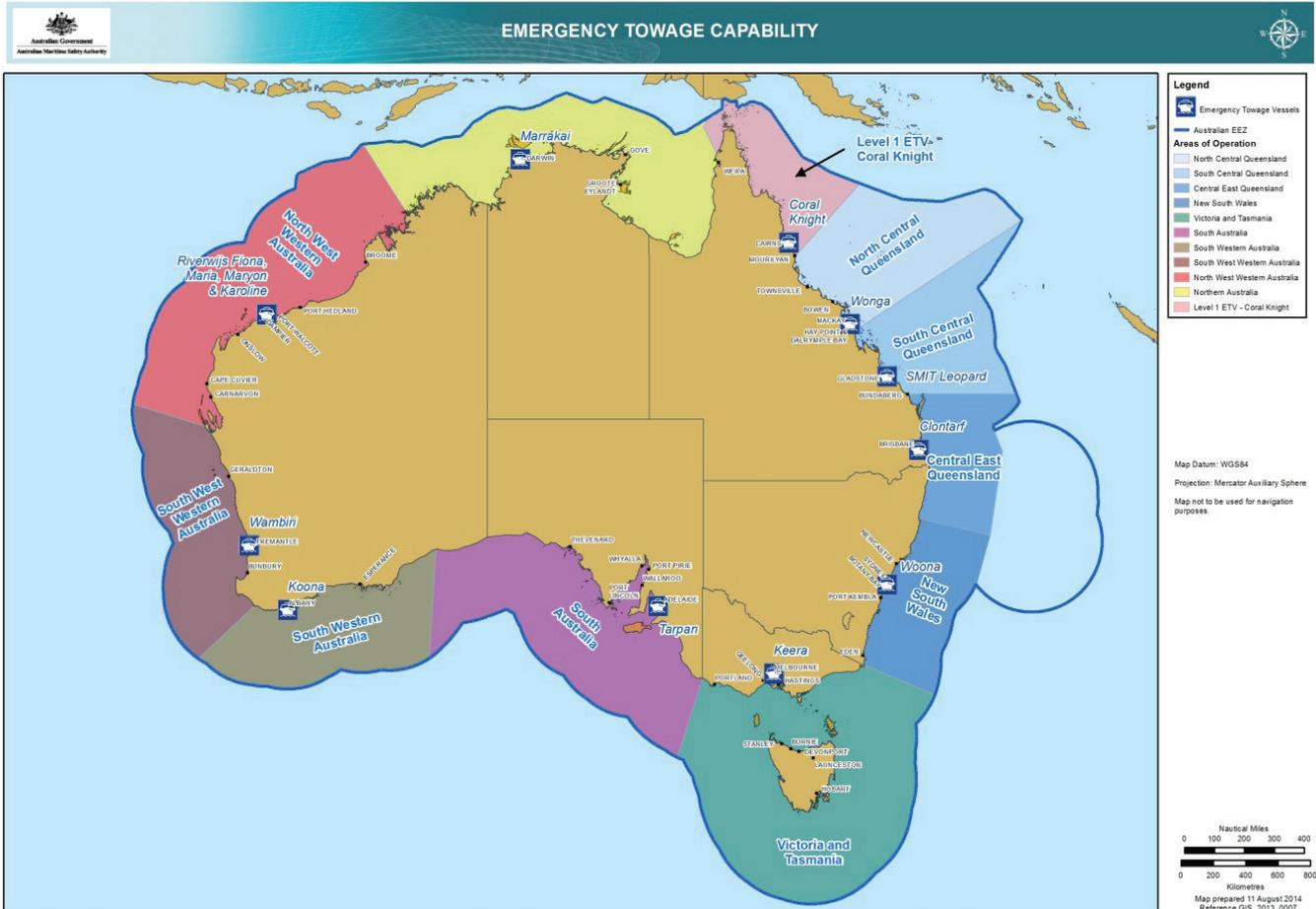


Figure 1 – Emergency Towing Vessel Regions