

Question on Notice

No. 616

Asked on Thursday 25 March 2010

DR ROBINSON asked the Minister for Transport (MS NOLAN) —

QUESTION:

With reference to the Maritime Safety Queensland's (MSQ) disaster planning and the Queensland Oil Spill Plan, and in particular, the Independent Review of the *Pacific Adventurer* Oil Spill —

Why was MSQ not properly prepared for such an oil spill, resulting in the failure in the response, particularly with regards to the response coordination and communication lines?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Cleveland for the question.

Firstly, let me say that Maritime Safety Queensland was properly prepared, and remains properly prepared, to respond to an oil spill of any magnitude that may impact the Queensland coastline.

Regarding planning arrangements, there are two key plans that were utilised as part of the state's response effort.

The first is the 'National Plan to Combat Pollution of the Sea by Oil and Other Noxious and Hazardous Substances', known as the 'National Plan'.

The National Plan was invoked very early in the response effort when it became evident that additional resources were required to effectively respond to an event of the magnitude experienced. Similarly, staff from Maritime Safety Queensland provide support to other states when the National Plan may be invoked elsewhere, as was the case with the *Montara Wellhead* incident off north-western Australia last year.

In the case of the *Pacific Adventurer*, activation of the National Plan was done proactively by Maritime Safety Queensland to ensure the mobilisation of interstate personnel and equipment to respond to a spill which was much larger than originally reported by the ship in question.

It is clear that the activation of the National Plan contributed to the success of the overall response.

Secondly, there is the Queensland Coastal Contingency Action Plan (known as Q-CAP), which is a sub-plan of the 'National Plan'.

Q-CAP is a threat-specific component of the Queensland State Disaster Management Plan, which clearly outlines the arrangements for mitigating the effects of ship-sourced oil spills that impact Queensland Coastal Waters outside port limits.

Q-CAP provides a clear plan, policies and procedures, and outlines arrangements for responding to oil spills in Queensland;

Q-CAP also incorporates the 'Oil Spill Response Incident Control System', known as OSRICS, an internationally accepted structure that defines the command and control arrangements, including the Incident Management Team roles and responsibilities when responding to oil spills.

The state was well prepared for this incident and as the two reports into the response effort reflect, the response to the incident was 'effective and in accordance with the policies and procedures set out in the National Plan'.

The reports also conclude that during field visits in May and June 2009 'it was hard to tell that a 270-tonne spill of heavy fuel oil had occurred'.

The reports also describe that decisions made during the response effort were 'appropriate, sound and consistent'.

I acknowledge that the reports also contained a number of recommendations to improve our capacity to respond to similar events. I am happy to advise the member that significant work has been conducted in this regard, including additional oil spill exercises and training, response planning and the establishment of a governance committee to oversee the implementation of these recommendations.

Contrary to the suggestion that the response was a failure, the reports tabled in this Parliament reflect that the overall result was 'a testament to those involved'.

It is notable that the reports did not support Lord Mayor Campbell Newman's election eve claim that government should dispense low flying planes (with complete disregard for cyclonic conditions) to disperse the oil. Indeed the IAT report, at page 12, specifically states "the initial decisions to undertake shoreline clean-up and not use chemical dispersants...at sea, were appropriate, sound and consistent with National and State plan policies".