

Coal carrier to be stuck on Great Barrier Reef for days

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This April 4 photo released by the Queensland Government shows a small amount of oil leaking from the Chinese coal carrier the Shen Neng 1 after the vessel ran aground near Australia's Great Barrier Reef off the coast of the state of Queensland late on April 3. The carrier will remain stuck for several more days as the delicate operation to pump fuel from the vessel continues.

A Chinese coal carrier that ran aground on the Great Barrier Reef will remain stuck for several more days as the delicate operation to pump fuel from the vessel continues, officials said Saturday.

The Shen Neng 1, which smashed into Douglas Shoal at full speed a week ago, is stranded in the pristine waters east of the resort spot of Keppel Island off the Queensland coast.

Queensland Premier Anna Bligh said the vessel could be refloated after

close to 1,000 tonnes of heavy fuel oil were pumped off the ship and once officials were confident it could be safely lifted off the shoal.

"We won't see all the oil off the ship probably until the end of the weekend at the earliest," Bligh told reporters.

"I wouldn't expect to see a refloat attempt for three, four or five days' time."

Australian police and transport officials are investigating how the Shen Neng 1, laden with 68,000 tonnes of coal, could stray off course and onto a mapped shoal in the world-heritage listed marine park.

On Friday, the ship's owner Shenzhen Energy Transport Co Ltd apologised for the accident and promised to cooperate with authorities to minimise the potential for environmental damage on the reef.

The ship is being stabilised by two tug boats while an initial oil spill of two tonnes was cleaned up using chemical dispersants. Queensland officials say the Chinese owners or their insurers will pay for the recovery operation.

"Make no mistake -- this company will pay a very substantial price for this incident," Queensland Transport Minister Rachel Nolan said.

"Their ship was off course in very environmentally sensitive areas and they will pay the price."

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