

# Salvaging ship from Barrier Reef could take weeks

April 5 2010

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In this image provided by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, the Chinese carrier Shen Neng 1 is hard aground on the Great Barrier Reef near Great Keppel Island tourist resort, Australia, Sunday, April 4, 2010. The 230 meter (755 foot) bulk carrier was carrying about 65,000 metric tons (72,000 U.S. tons) of coal to China when it ran aground Saturday. (AP Photo/Australian Maritime Safety Authority)

(AP) -- A salvage team could take weeks to remove a grounded coal-carrying ship from Australia's Great Barrier Reef, where it is leaking oil in a pristine marine environment, a state leader said on Monday.

The Chinese Shen Neng 1 ran aground late Saturday on Douglas Shoals, a favorite pristine haunt for recreational fishing east of the Great Keppel Island tourist resort. The shoals - off the coast of Queensland state in the [Great Barrier Reef](#) Marine Park - are in a protected part of the reef

where shipping is restricted by environmental law.

Authorities fear an oil spill will damage the world's largest coral reef, which is off northeast Australia and listed as a World Heritage site for its environmental value.

The ship hit the reef at full speed, nine miles (15 kilometers) outside the shipping lane.

State Premier Anna Bligh said a salvage team had reached the 755 foot (230 meter) ship on Monday and were attempting to stabilize it.

"According to the safety experts who have briefed me, it could take some weeks," Bligh told Australian Broadcasting Corp. radio.

"It's in such a delicate part of the reef and the ship is in such a badly damaged state, managing this process will require all the specialist expertise we can bring to bear," she added.

She said the ship's owner could be fined up to 1 million Australian dollars (\$920,000) for straying from a shipping lane used by 6,000 cargo ships each year.

"This is a very delicate part of one of the most precious marine environments on earth and there are safe authorized shipping channels and that's where this ship should have been." Bligh said.

Authorities fear the ship will break apart during the salvage operation or spill more of its 1,000 tons (950 metric tons) load of heavy fuel oil.

Marine Safety Queensland said in a statement a tug boat was at the site Monday trying to stabilize the ship and a second tug was due to arrive on Monday afternoon.

"One of the most worrying aspects is that the ship is still moving on the reef to the action of the seas, which is doing further damage" to the coral and hull, the government agency's general manager Patrick Quirk said.

Quirk said the initial damage report was that the main engine room was breached, the main engine damaged and the rudder seriously damaged.

Aircraft sprayed chemical dispersants on Sunday in an effort to break up an oil slick that stretched for about 2 miles (3 kilometers) long and 100 yards (meters) wide.

A police boat was standing by to remove the 23 crew if the ship broke apart and an evacuation was necessary.

The bulk carrier was taking about 72,000 tons (65,000 metric tons) of coal to China and ran aground within hours of leaving the Queensland port of Gladstone.

Conservationists have expressed outrage that bulk carriers can travel through the reef without a marine pilot with local expertise.

State authorities were seeking information about the effect the coal could have on the reef environment if the ship broke up before its cargo can be salvaged.

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Citation: Salvaging ship from Barrier Reef could take weeks (2010, April 5) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-04-salvaging-ship-barrier-reef-weeks.html>

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