

New break up fears for stricken N. Z. ship

November 2 2011



A handout photo taken on October 12, 2011 shows containers floating near the grounded container ship 'Rena' in the Bay of Plenty near Tauranga. Officers from a ship stuck on a New Zealand reef faced fresh charges Wednesday as fears were raised the vessel was close to breaking up and could spill more oil, worsening the environmental disaster.

Officers from a ship stuck on a New Zealand reef faced fresh charges Wednesday as fears were raised the vessel was close to breaking up and could spill more oil, worsening the environmental disaster.

The [container ship](#) Rena, which ran aground off the North Island resort area of Tauranga a month ago, is being buffeted by a storm, adding further stress to its already seriously damaged hull.

As the [weather](#) deteriorated Tuesday, Maritime New Zealand's salvage unit manager Bruce Anderson warned "the situation is looking increasingly precarious and we are preparing for the worst".

He confirmed Wednesday the Rena was still intact but visibility and sea conditions were poor making it difficult to assess what further damage had been caused and how many more of the ship's containers had gone overboard.

It was unsafe for anyone to remain on board but salvors had installed monitoring sensors on the vessel to measure how much the ship was moving and if it was tearing apart.

When the Rena ran aground on October 5, about 350 tonnes of oil spilled into the sea and was washed on to once-pristine beaches, killing at least 1,300 birds.

More than 1,000 tonnes of oil have since been pumped off ship but another 300 tonnes remain on board.

Nearly 90 containers were washed overboard, 50 of which were unaccounted for, and 1,300 containers were still on board.

The Filipino captain and second officer from the Rena were charged Wednesday with the discharge of [harmful substances](#), which carries a maximum penalty of a fine of NZ\$300,000 (US\$240,000) or two years in jail.

The pair have already been charged with operating a vessel in a manner causing unnecessary danger or risk.

New Zealand's Environment Minister Nick Smith has claimed the Rena ploughed into the Astrolabe Reef while taking a short cut to reach port.

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