

Ecuador emergency over stricken Galapagos freighter

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A picture released by Galapagos National Park shows an Ecuadoran freighter which ran aground on May 9, 2014 off the island of San Cristobal in the Galapagos

Ecuador declared an environmental emergency in the Galapagos Islands Thursday, after a freighter carrying pollutants ran aground last week.

The measure will free up resources to remove the ship and mitigate its impact in the face of "possible [environmental damage](#) that could unleash a disaster" said the Directorate of the Galapagos National Park (DPNG).

The vessel, which ran aground off the Baquerizo Moreno port on the island of San Cristobal on Friday, was carrying 19,000 gallons (around 72,000 liters) of cargo fuel that has already been removed.

But highly polluting motor oil and cleaning products remain in the ship's airtight holds, yet to leak out.

At the request of Galapagos authorities, Ecuador's Environmental Minister Lorena Tapia issued the environmental emergency.

The measure aims at protecting the archipelago's marine reserve, specifically the "area affected by the stranding and possible sinking of the cargo ship 'Galapaface I'" DPNG said in a statement.

The Ecuadoran-owned Galapagos Islands, located in the Pacific Ocean around 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) off the coast of Ecuador, are classified as a UNESCO world heritage site.

Galapaface 1, which was carrying 1,000 tons of cargo when it ran aground, became blocked by sand and rocks that cracked its hull, causing flooding in the vessel's engine room.

In 2001 the Ecuadoran ship "Jessica," which was carrying fuel, ran aground near the same spot, causing a serious environmental crisis that affected several species.

The region is home to a large population of sea lions.

The Galapagos Islands are famous for their unique flora and fauna

studied by Charles Darwin during the voyage of the Beagle as he developed his theory of evolution.

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