

Ship that oozed oil off Mauritius coast splits in two

August 16 2020



The split was caused by a crack in a cargo hold on the stern side, the ship's operator said

A ship that has leaked more than 1,000 tonnes of oil in pristine waters off the coast of Mauritius has split in two.

The bulk carrier MV Wakashio ran aground on a coral reef off the southeastern coast of Mauritius on July 25 and began oozing oil more than a week later, threatening a protected marine park boasting mangrove forests and endangered species.

Mauritius declared an environmental emergency and salvage crews raced against the clock to pump the remaining 3,000 tonnes of oil off the stricken vessel.

"It was confirmed on August 15 that the vessel has broken into two," the ship's operator Mitsui OSK Lines said in a statement Sunday, noting that the information came from the vessel's owner, Nagashiki Shipping.

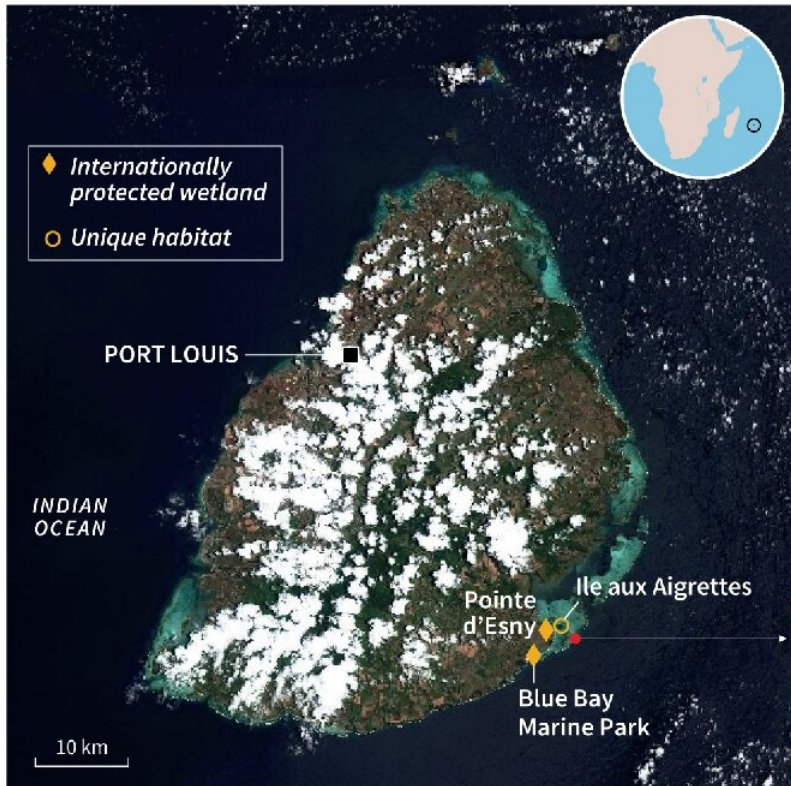
The split was caused by a crack in a cargo hold on its stern side, Mitsui said.

Officials had been preparing for the development for days, and images taken Saturday indicated it was inevitable, with the two pieces only partially attached.

'Worst ecological disaster'

Nearly all the remaining 3,000 tonnes of oil had been pumped off the ship by that time, though there were still 90 tonnes on board, much of it residue from the leakage.

Oil-oozing ship off Mauritius coast



AFP Sources: RAMSAR, MWF, OpenStreetMap, Copernicus

Unique protected sites in S. East

- ◆ **Pointe d'Esny wetland**
Rare subtropical mangrove forest. 1 of the island's largest remaining wetlands
- ◆ **Blue Bay Marine Park**
Unique coastal wetland with exceptional underwater seascape. Home to 38 coral species and the endangered green turtle
- **Ile aux Aigrettes nature reserve**
The last remnant of dry coastal forest in Mauritius. Home to endangered endemic species of bird (Mauritius Fody, Olive White-Eye) and reptile (Telfair's Skink, Ornate Day Gecko)

The MV *Wakashio* bulk carrier that had run aground and spilled over 1,000 tonnes of oil broke into two parts: Japanese operator (AFP photo/stringer Aug 16)



Oil-oozing ship off Mauritius coast

Mitsui noted Sunday that "an amount of unrecovered oil is believed to have leaked out of the vessel", without providing details.

Thousands of Mauritians have volunteered day and night to clean the powder-blue waters that have long been a favourite among honeymooners and tourists.

The spill is both an environmental and economic disaster for Mauritius, which relies heavily on tourism.

The spill already qualifies as the "worst ecological disaster" for the Indian Ocean island nation, Greenpeace Africa campaigner Happy Khambule said, adding that it "puts unique species under immediate threats".

Now that the ship has split, the salvage team intends to pull the front two-thirds out to sea using two tugboats to avoid further damage to the Mauritian coastline, a police official in the capital Port Louis told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to brief the media.

The remaining portion is still stuck on the reef and officials have not yet determined how they might remove it, the official said.



The salvage team intends to pull the front two-thirds of the ship out to sea using two tugboats and let it sink to avoid further damage to the Mauritian coastline

That portion includes the ship's engine room, which still contains 30 cubic metres of oil, and rough weather will complicate efforts to pump that oil out, according to a statement Sunday from the Mauritian crisis committee formed to respond to the spill.

The crisis committee expects rough weather for the next five days, "with high energy swells of a maximum height of 3.5 metres (11 feet)", the statement said.

Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth has come under fire, including from opposition leaders, for doing too little after the ship ran aground.

His government has vowed to seek compensation from the owner and the insurer of the ship for "all losses and damages" caused by the spill as well as clean-up costs.

Nagashiki, the owner, has pledged to "sincerely" respond to requests for compensation over damage to the [marine environment](#).

Japanese Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi said he planned to dispatch a team of environment ministry officials and other experts to Mauritius.



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"We regard this as a significant crisis that could result in the loss of biodiversity," he told reporters in Tokyo on Saturday.

"We are making arrangements to dispatch a team of experts and environmental ministry officials so that we can swiftly assess what the ministry can do," he said.

Global clean-up effort

France is also contributing to the relief effort, and Sebastian Lecornu,

minister of overseas territories, visited Mauritius Sunday to supervise the team sent to help mitigate the effects of the pollution.

He stopped first on nearby Reunion Island, and warned of the possibility that some oil could reach there.

"We remain vigilant about the fate of the wreck and the impact on our coasts," he said on Twitter.

A 10-member team from India's coast guard also arrived on the island Sunday with 28 tonnes of equipment including booms, barges and skimmers.

As of Sunday more than 800 tonnes of oil liquid waste and more than 400 tonnes of solid waste sludge and debris had been removed from the ocean.

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Citation: Ship that oozed oil off Mauritius coast splits in two (2020, August 16) retrieved 19 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-08-ship-oozed-oil-mauritius-coast.html>

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