

Fishing banned as Philippine oil spill spreads

March 3 2023, by Cecil Morella and Mikhail Flores



The slick off the Philippine province of Mindoro Oriental is threatening the region's rich marine life.

Thousands of fishermen in the Philippines have been ordered to stay ashore as authorities struggled Friday to contain an oil spill from a

sunken tanker that is threatening the region's rich marine life and economy.

The slick off Mindoro island, south of the capital Manila, stretched for 120 kilometres (75 miles) and was about nine kilometres offshore, said Ram Temena, disaster operations chief in the affected province of Mindoro Oriental.

The Philippine Coast Guard is still looking for the Princess Empress, which had engine trouble and sank in rough seas off Naujan municipality on Tuesday.

It was carrying 800,000 litres (210,000 gallons) of industrial fuel oil from Bataan province, near Manila, to the central province of Iloilo.

Another vessel rescued the 20 crew members on board.

Diesel fuel, which had been powering the Philippine tanker, and some of the cargo have leaked into the sea, the [coast guard](#) said previously, sparking concern for the environment and industries dependent on the ocean.

Coast guard spokesman Armando Balilo said experts and major oil firms were being consulted over how to recover the industrial fuel oil from the tanker, which is more than 400 metres (more than 1,300 feet) below sea level.

"It is beyond the capability of technical divers," Balilo told reporters.

"Second, we do not have the mechanical equipment, submersible, that can dive to syphon it off without endangering (crew) lives."

Rough seas have prevented the deployment of oil spill booms to stop the

toxic material from spreading, Balilo said.

Instead, they were spraying chemical dispersants on the water surface to break down the oil.

It is not known how much diesel fuel and industrial fuel oil are in the water.

The situation was "getting worse", said Provincial Governor Humerlito Dolor.

He had ordered the province's 18,000 registered fishermen to stay on shore until it was safe to fish. In the meantime, they would receive food packs.

"It will have a big impact on us," Dolor said. "Based on experience, the adverse effects on the community will be long term."

An estimated 591 hectares (1,460 acres) of [coral reefs](#), 1,626 hectares of mangroves and 362 hectares of seaweed could be "potentially affected" by the oil spill, Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Loyzaga said.

The tanker sank near the Verde Island Passage—a busy sea lane between the main island of Luzon and Mindoro—which Loyzaga said was "globally recognised" for its marine biodiversity.

Pola Mayor Jennifer Cruz said some dead fish coated with oil had washed up on the shores of the municipality, which is one down from Naujan.

"Our entire coastline was hit by the oil spill," said Cruz.

"Earlier, we could smell the foul odour. It's like we're inside an auto

shop."

Coast guard personnel and volunteers were cleaning up oil from beaches, some using their bare hands, and had already filled several drums with the toxic material, she said.

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