

Australia steps up Solomons oil spill help as damage worsens

3 March 2019



MV Solomon Trader ran aground on February 5 while loading bauxite at remote Rennell Island, some 240 kilometres (150 miles) south of the Pacific nation's capital Honiara

Australia is ramping up efforts to tackle an oil spill from a cargo ship stranded in World Heritage-listed waters in the Solomon Islands as fears grow of spiralling environmental damage, Canberra said Sunday.

MV Solomon Trader ran aground on February 5 while loading bauxite at remote Rennell Island, some 240 kilometres (150 miles) south of the Pacific nation's capital Honiara.

Around 75 tonnes of heavy fuel oil have leaked into the sea amid failed salvage attempts, while more than 600 tonnes of the oil remains on the stricken 225-metre (740-foot) vessel.

"Given escalating ecological damage, and a lack of action by commercial entities involved, the Solomon Islands government has requested Australia's assistance," Foreign Minister Marise Payne said in a statement.

"In response, we are mobilising an offshore pollution mitigation operation, including equipment, vessels and specialised personnel."

The operation will be run by Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) and will work alongside the Solomons' own efforts.

AMSA has been using aerial surveillance to monitoring the unfolding environmental disaster, while New Zealand on Friday dispatched two oil spill containment specialists to the area.

Rennell Island is the largest raised coral atoll in the world and includes a UNESCO World Heritage site which extends kilometres out to sea.



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The islanders rely on waters in the ecologically delicate region for their livelihoods.

The Solomon Trader is registered in Hong Kong and operated by a Hong Kong-based company, but its ownership is unclear.

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