

Abstract

Pacific Adventurer oil spill: Big birds, sea snakes and a couple of turtles

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On the 11th March 2009 the vessel *Pacific Adventurer* lost 600 tonne of ammonium nitrate and about 270 tonne of heavy fuel oil 7 nautical miles east of Moreton Island, Queensland Australia. Seventy kilometres of habitat were oiled and this included Sunshine Coast beaches, Bribie island and Moreton island foreshores and coastal wetlands. The incident resulted in a Disaster Declaration being imposed under emergency legislation. Oiled wildlife contingency planning systems were escalated and this activated the mobilisation of response personnel and mobile equipment resources state wide. The oiled wildlife response was integrated directly into the overall oil spill response and this operationally was an important feature. Over 20,000 aquatic bird species were observed in the areas adjacent to the oil spill. Less than 100 of these birds were oiled and only 13 Pelicans; 1 lesser crested tern; 1 wedge tailed shearwater; and 1 sacred kingfisher were responded to. Two oiled sea snakes were collected and taken into captive care. Two turtles were also oiled but were suffering from health issues independent of the spill that contributed to their oiling. Only two birds and one sea snake were confirmed as most likely to have died as a result of the spill event. Working with large birds such as Pelicans, sea snakes and turtles does create specialised requirements. The wildlife response although small did effectively utilise a mobile system of equipment to establish a high response capability. For Queensland a mobile response capability, given the frequency and type of spill events over the last 18 years, has shown to be an effective approach. This response also highlighted the importance of having a response capability for dealing with non avian fauna including marine reptiles.