

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Prime Minister of Mauritius, Pravind Jugnauth, has said the country should “prepare for a worst-case scenario”, as the MW Wakashio vessel is likely to “fall apart”.
- At least 1,000 tons of fuel are reported to have already leaked into the ocean, while some 500 tons have been removed.
- Thousands of community volunteers have mobilized in an attempt to mitigate the damage.
- The Government is leading the response, with Committees meeting daily to review and decide on strategic and technical issues.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

More than 1,000 tons of fuel have reportedly already leaked from the bulk carrier vessel, MW Wakashio, which ran aground on the reef of Point d’Esnay on the south-east coast of Mauritius on 25 July 2020.

Analysis indicates that leaked oil is expected to move north along the coast and could affect the coastal regions of Grand Port, Bambous Vireux and Flacq. Strong currents on 9 August were pushing the oil slick towards Riviere des Creoles.

Although the sea conditions improved faster than expected, Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth, who declared a “state of environmental emergency” on 7 August, told media on 10 August that, although the leak had been temporarily stopped, there was a need to prepare for the “worst-case scenario”, as the vessel was likely to fall apart “at some point”.

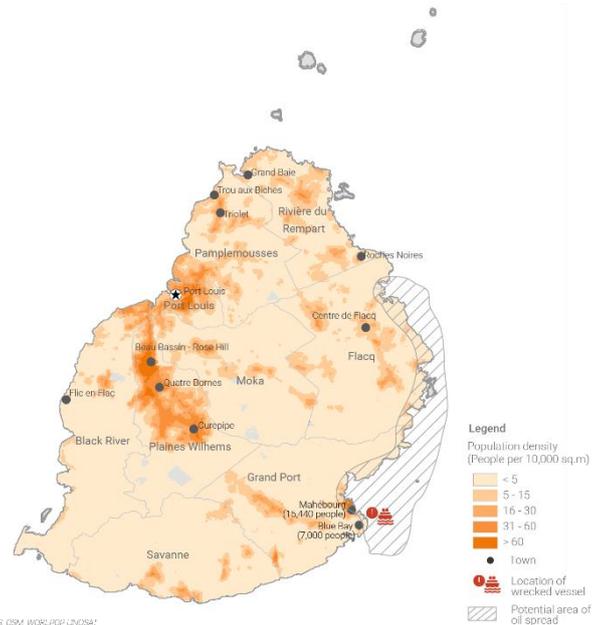
RESPONSE

The Government is leading the response and has established the following coordination mechanisms: the National Crisis Management Committee (chaired by the Prime Minister) meets daily in the afternoon to review operations and provide strategic guidance; the National Oil Spill Coordination Committee (chaired by the Director of Environment) meets daily in the morning to review progress, assess the situation and needs, and plan work for the next 24 hours; there is also a National Emergency Operations Command chaired by the Commissioner of Police and a dedicated Coordination Committee for the Salvaging of the Vessel (chaired by the Director of Shipping).

The response is underway, with floating dams, oil booms, oil pumps, skimmers, vessels to carry the oil sludge to shore (barges and helicopters) and transportation lorries to move the sludges to a recycling centre all being deployed. However, more booms, barges, lorries and intermediary storage containers are needed. Sea booms are being targeted to protect the most environmentally-sensitive areas.

Thousands of community volunteers have mobilized to support the response and are building artisanal booms and carrying out coastal clean-up operations. At least 95 tons of solid waste had been removed from the sand and oil in the mangrove is being cleaned-up manually from Falaise Rouge to Riviere des Creoles. However, more personal protective equipment (PPEs) is needed for staff and volunteers conducting clean-up, and efforts are underway to acquire the required amounts.

Regular aerial surveys by helicopters and drones are providing information on where the oil slicks are moving at sea (to inform pumping operations and placement of protective dams), and where oil has landed (to inform coastal cleaning operations). Oil slick movement modelling is being conducted by the Mauritius Oceanographic Institute (MOI), with inputs provided by the Government of France, a local university, and a specialized Indian Center collaborating with UNESCO. In addition, the Ministry of Environment is conducting daily assessments of the environmental impacts of the crisis, with support



from UNDP, and WHO has provided public health guidelines which the Ministry of Health has used to prepare messaging for affected communities.

The Government is leading discussions to prepare strategic and technical options for the possible worst-case scenario, as outlined by the Prime Minister, of the ship breaking-up. Transfer of fuel from the vessel is ongoing via air and boat.

Following a request from Prime Minister Jugnauth, France—in line with the POLMAR Plan— dispatched a team of 10 French specialists from La Reunion on Monday, 10 August, and a Japanese team of experts is due to arrive on Tuesday, 11 August. The Indian Government is providing technical support on environmental and pollution control and clean-up, which is already on-site. The United Kingdom's (UK) Maritime and Coastguard Agency is continuing discussions with local authorities on possible expertise and equipment required, including in preparation for the possible worst-case scenario. Additional countries are reviewing possible support, in close consultation with the Government of Mauritius.

The United Nations (UN), under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator and with the support of the International Maritime Organization and UNEP/OCHA Joint Environment Unit, is availing oil spill expertise and coordination capacity, which is due to arrive on Tuesday, 11 August, and has already begun remote support. UN entities that are resident in Mauritius are working closely with the Government to support the immediate response, including technical support on issues related to environment, oil spill and impact assessment by UNDP, support from UNESCO Oceanographic institute, public health support by WHO, mapping of populations at-risk by IOM and forensic investigation plus legal support from UNODC. More information about support from UN agencies and other development partners will be shared as the response evolves.

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