



KOREA P&I CLUB
한국선주상호보험

MEDIA RELEASE

GROUNDING OF MV SOLOMON TRADER

Wednesday 6 March, 2019

The insurer and owner of the grounded MV Solomon Trader have offered a sincere apology to the people of the Solomon Islands following the bauxite carrier's grounding on a sensitive reef near Rennell Island.

Although matters of liability are yet to be determined, the vessel's protection indemnity insurer - Korea Protection and Indemnity Club (KP&I) - and the owner - King Trader Ltd (King Trader) - have expressed deep remorse.

Describing the situation as totally unacceptable, both parties are acutely aware of environmental damage and impacts to the local community.

Chartered by Indonesian-based Bintan Mining, the Solomon Trader, loaded with nearly 11,000 tonnes of bauxite, initially grounded during an unexpected gale event on 5 February.

King Trader secured a local tug to try and remove the vessel in a timely manner, however the situation worsened with the arrival of Cyclone Omar, which pushed the stricken vessel harder into the reef, resulting in hull and engine room damage.

Several factors have impacted and delayed the salvage response, including the vessel's power being lost.

The remote and hazardous location has made it difficult to secure local resources and it's been time-consuming bringing in resources from other locations. Personnel and specialised equipment have been flown in by the vessel owners from different countries including Australia, New Zealand, Vanuatu, Singapore, the United States and Europe. Limitations of the local airstrip mean that heavy equipment including pumps and generators have had to complete the final part of their journey by sea.

Inclement weather has made it difficult and at times impossible to access the vessel, and conditions have been too dangerous for external underwater inspections - a key assessment ahead of salvage operations progressing in earnest.

Another setback was the vessel being ransacked once the crew was evacuated, resulting in on-board resources that may have assisted with the early response being removed or damaged.

KP&I and King Trader said the focus has always been on working with response stakeholders to protect the environment as far as practically possible, particularly as far as oil containment is concerned.

The response is being overseen by professional maritime salvors.

The restoration of some on-board power yesterday has enabled a deck crane to lift key salvage equipment on board.

The task of transferring some 600 tonnes of fuel oil on the vessel to higher and safer tanks is progressing, with a view to the oil being pumped to a barge which is due to arrive shortly from Vanuatu.

Another priority is dealing with some 70 tonnes of fuel oil that has leaked into the coastal waters. Boom placement and shoreline cleaning is underway, in accordance with recommendations from international oil spill experts.

Salvage divers are on standby to conduct external examinations of the hull and, if deemed possible, plug hull breaches with sealing compounds. These activities can only be done when deemed safe, as per weather and tidal conditions and in accordance with international maritime health and safety protocols.

Weather conditions have pushed much of the leaked oil to sea where it has dispersed, however some oil has still caused unacceptable coastal damage.

Reports of the Solomon Trader crew being absent from the vessel or intoxicated at the time of the grounding are false.

KP&I said everyone involved in the response had a common goal of making the situation better in the shortest possible time frame, however it emphasised that such maritime casualty responses can be time-consuming, complex and unpredictable, particularly in remote and hazardous locations.

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