

**STRATEGIC REVIEW
OF
COUNTER POLLUTION
RESOURCES
IN THE UNITED KINGDOM**

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March 2004

SUMMARY

The National Audit Office's (NAO) report "Dealing with Pollution from Ships", made several recommendations to the MCA.

These were that the MCA should explore the scope for achieving efficiencies in counter pollution activities and to undertake a strategic review of the overall counter pollution resources at its disposal, to assess in aggregate terms its ability to deal with large incidents and in particular with more than one major incident at a time.

This report is the result of the strategic review.

The review finds that MCA fulfils its responsibilities to minimise the risk of pollution of the marine environment from ships and, where pollution occurs, to minimise its impact on UK waters, coastlines and economic interests, in a manner that is proportional to the risks. The counter pollution equipment in the MCA's national stockpiles is sufficient to respond to all but the biggest oil spills. The review has also found that the risks of very large oil spills has been over-estimated in the past, compared with the historical data on real incidents. The MCA should use the revised probabilities of oil spills contained in this report as the basis for planning purposes.

There is no reason why the MCA should plan to have the capability of being the only responder to very large oil spills. There are other organisations within the UK that have significant counter pollution capabilities, in terms of appropriate expertise, trained personnel and equipment.

The MCA is likely to have to deal with medium size (100 to 1,000 tonne) oil spills on an approximately biennial basis and large (1,000 up to 10,000 tonnes) oil spills every 10 years. The resources currently available to the MCA to conduct at-sea response, particularly the aerial dispersant-spraying capability, are adequate if these spills are of crude oils. The capability of the MCA to alter the outcome at a large spill of HFO is more limited. The recovery of heavy oil at sea is an area of the MCA's capability that could be enhanced.

The probability of two very large (10,000+ tonne) or large (1,000 to 10,000 tonne) oil spills occurring simultaneously is very low. The expense in expanding the MCA resources (specialist personnel and equipment) required to effectively meet this unlikely double-threat would be out of proportion to the remote risk. There is a more realistic possibility of two smaller incidents happening simultaneously. The MCA could deal with two medium-size (100 to 1,000 tonne) incidents and possibly one large (1,000 to 10,000 tonne) incident and one medium-size incident.

The report makes a number of recommendations to the MCA.

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