



AMSA 2009-5873: Oil spill from *West Atlas* Rig; NW Australia

Situation Report: 9.00 p.m. Friday 21 August 2009 (all times AEST)

Summary:

Oil is escaping into the sea from an oil rig 140 miles offshore from the NW Australian coast. There are no dangers to people but the oil spill response is likely to be protracted and logistically demanding. The company is responsible for incident coordination *and has agreed to meet all costs but has sought to transfer coordination for the oil spill response to AMSA under National Plan arrangements. AMSA will accept coordination for oil spill response activities.*

Background:

At approximately 5.30 a.m. WA time (7.30 a.m. Australian Eastern Standard Time) this morning Friday 21 August the *West Atlas* jack-up rig suffered a well-head accident on the sea floor below the rig. As a consequence heavy oil is escaping to the surface and gaseous hydrocarbons into the atmosphere. (See attached photo of the rig and area map). *At dusk this evening the slick was approximately seven miles by three miles in area, extending to the north-east from West Atlas. It does not present any immediate threat to the coastline or offshore reefs and islands.*

West Atlas is operated by PTT Exploration and Public Company Ltd¹ based in Bangkok, Thailand. The NT Government is the Designated Authority for the rig. *AMSA has no jurisdiction or responsibility in terms of remediation of the safety of West Atlas or the operation to prevent further leakage from the well head.*

Situation:

West Atlas was immediately evacuated and is now unattended. The rig is reported to be stable with all power off to minimise explosion hazards. *The company has evacuated 59 of the 69 rig crew by helicopter to Truscott and then on to Darwin. The remainder remain on-scene to assist operations. Weather conditions are benign. Four vessels are on-scene at the rig.*

PTTEP has engaged a well repair expert from Singapore, expected to be on scene on Sunday. Time to repair the well-head is speculative, estimated between 10 days and a month depending on the precise circumstances. Noting the distance offshore, modelling suggests that it could take up to four days or longer before oil might impact the WA coastline or the offshore islands of the Ashmore-Cartier group. In that time, it will have weathered to some extent but around 40% might remain to come ashore. However, modelled oil movement further than two days out is speculative in nature.

The principal response option available is to apply dispersant to the oil slick. Dispersant is best applied from aircraft after the slick has widened and thinned but

¹ See [PTT Exploration and Production Public Company Limited](#)