

CEDRE Information Day – 29 March 2022

X-Press Pearl Incident: Sri Lanka



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Background

- MV X-Press Pearl cargo ship catches fire and burns for around two-week period (May 20 – 2 June 2021) before sinking 19 Km off coast of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Key risks:

- Bunker fuel oil
- Hazardous and noxious substances (81 containers including 25 tonnes nitric acid, caustic soda, methanol, epoxy resin)
- Plastic nurdles (87 containers; 1,680 tonnes)



UNEP/OCHA Joint Environment Unit Response

- Triggered on request of the Government of Sri Lanka both to UNEP/OCHA JEU and UNEP Executive Director
- Experts mobilized by UNEP/OCHA JEU Emergency Response Roster: the European Commission (DG ECHO - European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations)
- Facilitated through the UN Resident Coordinator Office in Sri Lanka

UN Team



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Mr. Luigi Al Caro
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Mr. Hassan Partow
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PLUS Backbench of Scientific Experts at Head Offices

Objectives:

The aims of rapid environmental emergency mission were to provide:

- Technical assistance in scoping and assessing the environmental impacts of the MS X-Press Pearl incident;
- Advisory support on reducing the risks caused by the incident over the short and longer-term;
- Recommendations on longer-term recovery, including building national preparedness and incident management capacity for future events.

Key Activities

- Review of technical documentation relating to incident
- Multi-stakeholder consultation meetings with over 20 institutions from Government, NGOs and academia
- Aerial and boat reconnaissance visits of ship-wreck
- Walkover site visits of impacted coastal zone
- Analysis of satellite imagery



Key Considerations

1. Complex and multi-dimensional emergency:
 - Oil spill
 - Hazardous and noxious substances (HNS)
 - Plastic pellets
 - Burned residues
 - Wreck and containers
 - Air pollution

2. Dynamic and evolving disaster

3. Transboundary Impacts

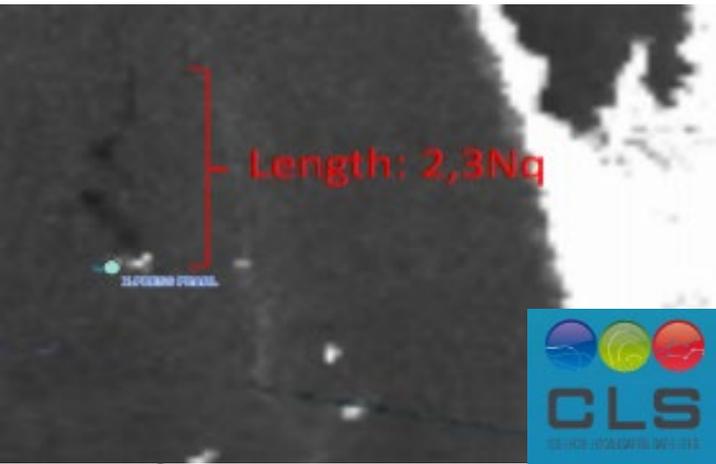
4. COVID Lockdown Restrictions

5. *Sensitive and highly mediatized incident:
i) compensation claims and ii) criminal enquiry*

Reducing Risks: Oil and Plastic Pellets

Leveraging agreements between the Government and shipowners/maritime insurance on:

- ✓ Offshore oil spill response plan. (Oil response equipment mobilized on-site)
- ✓ Shoreline oil spill response plan in the event of a slick reaching the coast developed



Reducing Risks: Plastic Pellet Clean-up



Majority deposited on sand surface



Buried pollution



Presence of burnt plastic particles

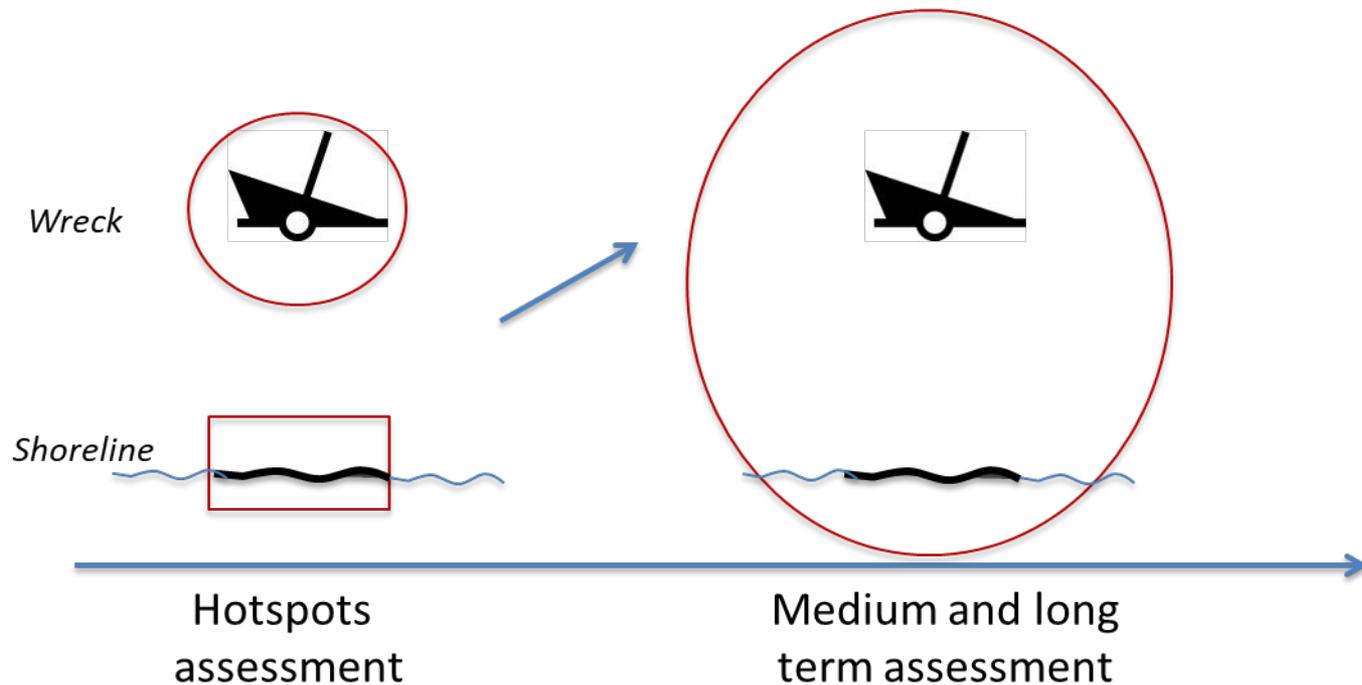
Recommendations

- Perform chemical analyses on pellets and burnt plastics
- Favor on site flotation to reduce sand removal
- Consider the environmental impact of clean-up techniques

Focus Assessment on Priority Hot spots

Assessing pollution in priority hot spots

- i) wreck and containers (incl. biomonitoring)
- ii) shoreline (pellet contamination)



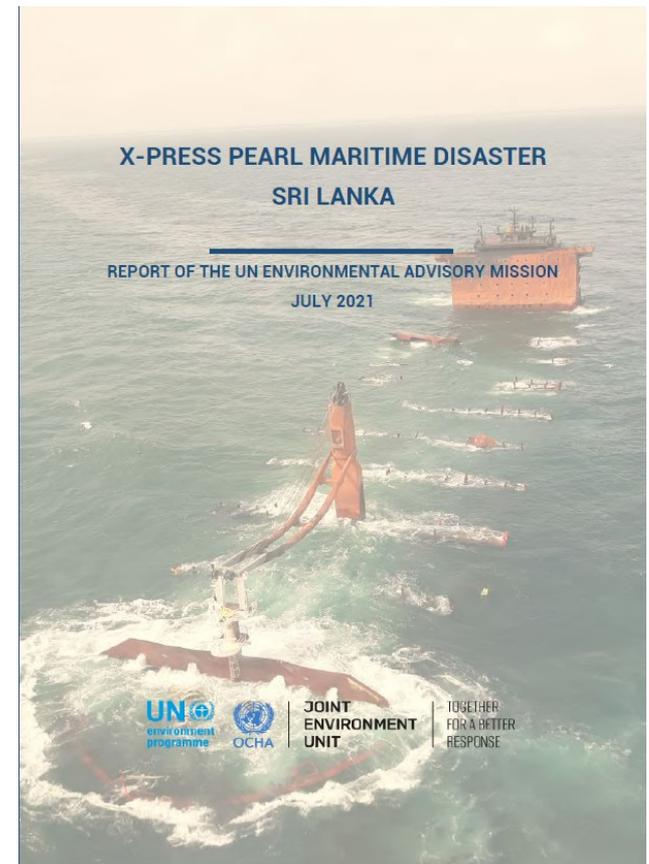
Reducing Risks: Wreck and Container Removal

- Elimination of the current risks by the removal of the wreck and container
- Decommissioning of the wreck and containers (onshore)
- Government oversight of the process



Presentation of Findings and Recommendations

- Inter-Ministerial Committee on X-Press Pearl chaired by Minister of Justice
- Detailed report shared with government
- Short and long-term recommendations including development of “Strategic Maritime Disaster Plan and Centre”
- ❖ Sri Lanka initiative for plastic pellets to be reclassified as a hazardous substance under the International Maritime Organizations (IMO) dangerous goods code for safe handling and storage



Thank you



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