

# PETROLEUM IN FIJI 2002

## 1. TANKER HITS FIJI REEF, OIL SPILL FEARED

SUVA - An oil tanker has run aground in stormy seas on a reef near Fiji's popular tourist islands, threatening an ecological disaster if the cargo leaks, the South Pacific nation's navy said this week.

A salvage attempt would be made within hours to refloat the Papua New Guinea-registered Great Theresa, which ran onto the reef several hours after it left Fiji's main port of Nadi, Navy Operations Officer Waisale Korowisa said.

So far the cargo, the size of which was unknown, has not leaked. Fiji Navy Commander Viliame Naupoto said Fiji had no salvage tugs or other equipment to deal with a large oil spill.

"If there is an oil spill, it will be disastrous for the tourist coastal area of Fiji, especially with the huge waves coming in," Naupoto told Reuters. The ship's crew of eight Dutch nationals was unhurt, he said. Fiji issued a high alert storm warning on Tuesday because of a severe storm approaching from Australia.

Rough seas with swells of up to six metres (20 feet) made it difficult for the navy to reach the ship, Naupoto said.

Naupoto said a tug had been secured to the ship, which was resting on the reef on Navula Passage, about 50 km (31 miles) west of Nadi, on the west side of Fiji's main island, Viti Levu.

"We are unsure if the salvage will result in an oil spill," Naupoto said. A salvage team from the vessel's Fiji agent, Neptune Fishing, was also attempting to reach the ship.

Guests at a luxury hotel on Viti Levu's Coral Coast reported seeing five distress flares this week and local disaster authorities were alerted.

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