

**Statement of Honourable K. Ramano,
Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and
Climate Change**

MV Wakashio Wreck and Oil Spill

Mr Speaker, Sir,

I would like to make a Statement on the development following the Wakashio wreck and its aftermath. At our sitting of 18 August 2020, I informed the House on the situation regarding the grounding of the MV Wakashio and the oil spill which occurred on 6 August 2020 and the days following.

On 24 August 2020, the planned sinking of the forward section of the wreck was completed by the Salvage Team at a depth of around 3100 metres. The rear section of the vessel is still aground on the reef at Pointe D'Esny. As at 23 August 2020, the 30 cubic metres of oil in the engine room have been pumped out by the Salvage team. Floating and loose objects as well as general wastes are also being removed from the rear section of the wreck. Samples of the coated paint on the ship hull will also be collected for analysis purposes.

I wish to inform the House that samples of the oil collected from MV Wakashio prior to the oil spill have been sent to France and Australia for the testing of the presence of Polyaromatic Hydrocarbons and heavy metals. The results of the analysis are expected by next week.

Mr Speaker, Sir,

Around 15.9 km of booms have been deployed at different areas namely Blue Bay Marine Park, Pointe d'Esny, Ile aux

Aigrettes, Pointe Brocus, Mahebourg Waterfront, near the wreck of the MV Wakashio as well as at 4 rivers namely Rivière La Chaux, Rivière des Créoles, Rivière Champagne and Grande Rivière Sud Est.

In view of minimal risk of residual oil spill, if any, and the observed negative impact of the booms on the corals, a strategy for the removal of same in a phased manner is being effected under the supervision of the experts. Accordingly, the deployed booms, including those at Ile aux Aigrettes and the Blue Bay Marine Park, are being removed while taking precautionary measures. These are being stored for decontamination purposes at the National Coast Guard Training School at Le Chaland. The booms deployed in front of the wreck will be maintained.

Mr Speaker, Sir,

My Ministry is working with all stakeholders and experts to come up by early next week, with an integrated environmental monitoring strategy for the immediate, short, medium and long term monitoring, taking into consideration international best practices, with a view to collect data for:

- (i) assessment of the impacts of the oil spill;
- (ii) compiling scientific evidence for claims;
- (iii) advising on end points;
- (iv) advising policy makers on timing for lifting of restrictions of access to contaminated areas; and
- (v) coming up with restoration measures of the affected sites.

A meeting was held with "*L'Association des Hôteliers et des Restaurateurs de L'Ile Maurice*" under the chair of the Deputy Prime Minister and it was agreed that environmental monitoring would be extended on the shoreline near hotels and tourist residences in the

affected and nearby regions with a view to communicate information as to the air, water and sand quality in the region.

Moreover, it has been agreed that a central repository for all data would be set up at the level of my Ministry to keep all records in connection with the MV Wakashio oil spill and its aftermath. Other stakeholders including the University of Mauritius would assist in this endeavour.

Mr Speaker, Sir,

Discussions have been initiated with the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) regarding the setting up of a Regional Oil Spill Coordination Centre along with a Regional Oil Spill Contingency Plan.

As at date, around 12 experts from Japan, UK, UN and International Organisation for Migration are in Mauritius and are providing assistance in different areas of expertise while some 10 experts are assisting remotely. Local experts from the UOM have also been participating in the Strategic and Coordination, Social and Environmental Impact Assessment as well as in the joint monitoring programme.

On 24 August 2020, a National Ramsar Committee was held under the chair of the Ministry of Agro-industry and Food Security. The Ramsar Convention Secretariat is requesting for status of the Blue Bay Marine Park and Pointe d'Esny Ramsar sites following the oil spill. A joint assessment of these sites effected by the local and Japanese experts revealed that those sites were not affected by the oil spill. The findings will be communicated to the National Ramsar Committee.

Air quality monitoring by the National Environment Laboratory of my Ministry is ongoing to assess the possible

presence of Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) at seventeen schools and eight other locations. So far, VOCs have not been detected at any of the affected sites. With the weathering of the oil, a gradual phasing down of air quality monitoring at the affected sites is being considered.

Coastal water quality monitoring at twenty seven sites is being carried out on a daily basis by the NEL, AFRC and MOI to assess for compliance with the Guidelines for Coastal Water Quality of the Environment Protection Act. Trend analysis for indicative parameters has also been carried out. It was noted that the levels of Oil and Grease and Total Hydrocarbons at the most impacted sites namely, Vieux Grand Port, Rivière des Creoles and Bois des Amourettes have decreased significantly as at 23 August 2020 as compared to the period immediately after the spill.

Mr Speaker, Sir,

I am informed by the Ministry of Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Fisheries and Shipping that as at 28 August 2020, 37 melon-headed whales and one bottlenose dolphin were found dead in the region of Grand Sable, Petit Sable, Pointe aux Feuilles and Pointe Canon to Deux Frères. Post-mortem examination was conducted by the veterinary officers of the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Food Security to determine the possible cause of stranding and death.

Mr Speaker, Sir

A sad coincidence, the same number, that is, around 37 were found dead in March 2005 in the same region.

The autopsy was assisted by the Mauritius Marine Conservation Society, Mauritius Megafauna Conservation Organisation and the Mauritius Museums Council. The preliminary report of the post-mortem revealed the following:

- a) No fluid was found in the thoracic and abdominal cavities;
- b) The intestines were found empty;
- c) Trachea and oesophagus were found to be clear;
- d) One of the lungs was found to be congested;
- e) Several worms were found in the heart and lungs of some of the carcasses.

All the samples will be subject to bacteriological and toxicological analysis.

Mr Speaker Sir,

An Action Plan on shoreline cleaning from International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation Ltd (ITOPF) has been submitted and is being adjusted. According to satellite imagery dated 10 August 2020 from the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and drone surveys carried out by *Polyeco Société Anonyme* on 11 August 2020, additional sites from Pointe du Diable towards Ile aux Cerfs will be assessed anew by ITOPF and included in the Action Plan.

In order to speed up the clean-up operations, two clusters have been set up and distributed between Le Floch Depollution and Polyeco SA. Both contractors are submitting their daily programme of work, which is reviewed and validated by the Solid Waste Management Division of my Ministry. Cleaning is being carried out in non-sensitive areas and according to four stages namely:

- (i) removal of accumulated/stacked waste oil/ unused artisanal booms;

- (ii) collection of contaminated debris such as plastic bottles, wood and other general wastes;
- (iii) removal of contaminated seaweeds and washing; and
- (iv) pressure washing of contaminated rocks in contained conditions.

In respect of removal and disposal of wastes, 1236 metric tons of liquid wastes Heavy Fuel Oil have been collected and have been sent to Ecofuel Ltd and Virgin Oil Company (Mauritius) Ltd. 815 metric tons of solid waste and contaminated debris have been collected and transferred at the Hazardous Waste Interim Storage Facility at La Chaumière for interim storage and subsequent exportation. The La Laura and Poudre d'Or waste transfer stations have also been opened for collection of solid wastes. Additionally, 1,007 cubic metres of saturated booms have been carted away to the Interim Hazardous Waste Facility at La Chaumière and La Laura Transfer Station. The contaminated sugarcane leaves are being dried to a moisture content up to 40% and would be carted away to Independent Power Producers (IPPs) for burning while the remaining contaminated wastes would be disposed of at the Interim Storage Facility for Hazardous Wastes at La Chaumiere for interim storage and subsequent exportation to licensed facilities for disposal.

Mr Speaker, Sir,

Government has established an E-Platform to facilitate the submission of claims. Any person or entity who has sustained a loss or damage caused outside the ship by contamination resulting from the escape or discharge of bunker oil from the ship, the cost of preventive measures as a consequence of the grounding of MV Wakashio and ensuing oil pollution, has been invited to submit his claim through the platform. Helpdesks have been made available at Citizen Advice Bureau at Bel Air Rivière Sèche, Plaine Magnien,

Bois des Amourettes and Mahebourg Social Welfare Centre to facilitate the online submission of the claims.

With these words, Mr Speaker, Sir, I thank you.