



10 Minutes For The Planet

Oil spills: black gold polluting the oceans©

by Sarah Heath and Catherine Balter-Kendall

Stressed syllables are underlined and in bold.*

Hello! I'm Sarah Heath and you're listening to 10 Minutes for the Planet on EnglishWaves.

A ship which recently **ran aground** in turbulent weather just off the Solomon Islands has meant that environmentalists and local **politicians** are facing a grave, potentially **catastrophic**, situation. The archipelago **is made up of** six main islands and over 900 smaller ones found in this part of Oceania which **lies** east of Papua New Guinea. Parts of these islands, which are being affected by the spill were listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1998. The southern part of Rennell Island is the home of the world's largest coral atoll and the surrounding area has many **endemic species**.

The **vessel was chartered** by an Indonesian mining company and **was laden with** bauxite when it **accidentally** hit the rocks just off Rennell Island. This has resulted in an oil spill which is threatening to devastate the area.

To date, around 80 tons of oil have **leaked out** of the ship and into the sea and while **salvage operations** have started, there is major concern over the remaining 600 tons on board. The ship's owner has thus far failed to act which has led to the local government appealing for help from neighbouring countries such as **Australia**.

The Australian High Commissioner has said that "this oil spill will have a **devastating** effect on the surrounding environment, including **potentially** on a protected UNESCO World Heritage Site, as well as the **livelihood** of the people of Rennell". Known as a "true natural laboratory", the seas around the Solomons are home to a delicate ecosystem of which the coral makes up a part.

oil spill (exp.) accidental release of oil into the sea

to run aground (exp.) (of a ship) to hit dry land or rocks

to be made up of (exp.) to be composed of

to lie (lay, lain) (vb.) to be situated

endemic species (exp.) animals that are native to a specific geographical area

vessel (n.) ship

to be chartered (exp.) to be hired

to be laden with (exp.) heavily loaded with, fully charged

to date (exp.) up to the present moment

to leak out (phrasal vb.) to escape

salvage operations (exp.) the cleaning up and recovery activity after an accident

livelihood (n.) means of

Oil spills over the past 40 years have resulted in hundreds of millions of gallons of oil being released into the sea causing **untold** damage to the marine **environment**. The full name for the oil in such a case is liquid **petroleum** hydrocarbon and it is a major pollutant. Once spilled into the ocean, it is a vast, if not **impossible**, effort to entirely **eradicate** the oil from the water as **currents** spread it for hundreds of nautical miles. An example is the oil production platform in the Gulf of Mexico which was destroyed in 2004 by Hurricane Ivan, which still releases 300-700 barrels of oil per day into the sea and, according to experts, will continue doing so until well into the 21st century.

The National Oceanic and **Atmospheric** Administration in the United States has reported that there are still around 25,000 gallons of oil buried along the Alaskan coastline – oil originating from the Exxon Valdez spill way back in 1989.

Oil generally floats on the surface of the water which means that animals such as birds and **seals** are often affected more than other species. It also depends on the kind of oil which has leaked into the water: lighter oils are slightly less **harmful** in that they disperse more easily through evaporation. They are however, still poisonous so still very much have a **detrimental** effect on marine wildlife, including plants. Heavier oils are far more difficult **to deal with** and will remain in the water for years if not cleaned out. These oils have a **devastating** effect, particularly on birds who become covered in the oil which **prevents them from** flying. The oil also destroys the birds' natural **water-proofing** which can then lead to death through hypothermia. When the birds try to clean themselves, they usually **ingest** some particles of oil which then poisons them. It is estimated that the Exxon Valdez oil spill caused the deaths of up to 500,000 seabirds.

Fish are also major **casualties** when oil is leaked into their habitat. Species themselves **are wiped out** in certain areas but so are their eggs, also destroying the next **generation**. The BP Deepwater Horizon spill in 2010 is considered to be the largest spill in history and totally wiped out prawn and oyster stocks along the Louisiana coastline – completely eradicating the fishing industry in the area. It also means that the marine food chain is **interrupted** for mammals who depend on fish for their survival. **Otters**, seals and dolphins, if they manage to avoid the effects of first-hand contact with the oil, can find themselves without food when the spill ravages the fish **populations**.

When the oil **washes ashore**, the **breeding** and **nesting grounds** for animals such as sea turtles also falls victim to the oil. Beaches are also home to numerous animals such as insects, **worms** and snails. They too become victims.

untold (adj.) vast, great

current (n.) a body of water moving in a definite direction

seal (n.) an aquatic mammal

harmful (adj.) dangerous

to deal with (phrasal vb.) to treat, to manage

devastating (adj.) very destructive

to prevent so. from ...ing (vb.) to stop so. from doing sth.

water-proofing (n.) resistance to water

to ingest (vb.) to absorb, to take in

casualty (n.) victim

to be wiped out (phrasal vb.) to be eradicated

otter (n.) a semiaquatic fish-eating mammal

to wash ashore (exp.) to reach land

breeding and nesting ground (exp.) area where birds or animals go to produce their young

worm (n.) small invertebrate animal, long with no arms and legs

The final **toll** in the Solomon Islands **remains to be seen** but if reports by the environment agency, Greenpeace are **anything to go by**, very little effort is being made to prevent more oil from the **stricken** ship leaking into the surrounding sea. What does the future hold for these beautiful but threatened islands?

Tune in next week for more stories on the environment, here on English Waves.

toll (n.) the number of deaths

it remains to be seen (exp.) is not yet known

anything to go by (exp.) an indication or evidence of proof.

stricken (adj.) suffering from the effects

***Tip!**

In four syllable words the main stress sometimes falls on the first syllable:

devastating

Frequently on the second syllable:

Australia, potentially, environment, petroleum, impossible, eradicate

And frequently on the third syllable:

politicians, catastrophic, accidentally, atmospheric, detrimental, generation, interrupted, populations