

# PETROLEUM IN SOUTH AFRICA 2002

## 1. SOUTH AFRICA PREPARES TO REFLOAT OIL-SPILL WRECK

ST LUCIA, South Africa - Salvagers worked yesterday to prepare a wrecked freighter for a refloating attempt that could break up the vessel and spill hundreds of tonnes of oil into a South African wildlife sanctuary.

The Italian-flagged Jolly Rubino, aground off South Africa's northeast coast near the UNESCO-recognised St Lucia Wetlands Park, would be patched up and drained of water taken on board since a fire caused its crew to abandon ship last week, Smit salvage said.

Authorities said they would decide yesterday whether to go ahead with the attempt to tow the still burning vessel off the beach, which could tear open the ship and spill up to 900 tonnes of fuel still aboard. About 400 tonnes of oil has already leaked from a crack in its hull.

"The salvage company has been working very hard pumping water out," said Charles Carey, a disaster management official. "They will know by (later yesterday) whether they are going to do the refloating attempt on Wednesday, or whether they will not do it at all," he added.

Spilled oil threatens the park's wildlife, which includes endangered turtles, hippos, crocodiles, and a wide variety of birds and fish.

The ship ran aground on Thursday about seven miles south of the estuary leading to the wetlands.

The prevailing wind was moving a small oil slick away from the park, which had not yet been polluted.

Conservationists said they would not take any chances, and had thrown up sand barricades to keep waves from washing oil into the wetlands.

Officials say the towing attempt is the best option available, as the ship's hull has been so weakened by the blaze that it would soon break open anyway.

### **a) PATCHING THE CRACK**

Smit said salvage workers would finish patching the crack in the hull with metal plates, and work to pump more water out of the vessel, which lay about 200 metres

(200 yards) from the shore, listing and pouring smoke from its cargo deck.

"It is still burning, but the temperatures are reducing day by day," said Smit spokeswoman Claire Gomes. The fire has raged through the ship's cargo for seven days, and shows little sign of subsiding. Smit has said it could take two weeks to extinguish the flames, but added that the intense heat would have destroyed any toxic chemicals on the ship.

The vessel's cargo included various toxic chemicals. Authorities said the ship lost 70 cargo containers over its side, and warned members of the public not to touch any debris washed up by the sea.

A boom was to be placed across the nearby mouth of the Umfolozi river, and pollution-control experts said they would close up the mouths of other rivers to the south of the park.

The park's marine conservation area is a nesting site for endangered Leatherback turtles, while reefs off the coastline are popular among scuba divers for their wide variety of fish.

The Jolly Rubino's 22 crew were airlifted to safety last Tuesday after the engine room fire spread out of control. Strong winds and high seas hampered salvage operators' attempts to board the ship until Saturday. The ship had been sailing from South Africa's main port, Durban, to Mombasa in Kenya.

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