



Forum: Sustainable Development Goals 14

Issue: The issue of oil spillage in Mauritius

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Introduction

The oil spillage in Mauritius had occurred on July 25th, 2020. This disaster had caused many damages to the marine life around the pristine lagoons, the inhabitants living around the coast of Mauritius, the white-sand beaches Mauritius was known for attracting tourists from around the world, and Fishermen whose livelihoods were ruined by the oil spill. The oil spill happened as MV Wakashio, a large capesize Bulk-carrier, ran aground on a coral reef in the south-eastern tip of Mauritius.

On the 4th of July the Japanese-Owned vessel departed from Liyungang, China, the vessel then stopped in Singapore and was expected to arrive in Tubarao, Brazil, on the 13th of August. The vessel also had no cargo onboard as it was departing and was flying under a Panamanian Flag of Convenience but was grounded by a reef on the 25th of July. By 6th of August, Oil had leaked from the stricken vessel and the Mauritian government tried to minimise the spill and control environmentally sensitive areas until Foreign aid was there to help them pump out an estimated 3,890 tonnes of oil still on board the vessel, at this point the Mauritian Government declared a state of environmental emergency. By 10th August 1,000 tonnes of Oil had leaked out the vessel, at this point, the oil spill had heavily affected coastal villages such as Mahebourg, leaving the community with shock and anger at the government's slow response.

On the 16th of August, the vessel had split in half as there was poor sea conditions making the removal of the remaining oil on the ship risky and, by now, the spillage is reaching one of Mauritius's natural reserves and one of the most sensitive area for marine wildlife in Mauritius which contains a unique coastal wetland remarkable for its diversity of corals and fish species, also known as Ile Aux Aigrette, as well as a place for the endangered green turtle. The oil was also reportedly moving northwards along the coastline. The oil threatens many species that are special to the island, species such as the critically endangered Pink Pigeon, Clown Fishes that dart around the coral reefs, and the giant tortoises that live in the nature reserves and is being studied at in a lab in Ile Aux Aigrette are the examples of the most affected species that could be both threatened to near extinction or fully extinct. Following the split of the ship, 40 dolphins died in the area that was affected by the oil spill, which led to a huge protest in Port Louis that consisted up to 150,000 people from the island making up 12% of the island's population in the capital. The people protested against the government and argued that they



could've done more before the ship even approached the island, this included the Mauritian diaspora that lived in cities such as London, Paris, and Berlin who partook in the peaceful protest against the Mauritian government. To this day, the people of Mauritius are still affected by the oil spill and are constantly checking the quality of the water surrounding the island and the people continuously try to clear up any signs of oil left from the spillage, despite warnings from the Mauritian government.

Definition of Key Terms

MV Wakashio

The MV Wakashio was a large capesize bulk carrier and was built by the Universal shipbuilding corporation of Tsu, Japan and laid down on the 23rd of September, 2004 and launched on 9th of March 2007. The Wakashio has a deadweight tonnage of 203,000 tons, she belonged to an associate company to Nagashiki Shipping co. and was operated by Mitsui OSK (Osaka Shosen Kaisha) Lines (MOL)

Flag of convenience

Flags of convenience are flags ships use to get benefit off the ship, these flags can result in the companies that operate them to receive lower wages, little to no tax, and cheap registration fees. These ships flew the flags other than the country of ownership, as per example Wakashio was flying a Panamanian flag rather than a Japanese one.

Ile Aux Aigrette

Ile Aux Aigrette is an island off the southeast coast of Mauritius. The island is known for having natural reserves for endangered animals such as the Giant & Green turtle. The island also acts as a scientific laboratory for animals in the little islet.

Diaspora

A group of people who spread from one country of origin to other countries.

Background Information

The MV Wakashio was a Japanese-owned vessel which was under the Panamanian flag of convenience which gave benefits for the company that owned the ship with lower wages and little to no tax for the shipment from places, it also made registering the ship easier for the company. The ship was headed from Liyungang, China to Tubarao, Brazil. The Bulk Carrier carried no cargo but an estimated 3,894 tonnes of low-sulphur fuel oil, 207 tonnes of diesel and 90 tonnes of lubricant oil on board. The vessel departed from China on the 4th of July but was grounded by a reef by 25th of July in the southeastern point of Mauritius and by 6th of August, oil had started leaking. The leak affected sensitive nature reserves like Ile Aux Aigrettes and Pointe D'esny which contained both endangered species and



species special to the island. The oil had threatened the country's economy, food, and security. The Mauritian government is at fault for taking small measures for the oil spillage rather than taking higher measures on the ship when it first approached the island.

Inaccurate statements made by the Panama Maritime Authorities

The Panama Maritime Authorities arrived on September 8th and had claimed that crew members had tried to find “Wi-fi” or internet connection for a birthday Party on board and added that they had changed the course of the ship in order to do so. This, eventually, became false throughout time as those in Mauritius were doubtful of this report, claiming that an internet connection could have been obtained even 12 nautical miles offshore. This claim was further proven to be false as given by a statement from Wakashio's operator Mitsui OSK Line that revealed that all crew members had access to unlimited free satellite internet while on board the ship. This was the second inaccurate statement that the Panama Maritime Authority had given about the grounding of MV Wakashio, first of which was the diversion of routes in order to navigate through the harsh weather near Mauritius, which then was proved wrong by Forbes as there was shown to be no weather anomaly at the time of MV Wakashio's journey near Mauritius. Six days after this statement was made, Wakashio's captain had been arrested for endangering safe navigation. The Mauritian police department had anticipated two answers from the two statements made by the Panama Maritime Authority, the captain has yet to comment on the subject matter.

Environmental impacts

The environmental impact of the oil spill is almost at a critical point for Mauritius both in terms of finance and economy, and the livelihood of Mauritians who live in the affected areas. Oceanographer and environmental engineer Vassen Kauppymuthoo outlined that the under 50% of the affected lagoons covered by environmentally sensitive area be it corals or seagrass or even mudflats it puts a greater emphasis on how sensitive the affected area is in terms of wildlife and oil spills. Flaks of the anti fouling coating can also poison the fauna and flora on the reef and is closely similar to what happened to the Great barrier reef, Australia. An unnamed scientist also underlined that this was the worst oil spill the country has encountered since decades and may have lingering effects lasting for decades, and to add to that, the spill had expanded to 26 kilometers in just 4 days after the oil spill had occurred. Many dead mammals had been reported to be seen dying on sight and dead on shore following the spill; species of which are affected most were the Melon-headed whales and dolphins around the area.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved



Mauritius

Mauritius, the country that relied on its economy to be run by tourism is now hit by two of the worst events in the country's history, that being COVID and Wakashio. The Mauritian government had tried to reduce the spillage from the ship since the 6th of August which got worse overtime resulting in the government declaring an environmental emergency by the 10th of August. It has been evident that the Mauritian government and Mauritius as a whole island was not geared up for a catastrophe at this caliber to even happen to the island and so called the United Nations and its organs and other countries like France to help them out with containing the spill, despite government warnings, Mauritians around the Island are working proactively and had even made 80 kilometers of make-shift ocean booms to contain the spill from affecting the whole island. Despite the efforts made by the Mauritian government, many were still enrage by the slow response the government has enacted before and after the spillage, this anger increased as 40 dolphins died caused by the oil spill which then resulted in one tenth of the population of the island to protest against the government and go as far as saying that they should resign and expressed that "I love my country, ashamed by my government". The Government also had asked for compensation from the Japanese operator and the owner of the vessel to sort out the state of the vessel and the oil spill, the government had also asked Japan to fund \$34 million to support the local fishing community and environmental projects in the affected area

Panama

A country that lies in Central America, Panama became involved in the Wakashio incident as the ship's flag was under their flag of convenience and was registered under Panama which meant that, under the United Nations convention on the Law of the sea (UNCLOS), that it was Panama's responsibility to inspect and solve the issue of the ship. On the september 8th, Panama's Maritime authorities came to Mauritius and had claimed two causes of the spillage two of which were debunked by Forbes, one of which was the claim that involved the crew members looking for connection and wi-fi for a birthday party on board the vessel, which was debunked as locals say that they can get connection even from 20 nautical miles from the island and was further proven as the operator of the Wakashio, Mitsui OSK Lines stated that all crew members should have unlimited free satellite wifi.

India

India, being a nation that touches the Indian Ocean, had helped Mauritius in containing the oil spill and sent 30 tonnes of technical equipment and as well as a 10-member team from the Indian coast guard who specialised in containing Oil spills.

Japan

16th October 2020, Tokyo had begun the consideration of economic assistance to Mauritius following the Oil spill. The funds, which is \$34 million, are intended to help the local community that is to



say the local businesses and fishermen that live in the affected area of the spillage and to support the environmental projects that went on Ile Aux aigrettes and other natural reserves. While Japan might not be liable to the issue and disaster under international law, Tokyo considered that providing aid to Mauritius would fulfill an obligation to Tokyo's international credibility. Officials had gone further as to saying that they will work closely with Mauritius in solving the subject matter. Japan had also sent a six-member crew of specialists to help in the cleanup.

France

7th August 2020, Mauritian Government had declared an environmental emergency and asked France for assistance. France sent both military and civilian equipment from the nearby island of Reunion, the French President had tweeted "When biodiversity is in danger, there is an urgent need to act. France is there" showing support and kindness towards the people of Mauritius and the Mauritian Government

Mitsui OSK (Osaka Shosen Kaisha) Lines

Mitsui OSK Lines, MV Wakashio's operator, apologized about the incident on the 9th of August and has pledged to pay \$9.4 million to help restore the areas affected by the Oil spill and planned to raise as near as one billion Japanese yen to support the efforts to restore marine environments, they plan to raise this much money in partnership of local NGOs and experts.

Nagashiki Shipping

Nagashiki shipping co. is a shipping company based in Kasaoka, Okayama Prefecture. Nagashiki shipping co. became involved in this issue as MV Wakashio was a Nagashiki-owned vessel. Upon hearing the oil spill, Nagashiki stated that they felt "deep responsibility" regarding the ship's status and position and then vowed to exercise the appropriate law for compensation.

United Nations & organs

The United Nations had expressed its concern and support for the people of Mauritius and those affected by the oil spill. On August 12th of 2020, The United Nations (UN) had released a news and press release underlining how the UN will solve the issue with both the people of Mauritius and the government, they also underlined that the deployment of team experts has been brought out and facilitated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), and The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) with flight arrangements by the World Food Programme (WFP). The United Nations also sent delegates to comprehend the situation before any action is taken against the owner of the Wakashio.

Timeline of Events



Date	Description of Event
4th July 2020	The Departure of MV Wakashio from Liyungang, China, to Tubarao, Brazil.
25th July 2020	MV Wakashio stricken and grounded by a coral reef in southeastern point of Mauritius.
6th August 2020	The Mauritian Government gave efforts in minimising oil leakage from the vessel while waiting for foreign help to pump out 3,890 tonnes of oil
7th August 2020	The Mauritian Government unable to contain the leakage and declared a state of Environmental emergency, asked for France's help and other country's help and aid
9th August 2020	MV Wakashio's operator, Mitsui OSK Lines, apologised and has pledged to pay \$9.4 million to help restore the areas affected by the Oil spill
10th August 2020	1,000 tonnes of Oil had leaked out of the vessel and cracks increasing as days pass and oil had started to heavily affect coastal villages such as Mahebourg, public opinion decreases
16th August 2020	The vessel (MV Wakashio) split in half resulting in 166 tons of fuel being released from the plit vessel
24th August 2020	Wakashio's bow was scuttled and and towed into open ocean
25th August 2020	Wakashio's owner, Nagashiki shipping co and Mitsui OSK Lines further apologised to the Greenpeace Japan and responded that it was "Nagashiki's deep responsibility".
31st August 2020	A tugboat working on a wreck sank after colliding with a barge in heavy weather, killing 3 crew members at most.
8th September 2020	The Panamanian Maritime Authority visited Mauritius to inspect the situation and gave two misleading statements to the government and the people of Mauritius
16th of October 2020	Tokyo began the consideration of helping Mauritius financially and physically to better the political relations of the two countries

Relevant UN Treaties and Events



The United Nations first passed the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS) to underline and define nations' responsibility and rights in respect to their use of the world's seas and oceans, this came into effect in 16th November 1994 but more resolutions were passed before the UNCLOS, those of which underlines the pollution of seas.

- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 16th November 1994 (**UNCLOS III**)
- International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage, 21st November 2008, (**BUNKER**)
- The Convention for the prevention of pollution from ships, 2nd October 1983, (**MARPOL 73/78**)
- International Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage, 1st November 2003.
- Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea Convention.
- Convention on Limitation of Liability for Maritime Claims.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

As this event is very recent there have been no other attempts to solve the issue at hand other than those which were mentioned in this research report. So to show how this issue could be solved it would be better to show what happened in the Guimaras Oil spill, Philippines, and see how the Filipino government handled the situation. The Guimaras Oil spill occurred in the Panay Gulf and occurred on the 11th of August, 2006. The Guimaras Oil spill affected the Taklong island national nature reserve, in a similar fashion to that of the Ile Aux Aigrettes and Pointe D'Esny, and the local villages and cities and is considered one of the worst natural catastrophes that has ever hit the Country, the World Wide fund for Nature in the Philippines also stated that the effects might still be felt by two generations, further emphasising the cruelty of the oil spill.

They've solved the issue through Local communities and international help. The Filipino Government had asked Indonesia, Japan and the United States for financial assistance and assistance on cleanup. The Filipino President, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, created Task Force Guimaras on August 22nd to oversee the process of cleaning up the oil spill and also the retrieval of 1.5 million litres of oil still inside the vessel and to add that the Government had created a Special Board of Marine Inquiry to determine who and what caused the spill. Later, the company of the owned vessel said that their foreign insurer was willing to pay the cost of damage brought about by the oil spill. This whole method of co-operation and willingness of paying should be applied to the Mauritian scenario of the Oil spill as Mauritius is not geared up to deal with a catastrophe of this caliber. This Oil spill in the Philippines is very similar to what happened and affected the people during the spill, that is why this is the chosen example of previous attempts to solve the issue

Possible Solutions



Mauritius, an island under prepared for such a catastrophe. Mauritius should be assisted when underprepared, a very close political relation with their neighbouring country is crucial to survival in these times of need and asking for assistance should be a definite must for Mauritius to enact. One proposition that would be nice is if western countries like the United States and the United Kingdom to be more involved in helping Mauritius as a part of both better political relations and closer ties between both countries. However, it's not only foreign powers that should do the work for Mauritius, the Mauritian government should also be more involved in the issue at hand, finding possible solutions on how to stop the spread of the oil spillage and helping local communities in Mahebourg clear out the Oil debris in their beaches.

Another solution is that of the production of a superabsorbent material that has the ability to sop up 10 times its own weight in oil which then can be shipped to an oil refinery and processed to recover the oil. This solution is a polymer material that transforms an oil spill into a soft, solid, and an oil containing gel which then can be turned and converted back to crude oil costing up to \$100 a barrel. This cost effective new polyolefin oil-SAP technology could both reduce the dramatic impact of the environment but also the recovery of the wasted oil. Though this idea seem very efficient and environmentally friendly, it is still in the works and research on this must continue, This idea is called the "complete solution for oil spill cleanup" which supports both environmental and financial factor that might affect the country, in the future this item or method should be used to recover the affected areas around Ile Aux Aigrettes and places like Blue Bay and Pointe D'Esny. Mauritius is hit by two of the worst events that could happen to the country as Covid-19 is blocking business and tourism for the country and the Oil spillage now destroying wildlife for the outsiders yet to be seen in this global pandemic and natural catastrophe.

The Mauritian Government should also be very involved in this issue as they are the ones who are affected heavily, this should be done by putting a task force to oversee the progress on how much of the oil spill is retrieved out of the sea and lagoon and the Mauritian Government should also update the situation more recently as information became outdated ever since Wakashio struck the reef, this method should be good for the people as they are fed with information week by week or day by days and they could even see governmental involvement in the oil spillage physically outside. If Mauritius was not to comply with these terms, media coverage around the world should be increased to see what is happening to the government, the people, and the Oil spillage as to prove that if the Government is refusing to increase information and media coverage, it could be a sign of hiding something away from the people of Mauritius. This goes the same for the Panamanian Maritime authorities as they fell quiet and silent ever since the false claims made regarding the causes of the oil spillage and the seamanship of MV Wakashio's captain. We need cooperation and close ties to solve the subject matter.

Guiding Questions



1. How is your delegation affected by this?
2. Is this topic of any interest to your delegation? If so why?
3. How will your delegation be affected by this issue, both politically and economically?
4. How does your delegation react to the response to the issue so far?
5. Has your delegation had a similar event before?
6. What is the stance of your delegation on the subject matter?
7. Did your delegation try to help on this issue at hand?

Bibliography

Guardian's series of Mauritius Oil spillage reports :

1. [Mauritius calls for urgent help to prevent oil spill disaster](#)
2. [Satellite photographs of the Mauritius oil spill | Environment](#)
3. [Experts and volunteers scramble to save Mauritius's wildlife after oil spill](#)
4. [At least 40 dolphins die in area hit by Mauritius oil spill](#)

BBC on the protest of 40 dead dolphins.

[Mauritius oil spill: Thousands march in Port Louis](#)

Mitsui OSK Lines and Nagashiki Shipping's apology

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<https://www.forbes.com/sites/nishandegnarain/2020/10/10/wakashio-captains-wifi-story-in-doubt-following-new-revelations-in-mauritius-oil-spill-case/#76823c653ada>

Tokyo's consideration in supporting Mauritius financially

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Environment/Japan-to-offer-Mauritius-economic-support-after-oil-spill>.

France's help to Mauritius's oil spillage

[France deploys teams to Mauritius as oil spill disaster worsens](#)

United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea

[United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea](#)

Panama's incompetency in getting involved in the subject matter

[Union urges Panama to step up after Mauritius oil spill](#)

Guimaras Oil spill.

[Saving an island from the worst oil spill in the Philippines: The case of Guimaras](#)



Appendix or Appendices

- I. [.https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/oil-spill-mauritius-calls-more-efforts-secure-guard-coral-reef-ecosystems](https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/oil-spill-mauritius-calls-more-efforts-secure-guard-coral-reef-ecosystems) (**International Coral reef initiative**)

this website is useful as it recognises the detrimental value of coral reefs and underlines and suggests what could be done to solve the oil spillage that affected the coral reefs in Mauritius

- II. <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/mauritius-oil-spill-from-nagashiki-shipping-cargo-ship-threatens-marine-biodiversity-and-local-economy-government-declares-national-emergency/> (**Operator's and Owner's response to the incident**)

This website is useful as it mentions the terms that was said by both the Owner and the Operator of the large capesize bulk carrier vessel MV Wakashio

- III. <https://www.acs.org/content/acs/en/pressroom/presspacs/2012/acs-presspac-november-14-2012/a-complete-solution-for-oil-spill-cleanup.html> (**A complete solution to oil spills**)

This website is useful as it gave an idea of a substance that would take out oil spills with ease in an environmental and financial friendly way