

Dredge capsizes on way to start Cairns Shipping Development

The Cairns Post, 26 April 2019

A DREDGING vessel carrying 43,000 litres of diesel has capsized on its way to start work on the long-awaited expansion of the Cairns shipping channel.

Dredging barge *Wombat* overturned in the Coral Sea about 160km east of Cooktown on Wednesday morning while under tow to Australia.

An Australian Marine Safety Authority spokesman said no crew members were on board the *Wombat* at the time.

“The barge remains connected to the tug *Vulcan* to hold the *Wombat* in position and tow it back toward PNG while the owner arranges commercial salvage services from PNG,” he continued.

“AMSA is in contact with the master of the *Vulcan* and the barge owner’s representatives and is monitoring the situation.

“The barge is not self-propelled but is fitted with machinery for the operation of its dredging equipment.”

The barge was on its way to support the \$127 million capital dredging program of the Cairns shipping channel.

The spokesman said there were 43 cubic metres of diesel on board.

“AMSA has been advised that the first priority will be the removal of the fuel,” he said.

[Hall Contracting is the secondary contractor](#), behind RN Dredging, due to carry out the \$127 million dredging program from early-July to mid-September.

A spokeswoman for Hall said the *Wombat* was carrying two large suction pumps, with the bulk of the actual dredging to be carried out by a separate vessel.

She said there was no risk of diesel leaking into the ocean, as it was kept in barrels sealed below the deck.

“The vessel underwent Australian Quarantine Inspection Services cleaning and successfully passed a survey inspection and warranty tow inspection prior to departure,” she said.

“Its watertight integrity was also routinely assessed multiple times, with no cause for concern identified.

“Hall Contracting has been advised the incident has not posed any environmental hazards and there are no indications of debris in the water.”

The cause of the capsizes is unknown.

It is understood the Cairns Shipping Development will not be delayed, with Hall having the option of deploying alternative suction dredges to complete the work.

Hall Contracting’s full statement

Australian dredging company Hall Contracting has been advised its cutter suction dredge, Wombat, overturned in the Coral Sea yesterday.

An external towage contractor was towing the vessel from Port Moresby to Cairns at the time of the incident.

No one was on board and all personnel aboard the accompanying tug boat are safe.

At this stage, the cause is unknown.

The vessel remains afloat and it is currently being towed back to Port Moresby under the direction of insurers.

The vessel underwent Australian Quarantine Inspection Services cleaning and successfully passed a survey inspection and warranty tow inspection prior to departure.

Its watertight integrity was also routinely assessed multiple times, with no cause for concern identified.

Wombat was afloat for several days before departing for Australia and was approximately three-and-a-half days into the journey when it overturned.

Hall Contracting has been advised the incident has not posed any environmental hazards and there are no indications of debris in the water.

We have been working closely with Marine Safety Queensland and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) to ensure all regulatory procedures are adhered to.

The dredge was originally being towed to Cairns to pump dredged material at Trinity Inlet. Wombat's return to Port Moresby will not delay the project, with Hall Contracting able to use alternative equipment to complete the task.