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Pre-Budget Submission

Australian Marine Oil Spill Centre

Submission to the Australian Government

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Introduction

Australia has long been a global leader in marine environmental protection, driving change and initiatives to ensure that there are strong protections from the risk of pollution, and that robust response frameworks are in place. Traditionally, these pollution risks have presented themselves in the form of liquid hydrocarbons carried as fuels for ships; as a product being moved from one place to another; or as a 'production fluid' from an offshore energy facility.

Recently, global efforts towards emissions reduction have seen significant investments in innovative solutions for achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions, with alternative fuels and technologies progressing rapidly. In Australia, government and energy industry investments in renewable energy, carbon capture, and alternative fuels reflect a strong collective commitment to a sustainable carbon neutral 2050 future and beyond.

While this transition period is happening and both shipping and energy industries are undergoing change, historical pollution risks, which can cause significant impacts to the marine environment [i]remain extent. As energy innovation increases and our energy supply diversifies, government and industry must remain committed to maintaining robust liquid hydrocarbon spill response capabilities and capacity.

About the Australian Marine Oil Spill Centre (AMOSC)

AMOSC was founded in 1990 by the Australian petroleum industry, to provide spill response capacity to member companies and government response agencies during a spill of oil to the marine environment. It was conceived as one of industry's showcase shared resource ventures, and initially comprised ten founding members and a single Geelong stockpile. Today, AMOSC has 24 members, four major equipment stockpiles and two significant training and administration centres (North Geelong & Fremantle). AMOSC also owns the sub-sea first response tool kit, one of four of its type globally, which can be deployed quickly to minimise the impacts of an offshore drilling/wellhead incident.

AMOSC's primary goal is to provide an industrial / national scale pollution response effort on behalf of and for its members. AMOSC's response capabilities include offshore, near-shore and shorelines strategies, and span the IPEICA tiered response capabilities –

AMOSC's Australian Based Capabilities	
Surveillance, modelling and visualization	Surface dispersants
At-sea containment and recovery	Near shore protection of sensitive resources
Shoreline clean-up	Inland waterway response
Source control	Oiled wildlife response
Offshore subsea dispersants	Shoreline Cleanup and Assessment Techniques (SCAT)

Table: Oil Spill Capabilities (based on extract from 'IPEICA Tiered Preparedness & Response Good Practice Guide' Pp 14.)

In addition, AMOSC undertakes technical work with its members, to build broader industry capability via an extensive accredited training programme, drills, exercises and bespoke response plans. [ii]

AMOSC also trains and assures the 'Core Group' [iii]– a spill response ready workforce of 100+ petroleum industry personnel who can be deployed at short notice to a significant spill anywhere in Australia.

A tripartite approach to marine protection and response – Industry, Jurisdictional & Commonwealth efforts

Australia's marine environment adds significant economic, social and community benefits to the nation.

Australia's national identity is deeply tied to its coastlines, with over 85% of the population living within 50 kilometres of the coast[iv]. Coastal waters are vital to Australian livelihoods and hold significant importance to the cultural heritage of Australia's First Nations peoples.[v]

While the environmental and cultural value of our oceans and coasts are invaluable, Australia's blue economy supports 462,000 jobs and contributes over $118 billion to annual national gross domestic product [vi]– and growth is projected to continue[vii]. Offshore energy industries powering communities, fishery and aquaculture industries securing food production, shipping transporting goods, and marine recreation and tourism, all rely on a thriving resilient maritime environment.

Contamination caused be a liquid hydrocarbon spill could have significant and acute consequences to Australia's blue economy sectors, and a poorly managed spill response could cause long-term contamination of the affected areas, harm Australia's clean, green reputation and our global competitive advantage.[viii]

For more than thirty years, Industry, Jurisdictions & the Commonwealth have worked together under the umbrella arrangement as outlined in the *National Plan for Marine Environmental Emergencies* (NP[ix]). The NP relies on the strong collaboration of industry, jurisdictions, Commonwealth and a range of other NGO stakeholders, working in a cooperative fashion. AMOSC has traditionally led the industry input to this.

Managed by the Australian Marine Safety Authority (AMSA) the NP is a cooperative arrangement that falls under the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF[x]). The NP is informed by risk-based life cycle planning at the national, state/territory, and local level, outlines obligations required of parties to the NP, as well as the basis for shared response planning, resources and strategy implementation. This in turn gives effect to international conventions while integrating with jurisdiction and Australian emergency management arrangements. From a basis of cooperation, the NP serves to tie together outputs of various state and Commonwealth legislation under common response and preparedness frameworks, policies and practises.

AMOSC's contribution to the NP includes access to the centre's significant trained human and equipment resources, and its sophisticated technical capabilities. These are available 24/7 for response needs. AMOSC is also able to tap into global spill response experts and import that knowledge to Australia for both preparedness and response efforts.

AMOSC further contributes to the NP through joint funding with AMSA of the aerial dispersant delivery known as the Fixed Wing Aerial Dispersant Capability (FWADC[xi]), and other preparedness and training services, including exercises.

The need for change

As it has done in the past, the Australian Government must continue to lead efforts in the safeguarding of Australian waters, coast and marine environment. A comprehensive spill response strategy is critical to mitigating risks and maintaining public trust during the energy transition.

The AMSA 2022 *Statement of Capability for the National Plan for Marine Environmental Emergencies* identified variable response capability across parties to the NP, effectively representing risk to the effective management of marine incidents, with national consequences. This was in terms of existing risk mitigation.

As is normal practise, the current arrangements recently undertook a root and branch review. While the NP has traditionally focused on marine liquid hydrocarbon spills, major shifts in the maritime industry present new hazards. Hazards associated with alternative fuels, new cargoes and changes to the offshore energy sector present additional consequences which also need to be managed.

In its current format, the NP is only partially fit for purpose, and to meet community expectation, the framework must extend to include hazards associated with alternative fuels and emerging industries, while continuing to provide traditional liquid hydrocarbon-based spill responses.

In August 2024, recommended improvements and additional inclusions of the NP were submitted for consideration by the Infrastructure Transport Senior Officials Committee (ITSOC). The recommendations were subsequently endorsed by ITSOC in September 2024, and work towards a 'new look' NP now in progress. AMOSC is supportive of these changes and looks forward to contributing to the revised NP work programme.

Suggestions for responsive, secure and sustainable change

Against this context, AMOSC emphasises the need to enhance risk appreciation, strengthening partnerships and streamline response capabilities. AMOSC encourages strategic adjustments to policy and regulatory response arrangements enabling stronger and streamlined response settings. Key here is to ensure that as resources are sought and diverted for new risk mitigation, liquid hydrocarbon response remains strong.

AMOSC encourages government to pursue policy and regulatory changes to optimise response efforts. These include:

1. In partnership **with the petroleum & energy industries via AMOSC, establish the Australian Oil Spill Response Organisation (AOSRO)** with responsibility for tactical pollution clean-up (all sources) in Commonwealth waters, and a mandate to work collaboratively with jurisdictions and ports as a 'support' agency.

   An AOSRO with focus on tactical execution across all IPEICA tiered preparedness capabilities, serving both the energy industry, and delivering pollution response services on behalf of the Australian government for maritime incidents would strengthen the current arrangements. Through a public/private partnership, the AOSRO could be a common contract holder for all shared services/technical services required for pollution response, increasing the efficiency of service delivery for both government and industry sectors and reducing duplication.

2. Through the AOSRO, **establish a shared pool of subject matter expert operational and management responders**, for both energy industry and maritime industry pollution incidents. Importantly this pool of human resources is cross trained in the same response doctrine, incident management system, and has expertise in marine pollution response.

Bringing together resources that are currently replicated across both sectors into a centralised organisation would enhance capability and increase capacity, reduce duplication and provide greater certainty to the public and government that pollution responses are fit for purpose.

3. With current Commonwealth regulators, develop a **common understanding of Australia's pollution risks, and then declare the capacity and capability requirement for Australia's worse case credible scenarios.** This capacity could be held by the AOSRO, and across jurisdictions and industry sources. Global response logistics support from international providers should also be factored in to meet the identified worse credible scenario.

   Currently, maritime and industry agencies have good situational awareness of their own domain, including individualised assessments of risk. However, the interfaces and cross over between risk creators has not been declared, and there is an opaque understanding of total capacity requirements in Australia. This information is spread over a number of organisations.

4. Normalising agency efforts at a Commonwealth level to take **a consistent regulatory approach to risk creation/pollution clean-up, consistent with contemporary practice on industry regulation.**

   The current approach to pollution response being delivered through different arrangements has produced a system with the features referenced in this submission.

5. **Improve regulator performance, capability and culture through regulatory stewardship** that is proactive, collaborative, and sustainable that can **anticipate, and respond to, change** over time while boosting productivity through **reducing unnecessary or duplicative regulatory costs and burdens**.

The continued protection of the marine environment from liquid hydrocarbons, and therefore the protection of the community and economy will strengthen community trust as government and industry work to achieve carbon neutral 2050.

AMOSC encourages the Australian Government to explore opportunities to streamline governance arrangements, improve the quality of regulation, and maintain expertise and capability in marine liquid hydrocarbon pollution response.

AMOSC welcomes the opportunity to discuss this submission and government investment with you and/or your department as Australia takes advantage of future opportunities.

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AMOSC 2024-25 Pre-Budget Submission[xii]

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