

How an Aussie cruise liner turned this ...



P&O PASSENGERS on the Brisbane-based Pacific Star have faced a backlash from Vanuatu locals, furious over allegations the cruise liner has illegally dumped up to 500,000 litres of oil.

News of the mass dumping of engine "sludge" infuriated taxi drivers who went on strike, refusing to transport P&O passengers from the cruise ship terminal to Port Vila and forcing them to walk the 5km into town.

Police and the Vanuatu Maritime Authority are investigating the dumped oil while local government authorities are calling for harsh fines, totalling \$35 million (VUV 3 billion), to be issued.

P&O has apologised for the dumping since it was discovered by Sunshine Coast Daily journalist Michele Sternberg, who visited the Teouma dump site while holidaying on the island.

She said the level of environmental vandalism was "unimaginable".

"This is dumping on a massive scale.

"It appears they've dug deep holes, lined some with a thin plastic and just poured hundreds of thousands of litres of oil in.

"When news broke, someone's come in and tried to cover some of the oil with dirt but it's still seeping out."

She said the main concern at the picturesque Teouma site was that about 100 villagers lived within 800 metres of the dump site and a school was less than 1km away.

"This area is on the side of a hill and below is a river, which the villagers use for drinking, washing and their children swim in.

"The river is in the direct line of this oil spill."

Pacific Star passengers were horrified to learn of the oil dumping when they arrived in Vanuatu last week, some saying they would boycott P&O in future.

"I would get off now and fly home, except I've paid so



... into this

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARD: Vanuatu locals are outraged over the dumped engine "sludge".

much money for this cruise," said one passenger, who did not want to be named.

The captain of the P&O Pacific Star would have been "well aware that Vanuatu is not capable of receiving engine dirty oil", according to Commissioner of Maritime Affairs Less John Napuati.

He said the ports of Apra in Guam, Noumea in New Caledonia, Papeete in French Polynesia and Suva, Vuda Point and Lautoka in Fiji are Regional Ships' Waste Reception Centres. Vanuatu is not.

The cost of oil disposal in nearby Noumea and Fiji is about \$US30,000.

P&O is alleged to have paid

just \$A230 per truckload to dump in Vanuatu.

"The oil spill ... is of high interest to every inhabitant of Vanuatu since such an incident may occur in the future if appropriate measures are not taken," said Mr Napuati.

Port Vila Municipality confirmed the dumping site at Teouma was approved only for sewage disposal and similar wastes.

Ernest Bani, of the Vanuatu Environment Unit, has called for the company to remove all the oil from the dump site.

"I don't think that P&O giving an apology is enough because it doesn't help the situation.

"It's something we can't accept and just saying 'we're sorry' is not good enough."

Vanuatu law provides for the boat to be confiscated and held until a court case settles the matter, according to Michele Kalwarai, Acting Secretary-General of Shefa Provincial Council.

Meanwhile, a former Pacific Star employee has alleged that he witnessed the dumping of oil at sea from the cruise ship in October 2005, which left a 3km oil slick.

He said that from the casual nature in which the dumping was carried out, it appeared that the practice was not a one-off.

NEWS BRIEFS

Body in river

POLICE have found a body in a river in south-east Queensland where a man went missing on Saturday night. A police spokeswoman said the discovery was made in the Mary River, south of Maryborough, at about 11.15am yesterday. Police are yet to confirm whether the body is that of a 21-year-old man who went missing after swimming in Maryborough's Riverside Park. —AAP

Chemical scare

ELEVEN coal miners have received treatment in a central Queensland hospital after being exposed to a potentially hazardous substance. The workers from the underground section of BHP Billiton's Gregory mine, north of Emerald, were taken by ambulance to Emerald Hospital about 12.30am yesterday. A spokeswoman said the men had been exposed to the industrial chemical potassium superoxide. —AAP

Anti-smoking ads

A GRAPHIC new anti-smoking commercial which features a female smoker disfigured by mouth and throat cancer has aired in Queensland. The commercial is the second in a series of major health warnings about smoking, with the first focusing on amputation risks. Because of its graphic nature, the new advertisement will air after 9.30pm. —AAP

Track drinkers

POLICE patrolling Flemington racecourse during Melbourne Cup Week have reported an "alarming" surge in underage drinking. Victoria Police Inspector Stephen Mutton said 138 young people were caught either drinking or in possession of alcohol during the four race days. Police and security staff also confiscated almost 50 false or altered forms of identification in just one day. —AAP

Tip-off claims

NSW coalition MPs Adrian Piccoli and Andrew Constance have strongly rejected claims they tipped off sacked Aboriginal Affairs Minister Milton Orkopoulos about a police investigation into child sex allegations. The pair were dragged into the scandal after sworn claims by ALP backbencher Jan Burnswoods. —AAP

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Apology

In the BI-LO catalogue on sale Monday 13th November 2006, we have incorrectly advertised Middle Bacon From the Delicatessen (excludes Free Range Bred) at an "each" price. Please note that should be per "Kilo" price. We apologise for any inconvenience caused.

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