



Are the UAE's Coastal Waters at Risk?

As one of the world's busiest and most strategic maritime junctions, the Strait of Hormuz understandably sees a high amount of shipping traffic each and every day. This passage is integral not only to maintaining the Emirati economy, but also to ensuring that global supplies of oil remain adequate to meet demand.

However, there are downsides to such prolific activity. The vessel traffic causes air and noise pollution on a day-to-day basis, which can interrupt the habits and contaminate the habitats of myriad marine animals. Meanwhile, oil and chemicals spills can be disastrous for local populations, taking weeks, months or even years to fully clean up.

A global problem

Of course, it's not just the Strait of Hormuz that's under threat from pollution from the shipping industry. In the last 10 years, there have been over 60 oil spills across the world, from which a cumulative 164,000 tonnes of oil has been lost and unquantifiable damage has been wrought on local ecosystems.

In one particularly recent example, the fuel ship MV Wakashio crashed into a coral reef near Mauritius last month. Although the majority of the fuel was recovered onboard, it's estimated that as many as 1,000 tonnes of crude oil were leaked into the surrounding waters, causing untold damage to the fish, reef and other organisms which reside in the area.

UAE taking precautions

In order to avoid similar catastrophes from occurring on its doorstep, the UAE have put in place a number of government regulations aimed at keeping Emirati coastal waters safe. In 1999, Federal Law No 24 prohibited vessels from discharging oil, chemicals or other waste materials into the natural environment, although most breaches since have simply taken place in international waters, which are harder to police.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment (MOCCAEE) has a dedicated response plan, which involves continual coastal monitoring, predictive modelling programmes and remote sensors. This has helped to keep tabs on the situation at all times and nip any problems in the bud.

Public commitment must match government action



Of course, government regulations like those mentioned above are crucial in cracking down on the pollution caused by industrial activity, but it shouldn't be forgotten that much contamination comes from individual Emirati citizens as well. Something as seemingly innocuous as [sunscreen, for example, can have a devastating impact on freshwater ecosystems](#), as can other chemicals contained in detergents, cosmetics and other everyday household items.

Perhaps the biggest issue from a consumer perspective, however, is the rampant problem of plastic pollution. Single-use plastics are a blight on the environment and much of the waste generated by this industry ends up in our seas and oceans, endangering the lives of the marine animals living there. As such, proper disposal and recycling of all plastic waste should be a priority for anyone in the UAE and beyond.