

Introduction

Papua New Guinea lies between the Coral Sea and the South Pacific Ocean in the eastern Malay Archipelago, north of Australia, east of Indonesia, west of the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, and south of the Marianas and Micronesia. The country includes the eastern half of the island of New Guinea, the islands of the Bismarck Archipelago (New Ireland, New Britain and the Admiralty islands), Bougainville, and many smaller islands.

Papua New Guinea's approximately 5,200 km of coastline consists of coral reefs, mangrove swamps, grassy lagoons, forested shorelines, and steep cliffs. The coastal climate is hot and humid year-round with northwest monsoons from December to March and southeast monsoons from May to October. In the higher elevations, the climate is much cooler.

The seas and coral reefs of Maza National Park host dugong and marine turtles, Tonda Wildlife Management Area and adjacent National Park, a RAMSAR site, has coastal plains, tidal rivers and mangroves which support more than 25 species of endemic and migratory waterbirds and both species of crocodile. The islands of New Ireland, particularly Tench, are important foraging areas for large numbers of brown and black noddy.

At Risk Wildlife

In this section, some individual wildlife species are mentioned followed by a letter in parentheses. These are species included in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species within the top three categories of risk - Vulnerable to extinction (V), Endangered (E) or Critically Endangered (CR).

Avian species – Papua New Guinea hosts a number of endemic waterbirds. It is also an important area for migrating seabirds, wading birds and ducks and geese.

Species of special concern include the Beck's Petrel (CR), Far Eastern Curlew (E), Great Knot (E), Bougainville moustached kingfisher (E), Salvadori's teal (V), Heinroth's shearwater (V), Sanford's fish eagle (V), and Bismarck kingfisher (V).

Marine mammals – Dugong (V) are found in nearshore waters of Papua New Guinea, with sperm whale (V), pilot whale, and more than ten species of dolphin inhabiting the offshore waters of the country. Orca and their calves spend time in nearshore waters from March to May and again between July and October. Australian snubfin dolphin (V) and Australian humpback dolphin (V), both riverine dolphins, were recently found to inhabit the Kikori Delta.

Marine reptiles – Green (E), hawksbill (CR), leatherback (V), loggerhead (V), olive Ridley (V), and flatback turtles all feed in Papua New Guinea waters. All but the flatback nest on local beaches. Green turtle nesting around Kavieng peaks between August and October. The Kamiali Coast in Madang province and the Huan Coast in Morobe province have important leatherback turtle nesting beaches. Hawksbill, Olive Ridley and loggerhead turtle nesting sites are limited within the country. Saltwater and New Guinea crocodiles are resident in Papua New Guinea.

Regional Seas

Pacific Ocean, including the Bismarck Sea, Solomon Sea, Coral Sea, and the Gulf of Papua.

Past experience

Papua New Guinea has experienced a number of minor spills, including the bulk carrier Zhi Qiang, which ran aground in the Louisiade Archipelago spilling raw sugar and fuel oil in 2012. That same year the Tai Fu 102 sank at anchor at Rabaul and the Asian Lily which ran aground on Kwaiawata island about 120 nautical miles from the mainland, oiling some 120 meters of shoreline. There were no reports of oiled wildlife in any of these incidents.

Response: the role of the authorities

The National Marine Pollution Controller of the National Maritime Safety Authority (NMSA) is the competent national authority, and coordinates spill response through its Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC). A new National Marine Pollution Contingency Plan (NATPLAN) was approved in 2017. Local ports and facilities are responsible for Tier 1 incidents, NATPLAN for Tier 2 and, in cooperation with other Pacific nations under the Pacific Islands Regional Marine Spill Contingency Plan (PACPLAN), for Tier 3 incidents. The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) may also be called in under a bilateral agreement. There is a provision in the NATPLAN for review/revision of the plan every five years and after each response to a pollution event.

NMSA is supported in spill response by a National Marine Pollution Committee which includes the head of the departments responsible for environmental protection, fisheries and marine resources, disaster management as well as the shipping, oil and mining and fishing industry, as well as a representative of an environmental NGO, to provide advice and support to the NMSA. The PNG Fire Authority may also be involved as needed.

A government nominated Environmental and Scientific Coordinator (ESC) provides advice on environment and science relative to oil spills.

At least one palm oil company has a pollution response plan for both fuel and palm oil spills.

Oiled wildlife response

Formal guidelines?

The NATPLAN requires the Conservation and Environment Protection Authority (CEPA) to develop an Oiled Wildlife Response Plan (OWRP) and designates responsibility for collection, assessment, cleaning and rehabilitation of wildlife impacted by marine pollution to CEPA. That plan is not completed as of 2018.

Response objectives and strategy

This will likely be addressed in the OWRP.

Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

Rehabilitation would likely be allowed but there is limited capacity in the country.

Impact assessment

CEPA, working with the ESC, would oversee impact assessment. The Environmental Science and Physical Geography Division of the School of Natural and Physical Sciences at the University of Papua New Guinea may be called in to assist as well.

Notification and early response

As of 2018 there is no system in place specifically for notification of oil impacted wildlife and early response to these animals, however CEPA sits on the National Marine Pollution Committee and would likely be made aware of oiled wildlife. The OWRP may address this issue more clearly.

Wildlife responders

There are no experienced oiled wildlife responders in Papua New Guinea, however, personnel from Mas Kagin Tapani have experience in sea turtle conservation and may be able to assist. Mahonia Na Dari, which focuses on marine conservation, may also be able to assist in field operations.

Cooperation between stakeholders

Mahonia Na Dari manages the Walindi Nature Centre, which supports tourism and marine conservation research and hosts a fellow NGO, Live and Learn Environmental Education.

Papua New Guinea is a signatory to the Noumea or SPREP (Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region). SPREP's Pacific Ocean Pollution Prevention Programme (PACPOL) has developed the PACPLAN. The country also holds an MoU with Australia for mutual assistance in the event of a major spill.

Permanent facilities

There are no permanent facilities in Papua New Guinea for wildlife rehabilitation, nor for oiled wildlife response.

Current processes

Regular response exercises are mandated by the NATPLAN.

The National Marine Pollution Committee meets, at a minimum, twice annually.

Documentation and references

General references

ITOPF Country Profile (2014)

Birdlife Country Profile

Papua New Guinea National Marine Spill Contingency Plan (NATPLAN) 2017

RAMSAR Annotated List of Wetlands of International Importance-Papua New Guinea

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