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Oil slick spreads to Singapore northeastern coastline

An oil slick from a damaged tanker has spread from beaches on Singapore's southeastern coastline to a marine nature reserve and other beaches, environment officials said Saturday.

Oil was found on the northeastern shore of Changi Beach and at Chek Jawa, a marine reserve on the southeast corner of Pulau Ubin, an island off the beach, a spokeswoman for the National Environment Agency (NEA) told AFP Saturday.

"The affected portion at Changi Beach is 700 metres (2,296 feet) long. Clean-up operations have begun. At Chek Jawa, some oil patches were sighted along a 150-metre stretch," a press release by NEA dated May 28 stated.

Previously, the oil slick affected only the southeastern coastline of Singapore, with authorities closing down 7.2 kilometres (4.5 miles) of beach and rock bunds, or embankments, as emergency crews cleaned up the oil.

The slick came from the Malaysian-registered tanker MT Bunga Kelana 3, which was carrying nearly 62,000 tonnes of crude when it collided on Tuesday with the MV Waily, a bulk carrier registered in St Vincent and the Grenadines.

About 2,500 tonnes of crude leaked from a gash on the double-hulled tanker's port side, officials said. Such tankers are designed to limit spillage in case of a rupture.

Singapore's Maritime and Port Authority said most of the leaked crude had been contained at sea.

Environmentalists were concerned that the slick could spread to Singapore's northeastern coastline.

"Definitely, where we're talking about Changi Beach and Chek Jawa, these areas have a high level of biodiversity," said Louis Ng, executive director of the Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES).

Ng added that a 20-man team from ACRES had been at Changi Beach since 3:00 am Saturday morning (1700 GMT Friday) to rescue wildlife hit by the oil, which included "hermit crabs, the starfish, sea snails and clams."

The group said they had rescued 81 oil-covered animals at a beach along the east coast of Singapore on Friday.