THE STORY......
The 164-metre bulk cargo ship Kiani Satu reported mechanical problems outside Buffalo Bay in the early hours of Thursday, 8 August. The Krynnsa and Wilderness NSRI teams responded immediately and alerted the Krynna Municipality. By first light, an extensive team was already on hand at Goukamma Nature Reserve. Considering increasingly rough seas, a call was made to rescue the 19 crew members off the ship.

The vessel, which was carrying 15,000 tonnes of rice and 330 tonnes of oil, eventually ran aground inside the Marine Protected Area of the CapeNature-protected Goukamma Nature Reserve on 9 August. By that evening a fully-representative Joint Operations Centre (JOC) was established and specialists from across the country had driven and flown in to manage the different aspects of the operation.

THE OPERATIONS
Two main teams, one dealing with operations at sea and the other managing things on land, were activated. Every night the two teams met for feedback and planning sessions.

At the head of the sea-based operations was the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) who assured the land-based JOC that the German ship owners had taken responsibility for the incident. The insurers would pay for salvage operations, clean-up and environmental implications, now and in the future.

After providing some warmth, sustenance and some first aid for light injuries, the crew was taken to Mossel Bay for visa processing.

By Friday morning 16 August, eight days later, the vessel had been pivoted by 70 degrees and was facing the right direction. When weather conditions cleared enough for flying time, helicopters removed all food on board as well as some eight tonnes of fuel. This proved sufficient and the ship finally was successfully towed off the sandbank at 11.30am on Saturday, nine days after her arrival.

On Sunday night the Kiani Satu was well out of South African waters and no longer posed a threat to our coast. While she eventually did sink some 110 nautical miles south of Buffalo Bay in 1000 metres of water in the early hours of Wednesday morning, 21 August, SAMSA has given their assurances that the ship was too far and too deep to pose any significant environmental threat. Nonetheless, the Department of Environmental Affairs will continue to monitor the sink site as part of their regular operations.

OPERATIONAL COMPLICATIONS
• The vessel went aground about 4km west of the Goukamma Nature Reserve on 9 August. The Krynnsa and Wilderness NSRI teams responded immediately and alerted the Krynnsa Municipality. By first light, an extensive team was already on hand at Goukamma Nature Reserve. Considering increasingly rough seas, a call was made to rescue the 19 crew members off the ship.

In the sea, the plan was to lighten the load and turn the ship to face into the waves with the help of the super-strong tugboat Smit Amandla. The vessel had become lodged in a sandbank in the breakers with starboard side facing the waves, which made it vulnerable to rough seas. Once it had adequately turned, attempts would be made during every high tide (at night and during the day) to carefully pull it from the sandbank. It was estimated that the ship required about four metres of swell to lift, which ironically needed the same cold and stormy weather that limited flying time for salvage helicopters and could potentially cause further damage to the Kiani Satu.

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While the drama at sea unfolded, the land-based JOC was being coordinated by Krynna Municipality Head of Disaster Management Richard Meyer, supported by Eden District Municipality Disaster Management Head Gerhard Otto.

AT SEA

• All salvaging, including daily transporting of salvages to the ship and back, had to take place with the help of helicopters. Cold, wet and stormy conditions were often not suitable for flying.

• There was no electricity on board, which complicated salvage operations.

• It was the Women’s Day long weekend. Buffalo Bay was hosting the annual Ross Taylor Benefit Surf Contest, which attracted hundreds of visitors to town. The ship incident added hundreds of other spectators, which complicated traffic and caused additional safety concerns in a salvage zone.

ON SHORE

The oil spill preventative measures were put in place in the area’s closest three estuaries, which included floating oil catching booms at all three river mouths and huge sand berms at Goukamma and Swartvlei. Contingency plans were also in place for Wilderness but were never necessary.

Specialised clean-up training for nearly 70 workers was initiated and a base camp set up for them at Buffalo Bay Caravan Park. Preparations for a long-term clean-up crew on the Reserve were also being made. An oil rapid response team was in place to deal with ad hoc spills as necessary.

Once the ship had left, the JOC was systematically closed down and final mop-up operations handed over to CapeNature, the custodians of the reserve and marine protected area.

During the three days of the incident, a total of 150 oiled seals were found as well as two large birds. The oil affected birds were cleaned and sent for rehabilitation. This is the equivalent of 1% of the estimated 5000 birds that might have been affected by the incident.

Mortalities: 8 penguins, 14 cormorants and three dead seals. In context these mortalities are not extremely high considering the applicable area from Port Elizabeth to Mossel Bay, as well as the prevailing stormy conditions and other natural factors.

By Wednesday 21 August 53 oiled penguins, 89 gannets and 4 cormorants have been rescued, cleaned and sent to Cape St Francis for rehabilitation.

A sea bird and animal rescue team, assisted by volunteers on the Western and Eastern Cape coast, remains on standby.

Roleplayers included the South Africa Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA), national Department Environmental Affairs (DEA) Oceans and Coast, Krynnsa Municipality, Eden District Municipality, CapeNature, SANParks, National Sea Rescue Institute (NSRI) Knysna and Wilderness, Southern Cape Fire Protection Association (SCFPA), SARS Customs, SAPS Sea Border Unit, NMMU (research unit), Western Cape Provincial Traffic Department, Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCJOB), several specialised service providers and many volunteers.

Thank You!

• Hundreds of volunteers and sponsors who helped, and who offered help, over this time period. There are too many people, organisations and businesses to thank individually, but please accept our sincerest appreciation and gratitude for all the big and the little things you have done.

• The owners of the Kiani Satu for unconditionally accepting responsibility and mobilising their insurance immediately and without question.

The Knynna Municipality and Joint Operations Centre Incident Coordinator Richard Meyer would like to thank:

• All members of this joint operation for their commitment, efficiency and brilliant attitude. The successful removal of this ship, under very strenuous circumstances, has saved our environment but also our economy.

• All members of the public for the co-operation and support that they have given to all efforts and people on the ground.

• The Knynnsa and Wilderness NSRI teams who worked tirelessly to carefully pull this ship from the sandbank.

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