

The number of ships carrying hazardous and noxious substances rose from 1,259 in 2017 to 2,118 in 2019, while the number of passengers transported from Croatian ports increased from 37.8 million in 2017 to 42.8 million in 2019.

The State Audit Office has found that Croatia does not have enough equipment to prevent and limit major sea pollution incidents, after examining the efficiency of pollution incident response management in the Adriatic in 2017-2019.

No major pollution incidents of 2,000 cubic metres or more occurred during that period. The largest incident occurred in Raša Bay in Istria in June 2018 when about eight cubic metres of fuel leaked into the sea from a cargo ship sailing under the Lebanese flag. The largest pollution prevention effort was undertaken in June 2018 when the Turkish ship Haksa, carrying magnesite, nearly sank in the waters off Split after the water penetrated the engine room. A diver managed to weld the crack up and the vessel was tugged to the Trogir shipyard.

Pollution incident response management, which falls within the authority of the Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure, was assessed as partly efficient. The State Audit Office said in a report that Croatia does not have sufficient equipment to prevent major pollution incidents, there is no company or state institution conducting an accredited training programme, and the register of certified companies for emergency response is not updated. The report says that the necessary equipment and vessels should be provided by the government and that the Ministry should develop the response management system in cooperation with the Defence Ministry to ensure that the system is as effective as possible. The Office noted that the Adriatic Sea is mostly enclosed and as such environmentally highly vulnerable. Economic activity in it is growing steadily, which leads to increased shipping traffic.

Increased traffic brings greater risk of pollution of the marine environment because of accidents at sea, release of polluted waters and industrial waste disposal. Exploration and exploitation of the seabed and subsoil also increase risk to the marine environment, according to the report.

Potential large-scale pollution incidents in the Adriatic Sea can result in major economic and environmental disasters for Croatia, the State Audit Office warned.

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