

Ship's owners charged with damaging coral

By **JORDAN BAKER**

THE owners of a ship that was stuck on a Great Barrier Reef sandbar face a fine of up to \$1.1 million after being charged with damaging 1500 square metres of coral.

The 225-metre, 73,000-tonne bulk carrier *Doric Chariot* was finally freed late on Tuesday after grounding on a sandbar off Piper Reef, 600km north of Cairns, more than a week ago.

But an environmental assessment by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) found it had cut a 50m by 30m gash in the reef

slope. It also found traces of tributal tin paint, an anti-foulant which is laced with poison to stop marine growths sticking to the hull.

"It appears as though there is 1500 square metres of coral damage," GBRMPA chairwoman Virginia Chadwick said in a statement.

The GBRMPA statement said representatives of the ship's owners, master and second mate faced Cairns Magistrates Court yesterday.

They were charged under a new provision of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act

dealing with damage caused by a vessel, it said.

The charge carries a maximum fine of \$1.1 million.

No plea was entered and the matter was adjourned to September 23, the statement said.

GBRMPA executive director Andrew Skeat said the vessel was wedged into a section of the reef that used to be in good condition.

"It was a range of corals with good live coral coverage," he said.

Scientists would continue to study the extent of the contamination while samples collected earlier this week were

analysed. GBRMPA would mount a clean-up operation to hasten the reef's recovery.

A spokesman for the Australian Maritime Safety Authority said the ship had been inspected and released from detention.

It had been declared seaworthy, he said.

A spokesman for the ship's owners said the *Doric Chariot* had resumed its journey and there was no significant damage.

He did not comment further.

The ship had been carrying a cargo of coal to India.



COURT AFTERMATH . . . the *Doric Chariot*