



Outcome of the First Meeting of the HELCOM Expert Group on Wildlife Response (EG WILDLIFE 1-2022)

Introduction

0.1 The First Meeting of the HELCOM Expert Group on Wildlife Response (EG WILDLIFE 1-2022) was held as an online meeting on 7 February 2022. The Meeting was chaired by the Chair of EG WILDLIFE, Mr. Hugo Nijkamp, Sea Alarm.

0.2 The Meeting was attended by representatives from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia and Russia, observers from Sea Alarm Foundation and WWF and the Chair of the Response Working Group as an invited guest. The List of Participants is attached as **Annex 1**.

0.3 Ms. Laura Meski, Associate Professional Secretary, acted as secretary of the Meeting.

Agenda Item 1 Adoption of the Agenda

1.1 The Meeting adopted the Agenda as contained in document 1-1.

Agenda Item 2 Matters arising from other HELCOM activities

2.1 The Meeting took note of the Outcomes HELCOM 42-2021, RESPONSE 29-2021 and HOD 61-2021 (document 2-1), particularly of the matters of specific interest to EG WILDLIFE.

2.2 The Meeting took note of the Terms of Reference for EG WILDLIFE for 2022-2023 as adopted by HOD 61-2021 and the Work Plan for 2022-2023 as approved by RESPONSE 29-2021 (document 2-2).

2.3 The Meeting also took note that HELCOM 42-2021 adopted the revised HELCOM Recommendation 31E/6 on integrated wildlife response planning in the Baltic Sea area. The Recommendation was updated with more recent references. The Meeting noted that EG WILDLIFE is to lead and facilitate the implementation of the Recommendation.

2.4 The Meeting further took note that HELCOM 42-2021 adopted the revised HELCOM Response Manual and that Chapter 7 of the Manual on co-operation in oiled wildlife response is important as it forms a good base for further work of EG WILDLIFE.

2.5 The Meeting took note that the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting was held on 20 October 2021 in Lübeck, Germany. The 2021 Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) was adopted by the meeting. The Meeting took note of the actions in the 2021 BSAP with particular relevance to EG WILDLIFE (document 2-3). In addition to the actions S32 on integrated management and S33 on mutual assistance, which are of direct relevance to EG WILDLIFE, the Meeting also noted that action S38 Undertake monitoring and pollution risk assessment regarding species and habitats in the Baltic Region by 2026 is a joint action between the HELCOM State and Conservation and Response Working Groups and also relevant for EG WILDLIFE.

2.6 The Meeting also noted the progress in planning a feasibility study and a full risk analysis for oil and hazardous and noxious substances (HNS) (action S31) by the Response Working Group.

2.7 The Meeting further took note that HOD 61-2021 discussed the implementation of the BSAP and guidance for the HELCOM main groups to plan their future work in implementing the BSAP. The meeting agreed to continue the discussion on the guidance at HELCOM 43-2022. HOD 61-2021 invited the Secretariat

to prepare a technical document for HELCOM 43-2022 on the guidance for the implementation of the BSAP clarifying the role of the leads and also taking into account the considerations at the Meeting of the Chairpersons of HELCOM and HELCOM main groups held on 25 January 2022.

2.8 The Meeting took note that the BALEX 2021 exercise was held on 24-25 August 2021 near the city of Kotka in the Eastern Gulf of Finland. The transnational exercise was led by the Finnish Border Guard, and the exercise included a national shoreline response exercise which was coordinated by Kymenlaakso Rescue Services. WWF Finland was involved in the shoreline response exercise and the OWR exercise therein. Representatives from the Finnish Environment Institute (Syke) participated as observers in the OWR exercise. The aim of the OWR exercise was to test oiled wildlife search and rescue and transport of oiled birds in the Finnish archipelago and to establish a wildlife rehabilitation centre.

2.9 WWF Finland pointed out that from the experiences of BALEX 2021 it is clear that OWR is not fully integrated in the management of marine pollution incidents, for onshore and wildlife response mutual assistance mechanisms need further development and that communication and information exchange on all levels at all stages need to be improved.

2.10 The Meeting was of the view that the scale of wildlife response (long-lasting response operations) might in many cases be unknown to authorities and thus not seen as important.

2.11 As a follow up of BALEX 2021, WWF Finland is trying to identify buildings of opportunity (3-4) along the Finnish coast, to make detailed plans for setting up wildlife response facilities. WWF Finland is also preparing a communications chart which take the volunteer organisation's structure into account.

2.12 The Meeting exchanged views on how to contribute to the implementation of relevant actions in the 2021 BSAP and the idea of a large scale, international OWR exercise was supported to find gaps in communication and situation awareness. An exercise could work as an eye opener for the remaining challenges. However, concern was raised by the Contracting Parties for having an EU funded project to finance the exercise as it would be time consuming to put a proposal together.

2.13 The Meeting concluded that OWR exercises are needed and information exchange on exercises is important.

2.14 The Meeting took note that Germany will host HELCOM BALEX 2022 north of the port of Rostock-Warnemünde, on 23-25 August 2022. The initial Planning Conference will take place online on 23 February 2022 and the Main Planning Conference will take place online on 27 April 2022. OWR is not planned to be part of the exercise.

Agenda Item 3

Update and planning/preparedness in Contracting Parties

3.1 The Meeting took note of the following national OWR planning and preparedness activities which have taken place since the last meeting:

- Denmark: Two exercises were held in autumn 2021 and one exercise will be held in March 2022. A newly introduced concept is the educational day where participants during an emergency meet and tell which role in the entire process they have (police, the Danish emergency management agency, Danish maritime agency, nature agency etc.). In that way they are all aware that the nature agency / environmental agency exist – which role we have – we get visible, so they remember to take contact in the early stages. It is also written in the oiled wildlife emergency plan. OWR is part of the whole operation at an early stage.

The OWR management plan is to be updated in the near future. Denmark will look into possibilities to make it available in English when available.

Two accidents have occurred recently in the same area near the border to Sweden (Bornholm); one spill and one windmill that has tilted. So far no wildlife has been harmed.

- Estonia: The Ministry of Environment organized two trainings on OWR in 2021. The first was a 4-day EUROWA training mainly for Estonian Fund for Nature (ELF) staff and volunteers, provided by experts from the Wildlife Rescue Centre Ostend. The second training was on OWR management for all

Estonian key authorities. The 2-day training was provided by Sea Alarm. Both trainings were considered very useful and should be continued.

The revised wildlife response plan was adopted in January 2022. Estonia will look into possibilities to make the plan available in English.

- Finland: Reorganization of the response system is ongoing to clarify the responsibilities regarding OWR. An Advisory Board for the oil and ship based HNS response has been established with a working group for OWR. The main task of the OWR working group is to redraft the OWR plan. The Ministry of Environment and Finnish Environment Institute (Syke) are working on solving the issue of funding.

WWF Finland is involved in organizing trainings within the EUROWA-2 project.

- Germany: The updating of the common framework plan on OWR is still in progress. It is a learning process and requires interaction between different authorities and others involved in OWR to be able to close gaps. Authorities aim to move from responsibility-oriented to task-oriented approaches. Training and exercises are important tools. Many trainings have been postponed due to Covid-19.

Two big incidents occurred last week, one of them being a 400m container ship that was stranded in the Wadden Sea close to the main shipping route. Due to rapid communication and response a major incident could be avoided.

- Latvia: The national OWR plan is pending adoption in the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development. Some legal issue still needs to be settled prior to adoption.

WWF Latvia has organized around 200 volunteers for responding to oil accidents. The first training for the volunteers was held in December 2021 on responsibilities of main authorities. Discussions are ongoing on the level of training and funding.

The Chair invited WWF Latvia to consider joining EUROWA and WWF Finland offered to help if needed.

- Russia: The Marine Rescue Service (MRS) has experience of cooperation with Baltic Fund of Nature. Baltic Fund for Nature promotes the development of a network of protected areas in the North-West of Russia and international co-operation in the field of the conservation of biodiversity and unique ecosystems of Baltic region. There is a program of theoretical classes with environmental movement volunteers to provide operational assistance in the oil spill response.

There is also a project «SIMREC». SIMREC project aims at mitigating the risks oil-spills pose on the environment of the Gulf of Finland by fostering cooperation between Finland and Russia and jointly developing a new generation of training simulations. By combining the know-how and expertise of authorities as well as research institutions of both countries, the project's objective is to develop tailored training programs and optimize the preparedness of response teams.

Russian parties will provide more detailed information on this topic at the next meeting.

Agenda Item 4

EG WILDLIFE activities

4.1 The Meeting recalled that according to the Terms of Reference for EG WILDLIFE the Group is to produce reports covering OWR activities in the Contracting Parties using the Self-Assessment Tool (SAT) at the end of every second calendar year. The previous report covering years 2019-2020 was adopted by RESPONSE 28-2020.

4.2 The next EG WILDLIFE report covering the OWR activities in 2021-2022 is to be submitted to the Response Working Group meeting in 2023.

4.3 The Meeting took note of the presentation on the online SAT (**Presentation 1**, document 4-2). The SAT in Word/PDF/Excel format has been used by the group for previous reporting. SATs from 2020 have already been inserted in the online SAT but are not published. When published, others can only see the result (graph) and not the answers to single questions.

4.4 The Meeting considered the online SAT useful and agreed to try out the online format for the next round of reporting. However, the most recent spread sheet (Excel) will also be made available to facilitate national coordination to come to an agreed report. Sea Alarm encouraged all Contracting Parties to fill in the SAT online and offered their assistance in that process.

4.5 The Meeting agreed at the next meeting to collect information on the relevant Country Focal Points for the online SAT (one account per country) and to look at the previous SAT reports by the Contracting Parties and the changes needed.

4.6 In preparation of the next EG WILDLIFE report, the Meeting decided to update the authority responsibilities, NGO-authority relationships and equipment stockpiles tables (cf. EWG OWR [Workspace](#)) prior to the next meeting of the Group.

4.7 The Meeting took note of the update on the EUROWA-2 project in document 4-3. The document lists activities within EUROWA-2 on the authority work stream which are directly relevant for EG WILDLIFE and for European authorities in general.

4.8 The Meeting also took note that the first EUROWA-2 authority workshop will be held online on 9-10 February 2022 and the second workshop on 8-9 March 2022. The content of the workshops is closely related to integrated management (BSAP action S32). The outcomes of the workshops will be shared with EG WILDLIFE as well as all other outcomes of the EUROWA-2 project.

4.9 The Meeting discussed future activities of EG WILDLIFE based on the proposals in document 4-1) and noted that many of the proposed topics are of interest.

4.10 The Meeting noted that the EG WILDLIFE activities need to look into how to advance the BSAP actions.

4.11 The Chair invited Contracting Parties to take lead in organizing a seminar or event on one of the topics of interest and noted that events can be organized with relatively little input but still have a good output.

4.12 The Meeting appreciated the offer by Sea Alarm and WWF Finland to assist Contracting Parties who take a lead in planning of seminars and events.

4.13 The Meeting considered the possibility of organizing a joint workshop with the Response Working Group and the SHORE Network on the framework for holistic/integrated management of marine pollution incidents.

4.14 The Meeting enquired on the possibility to organize a wildlife exercise as part of BALEX 2023 in Latvia. Latvia informed that planning of BALEX 2023 has not yet started but organizing a wildlife exercise will be considered.

Agenda Item 5 Training and information activities to support work of EG WILDLIFE

5.1 The Meeting took note of the report of the seminar on euthanasia which was held online on 20 April 2021 organized by Sea Alarm (document 5-1).

Agenda Item 6 Any other business

6.1 The Meeting took note of the list of contact persons for EG WILDLIFE (document 6-2). Contracting Parties were invited to inform the Secretariat (laura.meski@helcom.fi) on changes to contact persons for the Group.

6.2 The Meeting took note of document 6-1 on the update of the Sea Alarm Country Wildlife Response Profiles and invited the Contracting Parties to provide any updates to Sea Alarm (saskia@sea-alarm.org) at the latest **by 28 February 2022**.

6.3 The Meeting took note that a large-scale EU MODEX exercise is planned to be held in Finland in end of 2022/beginning of 2023. The exercise will have a wildlife component. European countries will be

invited to explore how countries deal with complex scenarios. Sea Alarm and WWF are part of the consortium.

Agenda Item 7

Next meeting

7.1 The Meeting decided that the next meeting of the Group (EG WILDLIFE 2-2022) will be held on 10 October 2022 as an online meeting.

Agenda Item 8

Outcome of the Meeting

8.1 The Meeting adopted the draft Outcome of the Meeting via correspondence.

8.2 The final Outcome of the Meeting has been finalized by the Secretariat and made available on the HELCOM Meeting Portal together with meeting documents.

Annex 1 List of participants

Representing	Name	Organization	Email address	Telephone number
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