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## Background

The attached document contains an outline for a project proposal on oiled wildlife response in the Baltic Sea prepared by WWF Finland, ELF Estonia and Sea Alarm.

## Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the information and discuss the proposal.

# OUTLINE PROJECT PROPOSAL OILED WILDLIFE RESPONSE IN THE BALTIC SEA

EWG OWR draft January 2017

Prepared by WWF Finland, ELF Estonia, Sea Alarm

## Table of Contents

<b>Background</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Present situation</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Recommendations on progress in the Baltic</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Outline for a project proposal</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Project partners</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Proposed Work Streams</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Work stream 1: Project management .....	5
Work stream 2: Communication and dissemination.....	5
Work stream 3: Planning and integration .....	5
Work stream 4: Training and exercises .....	5
Work stream 5: Equipment and facilities .....	5
Work stream 6: Future programme sustainability.....	6
Work stream 7: Reports and publications.....	6

## Background

Recent years have seen much progress in oiled wildlife response planning world-wide. Oiled wildlife response is increasingly being considered as an integrated part of overall oil spill response, and experts in the field are increasingly cooperating across borders and regions, developing joint protocols and streamlining training programs for wildlife responders.

Through European projects like the POSOW (<http://www.posow.org/>) in the Mediterranean, a basic training course for convergent oil spill response volunteers has been developed, which also includes an element of oiled wildlife response management. Within the EUROWA project (<http://www.oiledwildlife.eu/eurowa/project>), these training packages for the treatment of animals have been further expanded, including courses for advanced responders, specialists, section heads, veterinarians and managers. Also the structure for an international emergency response module for OWR, which could be requested by a member state as an expert resource in the event of an oil spill, has been developed in this project.

Meanwhile, governments and industry increasingly recognize oiled wildlife response as a professional part of a coordinated oil spill response and integrated plans and initiatives are taken to develop response plans and agreed guidelines at national and international levels.

Whereas not every oil spill will cause animals to get oiled, in certain habitats and/or seasons the risk of large numbers of animals can be considerable. In the past relative small oil spills (<1000 t) have caused the oiling of tens of thousands animals, mainly seabirds in the course of several days or a few weeks. The

response to even a relative small number of animals requires the authorities and animal care specialists to be prepared and have plans and guidelines to work from.

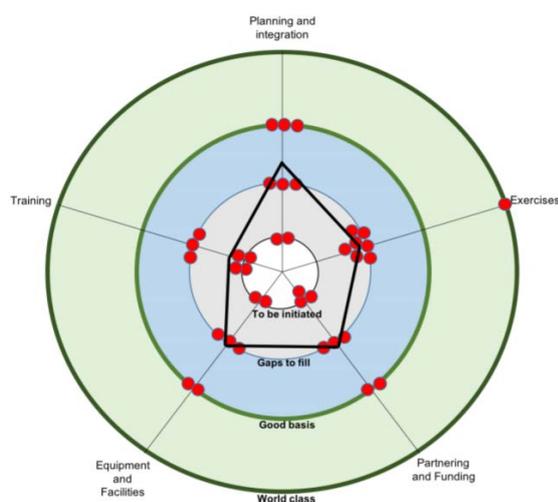
Very few countries in the world have the capacity to handle a catastrophic oiled wildlife incident on their own. Because resources locally, nationally and regionally always have their intrinsic limitations in terms of time and location, and because catastrophic oil spill events are relatively rare, expertise can only be built almost exclusively via well designed training and exercise programmes. International cooperation make these programmes cost effective, and also will lead to the effect that resources can be joined together cross-border without losing efficiency, enabling a response that can deal with larger volumes and complexities than a national response on its own. This was and is the main philosophy behind the EUROWA initiative. Now that the EU EUROWA project has finalised and delivered a series of training modules and the procedures for the international mobilisation of expertise, the philosophy can be taken to implementation at a regional level, such as the Baltic Sea.

## Present situation

The Baltic region is in a unique position due to its long history of cross-border cooperation in the field of marine pollution. Since 2010 the topic of oiled wildlife response and preparedness has been included in the Baltic Action Plan and the work of HELCOM RESPONSE. In 2014 an Expert Working Group on Oiled Wildlife Response (EWG OWR) was created by HELCOM RESPONSE to coordinate the international activities and assist CPs to increase their national preparedness and planning.

In 2015 the EWG OWR finalized a report on the status of national wildlife response plans in the Baltic Sea, which also analyses other aspects of oiled wildlife response. It is partly based on self-assessments carried out by the Baltic Sea states against an international standard that distinguishes four categories (planning and integration, exercises, training, equipment and facilities, and partnering and funding).

Figure 1 summarises the current situation of the Baltic Sea with regards to oiled wildlife response developments. There is a wide variability in the level of preparedness throughout the HELCOM region. Some countries are quite advanced in their preparedness level, mostly created via active Authority-NGO partnerships. Other countries do not have systems in place and still are at the brink of identifying and developing resources. In most countries there is a lack of national expertise and capacity, and a lack of dedicated training programs, equipment and facilities. A major roadblock to the development of adequate know how and capacity in the Baltic Sea is limitation of funding.



**Figure 1.** Graphical expression of the overall preparedness in the Baltic Sea, showing relative strengths and weaknesses (source: HELCOM Report on the status of national wildlife response plans in the Baltic Sea)

Under HELCOM the EWG OWR is paving the way for the realisation of these international procedures and cooperative efforts and has forwarded this project proposal as an important building block for the years ahead.

## Recommendations on progress in the Baltic

In order for the Baltic region and individual countries to move ahead and develop their oiled wildlife response capabilities, the EWG OWR recommended in its 2016 report to explore a more regional approach to overcome some national limitations in capability (see box 1).

### Recommendations EWG OWR

The variability in the level of preparedness between the various CPs is a matter of concern and leads to some key questions:

1. Does the HELCOM Region need to have one standard for national oiled wildlife response preparedness, and which standard is both reasonable and achievable?
2. Are there alternative solutions thinkable in which the region can further invest into a more regional capability that can be made available to countries which have difficulty to make arrangements on their own?

From the results presented in this report it can be concluded that it is unreasonable to expect CP's to agree and develop one single system of oiled wildlife preparedness and capability and establish this in each country in the foreseeable future. Some countries still struggle get started on this topic, let alone that a standard can be achieved within an agreed timeline.

Trying to develop regional capabilities seems to be an interesting concept, especially if that regional capability can be made available to countries that are facing wildlife challenges in an oil spill incident response and do not have the required national capacity or capability to effectively deal with them. Clearly each country will continue developing a national system of preparedness, and as part of HELCOM RESPONSE should inform other CPs about progress made. The EWG OWR could continue be a platform to identify challenges and finding international solutions to these challenges. Developing regional capacity would mean that a regional strategy needs to be developed. If this can be agreed by HELCOM RESPONSE, it would also mean that work towards developing this capacity could be financed via international resources such as the European Commission.

Still, each country should accommodate the involvement of an international response capability in their oil spill response planning. The EWG OWR could explore which minimum standards should be in place for such accommodating systems, and it would be in each of the CP's interest to have these minimum standards in place.

**Box 1:** Recommendations as published by the EWG OWR in their 2016 report (HELCOM Report on the status of national wildlife response plans in the Baltic Sea)

Based on the EWG OWR recommendations, the following actions could be encouraged via a 2-year EU co-funded project:

- all Baltic Sea countries must be encouraged to finalize their integrated oiled wildlife response plans, as a minimum providing a structure that can be applied to invite and integrate international response assistance from other European countries, ideally from the Baltic.
- finalised response plans need to be tested to make sure they are fit for purpose
- funding needs to be secured at national and international levels to allow national animal care experts to participate in international training events and exercises so that they can make progress on the EUROWA career path
- National authorities in charge of oil spill preparedness and response need to be made aware of existing international resources and expertise (training courses, equipment) for oiled wildlife response, and optimise procedures that would allow the mobilisation of these resources.
- Existing and developing resources in the region (trained experts, volunteers, equipment pools) need to be mapped and information shared between countries

- gap analyses should be completed to compare worst case oiled wildlife scenarios with existing resources
- based on the gap analyses, a detailed plan for national and regional development needs to be drafted.

## Outline for a project proposal

What follows is a sketch of a project set up that could be adopted by the EWG OWR and further developed and submitted by a partnership that runs the project in the course of 2018-2019, if funding from the EU is received. If initiated by the EWG OWR, and submitted to the EU in the course of Quarter 1, 2017, the project would enhance the philosophy of the EWG OWR, even if the group would not receive an extended mandate from HELCOM RESPONSE. Equally, a successful application for funding may lead to HELCOM RESPONSE wanting to keep the EWG OWR in function to discuss progress made by the project and ensure that newly developed ideas and concepts can be captured, agreed and implemented under HELCOM. In absence of a new mandate for the EWG OWR, HELCOM RESPONSE could adopt this function instead.

### Project partners

Lead partner: HELCOM SECRETARIAT?

Partners: ideally a mix of NGOs and authorities from different countries represented in the current EWG OWR.

### Proposed Work Streams

The project work streams have some standard topics, and some specific for the project objectives:

#### Work stream 1: Project management

Meetings between project partners, and the administrative requirements

#### Work stream 2: Communication and dissemination

Ensure that the objectives and deliveries of the project are communicated and disseminated as widely as possible, as a justification of EU funds well spent.

#### Work stream 3: Planning and integration

- A) Draft a generic OWR plan which could be adopted (with minor changes) in countries currently lacking a plan and/or resources to draw up a plan
- B) Analyse a chosen number of existing OWR plans (through table-top or physical exercises) and based on the results update and refine the plans
- C) Consider the integration of an international assistance module in the region (EUROWA) to complement the joint regional resources

#### Work stream 4: Training and exercises

- A) Organise training events for authorities in all Baltic Sea countries on oiled wildlife response management
- B) Organise training events for volunteers and professionals in selected Baltic Sea states where training programmes do not yet exist. Training events should be based on existing training programmes (POSOW/BASIC training course for convergent volunteers, EUROWA advanced responder course for advanced responders)
- C) Organise a cross-border exercise to test the integration of an international assistance module

#### Work stream 5: Equipment and facilities

- A) Make an inventory of existing expert and equipment stockpiles in the region and define which resources (experts and equipment) are fit for cross-border use in the event of a large-scale incident, where national Tier I and Tier II response capabilities are being stretched.

- B) Set capacity targets per country (trained rehabilitators and volunteers, equipment stockpiles) based on tiered response levels defined in national oiled wildlife response plans

Work stream 6: Future programme sustainability

- A) Explore and, if feasible, make a long-term plan for funding schemes in the region and set up a permanent regional body for coordinating oiled wildlife response (which could be the EWG OWR under HELCOM RESPONSE)

Work stream 7: Reports and publications

- A) Ensure all reports are laid out, printed and made available to relevant parties
- B) Develop a website that supports sustainability