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Submitted by	Sea Alarm
Reference	

Background

The attached document contains a revised proposal by Sea Alarm for a chapter on oiled wildlife response to be included in the HELCOM Response Manual Volume III.

References to oiled wildlife response can be found in both [Volume I](#) (oil) and Volume III of the HELCOM Response Manual. RESPONSE 19-2014 (25-27 November 2014) agreed on the proposal by EWG SHORE 9-2014 (24 November 2014) to move references to oiled wildlife response from Volume I to Volume III and invited EWG OWR to further elaborate on the text, if needed.

EWG SHORE 11-2015 (8 September 2015) considered a first draft of the chapter and made some amendment proposals (c.f. paragraph 4.11 of the Outcome of the meeting).

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to consider the draft chapter on oiled wildlife response and decide on the way forward.

Draft chapter on oiled wildlife response

Introduction

The response to wildlife issues in a marine pollution incident are normally referred to as oiled wildlife response. HELCOM has developed an oiled wildlife response and preparedness policy which is anchored in various documents and activities.

Important for the integration of oiled wildlife response into the other parts of oil spill response is to realise that most of the oiling of wildlife happens at sea. The scenarios in which this may happen are dependent on season and location. The number of animals and the species that may get involved are a result of where and when oil is spilled. There is no relation with the amount of oil. A small oil spill in the wrong place and the wrong season may produce many more animals than a large spill in a season and location where vulnerable wildlife is not present.

This makes the question of how many animals and which species a predictable one to answer, provided that data are available on the seasonal whereabouts of the vulnerable species and in which concentration they may be present. In the real time of an incident a trained population biologist who is allowed to join an overflight can verify whether or not the migration season of a certain species has started, and where the animals actually are in relation to the oil.

The shoreline component of a wildlife response will benefit from the data that are gathered by the Incident Management System that oversees the at-sea combat by oil. The needs of the integrated oiled wildlife response must be understood and recognised there too, and the shoreline part of the Incident Management System must actively communicate needs and be informed with continuous up to date information. The national oiled wildlife response plan must be integrated with both the at sea component of the oil spill response and the shoreline component which in many countries are responsibilities that are divided between different entities. The wildlife response will benefit if both at sea components and shoreline components are overseen and managed by a single incident management system.

Wildlife response as part of shoreline response

The shoreline response in an oil spill event is needed in the event that the oil is drifting towards the shore or has already started to pollute parts of the coast. Shoreline response is normally activated to either protect shoreline pollution or deal with the polluted shoreline.

Wildlife response should be activated as soon as there is a real probability that the oil at sea is in an area where vulnerable wildlife is abundant. Part of the oil affected wildlife may come ashore. This may even happen in areas where oil is not expected to affect the shore. Past spills have demonstrated that sometimes only oiled wildlife comes ashore and not the oil. In some examples the oiled wildlife response plan could not be activated because the shoreline response was not activated.

The logistic complexity of planning and managing an oiled wildlife response including the mobilising and deploying resources, setting up a response infrastructure that includes preventive measures (hazing/deterrence, pre-emptive capture or collection), sending and monitoring teams that look for live and dead animals in different sectors of the coast, the collection and transportation of these animals (and response teams), the planning, setting up and management of facilities where the animals can be treated, is often gravely underestimated. These activities need a separate coordinating unit that forms an integrated part of the overall incident management system. Especially if a more challenging scenario is at stake, when tens to hundreds animals arrive ashore every day in the course of many days or even weeks, the oiled wildlife response may involve many tens of individuals who every day have to be assigned and coordinated as part of field teams or facility teams. Experienced managers must be in charge who can oversee these activities and who know which decisions to take to ensure that the size of the response is not overwhelming the available resources.

The other key element of integrating the wildlife response is to ensure that wildlife activities on the shore are optimally scheduled and organised so that they do not negatively interfere with the other activities that take place as part of the shoreline response. For instance the collection of animals should precede the systematic clean-up of oil from the beach to ensure that all the corpses are collected for statistic purposes.

Another issue that is connected to oiled wildlife response is the emotive reaction that can be expected from the public. The media will highlight the arrival of oiled animals, and this may evoke strong reactions in support of the official response, or against it. For the incident management system these reactions can be anticipated to a large extent, and a communication strategy can help to channel the public opinion into one that is supportive and cooperative.

Last but not least, the health and safety requirements for wildlife responders working in an oily environment are in principle the same as what goes for work forces involved in other parts of the shoreline cleanup activities. In addition wildlife response personnel must take precautionary health and safety measures for working with wildlife.

[Integrating international assistance](#)

International assistance can be provided by anyone, and sometimes interested individuals or organised groups can freely cross borders in order to assist on the shoreline of the country where the incident took place. Also captured animals may be taken across borders by self-mobilised groups in order to be treated in their own country.

Mobilising international assistance can be a most interesting feature for countries that are facing a challenging oiled wildlife scenario which their national resources are not capable to deal with. However it is important to ensure that invited resources can be fully integrated in the operating incident management system and can work to the same agreed standards.

International assistance could be deployed to deal with the capture and collection of oiled wildlife in a certain sector of the coast, or work in certain departments of a facility where animals are treated.

Where the assistance involves individual experts or complete teams from abroad, it is important that there is clarity on the standards that nationally have been accepted, and that the experts and teams can make a significant contribution to the success of the operation. The experts and teams will need logistical and personal support in terms of airport pickups, hotel arrangements and transport. Professional teams and organisations can be expected to need to be paid for their services. These issues need to be arranged for ideally in advance, via standard contracts, and a Terms of Reference that both sides have signed.

The EUROWA project (2015-2017), co-financed by the European Commission, can be expected to provide a structure for the mobilisation and integration of international teams from other European Countries. The training programme that the project is developing aims at training responders to international standards.

The EUROWA deliveries are expected to provide an international standard for oiled wildlife response and the training programme that can deliver work forces at all required levels, including volunteers, advanced responders, specialists and managers. It will also deliver tools by which an international team can be activated, mobilised together with their equipment, and locally deployed in the national wildlife response. The EUROWA deliveries therefore can be considered by all countries and potentially be adopted as a first international standard for structuring an effective oiled wildlife response that is build with both local and international resources.

[Planning oiled wildlife response](#)

The HELCOM Contracting Parties have agreed to develop national oiled wildlife response plans by December 2016. These plans should provide the rationale for national oiled wildlife response and its

integration into other parts of an oil spill response, especially shoreline response. The Expert Working Group on Oiled Wildlife Response (EWG OWR) is monitoring the development of these plans and identify areas where plans of different countries can be mutually effective.

It is advised that national plans for oiled wildlife response do integrate the topic with both at sea response activities and shoreline response activities. They should also plan for the establishment of a coordinating unit for the whole range of oiled wildlife response activities, and ensure that this unit becomes an integrating part of the overall Incident Management System.