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Background

This document contains a proposal for a revised Chapter 7 on co-operation in oiled wildlife response for the HELCOM Response Manual as prepared by Sea Alarm and agreed on by the HELCOM Expert Working Group on Oiled Wildlife Response (EWG OWR).

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to consider the revised Chapter 7 on co-operation in oiled wildlife response for the revised HELCOM Response Manual.

7. CO-OPERATION IN OILED WILDLIFE RESPONSE

7.1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

General principles of good practice with regards to oiled wildlife response include, *inter alia*, the following:

- Ensuring health and safety of responders and general public are always the first priority of response.

- Objectives and strategy are clearly defined at the start of the response by being an integrated part of pre-spill planning.

- National legislation applies at all times.

- Invited foreign response groups or personnel can only work under licence and supervision provided by the national authorities.

- Professional international responders (e.g. EUROWA[1]) should be compensated for their incurred time and expenses, if formally invited and deployed as a part of an authority led response.

- Criteria and procedures for euthanasia, rehabilitation and release are set by national authorities, with the support of oiled wildlife experts, and can only be applied under their supervision. Criteria and procedures are best defined in the oiled wildlife response plan.

- Activities always aim at meeting the highest standards of animal welfare. Euthanasia is used as a means of minimizing animal suffering in cases where rehabilitation does not apply or is limited in capacity. If rehabilitation is an option, it should only be conducted if adequate resources can be provided. The rehabilitation must aim to minimise suffering during care and maximise post-release survival of treated animals.

- It is clearly defined how the possible contributions of volunteers (self-mobilising citizens) and volunteer groups (expert/non-expert NGOs) will be integrated into the response activity. It is also defined how these contributions will be coordinated and controlled.

7.2. POLLUTER PAYS

The Polluter Pays principle will be applied where possible, and claims should include the costs of a wildlife response. From the beginning, the wildlife response should be treated as an integrated part of the overall spill costs and claims structure. The probability that a claim is successful (i.e. paid by the Polluter) is enhanced if the wildlife response:

- is carried out in an organised and coordinated manner

[1] European Oiled Wildlife Response Assistance

- follows an agreed plan
- applies proven methodologies and internationally acknowledged protocols
- involves trained expertise and reliable parties who are informed about the recuperation of costs incurred
- follows a procedure to register and report reasonable wildlife costs from day 1 of the incident (e.g. timesheets, financial records, personnel assignments, travel and accommodation costs etc.).

7.3. WILDLIFE SCENARIOS AND COOPERATION

A spill of oil or other harmful substances in the Baltic marine environment has the potential to affect marine birds and mammals. Marine birds, in particular, could wash ashore in large numbers following an incident. The purpose of a fully integrated wildlife response strategy is to prevent and mitigate the effects of a pollution incident on animals, their habitats and populations. Such a strategy incorporates international objectives, allows the blending of national and international expert resources, and allows for cooperation on cross border aspects.

7.4. INTERNATIONAL OBJECTIVES OF A WILDLIFE RESPONSE

Wildlife response should serve the international objectives of species and habitat conservation and agreed international principles to deal professionally with animal welfare aspects.

7.4.1. Conservation

Decisions concerning wildlife response by one Contracting Party (CP) can strongly impact the nature conservation interests of another CP or the conservation objectives of the wider Convention. Species of conservation value (Red List species) will require priority attention but others will still need to be considered, especially if they are impacted in large numbers. A minimum requirement is that data are systematically gathered on the numbers of animals of every species that are impacted by a pollution incident. This requires a scientific lead and analysis to make sure the data and results are reliable, and to include number per species, sex, adult-juveniles and additional biometric data that could connect them to a breeding colony. For certain species, an explicit effort to try to rescue and rehabilitate live animals may be required from a conservation perspective.

7.4.2. Animal welfare

A pollution incident may lead to live animals appearing on the shoreline suffering from the pollution. These animals cannot be left to the intentions of self-mobilising citizens or unexperienced NGOs as it requires a professional approach to deal effectively with the various and complex issues of animal welfare. This needs predefined objectives, well elaborated strategies in the field of rehabilitation and/or euthanasia and the guaranteed availability of key resources. Most important is i) operational lead from the authorities and ii) the involvement of pre-identified experts who can apply accepted science-based methodologies and recognised international standards and protocols for rehabilitation

and/or euthanasia, and who should also be assigned to lead and manage these technical operations.

7.5. APPLICABLE TOOLS AND PRINCIPLES

7.5.1. Wildlife response via spill response measures

1. Proactive and reactive measures should be taken to prevent pollutants approaching sensitive habitats or large concentration of animals. Incident managers need to be fully aware of these environmental risks by having access to operational scientific data and/or scientists who can indicate where wildlife concentrations are located in relation of the oil as well as how behaviour and patterns may change over time. With this overall picture, managers will have the opportunity to prioritise the use of resources and reduce the number of animals that eventually can or will be polluted. They also have the opportunity to notify key authorities who in turn can consider the timely (or pro-active) mobilisation and deployment of resources that are needed for an on the shore wildlife response.

2. Due consideration should be given to the effects that certain response operations could have on (the behaviour) of wildlife present in the operational area, or on the durable quality of their habitats. The involvement of scientists with specific local or regional knowledge is important and may lead to a wiser application of measures that serve wildlife objectives without compromising the combat requirements.

7.5.2. An integrated operational wildlife cell

The lead authority of the wildlife response should set up an operational cell with a team of managers that can oversee all the strategic, tactical and operational aspects of the wildlife response. This cell must be fully integrated into the overall incident management to the effect that:

- The wildlife response is well funded and resourced, and can be made part of the Polluter Pays principle.
- Wildlife response decision-making becomes part of the overall incident response decision-making and information can be optimally shared between all components of the response to inform the decisions.
- The wildlife response cell can optimally deal with cross border issues, including international information sharing, optimising resources on both sides of a border, benefiting efficiency and cost effectiveness.
- Expertise and equipment can be resourced from abroad, using the general guidelines as described in Chapters 2-4.

7.5.3. Command structure for accommodating strike teams from abroad

The requesting Party shall provide a clear command structure for oiled wildlife response as an integrated part of the overall oil spill response command structure (see Figure 3). The Assisting Party (e.g. EUROWA, NGO, individual foreign experts) will be informed about this structure and given a clear role and responsibility as a part of that command system.

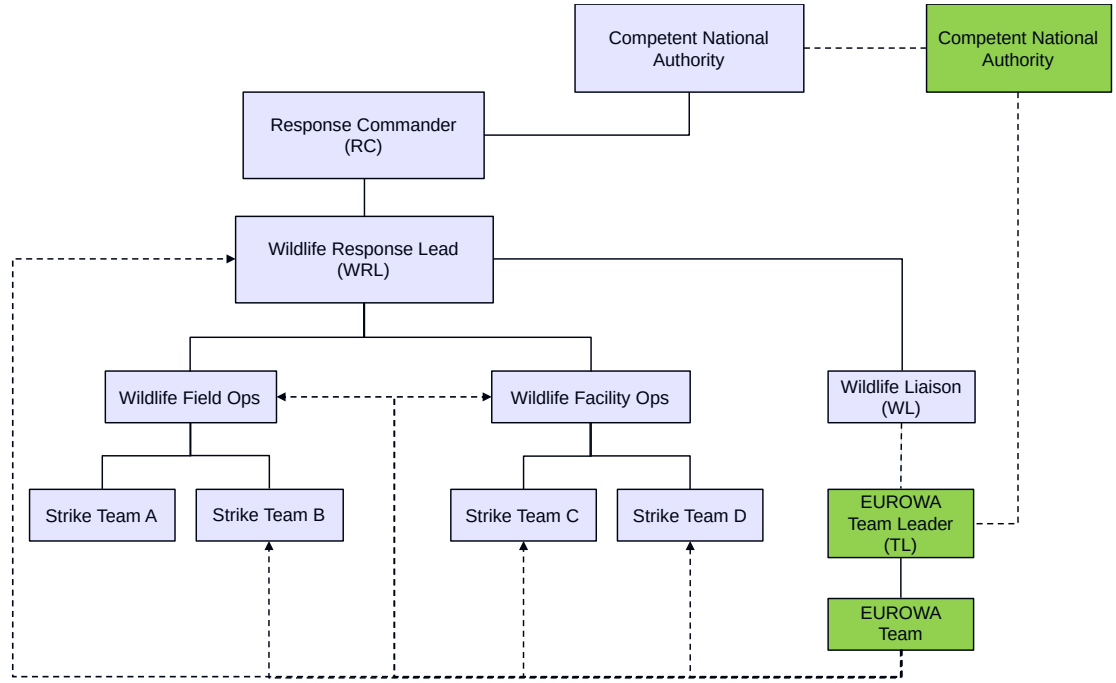

Figure 3: Command structure of the Requesting Party (purple) and command structure of the Assisting Party (green). A EUROWA Team has been taken as an example. Solid lines are management relationships. Dotted lines are communication lines; dotted arrows are technical assistance.

The invited contributions of experts from abroad often include the set up and running of a rehabilitation facility, scientific impact assessment, search and collection and/or management coaching. Groups or individual experts can be integrated into the command structure accordingly.

The Assisting Party, when considered as an organised group or Network, is expected to have its own command structure, including a Strike Team Leader (TL) with controlling power over the mobilised international group. The TL will liaise directly with the Wildlife Liaison (WL) who facilitates the Strike Team on behalf of the Wildlife Response Lead (WRL). The Assisting Party will be asked to provide:

- names and affiliation of the experts in the proposed team
- internal command structure of the team
- expertise they can give
- their operational needs if integrated into the national response.

The Assisting Party will be kept informed at all times by the Widlife Liaison (WL, c.f. Liaison Officer see Chapter 2). The WL has a direct link to the national command structure and is mandated to deal with the foreign experts. The Lead Country provides all means feasible to ease the work of the foreign experts.

Cross border information exchange and cooperation

Wildlife authorities leading the wildlife operational cells on both sides of a border should be enabled to exchange relevant information and make requests to each other that would make

the overall response more effective, reduce overall costs of the response, and allow an optimised use of resources. This exchange could include, for example, the formal approval and generation of documentation for transport of captured oiled animals across the border, in the case that a higher quality of care can be provided on the other side of the border.

7.6. NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS

It is important that, as a matter of their national preparedness, all CPs have in place:

- A strategy and tactical plan with clear objectives and identified resources
- A leading wildlife authority that sets up an operational cell to manage the wildlife response
- Trained and exercised national resources including experts and equipment
- A wildlife contact point for mobilisation and accommodation of international responders

HELCOM Recommendation 31E/6 calls for the development of national wildlife response plans and preparedness systems by all CPs. The HELCOM Expert Working Group on Oiled Wildlife Response (EWG OWR) facilitates regional cooperation in support of the implementation of the Recommendation.

7.7. PREPAREDNESS BETWEEN CONTRACTING PARTIES

The HELCOM EWG-OWR identifies mechanisms of international preparedness. This includes e.g.

- The identification of wildlife authorities in different parts of the Baltic Sea that could facilitate cross-border information exchange and cooperation
- Overview of stockpiles of wildlife response equipment
- Exchanges about the level of preparedness in different CPs, via the Self-Assessment Tool, and descriptions of this preparedness.

7.8. STRIKE TEAMS FOR WILDLIFE RESPONSE

Strike teams for wildlife response can be defined as operational groups that are deployed to carry out field operations or facility operations as follows:

- **Reconnaissance strike team**. Operational group that inspects parts of affected area (aerial surveillance) or coastline (by boat or vehicle) to monitor and identify wildlife threatened or affected. They report on numbers of observed animals and their location, degree of oiling, species, occurrences, required resources for capture.
- **Search and collection strike team**. Operational group that can take care of the search capture and collection of affected animals in a defined sector of the coast. The group will need resources such as vehicles, equipment, shelter.
- **Hazing/deterrence strike team**. Operational group that attempts scaring away animals from coastal or marine areas that are affected by oil.

- **Impact Assessment strike team**. Operational group that oversees the collection of all dead animals, the documentation, sampling and storage, analysis via necropsy and biometry, and reporting.
- **Field stabilisation strike team**. Operational group that sets up and operates a field stabilisation centre (when required), where affected animals can be stabilised (48 h minimum) before transported to a full rehabilitation centre.
- **Rehabilitation strike team**. Operational group that sets up and operates a full rehabilitation centre where affected animals can be stabilised, washed, rehabilitated and from where they can be released to the wild with a scientific tag.

Only one source of personnel exists in Europe from where all types of international strike teams can be invited: the EUROWA Network

7.9. ASSISTANCE FROM THE EUROWA NETWORK

The EUROWA network can be activated via a notification to Sea Alarm (BE), which can be done directly, or via CECIS. The EUROWA Standard Operating Procedure will be operated which can lead to the mobilisation of an international response team of qualified experts. The Team is headed by a Team Leader (TL) who acts as the point of contact for the Wildlife Liaison (WL) of the Requesting Party. The EUROWA Team also has a dedicated Technical Director (TD) who takes care of the technical leadership and the deployment of Team Members, when arrived in-country.

The EUROWA network can provide assistance via various fields of expertise:

- Wildlife response management: overall management, field ops management, facility ops management
- Field activities: expert personnel for field strike teams
- Facility operations: expert personnel for rehabilitation facilities and veterinary care

Qualified EUROWA experts work according to established international guidelines as published by EUROWA and IPIECA (see References).

7.10. TRAINING AND EXERCISES

The EWG-OWR has developed guidelines[2] for training of wildlife responders (using EUROWA qualifications) and the design of exercises (following the HELCOM classification, see chapter 8, and box below).

Training according to the EUROWA qualifications will enable the development of wildlife expertise in different countries, while these trained resources can provide mutual assistance across borders using a common set of wildlife protocols and standards. Such mutual assistance can be facilitated via the EUROWA SOP, by which a coordinated international Team is formed (see section 9), or directly via bilateral exchange between two CP's.

[2] Published on the EWG-OWR workspace

Guidelines for the design and development of wildlife exercises follow the HELCOM categories and nomenclature as described in Chapter 8 of the Manual.

BALEX ALPHA-W (wildlife table top exercise) A table top wildlife exercise in which a wildlife scenario is introduced to a group of participants who represent two or more CPs. The ALPHA-W can be integrated into another ALPHA table top or even a DELTA or DELTA-W exercise.
BALEX BRAVO-W (wildlife alarm exercise) Currently the EUROWA Module could be tested as part of a BALEX BRAVO exercise, by sending a request via CECIS. In the future, when CP's would have their own internationally qualified response personnel, teams or equipment, BRAVO-W exercises could include the request for these systems via bilateral or multilateral communications. In terms of equipment, for instance the mobilisation of the Finnish Bird Cleaning Unit (BCU) could be requested for.
BALEX CHARLIE-W (wildlife equipment exercise) For wildlife this could include an exercise in which a full equipment solution could be mobilised for a demonstration, or used for training, for instance Finnish Bird Cleaning Unit.
BALEX DELTA-W (wildlife operational exercise) A host country CP could design and plan for a wildlife exercise in which field activities or facility activities are simulated by (teams of) trained personnel. The interaction between personnel from different CPs will be useful to explore common standards for animal handling, management, documentation and communication.
BOX: Description of exercises that can be designed and organised in the field of wildlife response (source: EWG-OWR)

7.11. REFERENCES

HELCOM Contracting Parties jointly recognise and agree on the use of the following guidelines and documents to be applied in oiled wildlife preparedness and response:

- *Wildlife Response Preparedness (IPIECA)*
- *Key Principles for the Protection, Care and Rehabilitation of Oiled Wildlife (IPIECA)*
- *Handbook on Oil Impact Assessment (for seabirds)*
- *Claims Manual (IOPC)*
- *EUROWA documentation and manuals*