

EMPOWER

A new European initiative for oiled wildlife response and preparedness

EMPOWER is a new initiative that aims to professionalise the contributions that Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) provide to an integrated oiled wildlife response.

Marine wildlife emergencies that occur as a result of an oil spill incident are bound to challenge the existing preparedness system of the coastal country that is facing the pollution event. Similar to an oil spill response, an oiled wildlife response needs to be well prepared and carried out according to a pre-defined plan. Due to the very nature of the work, the success of a wildlife response strongly depends on the quality and performance of the volunteers and the quality of the organisations that direct and manage them. The ideal situation is one in which the wildlife activities carried out by volunteers and NGOs are seamlessly integrated into the overall response that is managed by the authorities.

While oil spill response is a well-developed professional field, for which national experts are trained and in a continuous state of preparedness, oiled wildlife response is still in its infancy. This is where EMPOWER steps in. EMPOWER aims to develop European oiled wildlife response towards levels that meet the international standards of professionalism that apply in oil spill response. This requires the national and international development of infrastructure, resources and training opportunities.

The wildlife aspect of planning is increasingly receiving attention from national oil spill authorities in Europe. A growing number of countries either have an integrated wildlife response plan in place or have started the process of looking into it. The existing plans are based on a mutual understanding between the national authorities and the NGOs that they have accredited to carry out the wildlife response. EMPOWER seeks to ensure that these structural relationships between NGOs and oil spill authorities are developed in all coastal European countries and are formalised as part of national oil spill response planning.

Sea Alarm has been building up a network of NGOs, national oil spill experts and industry representatives in all coastal European countries for the last 10 years. Under EMPOWER, this network will be formalised. The start has already been made by nine Founding Members who will discuss and develop a membership structure on the basis of which other organisations within Sea Alarm's network will be invited to join later this year. The Founding Members are leading NGOs from across Europe, each bringing in their own unique experience, point of view and skill set. The development of EMPOWER started in late 2008 and is enabled by funds granted to Sea Alarm by the European Commission and Oil Spill Response.

Sea Alarm

Name of Organisation	Country	Specialist Activity	Special value to setting up EMPOWER
Estonian Fund for Nature (ELF)	Estonia	Nature conservation; Volunteer co-ordination	Experience in national oiled wildlife incidents; Existing relationship with national authorities
Helmepa	Greece	Shipping and environment; Environmental education	Environmental protection
Legambiente	Italy	Nature conservation	Nature conservation; Organisation of volunteer networks
Sea Alarm	Belgium	Oiled wildlife response and preparedness	An established European network; International professional reputation
Seal Rescue and Research Centre Lenie 't Hart	Netherlands	Seal rescue and rehabilitation	Experience in international animal rescue operations; Rehabilitation of marine mammals
Royal NIOZ	Netherlands	Scientific research	International experience in wildlife impact assessment of oil spill events
Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)	United Kingdom	Animal welfare; Wildlife rehabilitation	International reputation in animal welfare issues; National and international oiled wildlife response
Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre Ostend	Belgium	Wildlife rehabilitation; Oiled bird rehabilitation	Experience in national and international oiled wildlife response
Zoomarine	Portugal	Zoo and dolphinarium; National stranding network; Marine wildlife response centre for sea turtles	National marine wildlife rescue and response; National network for oiled wildlife response