

Introduction

Lithuania is situated on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, bordering Latvia to the north, Belarus to the southeast, Poland and the Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation to the southwest. The 98 km sandy coast may be divided into the northern part of the Curonian Spit (a thin, curved sand dune peninsula that separates the Curonian Lagoon from the Baltic Sea) and the sector north of Klaipeda.

Traffic lanes from and to the Klaipeda harbour and the Buddinge Oil Terminal cross Lithuanian coastal waters. Under rough weather conditions navigation to and from Klaipeda port can be challenging due to high wave action into the Klaipeda Strait.

Russian pipeline terminals are located at Primorsk (Russia), Ventspils and Butinge (Lithuania). From here, tankers transit to and from Baltic Sea shipping routes and the Gulf of Finland where other Russian oil terminals are located.

At Risk Wildlife

Avian Species - Lithuanian waters serve as an important wintering area for a wide range of waterbirds. The southern region hosts internationally important winter concentrations of red and black-throated divers, long-tailed duck and velvet scoter that arrive from the Gulf of Riga. The northern region, especially the area off Palanga, is the second-largest Baltic wintering site for the globally threatened Steller's eider. Concentrations observed here generally represent 5 % of the total wintering population in the Barents, White and Baltic Seas. Breeding birds of concern include the southern dunlin, ruff and greater scaup.

Marine mammals - Harbour porpoise and grey seals are the only marine mammals commonly found on the Lithuanian coast. Other species would be considered rare or vagrant.

Marine Reptiles - No sea turtles are regularly found in this area.

Regional Seas

Baltic Sea

Past experience

Lithuania has experienced a number of medium-sized spills such as the Globe Assimi (1982), the Rudolf Breitchheid (1988) and the North Pacific (2001). There is no reference to any oiled wildlife response during these spills. In 1995 and 1997 mass mortalities of seabirds, primarily long-tailed ducks and velvet scoters, were linked to oil, however, oil source, location of spill and amount of oil spilled is not known.

Response: the role of the authorities

The National Oil Spill Contingency Plan places overall responsibility for oil spill contingency planning and response with the Maritime Search and Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC Klaipeda) of the Lithuanian Maritime Safety Administration (Ministry of Transport and Communication). Under this system the Lithuanian Navy responds in the Baltic and is generally responsible for all aspects of the operation.

The Lithuanian Coast Guard responds in the Curonian Lagoon and each port authority is responsible for cleanup in its own port. Shoreline cleanup is the responsibility of the Fire and Rescue Service of the Ministry of the Interior and the individual municipalities.

The Marine Environment Protection Agency (Regional Environmental Protection Department, Ministry of Environment) is the designated agency for overall responsibility for oiled wildlife response.

Oiled wildlife response

Formal guidelines?

Oiled wildlife response is being considered in the overall pollution response planning process under the Ministries of Environment, Defence and Interior, but as of 2014 no formal guidelines exist.

Response objectives and strategy

N/A

Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

Rehabilitation may be undertaken as directed by the Lithuanian Sea Museum under the present system.

Impact assessment

Present guidelines are not in place.

Notification and early response

In case of an oiled wildlife incident, the National Coast Guard and the Klaipeda State Seaport Authority will notify the Ministry of Environment. The Lithuanian Sea Museum is technically responsible for oiled marine wildlife response.

Wildlife responders

The Lithuanian Fund for Nature and the Lithuanian Society for the Protection of Animals are national organisations potentially interested in being involved in oiled wildlife response but no organisation in the country has experience. With such a limited coastline there is not significant interest in developing a large response system within the country. There is a strong likelihood that, in the event of an oil spill, help would be requested from neighbouring country NGOs with oiled wildlife response experience.

Other national organisations which may be able to assist in a response include the Lithuanian Ornithological Society and the Lithuanian Bird Ringing Center of the Zoological Museum in Kaunas. The Institute of Ecology of Nature Research Centre and the Marine Science and Technology Center of the Ministry of the Environment may provide assistance with impact assessment.

Cooperation between stakeholders

There is no specific cooperation, at present, between NGOs, scientific institutions and government agencies in the area of oiled wildlife response.

Lithuania is a signatory to the Helsinki Convention (HELCOM).

Permanent facilities

There are no permanent facilities for oiled wildlife response. The Lithuanian Sea Museum's Dolphinarium may be willing to rescue and rehabilitate oiled marine mammals at their facility, although they have no experience.

Current processes

N/A

Documentation and references

General references

IOPF Country Profile

Birdlife International

HELCOM Redlist

Baltic Marine Mammals (HELCOM)

Baltic Breeding Birds (HELCOM)

Zydelis et al. 2006. Beached bird surveys in Lithuania reflect marine oil pollution and bird mortality in fishing nets.

Marine Ornithology 34:161-166

Progress with the integration of oiled wildlife response into response planning (Background document for 2013

HELCOM Ministerial Meeting)

Report on the first stage of the development of the Baltic Sea Oiled Wildlife Rehabilitators group (Sea Alarm 2014)

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