

## Introduction

The Netherlands borders the southern North Sea. Its 451km of coastline can be divided into three parts:

- Wadden Sea Area, consisting of barrier islands separating the shallow Wadden Sea (tidal inlets, tidal flats) from the North Sea.
- "Hollandse kust", consisting of sandy shores with dunes, and the harbour inlets of IJmuiden and Scheveningen.
- "Delta/ Voordelta" area, consisting of four estuaries, two of which are closed, one is semi-permanently closed (Oosterschelde - storm surge barrier) and one is still open (Westerschelde).

Some of the busiest shipping routes of the North Sea are located in Dutch coastal waters. Most notable are the routes from the Channel to the German Bight (parallel to the Dutch coastline) and the entrances of the harbours of Rotterdam and Antwerp.

### At Risk Wildlife

#### Avian species

High densities of potentially sensitive aquatic and marine species occur year-round in Wadden Sea and Westerschelde areas. During winter, large numbers of wintering birds occupy the coastal North Sea waters along all of the Dutch Coast. A few are of special conservation interest, including the velvet scoter (*Melanitta fusca*), long-tailed duck (*Clangula hyemalis*) and the lesser white-fronted goose (*Anser erythropus*).

#### Mammal species

Five species of seal are found in the waters of the Netherlands. Grey and common (harbour) seal are resident, while harp, hooded and ringed seals are reported less often.

Multiple species of cetacean have been reported off the coast, with harbour porpoise being the most common.

#### Marine reptiles

Marine turtles are extremely rare in Dutch waters, thus unlikely to be a concern during an oil spill.

## Regional Seas

### North Sea

## Past experience

No major oiled wildlife incident has happened in The Netherlands. Dutch Rehabilitation Centres have, however, been involved in both the Erika (France, 1999) and Tricolor (Belgium, 2003) incidents, where considerable numbers of birds were transported to and treated in the Netherlands. Each of them also receives one to a few hundreds oiled birds affected by chronic forms of pollution each year.

The Fugelpits bird rehabilitation station has been involved in some responses outside the Netherlands (Sea Empress, Wales 1996) and Pallas (Germany 1998). The Pieterburen Seal Research and Rehabilitation Centre has attended Braer (Shetland, 1993) and Pallas (Germany, 1998).

The Royal NIOZ is internationally recognised for its wildlife impact assessment work in chronic oiling and spill incidents (Prestige, 2002; Tricolor, 2003 and Estonia, 2006). The NIOZ has also been involved in wildlife impact assessment for HNS incidents, such as the 2013 polymer spill affecting birds in Belgium and the UK and various incidents involving other non-petroleum products affecting birds.

## Response: the role of the authorities

The Netherlands Coast Guard functions as the spill notification point for coastal oil incidents. Information is then passed to Rijkswaterstaat (RWS), North Sea Directorate- the national oil spill response planning and management authority - which oversees and can activate the integrated oiled wildlife response plan.

### **Oiled wildlife response**

#### Formal guidelines?

Guidelines for responding to oiled birds are covered under the Rijkswaterstaat plan-Samenwerkingsovereenkomst Besmeurde Vogels (SVB), with other species such as seals or cetaceans covered under existing regulations for the individual species.

#### Response objectives and strategy

The oiled wildlife response plan aims to maximise rehabilitation success while minimising animal suffering, enable scientific impact assessment and minimise conflict between wildlife response and clean-up activities.

The plan is based on a 3-tiered response. At Tier 1 a maximum of 2 facilities respond, with the SBV initiated as/when the initial 2 facilities are overwhelmed. Under the SBV a temporary centre (TOV) will be erected in which all the national capacity is brought together (Tier 2). If that is not sufficient, international assistance can be mobilised (Tier 3).

#### Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

Rehabilitation will be attempted, using the response plan guidelines, which focus on animals having a high probability of survival. Euthanasia guidelines are included in the plan, including for situations in which numbers of animals are overwhelming and mass euthanasia may have to be applied.

#### Impact assessment

Impact assessment is integrated into the response plan with the Royal NIOZ taking the lead role in managing this aspect of response. Necropsies for impact assessment generally take place at NIOZ in Texel.

#### Notification and early response

When a spill is reported to RWS, it considers whether the oil is likely to impact wildlife and, if so, when and how to implement the national response plan. In addition, coastal rehabilitation centres report admissions of unusual numbers of oiled birds directly to RWS, who could decide to deploy a surveillance mission to identify the origin of the spill. RWS will decide whether the situation is significant enough to activate the national plan.

### **Wildlife responders**

#### **Birds**

Five coastal bird rehabilitation centres (Ecomare in Texel, Veldhospitaal Stg. Vogelrampenfonds in Haarlem, VogelKlas Karel Schot in Rotterdam, De Mikke in Middelburg and Fügelpits in Moddergat) respond in their areas to Tier 1 events. They work together as Oiled Bird Netherlands/Stichting Olivogelopvang Nederland (SON) to coordinate their efforts and resources. SON operates the Temporary facility in case of a Tier 2 response under the SBV and in the case of Tier 3 responses, SON integrates the assistance from international oiled wildlife response groups.

#### **Marine Mammals**

A marine mammal response will be coordinated outside of the SBV. Several specialised centres can respond to seals, including the Seal Research and Rehabilitation Centre in Pieterburen and Ecomare on the island of Texel. Dolphinarium Harderwijk would be involved should cetaceans strand during a response.

### **Cooperation between stakeholders**

SON is the organisation that acts as the umbrella for all specialised centres and experts that can deal with oiled seabirds. Although still in its infancy, SON coordinates training and exercises and sets operational standards for individuals and rehabilitation centres, as well as protocols for joint response in a temporary facility. SON is connected to the European Oiled Wildlife Responders. SON is the core group cooperating on oiled bird response. SON works in

conjunction with Rijkswaterstaat and the Royal NIOZ during an oiled wildlife response, coordinating live bird care with impact assessment (NIOZ) and beach cleanup (Rijkswaterstaat).

In autumn 2013, Rijkswaterstaat organised a full oiled wildlife exercise with SON members practicing beach capture, triage and setting up and running a temporary facility. On-going coordinated exercises are planned for the future to maintain capacity to respond.

The Netherlands is a signatory to the Bonn Agreement (with other North Sea countries), the DenGerNeth Agreement (with Denmark and Germany) for the Wadden and North Seas, and a quadripartite plan with France, the UK and Belgium.

### **Permanent facilities**

The main permanent rehabilitation centres for oiled birds in the Netherlands are located in Moddergat (Fügelpits), Texel (Ecomare), Haarlem (Veldhospitaal Stg.

Vogelrampenfonds), Rotterdam (Vogelklas Karel Schot) and Middelburg (De Mikke).

Rijkswaterstaat maintains a contract with a contractor (Ecoloss) to provide tent-based temporary facilities within 48 hours for large-scale cleaning and care operations under the SBV.

Permanent rehabilitation centres for marine mammals are located in Pieterburen (Seal Research and Rehabilitation Centre), Texel (Ecomare) and Harderwijk (Dolfinarium, cetaceans only).

### **Current processes**

The SBV is maintained by Rijkswaterstaat via a 5-year training, exercise and evaluation programme, which includes annual meetings between all stakeholders and a pre-defined programme of plan updates, tabletop exercises, field exercises and training of key officers.

### **Documentation and references**

General references

General references

ITOPF Country Profile

Birdlife International (accessed 4.2014)

Creating a realistic oiled wildlife response exercise. Cleaner Seas. Spring 2014.

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