

Introduction

The Russian coast of the Baltic Sea borders the Gulf of Finland (easternmost waters of the Baltic Sea), which is shared by Finland, Estonia and Russia. The total length of the Gulf of Finland coastline in the Russian Federation is over 512 km. The coastline of the islands is about 170 km. long. The border of the Russian part starts from the mouth of the river Narva in the south, goes through the Narva Bay to the north, turns round Gogland Island and continues along the northern coast, west of the entrance to the Gulf of Vyborg.

The Baltic Sea is globally a unique, sensitive, northern brackish-water ecosystem, with a mixture of species found in oceans and freshwaters. The uniqueness is reflected in many international conservation networks such as Important Bird Areas (IBA-areas), Baltic Sea Protected areas (BSPA) established by Helsinki Commission, RAMSAR-sites, National parks, Seal Sanctuaries and several large NATURA 2000 areas. In April 2004, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) classified the Baltic Sea as Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSAs). In the Russian part of the Gulf of Finland there are 10 key ornithological areas of European or global significance.

The Baltic Sea is an area of outstanding importance for wintering seabirds making these areas of utmost importance and thus at risk from oil spills and other discharges of pollutants. It is also an important migratory route, especially for waterfowl, geese and waders nesting in the Arctic tundra.

In spring, the Gulf of Finland is a natural 'funnel', where the streams of migrants are drawn from the south-west. They reach maximum concentrations in the Neva Bay and the Bay of Vyborg. During summer and autumn migrations, thousands of swans, geese, ducks, sandpipers, gulls and terns concentrate along the coast of the Gulf of Finland. More than 30 species of water birds breed along the coasts of the Baltic Sea. Common eider, *Somateria mollissima*, tufted duck, *Aythya fuligula*, red-breasted merganser, *Mergus serrator*, redshank, *Tringa totanus*, sandpiper, *Actitis hypoleucos*, as well as herring gull, *Larus argentatus*, arctic tern, *Sterna paradisaea*, and common tern, *Sterna hirundo*, are all characteristic species along the Baltic Sea coasts. Razorbill guillemot, *Alca torda*, black guillemot, *Cepphus grylle*, and guillemot, *Uria aalge*, are truly marine bird species nesting on small islands or steep rocks. The Baltic Sea is one of two breeding areas for the Caspian tern.

In particular, the diverse archipelagos, seashores and underwater ecosystems of the Gulf of Finland have high ecological values. The countless islands of the Gulf are important breeding sites for seabirds and the seas are resting and feeding areas for large numbers of divers, ducks and seabirds on passage and in winter.

In the Russian part of the Gulf of Finland marine mammals are represented by the Baltic subspecies of ringed seal (*Phoca hispida botnica*) and grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus*). Both species are included in the Red Books. The ringed seal occurs in the Gulf of Finland all year round, although a seasonal changes of habitats is characteristic. When the sea surface is free from ice, the seals stay in the southern part of the Gulf of Finland, but no further eastwards. The largest haul-outs of the ringed seals are near the islands Vigrund and Khitamata. In May-June and in September-November, the ringed seals forms haul-outs of several dozen individuals near Remisaar Island and on the Tiskolskiy Reef. Small groups of 10-15 seals are common in the islands Malyy Tyuters and Malyy, and single animals climb the stones along the coast of the Kurgalskiy Peninsula and the islands Bolshoy Tyuters, Moschchnyy and sometimes Seskar Island. The ringed seals cub on ice to the south and southeast of the Beryozovyye Islands. Thus the seals migrate to the northern coast of the Gulf of Finland for cubing, and moulting, and move to the southern coast in summer. In the middle of summer, they migrate from the coast to the deep areas.

In winter, the grey seal can be found in the Russia part of the Gulf of Finland. In summer, they can be seen at the southern coast of the Gulf. In the north, only single individuals are found in the region of the Khalikarty reefs. In the southern part of the Gulf, the breeding grounds of the grey seal can be found on the Malyy Tyuters Island, on the reef near the Vigrund Island and in the Khitamata Island, which is a part of the Kurgalskiy Reef.

The Gulf of Finland and the Archipelago Sea are particularly sensitive to pollution. The concentrations of hazardous substances are persistently high in the Gulf and in the Baltic Sea. Oil pollution prevention is further hampered by the intricate shape of the coastline with its many islands and narrow channels, as well as by darkness and cold and icy conditions in the winter.

The Baltic Sea has always been an important route for shipping activities, at present also for oil transportation as there are several important oil terminals in Finland, Russia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Since 2001, the Baltic Sea has experienced a notably increase in tanker traffic volume due to the inauguration of the Primorsk terminal at St. Petersburg, which clearly poses a threat to the wildlife from spills and discharges. At present, oil movements within the Baltic are dominated by the export of Russian crude and refined oils. Oil pollution prevention is further hampered by the intricate shape of the coastline with its many islands and narrow channels, as well as by darkness and cold

and icy conditions in the winter. The HELCOM statistics on ship accidents quite clearly indicate that the highest risk for accidents is in the entrances to ports, the Gulf of Finland and the southwestern Baltic, including the Danish straits. A gas pipeline planned to be constructed on the seabed of the Baltic Sea, which will link Russia and Germany via the Baltic Sea, will begin in spring 2010 as planned. The Russian part of the Nord-stream project -122 km of gas pipeline in the Gulf of Finland.

Regional Seas

Baltic Sea (Gulf of Finland, Gulf of Bothnia, Gulf of Riga)

Past experience

Oil spills occur more or less regularly in the Baltic Sea. The region has experience major oil spills, including the TANKER URSS 1 (22000 t. crude, 1977), GLOBE ASSIMI (16000 t. fuel-cargo-, 1979) ANTONIO GRAMSCI (55500 t. crude, 1987), VOLGONEFT (700-800 t. of waste oil, 1990), BALTIC CARRIER (2700 t. of oil, 2001), Fu Shan Hai (1200 t. of fuel oil, 2003). The two latest incidents caused an oiled wildlife incident. The BALTIC CARRIER, which occurred off the Danish coastline, approximately 20,000 seabirds were contaminated (WWF). The bird species most affected were Eider ducks, (*Somateria spp*), Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*), Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrato*), Goosander (*Mergus merganser*) and Swans (*Cygnus ssp*). The Fu Shan Hai (1200 t. of fuel oil, 2003) occurred in Ertholmene archipelago (Denmark), which is designated as a EU habitat area, EU bird protection area and Natura 2000 area. An estimated number of 1100-1600 seabirds, mainly auks and eiders, were killed in the spill. In Estonia, in January 2006, a small mystery spill of about 8 t of HFO caused an oiled wildlife incident in which ca 3000 birds became oiled, of which 500 alive.

Many illegal oil spills along the shipping routes kills a very large number of birds each year when no oil is detected on shores. About ten dead seals are found at the coasts of the islands each year. In 1991-1992 mass mortality of ringed seals was registered: more than 150 dead bodies of mostly adult seals were found along the coasts and on the islands of the Gulf of Finland.

Response: the role of the authorities

The Russian Federal Contingency Plan for Oil Spill Prevention and Response at Sea was developed at the request of the RF Ministry of Transport and adopted by RF Ministry of Transport, RF Ministry of Natural Resources, RF Ministry of Civil Defense Issues and Emergency Situation and Response to Natural Disasters (EMERCOM) in July 2003.

The Regional OSCP for the Baltic Sea Region of Russia has been finally approved in 2005 by the Ministry of Transport and includes comprehensive environmental sensitivity maps.

The competent national authority for oil spill management and clean-up at sea is the State Marine Pollution Control & Salvage Administration (SMPCSA) of the Ministry of Transport. The State Marine Pollution Control, Salvage and Rescue Administration (MPCSA) which includes the State Maritime Search and Rescue Coordination Centre (SMRRC) in Moscow and the eight Maritime Search and Rescue Coordination SubCentre (MRRC) spread along the regions, serves as the national and international contact point for marine pollution emergency situations. The Ministry of Emergency Situations (EMERCOM) is responsible for the shore clean-up operations, in cooperation with local municipalities.

The Federal Supervisory Natural Resources Management Service of the Ministry of Natural Resources of the Russian Federation (MNR) will assume responsibility for an oiled wildlife response. The Commission on Prevention and Response to Emergency Situations and on Securing of Fire Safety, which consists on representatives of relevant federal, regional and municipal bodies will play a coordinator role for an oiled wildlife response.

Oiled wildlife response

Formal guidelines?

Russia (Baltic Sea) does not have an oiled wildlife response plan in place. However, very basic guidelines have been addressed in the Oil Spill Contingency Plan.

Response objectives and strategy

No strategy has been predefined

Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

The authorities will allow the rehabilitation of the oiled animals. According to the Ministry of Natural Resources, personnel for rescuing and rehabilitating oiled wildlife were trained in January 2008. However, most likely national NGOs do not have local expertise or facilities, will make that the direction and oversight of any wildlife response team will most likely be undertaken by international expertise.

As yet neither protocols on rehabilitation of oiled wildlife nor safety protocols for responders do not exist.

Impact assessment

The corpses of dead animals will be collected for counting before they will be disposed of by the authorities. Post-spill impact studies have not been conducted.

Notification and early response

In case of an oil spill incident, the Ministry of Transport will be informed. Subsequently the Ministry of Emergency Situations (EMERCOM) can be expected to notify Federal Supervisory Natural Resources Management Service of the Ministry of Natural Resources of the Russian Federation (MNR).

Wildlife responders

There is no reference of the existence of a wildlife rehabilitation centre or dedicated organisations in Russia coastline of the Baltic Sea who would respond to an oiled wildlife incident.

The most active Russian organisation in the Baltic region is the Baltic Fund for Nature (BFN) of the St Petersburg Society of Naturalists (SPNS) which aims to facilitate the development of scientific projects, educational and informational programmes on nature protection in the Baltic regions of the Russian Federation. It is member of the Sweden-based international organisation the Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB) that promotes the protection and improvement of the Baltic Sea environment and natural resources, and in turn is a member of the International World Conservation Union (IUCN).

The other CCB members in Russia are, which can provide useful information and contacts during an oiled wildlife incident, includes the Ecodefense (Kaliningrad), Green World (St. Petersburg), Neva River Clearwater (St. Petersburg), The Guide Environmental Group (Kaliningrad), The Greens of Karelia (Karelia region) and the Centre for Environmental Information (St. Petersburg). Eco-defence together with another organisation, the International Socio-Ecological Union, who addresses among others, animal welfare, marine and oil pollution issues, were both involved in an oil spill exercise (15th June, 2005, Kola Bay, Murmansk). Bellona, a science-based environmental organization working on oil and gas issues in the northern areas of Russia but also at the Russian part of Nord-stream project, could provide relevant information and have experience in coast clean up as followed a training organized by WWF-Murmansk. The Russian Regional Environmental Centre (RREC), which assists in the co-operation at international, national and regional levels among different stakeholders addressing environmental problems, could be reached as well.

International NGOs are actively involved in programmes and projects in relation to marine conservation and energy issues, including World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Greenpeace.

Cooperation between stakeholders

The cooperation in the field of oiled wildlife response activities between the stakeholders and the authorities are conducted in the framework of the Commission on Prevention and Response to Emergency Situations and on Securing of Fire Safety.

Permanent facilities

There are neither records of any permanent oiled wildlife rescue/rehabilitation facilities nor equipment for treating oiled wildlife.

Current processes

A questionnaire on oiled wildlife response completed by Russia Federation and the other Contracting Parties at HELCOM RESPONSE have been sent to Sea Alarm and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-Finland). Oiled wildlife response should become an integrated element in HELCOM RESPONSE's working programme.

An annual international pollution response exercise called BALEX DELTA 2008 (in August), organised by HELCOM simulated a major oil spill from an offshore platform outside Kaliningrad, Russia. Up to 20 oil-pollution-combating ships and other vessels from six HELCOM Member States - Denmark, Finland, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden supported by helicopters took part in the exercise. Also, the European Union was represented by one response vessel chartered by the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA). In addition, about 40 observers from

Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden, as well as EMSA monitored the actions of the response units.

Documentation and references

General references

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