

Case Study: European Oiled Wildlife Response Assistance (EUROWA) Project (2015-2016)

Project overview

To develop a Module (in EU terminology) for oiled wildlife response which will become an integrated part of overall oil pollution response under the international system of mutual assistance existing between European Member States and the European Commission. The Module consists of a team of experts and equipment that can be mobilised via the Common Emergency Communication and Information System or CECIS.

Background

Europe has experienced a number of oil spills which affected wildlife, including large spills such as the Sea Empress, Prestige, and Tricolor incidents. These incidents resulted in thousands of oiled birds and other animals coming ashore, adding further complexity to the already challenging aspects of the oil spill response. Despite increasing awareness of the importance of oiled wildlife response when oil spills occur, not all European Member states have an oiled wildlife response plan and the expertise in country to deal with live oiled animals.

For a number of years, Sea Alarm has been active in promoting oiled wildlife response preparedness at Regional Agreement response meetings, including HELCOM (Helsinki Convention, Baltic Sea), OTSOPA (Bonn Agreement, North Sea) and REMPEC (Barcelona Convention, Mediterranean).

Sea Alarm invited key European oiled wildlife response organisations to look at creating a mutual assistance unit (Module) whereby these groups agree protocols and guidelines which allow the seamless integration of personnel from the various organisations during a large oiled wildlife incident, as well as to provide standardised training and qualification requirements for skills at various levels.

Under the EU's Civil Protection Financial Instrument, Sea Alarm applied for funding to develop the EUROWA Module in 2015/16, working with four partner organisations and three subcontractors (see partners and subcontractors below) over the course of two years. The project was then co-financed by the European Commission under Grant Agreement ECHO/SUB/2014/693276.

Project implementation

The work began in January 2015 with a kick-off meeting at Sea Alarm's offices in Brussels and concluded with a final team event at RSPCA Mallydams wildlife centre in December 2016. The work programme for the project included:

1. Creation of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for team members
2. Creation of a suite of responder training packages for all roles within the team
3. Updating and maintenance of an existing equipment stockpile
4. Creation of an equipment instruction handbook
5. Creation of an e-learning package to allow governments and NGOs to review the processes for initiating a EUROWA response
6. Presentation of the EUROWA SOP to Regional Agreements
7. Creation of a system of MoUs between Sea Alarm, as coordinator, and network member organisations

During the course of the project, a number of events were held:

- Two equipment inspection and mobilisation exercises (in Ostend).
- Two network team events (November 2015 in Ostend, December 2016 in the UK)

Four training sessions (Advanced Oiled Wildlife Responder, September 2016 in Ostend; Oiled Wildlife Response Veterinarian and Oiled Wildlife Response Manager (October 2016 in Ostend); Oiled Wildlife Response Specialist (December 2016 in the UK).



Figure 1 EUROWA Veterinary Training Course



Figure 2 EUROWA technical meeting

Results

Advocacy

Opportunities to present the EUROWA Module to Regional Agreements for the North Sea, the Baltic, and the Mediterranean, served to both showcase the Module itself and to further reinforce the importance of oiled wildlife response preparedness as part of overall spill response to the governments of the different countries represented in these Regional Agreements

Capacity building

The initial training events created a core of people capable of managing various aspects of an oiled wildlife response. These people continue to train others at various levels (BASIC, ADVANCED, SPECIALIST, SECTION HEAD and MANAGER), resulting in further capacity within Europe to respond to oiled wildlife incidents. As of June 2020, a total of 324 people have been trained at Basic Responder level, 72 have completed the Advanced Responder training, 7 have achieved the Specialist level and 6 people have been trained at the highest level, Manager.

Cooperative efforts between and among the member organisations further increase the ability to respond throughout Europe.

Wildlife response preparedness

EUROWA has developed a firm basis for providing response and preparedness services to European authorities via the EUROWA Module. The Module consists of a team of experts and a stockpile of equipment that can be mobilised 24/7 to complement the capability or capacity of a local wildlife response. An internal Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) provides guidelines for joining and operating as a team. An external SOP procedure provides guidelines for authorities as to how to notify and mobilise the Module.

In addition to the response team, EUROWA has developed a set of technical standards and procedures which will set up an effective and high-quality response preparedness framework in line with recognised global good practice guides and principles.

Training and exercises

Through delivery of training and exercises, EUROWA maintains a core of response personnel able to respond throughout Europe. Training courses have been held, and continue to be held, in different European countries such as Belgium, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland and the UK. The EUROWA Basic Responder course has also been delivered in Arctic Russia.

As part of a wider spill response exercise in 's-Gravenzande in the Netherlands in October 2013, an oiled wildlife search and collection exercise was held, which helped strengthen awareness of real-time hazards and management concerns during this phase of oiled wildlife response.

Wildlife response

The first opportunity, after the EU project, to demonstrate the added value of the EUROWA concept, was the response to the Bow Jubail (the Netherlands, 2018). Here a wide mobilisation took place of EUROWA-trained experts from various countries, to reinforce the management team and work force of the temporary facility where over 500 oiled swans were treated. Whereas the Netherlands preparedness project is based on EUROWA standards, the trained team of Dutch experts was supported by immediate assistance from EUROWA colleagues and equipment from abroad.

Facilitating multi-stakeholder activities

Sea Alarm has brought together wildlife response organisations and individuals from around Europe to develop the EUROWA project. The team continues to increase its collaborative activities through projects such as Sea Alarm's contract with the Dutch Authorities (Rijkswaterstaat) where EUROWA team members are training and assisting in exercises to build capacity in the Netherlands. In addition to this, Sea Alarm has obtained funding from the private sector (Aramco) to continue during 2018-2019 the roll-out of the EUROWA training and preparedness programme.

Since European governments are the main end-users of EUROWA response capability, it is important that they have an appreciation of the need to embed EUROWA response services into their emergency preparedness structures. Through the Self-Assessment Tool developed under Sea Alarm's leadership by members of the HELCOM Response Expert Working Group on Oiled Wildlife Response (EWG-OWR), governments in HELCOM and OTSOPA countries are able to clearly recognise areas where oiled wildlife response will need further development and consider how best to utilise the knowledge and skills of the EUROWA network to improve their national response capabilities.

Next steps

Continuation of EUROWA network development was possible following the end of the EU-funded phase in 2016, via a donation from Aramco in 2018-2020. That continuation project has seen four EUROWA training courses being run in Europe and three national oiled wildlife response planning workshops, as well as upgrades made to the EUROWA equipment stockpile. The activities of the EUROWA network continue today in the framework of the EUROWA Charter, to pursue the objectives in the EUROWA Work Programme. Further details can be seen on the EUROWA website (via the link below).

Links

[EUROWA Website](#)

[EUROWA Standard Operating Procedure Volume 1 \(External\)](#)

[EUROWA Layman's Report](#)

[EUROWA Training Packages](#)

EUROWA Partner Organisations (Project Phase 2015-2016)

Sea Alarm Foundation (coordinator)

Pro-Bird (Germany)

Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (United Kingdom)

Wildlife Rescue Centre Ostend (Belgium)

WWF Finland (Finland)

EUROWA Subcontractors (Project Phase 2015-2016)

Estonian Fund for Nature (Estonia)

Tim Thomas (independent Wildlife Consultant)

ONIRIS/CVFSE (Centre Vétérinaire de la Faune Sauvage et des Écosystèmes) (France).