

Case study: HELCOM

Project overview

To improve awareness of the importance of oiled wildlife response in the Baltic Region and to work with the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) to improve oiled wildlife response preparedness and integrate oiled wildlife response into the overall pollution response plans of its Contracting Parties.

Background

The Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission, also known as the Helsinki Commission or HELCOM, is a Regional Sea Convention in the Baltic area which has ten Contracting Parties: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the European Union. HELCOM is an Intergovernmental Organisation for regional environmental policy making, established to protect the Baltic Sea Marine Environment from pollution through cooperation. In this role, HELCOM develops recommendations and supervises all parties in the protection of the marine environment and coordinates response during major maritime incidents.

Within HELCOM, the Response Group is tasked with ensuring prompt response, at both national and international levels, to maritime pollution events. HELCOM Response also ensures appropriate equipment is available for pollution events, provides surveillance of maritime traffic and analysis of developments in maritime transportation as these aspects may impact pollution incidents.

As with most Regional Agreements, HELCOM has its own oil spill response plan, which integrates with Contracting Parties' oil spill response plans where a multi-country response is needed. In the early 2000s however, none of these plans included any reference to oiled wildlife. Sea Alarm began working with HELCOM to address this gap, first presenting at the HELCOM Response Group and gradually building interest in the issue.

Project implementation

In 2005 and 2007, Sea Alarm was an invited speaker at the sixth and eighth meetings of HELCOM Response respectively, presenting on oiled wildlife response planning and integration of wildlife response into overall spill response. As a result of that presentation, the delegates agreed to further investigate the issue.

In 2008, Sea Alarm, in cooperation with WWF Finland, reported to HELCOM Response on the regional Baltic oiled wildlife workshop they had organised and presented in March of that year.

In 2009, Sea Alarm, WWF Finland and the delegation from Estonia presented a proposal to include wildlife response in the HELCOM Response Manual. The proposal was adopted in principle.

In 2010, Sea Alarm was granted observer status at HELCOM, strengthening cooperation between the two organisations. The Recommendation on 'Integrated oiled wildlife response planning in the Baltic Sea Area' which was proposed by Sea Alarm and WWF Finland was also formally adopted by HELCOM.

In 2012, Sea Alarm staff were invited as expert observers at the annual HELCOM BALEX DELTA oil spill response exercise. Hugo Nijkamp of Sea Alarm attended as a member of the EU Civil Protection Team, which is organised and coordinated by the European Commission's Emergency Response and

Coordination Centre. Also in 2012, Sea Alarm and WWF Finland, in cooperation with WWF Poland and the Institute of Oceanography at the University of Gdansk, organised a Baltic States Wildlife Response Workshop, as part of the HELCOM Response Oiled Wildlife Preparedness Work Programme 2011-2014.

In 2013, HELCOM agreed to strengthen its wildlife response capability by having national response plans in place for all Contracting Parties by 2016.

In 2014, the Expert Working Group on Oiled Wildlife Response (EWG-OWR) was created. Sea Alarm, with colleagues at WWF Finland, were instrumental in this process. Also in 2014, Sea Alarm delivered the first oiled wildlife response planning course to HELCOM and Bonn Agreement members. The course, which was initially intended for HELCOM members, was expanded to include the Bonn Agreement Contracting Parties based on the interest they expressed. It was hosted by the European Community's Emergency Response Coordination Centre in Brussels.

In 2016, Sea Alarm, in close consultation with the EWG-OWR, developed a Self-Assessment Tool (SAT) which allows countries to gauge their progress toward oiled wildlife response preparedness and to provide a report on their status to HELCOM.

SEA ALARM	To be initiated	Important gaps to be filled	Strong basis	Excellent
Planning and integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only an oil spill response plan exists; it may or may not have reference to OWR No authority so far has taken responsibility to oversee the quality of wildlife response and preparedness There is no common rationale for the development of an integrated OWR plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is recognised that OWR needs a plan; meetings have taken place, but no draft document written as yet One authority has taken responsibility to take a lead on plan development, but other relevant authorities are not engaging as yet A scoping/needs analysis has resulted in a clear picture of what is needed and who needs to do what 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A mature plan has been developed on the basis of scenario analysis, but not fully formalised or integrated as yet All relevant authorities are engaged with the OWR plan, by formal decision All relevant parties (Authority-NGO-Private) have been brought around the table and have divided and agreed roles, responsibilities and development tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OWR plan formalised and fully integrated with all relevant oil spill plans (oil sea response, coastal response, regional plans and implemented as a multi-year programme and budget Annual activities demonstrate full commitment with all signatures of the plan and significant preparedness improvements thanks to training and exercises in which all signatures participate Progressively the preparedness is increasing according to plan and agreed budget; plans are managed
Exercises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No OWR exercises take place There is no actor who is interested to organise OWR exercises The importance of exercises such as table top, field exercises and facility exercises is acknowledged but not acted upon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exercises have had an ad hoc character and were not related to a plan or training programme Wildlife aspects are exercised by one or more parties, but not by everyone together Ad hoc exercises were limited to table tops and/or simple field exercises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exercises take place coherently every year and look at different aspects of a response Exercises are attended by all stakeholders together but there is no clear relation with training Exercises are structural, but a large mobilisation exercise testing the build-up and operations of a facility has not been held to date 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exercises take place according to a pre-defined schedule that directly relates to the agreed plan Wildlife aspects are exercised by all stakeholders together and aiming at testing trained officers working There is a full diversity of scheduled exercises (table top, field, facility) as part of a formal plan-related exercise programme
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roles and responsibilities in a wildlife response are not clarified and are not discussed between stakeholders There is no in-country expertise available to provide training courses There are parties interested in being trained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some but not all stakeholders have assumed their roles in a wildlife response and have a key personnel to be able to take responsibilities according to clear job descriptions The need for training at different levels (hands-on or managers) is recognised, but actual training is limited to basic hands-on (e.g. volunteers) only Training is provided, but not to international standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roles and responsibilities are defined as job descriptions as part of an agreed plan and a training programme has been agreed and is centrally coordinated, delivering key personnel from different organisations Training is recognised and taking place for both hands-on personnel and managers Training packages aim at international standards, and an increasing number of staff is already qualified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trained personnel from different stakeholder organisations are offered regular opportunities to exercise together, to practice their skills in realistic scenarios A centrally coordinated training programme aims to deliver responders at all levels and ensure various individuals can take key roles in the higher management positions Trained staff are fully qualified according to international standards and have reached levels where they can assist with training other responders in a response abroad
Equipment and facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of facilities in OWR is recognised, but plans to realise them have not been developed or tested Equipment stockpiles are unknown or absent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is clear what facilities are needed for different purposes in a wildlife response. At this stage, only small site facilities can be used or developed, equipped and staffed, serving only for relatively small incident scenarios Equipment stockpiles are available in-country, but an analysis of their completeness has not been made 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The use and development of facilities has been described in the plan and procedures and criteria are available for scaling up facility size to a desired maximum level that can be equipped and staffed Equipment stockpiles and lists of equipment and consumables have been drawn up as well as an updated list of manufacturers and providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The use and development of facilities is the subject of specific exercises in an exercises programme in which the performance of contractors and responsible organisations is regularly tested and evaluated Equipment mobilisation in relation to facility build up and field activities is regularly tested and evaluated as part of an exercise programme
Euthanasia (incl. mass euthanasia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Euthanasia has not been considered as an explicit response option, and resources not identified nor developed No stakeholder discussions have been held to define criteria for euthanasia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Euthanasia is considered as a response option but guaranteed/contracted providers with certified resources are not in place Criteria (when and how) for euthanasia have been agreed between stakeholders but a risk-based gap-analysis has not been carried out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan includes species specific options for euthanasia, and certified resources for each have been identified and contracted Agreed guidelines for euthanasia have been developed and provide guidance for different regions and worst-case scenarios 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The plan for euthanasia is structurally and regularly exercised and demonstrates that the identified resources can also deal with worst case scenarios All stakeholders have agreed to the guidelines and well-developed communication strategies are in place for inform the public, not only in worst case scenarios
Partnering and funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No dedicated central funds are explicitly available for wildlife preparedness It is recognised that wildlife impact or response can be controversial in terms of public reactions, but no multi-stakeholder activities have been organised to date to explore common ground and solutions There is a high reliance on OWR resources from abroad, but the procedures to invite and integrate responders from abroad have not been discussed or described 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funds are available to the extent that some ad hoc activities can be financed; there is no multi-year approach nor budget available Multi-stakeholder meetings have been discussing wildlife impacts and options for a response, and it is recognised in bringing different opinions are possible, but no actions have been taken to lead solutions in bringing different opinions Clear Wildlife Response resources from abroad are identified and have been identified and discussions take place on mobilisation procedures, but no formal procedure has been agreed nor described 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A multi-year budget has been created to finance a number of activities, contracts and equipment investments. But it is still expected that various key stakeholders to contribute in-kind to the agreed preparedness level Multi-stakeholder processes have led to the agreed objectives and strategies for an OWR Multi-stakeholder OWR resources from abroad have been described as part of the agreed Wildlife Response plan. Their mobilisation however is not part of an exercises programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A multi-year budget has been created that allows one or more key stakeholders to coordinate an all-encompassing programme and overseeing investments, training and exercises, and provide personnel staff to undertake key roles and responsibilities in the management of a response A response will involve a broad range of stakeholders in the response activities, ensuring different viewpoints are respected and publicly communicated as of one voice so that the public is likely to support the response and its decision taking The assistance by OWR resources from abroad is described in part of the wildlife response plan and mobilisation procedures are regularly exercised and tested

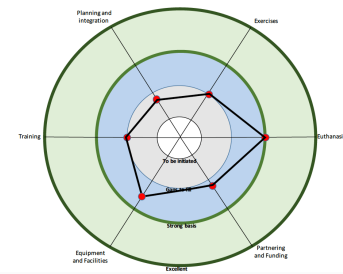


Figure 1 Extract from the Self-Assessment Tool: SAT Questionnaire and Preparedness Diagram.

In 2017, the EWG-OWR, chaired by Sea Alarm, published the *Report on the status of National wildlife response plans in the Baltic Sea*, with data gathered from Contracting Parties who used Sea Alarm's Self-Assessment Tool to determine their progress on oiled wildlife response. A one-day wildlife response manager's course was presented by Sea Alarm prior to the EWG-OWR meeting.

In 2018, Sea Alarm again attended the annual BALEX DELTA exercise and participated in observer discussions. As another step toward in integrating oiled wildlife response into overall response, Sea Alarm joined the HELCOM Response Shore Group. This is significant since most wildlife response takes place onshore and a history of cooperation between all parties working in the same area during a spill is the best indicator of the likelihood of smooth operations. In addition, 2018 saw the launch of a new version of the Self-Assessment Tool (Version 2.0) by the EWG-OWR, with the new version including a framework for measuring preparedness for euthanasia as a wildlife response strategy.

In 2020, at the HELCOM Response and Shore group meetings, the concept of improving coordination of all aspects of at-sea, shore and wildlife response was discussed. In a cooperative effort between the Swedish delegation, WWF Finland and Sea Alarm, a strategy for the draft Baltic Sea Action Plan was proposed, which was ultimately adopted by HELCOM Response. Sea Alarm updated attendees on the role of the newly formalised EUROWA network in assisting HELCOM Contracting Parties during an oiled wildlife response by providing experienced responders to lead and train personnel in affected countries.

Results

As can be seen by the Project Implementation section, Sea Alarm has worked steadily with HELCOM for more than 10 years and will continue to work with them in the future, to ensure wildlife response is integrated at all levels in oil spill response in the region. This working relationship has resulted in significant advances in oiled wildlife response preparedness within the Baltic Sea Area and has stimulated other Regional Agreements' interest.



Figure 1 HELCOM capacity building and training events



Figure 2 HELCOM training event with practical exercise

Advocacy

Perhaps the most important aspect of Sea Alarm's relationship with HELCOM has been its consistent role in advocating for inclusion of wildlife response in the overall oil spill response process, regularly attending meetings and providing input on the value and importance of including wildlife response in the Agreement's oil spill planning efforts.

Over time, steady progress has been made in the region, largely as a result of the relationships Sea Alarm has built with HELCOM Member States, with the oil and gas industry working in the region, and with relevant NGOs likely to be involved in response. This has also allowed Sea Alarm to use HELCOM's process as an example which other Regional Agreements can follow.

Capacity building

Working with local and national authorities as well as NGOs such as WWF Finland and the Estonian Fund for Nature (ELF), Sea Alarm has regularly organised and led workshops and training programmes in various Baltic countries.

As chair of the EWG-OWR, Sea Alarm leads the efforts of this group to help HELCOM Contracting Parties develop wildlife response plans which can be integrated into national and local oil pollution contingency plans, with agreed guidelines on the aims, minimum standards required, and involvement of volunteers in oiled wildlife response.

As can be seen in the next section, the capacity to respond to oiled wildlife in the Baltic Region has progressed significantly.

Wildlife response preparedness

As of 2017, five out of nine Baltic Countries have oiled wildlife response plans, most developed through active partnerships between authorities and NGOs. Using the Self-Assessment Tool (SAT 2.0) developed by the EWG-OWR, each Member State is able to provide a clear picture of their ability to respond to oiled wildlife and, based on their input, have a clearer road to further improvement where needed.

Today, HELCOM and the Baltic Region are role models for improving oiled wildlife response capability, having the highest level of preparedness of the Regional Agreements in Europe.

Training and exercises

As chair of the EWG-OWR, Sea Alarm ensures that the group members meet at least annually to discuss developments in national preparedness, training, exercises and share information.

In addition to leading and facilitating training and exercise programmes for EWG-OWR members and for NGOs and other responders in the region, Sea Alarm is regularly invited to participate in HELCOM Response's annual BALEX DELTA exercise, providing valuable insights into how wildlife might be affected by the exercise scenario. These real-time inputs leave a strong impression on participants as they work through the scenarios and aid them in bolstering their efforts to integrate wildlife response in their processes.

Facilitating multi-stakeholder activities

HELCOM is in fact a multi-stakeholder entity. It is tasked with facilitating Baltic Member State cooperation on pollution prevention, nature conservation and biodiversity, pollution response, reduction of pressures on the Baltic from land-based hazards, and other aspects of improving the health of the Baltic Sea under an ecosystem based approach. By working with HELCOM and bringing other NGOs into the process Sea Alarm has been able to foster working relationships between the two groups.

Links

[Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission \(HELCOM\)](#)

[HELCOM Recommendation 31E/6 – Integrated Wildlife Response Planning in the Baltic Sea Area](#)

[HELCOM Response Manual Volume 1](#) (see throughout and also Chapter 11)

[HELCOM Expert Working Group-Oiled Wildlife Response](#)

[Terms of Reference for EWG-OWR](#)

[Self-Assessment Tool for oiled wildlife response preparedness](#)

[EUROWA](#)