Introduction
The French Republic consists of ‘Metropolitan France’ in Europe (the mainland including Corsica) and a number of overseas departments, territories and collectivities outside Europe, including Martinique, Guadeloupe, Réunion and French Guiana (all Departments), the French Southern and Antarctic Lands and various islands and small archipelagos in different parts of the world. This Country Wildlife Response Profile covers Metropolitan France, which is called ‘France’ throughout the document.

France is bordered by the North East Atlantic Ocean (Bay of Biscay, Gulf of Gascogne) on the west; La Manche (English Channel) on the northwest; the North Sea, Belgium and Luxembourg on the northeast; Germany, Switzerland and Italy on the east; Monaco on the southeast; and the Mediterranean Sea (Gulf of Lyon, Côte D’Azur, Ligurian Sea), Andorra, and Spain on the south. The country is divided into a large number of administrative regions or departments, which also have certain delegated responsibilities with regards to oil spill response.

The French Atlantic coast is rocky with pockets of sandy beaches, some large and partly enclosed estuarine systems, with sandy beaches predominating south of the Gironde estuary. The Mediterranean coast is varied with rocky shores, sandy beaches, and coastal wetlands.

At Risk Wildlife
In this section, some individual wildlife species are mentioned followed by a letter in parentheses. These are species included in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species within the top three categories of risk - Vulnerable to extinction (V), Endangered (E) or Critically Endangered (CR).

Avian species – There are a number of important migration and wintering sites along the coast of France. On the Atlantic coast, the Baie des Veys et Marais du Cotentin and the Estuaire de la Loire each host 20,000 or more waterbirds during these times. The Estuaire et embouchure de la Seine, which includes the Réserve Naturelle de l’Estuaire de la Seine and the port of Le Havre, has a variety of habitats which also support large numbers of migrant and wintering birds. The Carmargue, in the Rhone delta on the Mediterranean, is considered one of the most important areas in France for waterbirds, with nearby offshore islands providing breeding and nesting habitat for seabirds. In addition to hosting breeding and wintering wetland birds, the Etangs de Leucate et Lapalme is a key migratory bottleneck for raptors and passerines, with tens of thousands of birds transiting the area in a very short time during both spring and autumn.

Species of special concern include Atlantic puffin (V), Balearic shearwater (CR), black-legged kittiwake (V), common pochard (V), horned grebe (V), Leach’s storm-petrel (V), long-tailed duck (V), velvet scoter (V), and Yelkouan shearwater (V).

Marine mammals – Grey and harbour seals are found on the northern shores of France. Approximately 42 species of whale and dolphin are found in the waters around France, although few are considered nearshore species other than the minke and Couvier’s beaked whales. Most of the populations of whales and dolphins in the Mediterranean are genetically distinct from those of the Atlantic.

Species of special concern include fin (E), and humpback (V) whales, and common dolphin (V, Mediterranean population E).

Marine reptiles – Loggerhead (V), and a small number of leatherback (V), turtles forage in both the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea off of France. In the Mediterranean loggerheads nest in limited numbers on the Languedoc coast, and juveniles feed in the Gulf of Lion, which may also be an overwintering site.

Regional Seas
Northeast Atlantic
Mediterranean Sea
North Sea

Past experience
France has experienced a considerable number of oil spills and other incidents, including Olympic Bravery (1976).

In the aftermath of the Amoco Cadiz, Erika, Prestige, Tricolor and MSC Napoli incidents, oiled birds were rescued and rehabilitated in France. The Erika spill, where tens of thousands oiled birds arrived on French coasts, is internationally regarded as a worst-case oiled wildlife response incident. In the wake of that spill France improved its preparedness for response to oiled wildlife incidents. Integrated response plans have been put in place and hands-on organisations have further developed their skills and facilities.

Response: the role of the authorities
The national contingency plan (Plan Polmar) consists of two separate sections, the Polmar Mer for at sea response and the Polmar Terre for shoreline. Under the Plan Polmar, the Secrétariat Général de la Mer oversees the work of the Competent National Authorities which are the three Prefectures Maritime: Prefecture Maritime Manche Mer du Nord, Prefecture Maritime Mediterranee, and Prefecture Maritime Atlantique, who respond in the North Sea and La Manche (English Channel), the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic respectively.

The Regional Operational Centres for Surveillance and Rescue (Centre Regional Operationnel de Surveillance et de Sauvetage, or CROSS) are the spill notification points for offshore response.

Minor incidents may be handled by the local coastal communal authorities. In larger incidents, the affected Département Préfet would be the recognised authority, with the Ministry for the Ecological and Inclusive Transition brought in as needed on larger incidents.

Within the Ministry for Ecological and Inclusive Transition, the Directorate of Nature and Landscapes, Sub-Directorate of Hunting and Wildlife, Bureau of Wild Flora and Fauna has contacts on regular basis with the rehabilitation centers and may play a coordinating role in major oiled wildlife incidents.

Oiled wildlife response
Formal guidelines?
The Plan Polmar includes a wildlife response section, however, wildlife response is only included in the Polmar Terre, which is not activated until oil reaches the shore. In the case of an offshore incident where wildlife arrives on shore before the oil, there is no process for activating the wildlife aspect of Polmar Terre. In addition, the wildlife section of the Polmar Terre varies by region, with some being very detailed and others less so.

Response objectives and strategy
In France, an attempt to rehabilitate affected wildlife will be undertaken if it is considered reasonable, based on the size of the incident, the species involved and the resources available.

Euthanasia or rehabilitation?
Rehabilitation would be allowed under each region’s predefined strategy, with euthanasia utilised based on welfare concerns.

Impact assessment
Beached bird surveys are conducted every year in France to assess mortality rates due to chronic oil pollution, however, there are no guidelines in the Plan Polmar for impact assessment during and following an oil spill. It is likely that the personnel involved in beached bird surveys would be involved in this process.

Notification and early response
As with the wildlife section of each regional Polmar Terre, notification procedures vary between regions, however, any response organisations and wildlife rehabilitation centres mentioned in Polmar Terre will be notified to initiate response, according the region’s predefined strategy.

Wildlife responders
There is a national network of wildlife rehabilitation centres centres in France, the UFCS (Union Francaise des Centres de Sauvegarde de la Faune Sauvage). Many facilities are members of this network. There are national rules regarding the management and activities of all wildlife centres in the country.

The LPO (Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux) is the national organisation for the protection and conservation of birds, which acts as the national Birdlife International partner. LPO is a network of organisations that are either
franchised or directly linked to the headquarters. LPO is mentioned in Plan Polmar as a national responder. In case of oiled bird incidents, LPO is likely to be involved throughout France.

The Veterinary School at Nantes (Ecole Nationale Vétérinaire, Agroaumentaire et De L’alimentation, Oniris) is a key player in France in the development and implementation of good veterinary practice in the rehabilitation of oiled birds.

In 2007, the Groupe Tortues Marines France (GTMF) took over the Marine Turtles Group that was created by the Ministry of Sustainable Development. It is run by the Natural Heritage Service of the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) in Paris and is composed of more than 150 members who are involved in conservation of marine turtles. There are two sea turtle stranding response groups in France, the RTMAE (French eastern Atlantic sea turtle network), which works in the Atlantic and the RTMMF (French Mediterranean Sea Turtle Network), which works in the Mediterranean.

Cooperation between stakeholders
The groups involved in marine turtle and seabird rescue, CTMF and UFCS, work cooperatively under the guidance of government oversight agencies.

France is a signatory to the Barcelona Convention (Mediterranean) and active in the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre (REMPEC), the Bonn Agreement (North Sea), Lisbon Agreement (with Portugal, Spain and Morocco), the Manche Plan (with the United Kingdom), Mediplan (bilateral agreement with Italy for the Tyrrhenian and Ligurian Seas), RAMOGE (trilateral agreement with Italy and Monaco), BISCAYE (bilateral agreement with Spain for the Bay of Biscay), and LION Plan (bilateral agreement with Spain).

Permanent facilities
There are six rehabilitation centres along the Atlantic coast equipped to handle large numbers of oiled birds, in addition to several mobile units. Also, on the Atlantic coast, the Oceanopolis Aquarium and the Clinique CHENE are equipped to handle a limited number of marine mammals.

The Centre d’étude et de Sauvegarde des Tortues Marines de Méditerranée (CESTMed) is a member of RTMMF which has a rescue centre which has capacity for approximately eight turtles. CESTMed also conducts post-release monitoring of rehabilitated turtles. On the Atlantic coast, the La Rochelle Aquarium has a similar facility and also conducts post-release monitoring.

Current processes
Personnel from Oniris are active in European oiled wildlife response trainings and other activities.

Documentation and references
General references
General references
ITOPF Country Profile (2013)
REMPEC Country Profile
Birdlife International Country Profile
Camphuysen, C. (2005). The Tricolor oil spill: an incident that should have been prevented. Atlantic Seabirds. 81-84.
Sea Turtles of the Mediterranean (in) State of the World’s Sea Turtles (SWOT) Report Vol. XIV

Terms and Conditions
These Country Wildlife Profiles are provided in good faith as a guide only and are based on information obtained from a variety of sources over a period of time. This information is subject to change and should, in each case, be independently verified before reliance is placed on it. Country Wildlife Profiles may have been issued solely to incorporate additional or revised information under one heading only. Each Profile has therefore not necessarily been completely verified or updated as at the stated Date of Issue.

Sea Alarm hereby excludes, to the fullest extent permitted by applicable law, any and all liability to any person, corporation or other entity for any loss, damage or expense resulting from reliance or use of these Country Wildlife Profiles.

© Sea Alarm Foundation, 2019

This Country Wildlife Profile is subject to the accompanying Terms and Conditions