

Contingency planning and cooperation for dealing with oiled wildlife

An international approach

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Introduction

Over the past decade several major oil spills in European waters, particularly *Braer*, *Sea Empress* and *Erika*, highlighted the threat that such incidents pose to wildlife, especially , but also seals, in some instances otters and possibly cetaceans. The professional people and agencies involved in the wildlife response during these incidents are in general agreement that much can be done to improve the success of rehabilitation operations and the its perception with both the general public and others involved in the wider clean-up operations. It was clear from these incidents and the associated wildlife response that there has been a lack of a co-ordinated, professional and cost-efficient approach to the collection, cleaning and rehabilitation of wildlife, as well as the loss of important scientific material.

The immediate response to a spill is rightly to collect, assess and clean oiled wildlife. The lack of a co-ordinated approach, however, often means that a number of groups are operating more or less independently from each other and from the authorities responsible for the overall contingency operations. *Braer*, *Sea Empress*, and *Erika* demonstrated that such uncontrolled activities can be counter productive , with misuse of resources, frustrations and sometimes jealousies. In many cases even minimum standards for animal welfare were not met because of the involvement of unqualified 'experts' and inexperienced volunteers. Because the wildlife response in each of these incidents was not properly evaluated among groups, lessons were not learnt and problems that occurred at one incident were repeated in subsequent incidents.

Sea Alarm Foundation

In recent years a group of individuals and agencies involved in wildlife rehabilitation have recognised this problem and are convinced that it should not continue. From this, the Sea Alarm Foundation was established in 1999. It aims are to further and improve the ability of professional wildlife responders, agencies, governments and industry to effectively cooperate in anticipation of, and during, an oiled wildlife emergency.

Discussions with and between these groups resulted in a number of projects that will be carried out by the Foundation over the next few years. These should result in an increased professional approach by oiled wildlife responders and the formal recognition of their professionalism in oil contingency plans and their involvement other pre-spill agreements at national and international levels. Sea Alarm's Business Plan 2002-2005 aims to progress these matters over the next three to four years.

Sea Alarm's activities

Sea Alarm's present activities aim at:

- making different parties aware of the need to recognise oiled wildlife response as part of an overall oil spill response, while at the same time
- developing means by which oiled wildlife responders can increase their professionalism, e.g. by establishing cooperation, training etc,
- stimulating oiled wildlife responders to make pre-spill arrangements with authorities and industry at their respective national levels,
- developing a pan-European oiled wildlife emergency facility (central database) in support of mutual help between countries in case of an incidental oil spill,
- involving national authorities in these processes, e.g. by active participation in the development of international guidelines for oiled wildlife response planning in Europe

The following sections give a summary of the present key projects and activities.

Guidelines for Oiled Wildlife Contingency Planning (EU-funded project)

Discussions amongst Sea Alarm's associated organisations have revealed that in most European countries, wildlife rehabilitation plans are not, or not well, addressed in existing National Oil Spill Contingency Plans. Some national agencies have indicated that a major oil spill in their country could readily run out of hand because of a limited capacity of national wildlife response and rehabilitation facilities. Such countries would welcome an international network that could offer assistance during the developing stages of a spill or, if necessary, organise the international component in a tiered response mechanism (local response-national response- national/international response).

This project has been developed in partnership with various industry partners, such as ITOPE, IPIECA's Oil Spill Working Group, BP and TotalFinaElf. Co-funding will be received from the European Commission. The project will look at oiled wildlife contingency plans that are currently used in the different European Coastal States, as well as examples of such plans that exist in other parts of the world. These plans will be summarised and discussed at a workshop by European oiled wildlife response experts and experts from elsewhere to develop three-tier response programme for Europe.

Questions to be addressed at the workshop are:

Would such a system be feasible from a EU perspective?

Which opportunities and thresholds can be identified?

Which modifications to existing contingency plans, if any, are required to implement a pan-European contingency plan to deal with oiled wildlife?

Based on the results of the workshop, *Guidelines for Oiled Wildlife Contingency Planning in Europe* will be drafted. These should provide with a set of options for implementation at a European level. After the guidelines have been drafted and discussed, a second workshop with national authorities will look at options for their implementation across Europe. This workshop should result in a geographical and institutional analysis and determine the national capabilities to respond and what is need to mobilise wider sources if required. Which pre-spill arrangements (national contingency plans) should be in place so that cooperation at a European level be formalised?

Developing a database

The project aims to design and build a database to contain:

- relevant data on oiled wildlife expertise in all European countries, including wildlife rehabilitators, their organisations, expertise and response facilities, specialisations, training facilities, emergency equipment, etc.

- details of national oiled wildlife contingency plans, including the response mechanisms, responsible authorities, relevant key officers and agencies.
- details of stored equipment in each European country, both privately and publicly kept, that could be put at the disposal of an international assistance, together with address details, logistic information, etc.
- details of expertise and facilities that can be called in from outside Europe.

Phase one of this project has started, financed by the P&I Clubs (Protection and Indemnity Clubs, the maritime insurers). It will involve the participation of ITOPF and OSRL in order to ensure that the database will meet all necessary requirements for its use in any (near) future oil spill emergency in Europe or elsewhere.

Initiating and facilitating discussions and cooperation

Organise annual meetings for the European Community of (Oiled) Wildlife Responders. Two such meetings have already been held, Pieterburen (Netherlands 2000) and in The Hague (Netherlands 2001). A further meeting is scheduled for spring 2003. Sea Alarm Foundation aims at an increasing participation of Industry and Governments at these Conferences, in order to establish mutual understanding and cooperative structures at national and international levels.

At national levels, Sea Alarm stimulates its associate members to cooperate with national authorities and industries to work towards pre-spill agreements and preventive measures. Sea Alarm has received a budget donation from INTERTANKO for this project. At international levels Sea Alarm aims at establishing regional networks e.g. for regional seas such as Baltic Sea, North Sea, NE-Atlantic, Mediterranean.

The Foundation is also setting up an electronic newsletter to enable exchange of information, monitoring progress and announcement of upcoming relevant events on a regular basis.

The International “Wildlife Alliance”

The International Alliance of Oiled Wildlife Responders (or “Wildlife Alliance”) is the result of discussions amongst a group of international experts and supporters. They decided to start structural cooperation at Myrtle Beach in March 2000. A Board of Directors that will coordinate this initiative was appointed in April 2002, and includes representatives from four continents and different organisations e.g. IFAW, IBRRC, Tri-State, RSPCA, Earthkind, Bretagne Vivante and Sea Alarm Foundation. The formal establishment of the Wildlife Alliance as a ‘not-for-profit’ membership organisation is pending a number of administrative steps. Sea Alarm Foundation has been active in the discussions since Myrtle Beach and is currently supporting the organisation by writing its Plan of Approach and Business Plan. Sea Alarm also aims to ensure the use and application of European expertise and experiences.

The “Wildlife Alliance” has the potential to become the world platform for developing standards (best practices) for oiled wildlife response, based on principles of animal welfare and human safety. Education and training will be amongst the other spin offs of the initiative.

Future of Sea Alarm Foundation

Sea Alarm Foundation is seen as a facilitator, that will set in motion and catalyse certain processes in Europe and elsewhere in the world in order to lift oiled wildlife rehabilitation to a higher level of professionalism and increase oiled wildlife preparedness. In theory, the Foundation’s existence should phase-out as and when these processes have been established by the various existing bodies. However, it is more likely that the Foundation will continue to act as a catalyst for certain on-going activities, and should become the permanent facilitator

for certain services. This open-ended scenario was set up to guarantee a cost-efficient approach at any stage of the Foundation's development.

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Contents

- Introduction
- Oiled Wildlife Rehabilitation
- European preparedness
- Sea Alarm Foundation
- Present projects and activities
- Future

Past major oil spills Europe



Torrey Canyon



Braer



Sea Empress



Erika

Marine wildlife got involved...



Each time a wildlife response was set up...



...more or less from scratch

But the threat continues...



**It is now time for a
European approach...**



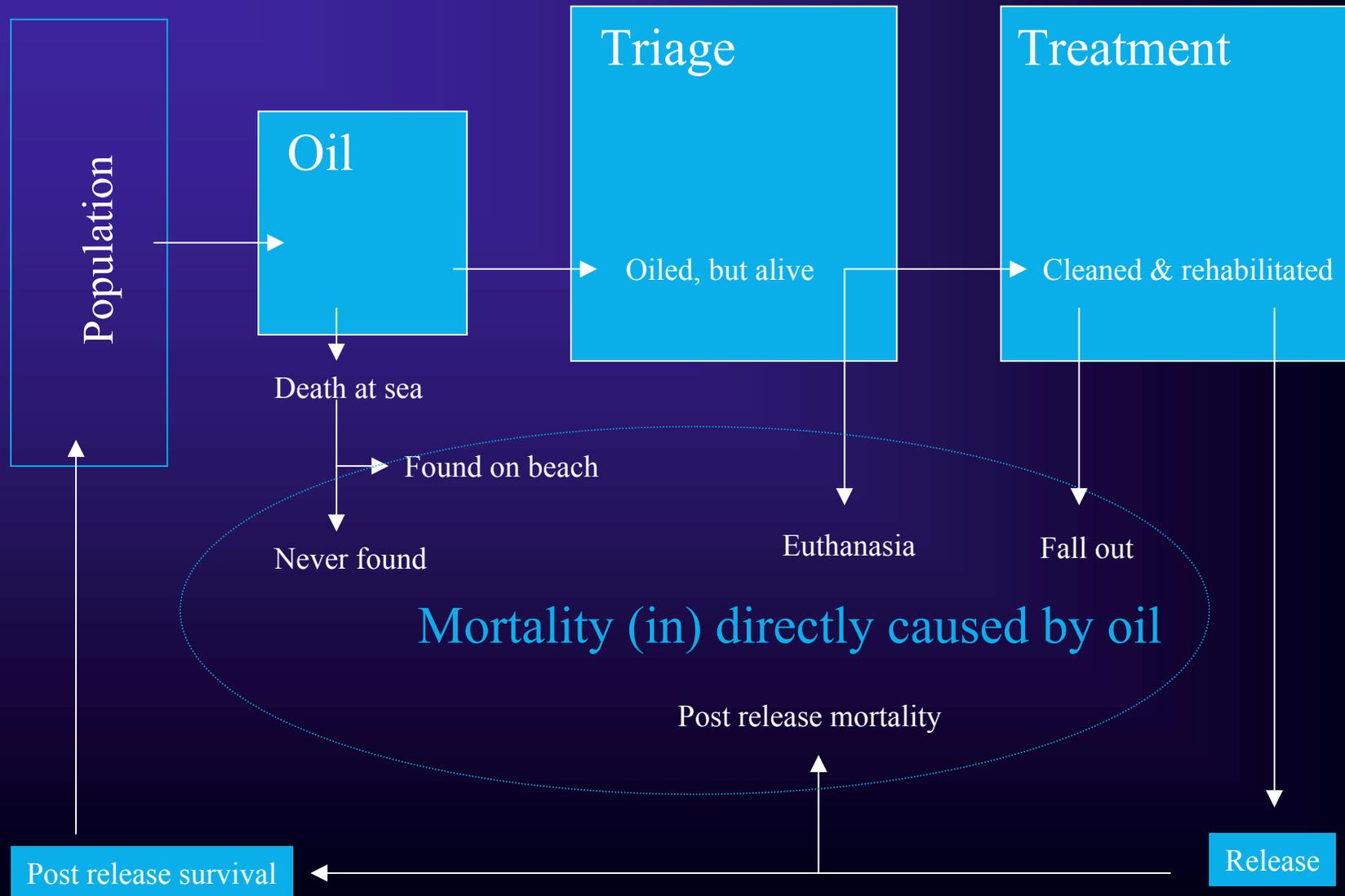
...based on lessons learned!

Evaluation of oiled wildlife responses in past spills:

- Coordination of overall response
- Cooperation between parties
- Professionalism: Animal welfare
- Scientific data for evaluation
- Methodology of cleaning/husbandry
- Training and accreditation of staff
- Management of volunteers
- Human safety

Should be improved!!!

Oiled Wildlife Response: *Dance around oil spill mortality*



Why rehabilitate oiled wildlife?

- Animal welfare considerations
- Reaction of human nature
- Action required by public & media
- Conservation: Species depending

Notwithstanding the ethics/controversies:

If it has to be done, let's do it well!!!

- Professional
- Coordinated
- Respecting the local rules
- Respecting principles of human safety & animal welfare

Sea Alarm Foundation is

- An initiative of European wildlife responders
- Aiming at
 - Learning lessons from the past
 - Establish cooperation between governments, industry, rehabilitators
 - Working together towards efficient, effective future responses in Europe and elsewhere in the world

Presently established:

- Good working relationships with European marine wildlife rehabilitators, industry and some governments
- History of reports and meetings
- Programme of action
- Funding
- International expertise network
- Strategic projects 2002-2003

Strategic projects

- Guidelines for Oiled Wildlife Contingency Planning in Europe
- Database for oiled wildlife contingencies
- International standards/accreditation
- Cooperation at national and European levels

Guidelines for Oiled Wildlife Contingency Planning in Europe

SEA
ALARM



TOTAL FINA ELF



- Workshop: review of existing oiled wildlife contingency plans
- Writing of Guidelines
- Workshop: Implementation and cooperation in Europe
- February-October 2003

Database for Oiled wildlife contingency responses

SEA
ALARM



P&I Clubs
International Group

- Relevant data on oiled wildlife expertise in Europe
- National response systems
- Stored equipment & mobility
- Expertise and facilities outside Europe
- First set-up: October 2002-January 2003
- Extention and maintenance: January 2003-

Discussions and cooperation

- Annual Sea Alarm Conferences
- Newsletter
- National cooperation and pre-spill management agreements*
- Regional networks (Baltic, North Sea, NE-Atlantic, Mediterranean)
- Exchange of expertise
- Discussions on methodology
- Sharing of information

* Co-funded by INTERTANKO

International expertise networks

International Alliance of Oiled Wildlife Responders:

- Membership organisation
- Development of standards (best practice) for oiled wildlife rehabilitation
- Training, education
- Accreditation

Future of European oil spills

(which hopefully never happen)

- Integrated national and international response plans
- Nationally coordinated responses with international assistance if needed (Tiered response system)
- Cost efficient maintenance of preparedness
- Effective methodology
- Professional and respectful approach
- Evaluation and learning lessons



**prepared to catalyse
and facilitate,
as long as needed**