

Abstract

EMPOWER - A New European Initiative for Oiled Wildlife Response and Preparedness

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Marine wildlife emergencies that occur as a result of an oil spill incident are bound to challenge the existing preparedness system of the coastal country that is facing the pollution event. Where the oil spill authorities will start coordinating and managing the overall oil combat and clean-up activities, there will be NGO's that stand up in order to start rescuing and treating the affected wildlife. In most European countries these organisations will make use of volunteers which are mobilised and coordinated in the immediate aftermath of the event.

In analogy of oil spill response, an oiled wildlife response needs to be well prepared and carried out according to a pre-defined plan. Due to the very nature of the work, the success of a wildlife response strongly depends on the quality and performance of the volunteers and the quality of the organisations that direct and manage them. The ideal situation is one in which the wildlife activities by volunteers and NGO's seamlessly integrate into the overall response that is managed by the authorities.

Increasingly the wildlife aspect is receiving the attention from national oil spill authorities. The number of European countries that have an integrated wildlife response plan in place or started to look into planning is growing. The existing plans are based on a mutual understanding between the oil spill authorities and the NGO's that they have recognised and accredited for carrying out the wildlife response. However, where oil spill response is a well-developed professional field, for which national experts are trained and in a continuous state of preparedness, oiled wildlife response is still in its infancy.

EMPOWER is new initiative that aims to professionalise the contributions that European Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) could provide to an integrated oiled wildlife response. EMPOWER aims to develop European oiled wildlife response towards levels that meet the international standards of professionalism that apply in oil spill response and facilitate structural cooperation between NGOs and their national authorities as part of the national oil spill response plan. EMPOWER is funded through Sea Alarm by Oil Spill Response and the European Commission and is managed by a steering group of nine European NGO's.