

## **Outcome of the Q&A Session during EOW 2009**

### **Introduction**

The new EMPOWER initiative was officially launched at EOW on 6 October, with a presentation given by Hugo Nijkamp (Sea Alarm) in one of the morning sessions of the Conference and an open Q&A session in the evening.

Before the conference Sea Alarm, as EMPOWER Secretariat, had sent by email an invitation to most European EOW participants to attend the Q&A session on Tuesday evening. The invitation explained why EMPOWER is being set up and included some draft documents that had been prepared by the EMPOWER Steering Group, on the basis of which a European organisation could become EMPOWER Network Member:

- A draft Code of Conduct which all prospective members must sign to become part of the Network.
- A draft Application Form which all prospective members must fill in giving contact information plus information on their organisation.
- A draft Terms of Reference which detail the structure and framework of EMPOWER, as well as the advantages of becoming a network member.

The selected participants were asked to read these documents and to consider if their organisation would be interested in becoming a member. Any questions on the papers or the presentation by Sea Alarm at the conference could be reserved for the Q&A session.

During his presentation in the morning, Hugo Nijkamp explained the concept of the EMPOWER network, its aims, objectives and benefits to the conference audience.

In the evening, more than 46 interested individuals attended the Q & A session, including potential members. After a short introduction by Hugo Nijkamp, who moderated the session, the audience was given the opportunity to ask questions, voice ideas and opinions.

The summary below details the questions asked and answers given. Note that some additional information appears which was not given on the day but has been included here to provide further supporting information or clarity where needed.

### **Questions and Answers**

- ***If the threshold to become a member is very low, how will 'high standards' of oiled wildlife response be maintained and controlled?***
  - In its initial stage, EMPOWER is focussed on creating a network of organisations with good attitude and behaviour during spill response. If in the future the network will look at developing skills and standards this should be proposed by members. The benefit of EMPOWER is for authorities to be able call on a network of NGOs they can work within the framework of their national oiled wildlife response plan. Members who 'misbehave' or operate in a non-professional way which is not in the spirit of EMPOWER will be excluded from the network. Excellent behaviour of EMPOWER members strengthens the "brand" and benefits all members.
- ***What kind of structure and rules will EMPOWER have?***
  - The precise structure and rules are open for discussion, however to start with it has been kept simple. Steering Group members were initially not voted for, however the Terms of Reference allow for Steering Group members to rotate so other organisations have an opportunity to become involved. If all the network members are in favour then a more detailed formal structure can be put in place, however this should not be overly bureaucratic as this would be counter-productive (as was the case with the Oiled Wildlife Alliance).

- **Would EMPOWER be able to influence the national chain of command?**
  - No, EMPOWER as a whole will not impose any protocol or method on its Members since each country has different approaches for oiled wildlife response. The aim of EMPOWER is to create an environment for better organisation of NGO'S at national level to facilitate cooperation with the authorities. It is not for EMPOWER to decide how the response is run at a national level, although it could give guidance on planning.
  - Sea Alarm already has an advisory role to a number of European authorities and has been able to include oiled wildlife response in some of the Regional Conventions.
  
- **What specifically are the benefits for EMPOWER members?**
  - There are some European NGOs which during past spills have not worked in a professional way, leading to some EU authorities being distrustful of wildlife response NGOs in general. EMPOWER aims at improving this situation and is based on open recruitment to all organisations which sign up to the Code of Conduct.
  
- **Has the issue of cross-border collaboration between addressed in considering R&D funding opportunities at EU level?**
  - SAF raised the issue of a lack of general funding for oiled wildlife response at EU level at a recent HELCOM response meeting. Via HELCOM's formal request, the EU responded that their funding structure is in the process of being changed at that there will be funding opportunities available for oiled wildlife response in the future (2010 and beyond).
  
- **Will recruitment to the network be active or passive?**
  - In principle, recruitment is open to all relevant NGOs, however those organisations who are known to have a proven track record and operate with 'good intentions' will be encouraged to join the network. It should be emphasised that EMPOWER membership does not give an NGO a 'ticket' to a spill.
  
- **Could 2 levels of membership be created: 1) network member (for exchange of information) and 2) response member (at a later stage once standards have been defined)?**
  - It is the intention at this stage to have a low threshold for entry and to invite as many groups as possible to join as network members. The second level of response membership should be based on a process of accreditation of organisations which is the intention for a later stage.
  - In the end it is the national authority who invites an NGO to participate in an oiled wildlife response. At that stage, being an EMPOWER member may be an advantage as authorities may prefer to work with NGOs that have committed to its Code of Conduct.
  - EMPOWER will organise the development of criteria that could be used to accredit hands-on responders, response organisations and/or their methodologies and national networks. EMPOWER aims to design and carry out processes that should lead to the criteria. These processes should be fair for everyone, not excluding any organisation, network or methodology beforehand. In order to have their unique methodology tested, organisations are invited to share knowledge and provide scientific evidence of success. Accreditation can then be left to the national authorities or response groups who would like to select the individuals/organisations they prefer to work with.
  - If scientists, or hands-on rehabilitators wish to set up a subgroup of membership within EMPOWER, e.g. to discuss certain issues, this can be facilitated.
  
- **Is the aim of EMPOWER to create an EU response team?**
  - No this is already in place by SAF, whereby a small group of experienced and trained individuals have been identified and can be made effective as a coordinated team which can be trusted to make a good contribution to the response at a technical level. This open ended response team is separate from EMPOWER.
  - EMPOWER therefore is a platform for discussion and development, NOT a new response organisation.

- **Could access to training be a 'selling point' of EMPOWER?**
  - In general, training is of key importance in achieving one of the main aims of EMPOWER, i.e. to increase the quality of wildlife response across Europe. However simply 'providing training' is too general; there is first a need to define what is the protocol or method to be trained in.
  - Those individuals or organisations that are looking for quality training may approach EMPOWER for guidance as to where to go. This means that EMPOWER should look at the possibilities to create training opportunities for its members.
- **Who makes decisions during a spill – SAF or EMPOWER?**
  - Neither – decision-making is the responsibility of the authorities. EMPOWER is an initiative to allow more organisations to develop into those which governments could use effectively during a spill. SAF can be called for assistance, e.g. to advise which individuals have certain skills and may be a valuable addition to a response.
- **Does EMPOWER provide certification for an NGO and can the logo qualify a member to respond for an authority?**
  - If there is a national accreditation requirement, this would come from the authorities, so this is something which all prospective members should consider in their own country. As there are many methods/protocols currently in use across Europe, it would not be fair to choose one at this stage. EMPOWER should create a forum for sharing information on different methods.
  - NGOs who have developed their own response methodologies in the course of many years or decades are invited to share their knowledge within the EMPOWER network. Providing the details of a methodology and the scientific evidence that the method actually works will be of key importance to have the method qualified as a useful/effective one. EMPOWER will develop a procedure that is fair for everyone. EMPOWER will not impose any method on anyone. In the end it will be the national authorities who will be the ones who will invite an organisation/methodology to the spill response; NOT EMPOWER.

## Conclusions and Way Forward

In closing the Q&A session, a show of hands revealed a significant number of organisations are interested to join up to EMPOWER. The EMPOWER Steering Group will now consider feedback from the Q&A session and from conference participants in finalising the EMPOWER documentation. Once this process is completed, the EMPOWER network will be officially opened for Membership applications during the month of November 2009. Prospective members will be notified of this opening by Sea Alarm and a notice will also be published on the EMPOWER section (still under construction) of <http://www.oiledwildlife.eu/>.

For any reaction on the reflection of the Q&A session given above, please use the post-conference forum facility.

Sea Alarm Foundation (EMPOWER Secretariat)  
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