



Workshop on "European Local Authorities role in preparedness and response to oil pollution to safeguard seafood production: state and perspectives"



European Workshop

“European Local Authorities role in preparedness and response to oil pollution to safeguard seafood production: state and perspectives”

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Report

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Introduction

Fisheries and aquaculture activities are a very important economical resource widely distributed along European coasts. Oil pollution, chronic, deliberate or accidental, may affect catches and cultivated stock may become physically contaminated or may acquire unpleasant smell and taste, fishing and cultivation gear may be oiled, leading to the risk of catches or stock becoming contaminated or fishing being halted until gear is cleaned or replaced. Apart from direct effects, oil may cause more subtle longer-term damage to behaviour, feeding, growth or reproductive functions as well as to survival of larval or juvenile forms. Damage may also result from measures taken to combat an oil spill.

The increased public awareness, heightened food quality and safety standards make even a small oil spill the reason for a large impact generating also strong political interest. Both actual and potential contamination of seafood can substantially affect commercial and recreational fishing, aquaculture and subsistence seafood use. Loss of confidence in seafood safety and quality can impact seafood market long after any actual risk to seafood from a spill has subsided, resulting in economic loss. Many European maritime cities where remarkable harbour traffic and fisheries and aquaculture activities co-exist are characterized by these threats, among these, Tarentum in Italy, Brest in France and Cadiz in Spain. In this respect, there is a need to improve the local communities capacity to adequately prevent and prepare the response to accidental or deliberate oil spills taking into account, particularly, the fishery and sea-farming activities. In this area, local authorities could play a very relevant role in prevention and preparedness and, in case of an oil spill, in taking decisions about the application of restriction or closure to harvesting and marketing of seafood. Questions, however, need to be addressed concerning mainly the criteria to be applied in taking these



decisions, the necessary data and information backing them and how to communicate to the public.

Therefore, the workshop was a step in providing European local authorities, relevant port and harbour authorities, local emergency services besides those responsible for and involved in dealing with fisheries and aquaculture activities, health and safety issues, with sound technical and scientific bases as regards oil pollution prevention and response. Particularly, the four sessions focused on key issues motivating the need to strengthen the stakeholders' capacities to prepare and respond to accidental or deliberate marine oil pollution as well as the call for increasing the cooperation among European maritime cities with relevant harbour traffic and fisheries and aquaculture activities as regards pollution prevention and response.

Report of the sessions

During the four sessions, particularly in Session 1, "Oil pollution impact on the marine environment and aquaculture and seafood production", various interventions underlined the seafood production vulnerability to oil pollution, mainly due to land based sources. The adoption of environmentally sustainable techniques introduced in sea farming activities was illustrated as well as the close relationships between the quality of the environment and of the sea farmed products.

Risks for fisheries and aquaculture activities, and seafood farming in particular, have been shown to arise from a number of threats other than accidental oil spill, linked, in particular, to pleasure boating and seaborne trades. Among these threats, the deleterious effects of antifouling TBT based paints and the occurrence of pathogenic and alloctonous species in ballast waters were quoted. However, the pollutants introduced into the marine environment by sea-farming activities were also identified.

In planning preventive measures, it has been recalled that it is necessary to bear in mind the fact that the amount of hydrocarbons spilled at sea because of accidents is quantitatively less important than the one released from operational activities. The importance, in this context, of the availability in ports and harbours of reception facilities and the need to discourage illegal discharges was stressed.

In Session 2, "Monitoring of pollutants and contaminants as a tool to manage sea-food production with respect to sanitary risks", the availability of technologically up-to-date remote detection facilities, both airborne and satellite-based, together with reliable oil slick drifting forecasting and communication system capabilities, has been considered a very useful aid in promoting sea-farming protection activities against an oil spill. Projects are in place in order to develop and test corresponding systems and strategies.



The requirement for reference data about contamination in different matrices, biodiversity and oceanographic features of any coastal area of fisheries and aquaculture importance was addressed.

A deep knowledge of the concerned territory and its related resources and oceanographic features has been considered a key factor in the planning of protection of sea-farming and fisheries and aquaculture activities with respect to accidental pollution. Furthermore, the lack of reliable data affects the decision-making process in responding to an accidental pollution.

The participating Municipalities, Tarentum, Brest and Cadiz, have all underlined the importance of monitoring activities in this context as a key source of scientific knowledge about the naturalistic features of the concerned marine territory, essential for planning and implementing in practice preventive measures and restoration activities.

In Session 3, "Contingency planning and sea-farming activities", concepts and techniques in the field of prevention and of the response at sea were recalled and the structure of some contingency intervention plans was also delineated.

Taking into consideration the limited capability in oil recovery at sea, the need for contingency plans especially designed for the coasts has been underlined according also to the different competences, on land and at sea, established in various Countries. In this regard the requirement for a close cooperation between local and national authorities was pointed out, particularly in the field of equipment and logistics.

Concerning international cooperation, the strengthening of the Mediterranean coastal states capacities to prevent and respond to marine pollution incidents is among the duties of the IMO/UNEP Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre (REMPEC) based in Malta. Actions undertaken in the framework of the Mediterranean Action Plan and of the new strategic approach to the prevention of accidental pollution were delineated, particularly with reference to the exchange of information, to the agreements reached in the field of mutual assistance and to the training provided on spill response matters.

Furthermore, it was strongly emphasised that every accident involving the spillage of HNS has showed its own peculiarities; thus, it is of paramount importance to consider the need for flexibility in contingency planning in order to be able to face unforeseen occurrences. The "adaptability" of a contingency plan is a key factor in determining its effectiveness, "rigidity" must be avoided favouring patterns of intervention based on timely rational management of all the available human, scientific, technological and natural resources.

The need for monitoring and keeping updated the emergency response framework, mainly with respect to human resources and means availability and their state of readiness was also highlighted.

In Session 4, "Economic losses and damage compensation arrangements" actions of the European Commission in matters of marine pollution response have been illustrated and



some experience in damage claims and compensation procedures have been recalled. The lack of baseline data on natural and economic resources affected by oil spills has been pointed out among the major difficulties to face in this field. The availability of reliable fisheries catch data and information on fisheries biology have been shown to be necessary also with respect to the provisions of the existing international regimes for compensation of pollution damage, namely the Civil Liability Convention and the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund.

About fisheries and aquaculture activities, lecturers showed how economical damage is mainly linked to the marketability of seafood products thus leading to the need of agreements, on an European scale, about guidelines, thresholds and exclusion procedures to follow with respect to the seafood products marketing after an oil spill.

The implications of oil spills for the marketing of seafood products are potentially severe and public health concerns are often raised. Any pollution incident leading to the contamination of food inevitably acquires a political dimension irrespective of the scientific basis for public health concerns. Countermeasures are sometimes necessary in order to limit the indirect effects of oil spills on fisheries and aquaculture. Temporary restrictions on fishing and harvesting activity during oil spills can be a means of protecting consumers from tainted seafood.

Recommendations

Some indications and recommendations that had arisen from the lectures, the discussions that followed and the final debate may be summarized as follows.

- Efforts must be made to bridge the gap existing in spill response preparedness among the coastal States as well as within them.
- The availability in ports and harbours of reception facilities and the need to improve control and repressive activities to face illicit practices were stressed as key factors to reduce oil pollution.
- The adoption of environmentally sustainable techniques in sea farming activities have to be broadened as well as the phasing out of polluting practices.
- It is recommended that local Authorities give concrete support to actions carried out at local, national and international level aimed at removing chronic and operational sources of oil pollution and at the implementation of agreements in the fields of oil pollution preparedness and response.
- Local Authorities are encouraged to promote co-operation with sea-farmers, civil protection bodies and other relevant stakeholders in order to set up contingency plans devoted to the protection of fisheries and aquaculture activities and of the coasts under their administrative competence.



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- Administrative arrangements among local Authorities, sea-farmers, civil protection and national environmental Authorities as well as technical advice are required in order to allow local Authorities to provide or to make available to oil spill responders means, equipment and training at local level.
- A better understanding of the existing relationship among marine environment protection, citizens' health and fisheries and aquaculture activities is required; to this end local Authorities have to promote and sustain accidental pollution response exercises and monitoring, research and academic activities in the field of fisheries and aquaculture resources.
- Remote sensing and forecasting capabilities have been considered very useful aids in driving sea-farming protection activities against an oil spill.
- The sharing of experiences gained in facing an emergency was considered crucial to broaden the spectrum of choices in decision makers' hands (i.e. the role of fishermen during the M/T PRESTIGE emergency or the "tar traps" on the shoreline made of net pieces, etc.). In this framework, the exchange of experts was considered a very valuable tool in the field of training as well as their participation in missions as observers and the sharing of tools, as literature, manuals, documentation, models and databases, was considered as the basis for capacity building.
- In order to improve the local, national and international capability in answering to the needs arising from oil pollution, the establishment of an European scale network of expertise, including responders, science, industry, media and decision makers was considered of strategic importance.
- The value of emergency responders web sites (the EC Civil Protection Unit, IMO, REMPEC, National scientific/technical institutions, etc.) has to be improved through the availability free of charge of more downloadable technical documents.
- Voluntary help in case of emergency is welcomed but the need for specific training and appropriate equipment was pointed out.
- Taking into account the biological cycles of the reared species as well as the production practices, in order to better manage an emergency case concerning sea-farming activities, the importance of assessing and making widely known the most vulnerable periods occurring in the year in the local sea-farming plants was pointed out.
- Taint testing has shown to be an effective and low-cost technique to control the marketability of seafood, particularly if coupled with studies dedicated to species and contaminants as was demonstrated during the M/T IEVOLI SUN chemical accident.
- As regards control of the marketability of seafood products, the lack of background data has to be overcome and on an European basis, a need for finding out and agreeing on



the procedures to follow with respect to the seafood products marketing after an oil spill was shared.