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REGIONAL MARINE POLLUTION EMERGENCY
RESPONSE CENTRE FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA (REMPEC)

CENTRE REGIONAL MEDITERRANEEN POUR L'INTERVENTION
D'URGENCE CONTRE LA POLLUTION MARINE ACCIDENTELLE (REMPEC)

MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN
PLAN D'ACTION POUR LA MEDITERRANEE



8th Meeting of Focal Points of the
Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response
Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC)

REMPEC/WG.28/9/4
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Agenda Item 9

MEDITERRANEAN TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP

Note by the Secretariat

Background

1. Within the context of sea-based pollution prevention and control activities, the Eleventh Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (Malta, 27 - 30 October 1999, UNEP(OCA)/MED IG.12/9) approved the following recommendation:

“To support the establishment of a Mediterranean Technical Working Group, co-ordinated by REMPEC, which will work, as a minimum, by correspondence and whose function will be to facilitate the exchange of technical data and other scientific and technological information aimed at assessing the nature, exposure and risks from accidental marine pollution and promoting remedies for such pollution in the Mediterranean Sea area.”

2. In this context, during the REMPEC Focal Points Meeting held in 2000, the Secretariat presented draft guidelines for the establishment of a Mediterranean Technical Working Group (MTWG) recalling also that a number of regional agreements had already set up permanent working groups of experts for the exchange of information on operational and technical questions.

3. The said REMPEC Focal Points Meeting agreed on the establishment of the MTWG aimed at facilitating the exchange of technical data and other scientific information on preparedness and response issues to marine pollution emergencies. An informal drafting group was established during the Meeting to consider the proposed guidelines for the method of work of the Working Group.

Guidelines for the Mediterranean Technical Working Group (MTWG)

4. The same Meeting of REMPEC Focal Points held in 2000, concurred with the proposed revised text of the guidelines for the method of work of the Working Group prepared by the informal drafting group ("Guidelines for the Mediterranean Technical Working Group"). The Meeting also decided to appoint Italy as the lead country and Mr. Ezio Amato as the Chairman of the Working Group.

Work of the Mediterranean Technical Working Group (MTWG)

5. Apart from agreeing on the "Guidelines for the Mediterranean Technical Working", the Meeting of REMPEC Focal Points also agreed upon the items of work to be carried out during the biennium 2000/2002 as follows:

- an inventory of oil traded in Mediterranean ports or terminals;
- an inventory of bulk chemicals traded in Mediterranean ports or terminals;
- an inventory of the national legislations for the implementation of MARPOL convention, specifically its article 4 on the prosecution of violations concerning illegal discharges.

6. During the 6th Meeting of REMPEC Focal Points held in 2003, Mr. Amato, the Chairman of the MTWG, presented the outcome of a pilot research carried out by ICRAM (Central Institute for Applied Marine Research) on behalf of the Italian Ministry of Environment aimed at providing the MTWG with an on-going experience and with suitable tools to pursue the assigned tasks, with regard to the inventories of oil and bulk chemicals traded in Mediterranean ports and terminals. In particular, although qualitative data were not sufficient to work out models for a risk analysis of the Hazardous and Noxious Substances (HNS) transported in the Mediterranean, data collection forms for HNS shipped within the basin were prepared and a preliminary ranking of the most handled HNS within the inquired Italian ports was given. The HNS traffic intensity related to the selected ports was also recorded.

7. Having recognized the challenging nature of the first task assigned to the newly established Technical Working Group as well as the relevance of its goals in the framework of the cooperation amongst Mediterranean coastal States in the field of prevention of and response to marine pollution, the Meeting stressed the need to complete the assessment of the HNS traded in the Mediterranean by further collecting data from ports of other countries following the Italian model. The Meeting emphasized that these data together with an assessment of routes and quantities of HNS being shipped within the Mediterranean, would complete the whole picture in the region. In this regard, the Meeting agreed to extend the mandate of the Chairman in order to finalize the work in progress.

8. During the 7th REMPEC Focal Points Meeting held in 2005, the Chairman of the MTWG stressed that only a few countries provided relevant information on seaborne trade of HNS and that the collected data were not homogeneous with respect to details and categorization, therefore not allowing the elaboration of data at regional level. In the same way the inventory of national legislations for the implementation of MARPOL Convention did not produce the expected results due to lack of information. As the assigned tasks had not been completed by the Working Group, the report of the Working Group's activities was not included in the agenda of the Meeting. However, the Chairman of the MTWG emphasized the need to continue this challenging project in order to conclude the planned tasks and also stressed that more information regarding the quantity and type of HNS entering and leaving the Mediterranean ports would certainly increase the capacities of the Mediterranean coastal States for preventing incidents involving such substances.

9. Due to the unavailability of most of the data, the progress made by the MTWG since the last Meeting of REMPEC Focal Points is still not sufficient to work out models for a risk analysis related to the maritime transport of HNS within the whole Mediterranean basin.

Future role of the Mediterranean Technical Working Group (MTWG)

10. Since its establishment in the year 2000, the existence of the MTWG has been fully supported by the Contracting Parties. Although aware of the difficulties encountered while carrying out its work, the Parties agreed to continue the work of the MTWG. Taking all this into account, the Secretariat strongly believes that the Working Group may bring value added to the whole Mediterranean region and invites the Meeting to consider a further development of the role of the MTWG.

11. In view of the fact that the tasks assigned to the MTWG by the Focal Points Meeting held in 2000 are currently partly covered by some of the activities carried out by REMPEC within the framework of the SAFEMED Project and in line with the programme of activities of the Centre for the current biennium, the Secretariat invites the 8th Meeting of REMPEC Focal Points to consider and express its views on the possibility of reviewing both the tasks and the method of work of the MTWG.

12. Taking into consideration the existence of international fora, it could be envisaged to establish a link between the work carried out at the regional level by the MTWG and the work carried out at the global level by the OPRC-HNS Technical Group meeting within the framework of the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) of the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The OPRC-HNS Technical Group, to which REMPEC and a number of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention already participate on a regular basis, is an MEPC subsidiary body and offers the opportunity for sharing experiences amongst a network of partners – IMO Member States, Regional Agreements and industry. It also plays an important role in assisting countries in understanding and implementing the 1990 OPRC Convention and its 2000 Protocol. In this view, the MTWG would give the opportunity to all the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention to actively contribute to and participate in the workings of this international forum.

13. In accordance with article 3 of the Guidelines for the MTWG which states that “*The Meetings of REMPEC’s Focal Points should periodically examine and review these guidelines and make recommendations as appropriate to facilitate the work of the Group*”, the Secretariat invites the Contracting Parties to consider the following proposals:

- to envisage the MTWG as a regional forum through which the Contracting Parties would contribute to the relevant work carried out at a global level (e.g. IMO OPRC-HNS Technical Group);
- to maintain the MTWG as a correspondence group;
- to nominate REMPEC as the Secretariat of the MTWG and task the MTWG Secretariat to amend the Guidelines for the MTWG accordingly and to circulate them to the Focal Points;
- to designate appropriate national entities and/or officials as contact points for the MTWG.

14. The Meeting is also invited to note that the envisaged new tasks for the MTWG will remain within the initial original scope of the Group. Consequently, there will be no need to amend the recommendation approved by the Contracting Parties quoted in paragraph 1 of the present document.

The Meeting of Focal Points is invited to consider and agree upon the proposals of the Secretariat as outlined in paragraph 13 of the present document.