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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)

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Agenda Item 9

MEDITERRANEAN ASSISTANCE UNIT (MAU)

Note by the Secretariat

General introduction

1. Following a proposal adopted by the 1992 Meeting of REMPEC Focal Points, the establishment of the Mediterranean Assistance Unit (MAU) was approved by the Eighth Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties, held in Antalya, Turkey in October 1993 (UNEP(OCA)/MED.IG.3/5).
2. The MAU is an expert advice capability which is to be mobilized by the Director of REMPEC upon request of a Contracting Party in case of an emergency situation.
3. Although the MAU has been put on alert at the time of several incidents, until last summer, the "Nassia" incident (Turkey, March 1994) was the only experience of activating the MAU.
4. Currently, the MAU is based upon three agreements between REMPEC and the following institutions: CEDRE (Centre de Documentation, de Recherche et d'Expérimentations sur les pollutions accidentelles des eaux), based in Brest, France; ICRAM (Istituto Centrale per la Ricerca Scientifica e Tecnologica Applicata al Mare), based in Rome, Italy and FEDERCHIMICA (Federazione Nazionale dell'Industria Chimica) based in Milan, Italy.

Funding of the MAU

5. When deciding upon the establishment of the MAU, the Contracting Parties, at their Eighth Ordinary Meeting, specified that it will be activated "within the limits of the budget allocated to it by the Meeting of Contracting Parties".
6. At their Ninth Ordinary Meeting, held in Barcelona, Spain in June 1995, the Contracting Parties also decided that the expenses related to the activities of the MAU will be covered through a special revolving fund. The initial funding of this revolving fund

originated from the recovery from insurers of the expenses incurred by the Centre when assisting in the response to the "Haven" (April 1991) and "Nassia" (March 1994) incidents. As at the end of 2005, the balance of the MAU revolving fund account (inclusive of bank interests) was USD 21,100.49.

7. The following allocations in the budget of REMPEC for the maintenance of the level of preparedness of the MAU have been approved at the following Meetings of the Contracting Parties:

1997 - 10th Ordinary Meeting: USD 16,000 for the biennium 1998/1999
1999 - 11th Ordinary Meeting: USD 8,000 for the biennium 2000/2001
2001 - 12th Ordinary Meeting: USD 8,000 for the biennium 2002/2003
2003 - 13th Ordinary Meeting: Euro 2,000 for the biennium 2004/2005
2005 - 14th Ordinary Meeting: Euro 1,000 for the biennium 2006/2007

8. These budget allocations were deemed to cover the cost of renewal of an insurance policy and standby prepaid air tickets for MAU members. However, the surplus funds after deducting these expenses were not transferred to the special revolving fund.

Latest developments

9. During the summer of 2006, as a result of the conflict in the Middle East, an oil spill spread along the Lebanese and Syrian shorelines. Following a request for assistance received from Syria, the Director of REMPEC activated the MAU and Dr Ezio AMATO from ICRAM proceeded to Syria for an assessment mission. The expenses related to this mission, which took place between the 8 and 11 August, 2006, would practically reduce by half the available funds in the MAU special revolving fund. At this stage, it is not expected that these costs will be recovered, as was the case with previous incidents.

10. During the same event, REMPEC was also requested by the Lebanese authorities to assist them by providing on site expert advice on a more extended period of time (2-3 months). The human and financial resources of the Centre did not permit it to reply positively to this request on its own. The International Maritime Organization (IMO), the Government of Canada and France kindly made funds and personnel available allowing REMPEC to assist the Lebanese authorities with expert advice on site during the period mid-August - November 2006.

Scope of the MAU and available resources

11. Although a fact finding or assessment mission following an incident may require only a few days for the MAU expert, the scope of action, as described in the decision adopted by the Contracting Parties, may involve a medium term expert mission, in particular, if it is decided to assist in the crisis management and organization of intervention. Clearly, the support provided to the Lebanese authorities during the last quarter of 2006 should have fallen under the scope of the MAU.

12. This situation thus raises the issue of appropriate funding for the MAU.

13. As the Contracting Parties have always allocated funds for the maintenance of the level of preparedness of the MAU, it is assumed that they will continue providing the Centre with the necessary funds. However, there is a need to further discuss the scope expected by the Contracting Parties and determine the level of secured funds accordingly.

14. Due to its limited human resources, the Centre cannot be expected to assist the Contracting Parties which so request, with direct expert advice, except for very limited periods of time. Thus, the activation of the MAU is instrumental to achieve the mandate of the Centre, which is to provide assistance in emergency situations.

15. The need for medium term support varies greatly from one country to another, but is crucial for less prepared countries. Moreover, as the recent experience has shown, there is a need for REMPEC to be in a position to provide immediate and adequate expert assistance. It has also to be acknowledged that the mobilization/funding of additional experts through regional and international organizations could take some time.

16. However, the occurrence of incidents is not such that it should be wise to allocate large sums of money to the MAU special revolving fund. It has also to be considered that in usual circumstances, expenses incurred might be recovered from the liable person.

17. In view of the above, the Centre is of the opinion that the MAU revolving fund should at least be maintained at a level equivalent to the average expenses of a one month mission, which will provide sufficient time to address the need of either supplementary funding or the mobilisation of external expertise through the regional and international organizations. In order to reach this level, it is proposed that the surplus funds allocated to the budget line providing for the level of preparedness of the MAU be transferred to the MAU special revolving fund.

The Meeting of Focal Points is invited to take note of the information provided in this document and decide upon the proposal of the Secretariat with a view to submitting an appropriate recommendation regarding the funding of the MAU to the next Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties.