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## MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN (MAP) REGIONAL MARINE POLLUTION EMERGENCY RESPONSE CENTRE FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA (REMPEC)

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

REMPEC/WG.45/10  
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Agenda Item 10

### **MEDITERRANEAN ASSISTANCE UNIT (MAU) AND RELATED ACTIVITIES**

#### **Note by the Secretariat**

#### **SUMMARY**

**Executive Summary:** This document presents the achievements of the Mediterranean Assistance Unit (MAU), which provides immediate expert assistance at no cost for the Mediterranean coastal States to respond to oil and chemical spills at sea, and proposes ways forward to further strengthen the MAU for the benefit of Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention.

**Action to be taken:** Paragraph 23

**Related documents:** UNEP(OCA)/MED IG.3/5, UNEP(DEPI)/MED IG.23/23, REMPEC/WG.18/12, UNEP(OCA)/MED IG.5/16, UNEP(DEPI)/MED IG.17/20, UNEP(DEPI)/MED IG.23/11 and REMPEC/WG.45/6/2

#### **Background**

1. In case of a marine pollution emergency, Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean ("the Barcelona Convention") and its Protocols can request assistance from other Parties regarding expertise, through existing bilateral or multilateral agreements, or through the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC).

2. In this context, the Mediterranean Assistance Unit (MAU)<sup>1</sup> was established by the Eighth Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols (COP 8) (Antalya, Turkey, 12-15 October 1993).

3. The primary objective of the MAU is to rapidly provide the services of selected experts to a Contracting Party which, in case of emergency, will request such assistance. By going to the scene of an accident the experts shall provide advice and technical expertise to the authorities with a view to assisting them during the initial phases to decide on the combating measures to take, and on the assistance that could be necessary to request. Another role of the Mediterranean Assistance Unit shall be to help the requesting State to implement the provisions for regional cooperation in case of emergency, particularly through the arrangements and procedures defined in the Mediterranean Guide on Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in Responding to Marine Pollution Incidents<sup>2</sup> adopted by Twentieth Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols (COP20) (Tirana, Albania, 17-20 December 2017), hereinafter referred to as the "Guide".

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<sup>1</sup> UNEP(OCA)/MED IG.3/5

<sup>2</sup> UNEP(DEPI)/MED IG.23/23, Decision IG.23/11

4. The organization and the activation of the MAU shall be the responsibility of REMPEC which shall assume this responsibility in accordance to the Protocol concerning Co-operation in Preventing Pollution from Ships and, in Cases of Emergency, Combating Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea (2002 Prevention and Emergency Protocol).

#### **Areas of expertise of the Mediterranean Assistance Unit**

5. According to the decision establishing the MAU, the MAU shall provide expert services in the following areas, among others:

.1 Response to pollution by oil

- Crisis management and organisation of intervention
  - . analysis, assessment and forecasting of oil slick behaviour, fate and movement;
  - . response planning and logistics;
  - . response strategy/tactical choices and options.
- Combating methods and techniques at sea
  - . containment/recovery;
  - . use of dispersants and other treatment products.
- Shore clean-up techniques and methods
- Oiled wildlife response
- Treatment and disposal of wastes
- Financial documentation and claims for compensation

.2 Response to pollution by harmful substances

- Crisis management and organization of intervention
- Analysis, assessment and forecasting of fate and behaviour of gas clouds, floaters, dissolvers, of sinkers
- Recovery of packages at sea
- Response to chemical spill depending on their behaviour (personnel protection; aquatic toxicity and rehabilitation; biogeochemical cycling)
- Decontamination
- Oiled wildlife response
- Treatment and disposal of wastes

6. With a view to defining, jointly with REMPEC, the composition of the team to be deployed on site, competent authorities shall specify as precisely as possible, as to what areas of expertise are required. To facilitate this process, the Guide provides in its Annex II: "Emergency Procedures", a set of Standard forms for request and offer of assistance, including Annex II.3 entitled "Standard form for the request of MAU experts", which refers to the above list of areas of expertise.

7. During the AGIA ZONI II incident, further detailed below, the competent authorities of Greece used the said forms specifying the need for expertise on "removal of submerged/sunken oil", noting that such area of expertise was not listed in Annex II.3 of the Guide. It was further noted during the communication that the date of the mission was also missing from the Annex II.3. To address these gaps the Secretariat proposes to amend Annex II.3 "Standard form for the request of MAU experts" to the Guide, by adding:

- .1 a field entitled "other (please specify)" in the section related to the areas of expertise of Annex II.3 of the Guide; and
- .2 a new section "Dates of the mission" specifying the first and last day of the mission, including travel and a note stating that "The possible extension of the mission and the composition of the expert team will be assessed in consultation with the authorised requesting authority and the experts on site".

### **The composition of the MAU**

8. The MAU is composed of a selected limited number of highly qualified experts and centres of expertise, for each area of expertise. An expert or centre of expertise can be selected for more than one area of expertise.

9. The composition of the MAU is published every two years and updated as necessary depending on the changes requiring implementation. Currently, the MAU is composed of five (5) members:

- the Centre of Documentation, Research and Experimentation on Accidental Water Pollution ([Cedre](#));
- the Italian Federation of the chemical industry. ([FEDERCHIMICA](#));
- the Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research ([ISPRA](#));
- the Sea Alarm Foundation ([Sea Alarm](#)); and
- The Mediterranean Operational Network for the Global Ocean Observing System ([MONGOOS](#)).

10. The Annex I.5 of the Guide provides for each member of the MAU the name, status, obligations/responsibilities (WHO); their role/services, resources (WHAT); and their procedures, conditions and contacts (HOW).

11. The experts and centres of expertise are selected for a renewable term of 2 years. During this term, the experts and centres of expertise shall respond, in accordance with permanent instructions, to all the requests made in events where the MAU is mobilised. Such arrangements are formalised through individual contracts signed between REMPEC and the members of the MAU, which define role and responsibilities, travel arrangements, personal insurance, mobilisation, confidentiality, financing and liability of these members and their experts.

12. With a view to strengthen the MAU emergency assistance capacity as well as to provide the countries with direct and personalised expert advice at their request, REMPEC continues to seek opportunities to extend the MAU scope of expertise, geographical proximity and language diversity. In this regard, the Centre is in close contact with the newly established Adriatic Training and Research Centre for Accidental Marine Pollution Preparedness and Response ([Atrac](#)), based in Croatia, with a view to sign a contract in the framework of the MAU.

13. Considering the above, the Secretariat proposes to continue to explore other cooperation arrangements required to provide the necessary technical support and assistance to Mediterranean coastal States to respond efficiently to accidental marine pollution.

### **Revolving Fund**

14. To facilitate the mobilisation of MAU experts and reduce burdens from Mediterranean coastal States, in accordance with Decision IG 17/18<sup>3</sup> adopted by the Fifteenth Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols (COP 15) (Almeria, Spain, 15-18 January 2008), to maintain the funding of the MAU, at a level equivalent to the average expenses of a one month mission, the Centre has been transferring any surplus funds allocated to the budget line providing for the level of preparedness of the MAU to the MAU special revolving funds, of which the balance is as of March 2019 USD 33,828.82. The abovementioned threshold, which has been estimated to USD 36,150 will be reached by the end of 2021, should the revolving funds not be used by then.

15. Initial costs of assistance covered by REMPEC within the MAU includes experts' air tickets, daily subsistence allowance and fees in accordance with the contract signed with the MAU Members. REMPEC reserves the right, according to the applicable legal regimes, to seek reimbursement for the expenses thus incurred.

16. As further detailed in the document REMPEC/WG.45/6/2, in March 2018, REMPEC submitted a claim for the recovery of expenses, debited from the MAU special revolving funds, related to the deployment of two experts from the MAU (Athens, Greece, 8-14 October 2017), to respond to the request for assistance from the Greek authorities in the aftermath of the sinking of the oil tanker

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<sup>3</sup> UNEP(DEPI)/MED IG.17/20 Annex V

“AGIA ZONI II”. The claim was approved and paid in accordance with the international system of Compensation established by the Civil Liability Convention 1992.

### **The MAU mobilisation**

17. On 15 October 2018, the MAU celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and since its establishment, the MAU and has been activated on many occasions to support Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention to respond to oil spills incidents and has contributed to the improvement of response to marine pollution accidents and the management of emergency situations in the Mediterranean, as illustrated below:

- .1 REMPEC activated the MAU for the first time during the NASSIA / SHIPBROKER incident (Bosporus strait, Turkey, March 1994) which released 95,000 tonnes of crude oil;
- .2 as a result of the Jiyeh Power Plant incident (Lebanon, June 2006), which caused the release of 15,000 tonnes heavy fuel oil impacting the Lebanese and Syrian coastline, upon a request from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, REMPEC activated the MAU and deployed, an expert from ICRAM (former ISPRA), within the framework of a Joint UNEP-OCHA / REMPEC team of experts<sup>4</sup>;
- .3 MONGOOS provided forecasting models after the grounding of the COSTA CONCORDIA (Italy, January 2012);
- .4 MONGOOS was also mobilised, through the MAU, at the request of the Maltese authorities, to run oil spill simulations to assess the risk related to the potential bombing of the MT MORNING GLORY (March 2014); and
- .5 upon request of the competent authorities from the State of Israel, Cedre and ISPRA, provided technical advice to respond to the incident inland and mitigate further spreading of 5-million litres of crude oil pollution gushing from a breached pipeline (Evrna dessert, Israel December 2014).

18. Since the last meeting of Focal Points of REMPEC, the MAU was mobilised during the following incidents:

- .1 in March 2017, further to the concerns raised about the potential risk of marine pollution, the MAU was activated through MONGOOS to simulate the worst spill scenario in the context of the military intervention at Ras Lanuf and Es Sidra Terminals, in Libya;
- .2 in the aftermath of the sinking of the oil tanker “AGIA ZONI II” CS: SVAD4 - Greek flag – IMO No: 7126152 (Piraeus, Greece, 10 September 2017), which had on board 2.195 M/T fuel oil, 340 M/T marine gas oil as cargo, 15 M/T marine gas oil as bunkers and 300 L lubricants, further to the request for assistance published by the Hellenic Coast Guard on the Common Emergency Communication and Information System (CECIS) and the acceptance of REMPEC’s offer, two experts from Cedre, and ISPRA were mobilised to provide onsite technical support on sunken oil assessment and removal techniques as well as efficient oil removal from sandy beaches, in the framework of the MAU (Athens, Greece, 8-14 October 2017);
- .3 in the context of the response to the bunker oil spill estimated to 530 cubic meter resulting from the collision between the RoRo Ship “ULYSSE” and the Container Ship “VIRGINIA” (September 2018), REMPEC provided regular oil spill forecasting models from MONGOOS to the French authorities; and
- .4 upon request of the Republic of Tunisia, MONGOOS was mobilised to predict the movement of a lost offloading hose (Ashtart offshore installation, Tunisia, 6-14 March 2019), retrieved on 14 March 2019.

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<sup>4</sup> REMPEC/WG.28/9/2

19. Competent national authorities are regularly invited to test the procedures for the mobilisation of the MAU, during their national exercises and drills. Such testing allows them to familiarise their staff with the procedures, including making use of the related forms as referred in paragraph 3 and 6 above and to address all aspects facilitating the mission of the MAU experts. These procedures were applied in the context of the following recent national exercises: TOMMASSOS, (Israel, November 2018), Maltex 2018 (Malta, October 2018); NEMESIS 2018 (Cyprus, October 2018); SIMULEX 2018 (Morocco, June 2018) and the regional exercise RAMOGEPOL 2018 (France, Italy and Monaco, September 2018).

20. In this regard, the Secretariat invites the Contracting Parties to conduct regular testing of the procedures during communication and full-scale exercises.

### **Way forward**

21. To facilitate access to the information related to the MAU members, the areas of expertise available, the revolving fund, as well as the procedures and forms for the mobilisation of the MAU, the Secretariat proposes to develop a dedicated web page for the MAU on REMPEC's Website.

22. In line with Decision IG.23/11 adopted by COP 20, REMPEC explored financial resources to develop an electronic version of the operational part of the Guide, which would facilitate requests for assistance. A Beta version of the electronic version of the Guide has been developed and will be further tested and enhanced in the framework of the Western Mediterranean Region Marine Oil & HNS Pollution Cooperation — West MOPoCo co-financed by the European Union under the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism. The related communication system, titled "Mediterranean Emergency Reporting System (MedERSys)" aims to ensure guided online emergency communications based on the procedures defined in the Guide.

### **Actions requested by the Meeting**

23. **The Meeting is invited to:**

- .1 **take note** of the information provided in the present document; and
- .2 **consider** the proposals put forward by the Secretariat, as laid down in paragraphs 7, 13, 20, and 21 of the present document.