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

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

REMPEC/WG.56/3/3
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Agenda Item 3: Illegal and accidental oil and HNS pollution from ships

Mediterranean Assistance Unit (MAU) and related activities

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Note by the Secretariat

This document presents the developments on funding the Mediterranean Assistance Unit (MAU), to provide assistance at no cost for the Mediterranean coastal States upon request in case of emergency and proposes raising the Special Revolving Fund at a level equivalent to the average expenses of an additional month mission to ensure adequate funding of the MAU to ensure its state of readiness to assist the Mediterranean coastal States for any eventuality in case emergencies.

Introduction

1 The Eighth Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (Antalya, Türkiye, October 1993) established by Decision (UNEP(OCA)/MED.IG.3/5) the Mediterranean Assistance Unit (MAU) following a proposal adopted by the Meeting of the Focal Points of REMPEC (Malta, September 1992) within the framework of the Emergency Protocol (1976).

2 The MAU is an expert advice capability which is mobilized by REMPEC upon request of a Contracting Party (CP) in case of an emergency. Currently, the MAU is based upon six agreements between REMPEC and selected Centres of expertise which provide expert advisory service. These are Cedre based in Brest, France, the Adriatic Training and Research Centre for Accidental Marine Pollution Preparedness and Response (ATRAC) based in Rijeka, Croatia, *Federazione Nazionale dell'Industria Chimica* (FEDERCHIMICA) based in Milan, Italy, Sea Alarm based in Brussels, Belgium, the Mediterranean Operational Network for the Global Ocean Observing System (MONGOOS) based in Rome, Italy.

3 Since its establishment, thirty years ago, the MAU has been put on alert several times. It has been activated on a number of occasions, including, but not limited to: the “Nassia” incident in Türkiye (1994); the “Jiyeh Power Plant” oil spill in Lebanon and Syrian Arab Republic (2006); the grounding of the “Costa Concordia” in Italy (2012); the “Evrona” oil spill from the pipeline in Israel (2014); the sinking of the “Agia Zoni II” in Greece (2017); and more recently, the “Electrical Banyas” oil spill in the Syrian Arab Republic (2021).

Funding of the MAU

4 When deciding upon the establishment of the MAU, the Eighth Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties specified that the MAU would be activated within the limits of the budget agreed by the Meetings of the Contracting Parties.

5 At their Ninth Ordinary Meeting (Barcelona, Spain June 1995), the Contracting Parties established a special Revolving Fund to cover expenses related to the activities of the MAU. The allocations in the budget of REMPEC have been approved by the 10th (1997) to the 14th (2005) Ordinary Meetings of the Contracting Parties, however, unused funds, after deducting insurance policy and standby tickets for the MAU members, were not transferred to the Revolving Fund.

6 The 2006 oil spill incident along the Lebanese and Syrian coastlines, highlighted the limitations of the Revolving Fund. The expenses related to the mission of the expert mobilized between 5 and 11 August 2006, upon the request for assistance from the Syrian Arab Republic, reduced the available funds in the MAU Revolving Fund, by half. At the same time, REMPEC was also requested by the Lebanese authorities for its assistance which provided an on-site expert for a more extended period of time (2-3 months). However, due to the funds being depleted by the first mission, REMPEC was only able to accommodate such a request, with the support of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the Government of France and Canada. This assistance was provided to the Lebanese authorities by REMPEC during the period mid- August-November 2006 with experts on site.

7 The support to Lebanon should have fallen within the scope of the MAU, and, consequently, following the recommendation of the Eighth Meeting of the Focal Points of REMPEC (Malta, May 2007), the Fifteenth Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties (Almeira, Spain 2008) approved by Decision IG17/18, the recommendation of the Eighth Meeting of the Focal Points of REMPEC to maintain the funding of the MAU at a level equivalent to the average expenses of a one month expert mission, by transferring any unused funds allocated to the budget line providing for the level of preparedness of the MAU Revolving Fund.

Latest developments

8 The experience obtained from activating the MAU in the following events: the grounding of “Costa Concordia” incident off the coast of Italy (January, 2012); the oil tar ball pollution along the Israeli and Lebanese shorelines on February and March 2021, respectively; the “Banyas” oil spill in the Syrian Arab Republic (December 2021), which all occurred during the COVID pandemic period, emphasized the need for additional financial support for REMPEC, to enable the Centre to be in a position to provide, through the MAU, immediate and adequate expert assistance.

9 Furthermore, following the 2021 incidents and the recent incident of the XELO tanker that sunk off the coast of the Gulf of Gabès, Tunisia (April 2022), other categories of expert advice and assistance have been identified as being required. In this connection, REMPEC is currently in negotiations to finalize agreements with the Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA), and the International Salvage Union (ISU).

10 Noting the above, REMPEC is proposing that the MAU Revolving Fund should be increased to cover an additional month so that the Revolving Fund will be able to fund the average expenses of a two months’ expert mission.

Actions requested by the Meeting

11 **The Meeting is invited to:**

- .1 **take note** of the information provided in the present document; and
- .2 **consider** the proposal of the Secretariat set out in the **Annex** to the present document, with a view to submitting to the next Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties, an appropriate decision regarding the increase in the funding of the MAU.

Annex

Draft Decision on Revision of the Mediterranean Assistance Unit (MAU) Revolving Fund

Draft Decision IG.XX/XX
Revision of the Mediterranean Assistance Unit (MAU) Revolving Fund

The Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention) and its Protocols at their 23rd Meeting,

Recalling Decision of the Eighth Meeting of the Contracting Parties, Antalya, Türkiye, 12-15 October 1993, to establish a Mediterranean Assistance Unit (MAU) to combat accidental marine pollution (UNEP(OCA)/MED IG.3/5),

Further recalling Decision IG.17/8 of the Fifteenth Meeting of the Contracting Parties, Almeria, Spain, 15-18 January 2008, on the Programme of Work and Budget for the 2008-2009 biennium,

Recognizing the value of the MAU as recently demonstrated,

1. *Approves* the proposal of the Fifteenth Meeting of the Focal Points of the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC) to raise the funding of the MAU Revolving Fund to cover an additional month with a view that the Revolving Fund will be able to fund a two months' expert mission,

2. *Agrees that* additional funding would be funded through the transfer of any unused funds allocated to the budget line for the MAU.
