



SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Tenth Ordinary Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region and Related Protocols (Noumea Convention)

Madang, Papua New Guinea
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Information Paper 2

Pacific Regional Response Centre – Information paper presented by MNZ at SPILLCON 2010

Purpose

1. To provide the Parties with information of a Pacific Regional Response Centre concept as presented by Ms, Catherine Taylor Director of Maritime New Zealand at the recent SPILLCON 2010 that was held in Melbourne April 2010.

Background and Introduction

2. The International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation (OPRC Convention) was adopted in 1990 to minimise the environmental and economic consequences of major oil pollution incidents. Bilateral and multilateral co-operation for regional arrangements to prepare for and combat oil pollution incidents were also emphasized in the articles of the Convention.

3. Several global multi- and/or bi-lateral regional agreements that emphasizes private/public sector partnership, have been established with the aim of increasing regional capacity for preparedness and response to oil spills and developing mutual assistance and/or joint response operations, should a major oil spill occur in the region.

4. In and around our South Pacific region, some of the well-known high risk areas include the Malacca Straits, the South China Sea, the Torres and Bass Straits' and areas around the Pacific Islands. The increase of shipping traffic with increased mineral and oil/gas productions in our region coupled with an increase in 'interest' in the Antarctic areas also add to the risk areas and risk activities. The need now to *review the status of oil spill risks on a sub-regional basis*, as well as the strategies relating to oil spill response, is imperative to further improve the response capability within the region, particularly through regional co-operation.

Framework for Regional Cooperation

5. Internationally, the establishment of regional oil spill centres was cited by the IMO as an effective tool for strengthening and increasing the national and regional capabilities.

6. The term ‘Regional Centre’ or ‘Regional Activity Centre’ (RAC) can be generally defined as a financially sustainable institution that has been designated by the Contracting Parties to a United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) regional seas Convention, or by Parties to a non-UNEP regional Convention or agreement, to carry out specific functions and activities in support of the oil pollution emergency Protocol to the Convention or regional agreement

7. Historically and where such regional centres have been established, there is a greater level of sustainable cooperation and an overall improvement in the level of awareness and increased capacity for prevention, preparedness and response to oil pollution both at national and regional levels. Some of the key functions and benefits of a regional centre area that it:

- Provides a structure for a prompt and co-ordinated response, in the event of a major pollution incident
- Facilitates notification, reporting and communication between Member States
- Is dedicated to a specific issue/field of work
- Increases visibility on actions and programmes
- Provides a forum for sharing experience
- Provides and/or facilitates technical assistance
- Acts as a regional archive
- Provides skills through capacity-building
- Enables and facilitates co-operation with the industry sector

8. A variety of models exist for establishing a regional centre. These differences depend on a variety of factors, such as the nature and structure of the regional agreement, the availability of funding, and political will. There are a variety of structures that have been successfully adopted including; Intergovernmental UN Regional Centres (Type A); Independent Intergovernmental (non-UN) Regional Centre (Type B); Light Secretariat Arrangements (Type C); National centres with a regional mandate, Regional Activity Centres (RAC) (Type D)

9. The relevance of these structures is obvious in assessing a regional centre such as the Secretariats’ Pacific Oceans Pollution Prevention Programme (PACPOL) set up under the auspice of the IMO. But is an IMO member state such as NZ doing enough to support SPREP? NZ acknowledged that they have certain obligations as a primary and secondary response centre for the SPREP sponsored Pacific Island Pollution Plan and that they could potentially provide a greater degree of assistance to PACPOL including participating in a coordinating group on maritime environmental protection. This coordinating group could take shape as a ‘regional centre’ and is described below.

10. A second consideration concerns a 'latitudinal' approach to regional cooperation. This would effectively section off 3 distinct areas for regional cooperation; the South Pacific, Australia and NZ and the Antarctic. In some ways, this has already occurred through SPREP in the South Pacific, an Agreement for cooperation in oil spill response between Australia and NZ and the Antarctic Treaty between Antarctic partners. But noting the framework that exists for regional cooperation, there would be some work needed to 'harmonise' the current treaties into a format that could have greater awareness as a maritime environmental program that could have applicability under the IMO.

11. The initiating of a regional centre to process and coordinate regional activities would have the two main ramifications – Funding and Operation/Management.

Cooperation between Industry and Government

12. Based on studies (IOPC Funds 2008 Declining Frequency of spill data), it is evident that frequency of major spills has declined due to prevention efforts by government and industry. While this cooperation can be evidenced in Australia with AMOSC and AMSA, the incorporation of the IMO into this partnership appears to have a successful Outcome.

13. The Global Initiative is one example of a joint programme between industry and government, and IPIECA and IMO, in particular, at the global level. The programme aims to improve and sustain the capacity of developing countries to protect their marine and coastal resources at risk from an oil spill incident. The Global Initiative is organized on a regional basis with focal points established for West and Central Africa; the Mediterranean; Caspian and Black Sea and the Caribbean.

Conclusion

14. Regional cooperation programs in marine oil spill response can have two outcomes; a program which exists in the background and is able to sustain capability or a program that features prominently within the region and also internationally.

15. The South Pacific program continues to build in terms of capability and capacity. Any potential enhancement to this program could be to add other regional areas to the existing program. Other enhancements could be undertaken by increasing the profile of this program with the primary assistance states (as determined in PACPOL) of New Zealand, Australia, United States and France and for these states to regularly meet with the Pacific Islands on spill preparedness and response issues. The support of IMO and regionally based industry is fundamental to this program and needs the full encouragement of South Pacific member nations to maximise the engagement.

16. The regions that NZ engages in could be centrally convened as a regional centre; these include the South Pacific, Australasia and Antarctica. The mechanisms for making this occur with full engagement are available within the international community. The challenge will be engaging governments, industry and maritime communities into a program of collective maritime protection and pollution prevention. While this may take several years, we need to recognise the benefits that full regional cooperation can bring.

Recommendations

17. The Parties are invited to:

- **note** the information provided for a Pacific Regional Response Centre as and provide comments.
 - **commit** support for this initiative.
 - **commit support** for the review of the status of oil spill risks in the region.
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30 July 2010