KINGDOM OF THE NETHERLANDS – NATIONAL ORGANISATION

INFORMATION ON NATIONAL STRATEGIES, LEGISLATION, ORGANISATION, SHIPS, AIRCRAFT AND EQUIPMENT

15.1 INTRODUCTION

The Netherlands is a Coastal State and has Rotterdam, the largest port in the world, within its boundaries. Other ports in the Netherlands are Flushing in the south and Amsterdam and Delfzijl in the far north. The Netherlands has an Exclusive Economic Zone of about 65,000 km^2 in which gas and oil production platforms can be found. It also has three main ship traffic separation zones. Annually, 245,000 route bound ship movements are registered. In summertime recreation is important in a densely populated coastal zone. The Waddenzee in the north is a sensitive area, known as the “delivery room” for fauna.

15.2 RISK ANALYSIS

Taking into consideration the dense traffic in the three ship traffic separation schemes, and also considering the other activities in the Netherlands EEZ, the level of preparedness has been decided on the basis of a risk analysis conducted in 2005. Although the area is relatively small, three main areas have been defined: the North Sea (roads to Rotterdam); the Waddenzee and the Scheldt estuary. These areas take account of specific sensitive areas. The level of preparedness is set for the North Sea on a recovery capacity of 15,000 tons because that is the volume of an outflow resulting from a collision between a tanker and another ship.

15.3 NATIONAL LEGISLATION

The Netherlands is signatory to many international conventions such as UNCLOS, the HNS-protocol and MARPOL. International regulations have been implemented in national law. With regard to maritime incidents the most important regulation is the BON Act, which stands for Response to Accidents North Sea. The powers given to authorities in this act are quite stringent and include the power to take over command of a vessel. As well as this Act, the Netherlands uses the Wrecks Act in cases where ships sink or lose cargo inside the 12 miles zone.

15.4 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF NATIONAL ORGANISATION

The Minister for Transport, Public Works and Water Management is the coordinating Minister for North Sea activities. This Minister is also responsible for policy in maritime accidents. However, the Director of the Netherlands Coastguard is in charge of coordinating the response operations. Therefore the Coastguard Centre is the National Focal Point, including for all international contacts. The North Sea Agency will take actual response measures, which is part of the DG for Water Management. In an incident an Operational Team can be called together at the Centre. Management matters are dealt with by a Regional Management Team, which meets in The Hague. Relevant departments are represented on this Team. This up-scaling may finally lead to a ministerial team chaired by the Prime Minister.

15.5 STRATEGY IN RESPONSE

Under the BON Act, the North Sea Calamity Plan (Rampenplan voor de Noordzee) which is reviewed regularly describes the organisation, (inter)national legislation and communication. With regard to the Response Organisation the North Sea Agency has its Incident Response Plan. Three plans together could be regarded as the Netherlands Contingency Plan: the North Sea Calamity Plan, the National Capacity Plan and the Incident Response Plan.

The main strategy in response is to secure the safety of human populations (SAR) on vessels in distress, on offshore installations and on the mainland. With regard to the preservation of the marine environment, the first measures aim at containing the oil or other substance in the damaged vessel. This is undertaken by the owners or contracted Salvage Company. Discharged oil will be contained and recovered mechanically by means of booms and skimmers. The Netherlands has developed and improved the so-called sweeping arm. The application of dispersants is permitted though under strict conditions. These conditions are related to sea-conditions, type and quantity of oil, season and water depth. Coastal pollution is treated by means of recovering and combustion of sand/oil mixtures.

15.6 MEANS FOR COMBATING SPILLS OF OIL AND HARMFUL SUBSTANCES

The Netherlands Coast Guard currently operates one aircraft equipped with Remote Sensing for the routine patrol of the EEZ. In late 2007 this will increase to two aircraft. Annually about 1700 hours are scheduled and this number will increase to approximately 2000 in the third quarter of 2007. The main objectives of the flights are to detect and observe combatable pollution at an early stage, and to identify the source of pollution. The operators are specially qualified policemen who can make official statements on their findings for forwarding to the public prosecutor.

For the mechanical recovery of oil the Netherlands owns a tanker class, first line, response vessel, the ARCA. She is permanently equipped with two 15 meters sweeping arms and also has booms and other skimmers available. Besides the ARCA a number of trailing suction hopper dredges are available on stand-by contracts. Most of these vessels have one or two sweeping arms permanently installed. Annually operational trainings are executed. Booms and skimmers are stored and maintained in the main stockpile in Rotterdam. In the Waddenzee in the North and in the Scheldt estuary, equipment and vessels are on stand-by to clean up oil slicks.

When an incident involving hazardous and noxious substances (HNS) occurs on board a vessel, the essential first step in the response is to obtain information on the chemical properties of the substance and, consequently, the behaviour of the substance after release. As long as the HNS remain on board the vessel, it is the obligation of the ship-owner and crew to deal with the incident, assisted in most cases by the specialised crew of a salvage company. The authorities require that they are kept informed. If HNS are discharged into the sea, models are used to predict consequences of the behaviour such as gas plumes or dissolved substances in the water column. Packaged goods *e.g.* lost containers have to be detected by means of side scan sonar and identified and possibly removed.

Response to coastal pollution is also the responsibility of DG Water Management. Oil or other substances that are washed ashore will be collected and treated. Contractors will supply equipment and manpower to deal with the pollution.

15.7 INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Being a Contracting Party to the Bonn Agreement and a Member State of the European Union, the Netherlands maintains close cooperation with neighbouring states and has entered into bi- or multilateral operational plans. Recovery vessels, aircraft, equipment and personnel are all available to assist Bonn Agreement and EU member states. All equipment and ships can be placed at the disposal of another Contracting Party through a standard contract.