

Chapter 14: Ireland – National Organisation

14.1 INTRODUCTION

Ireland's Exclusive Economic Zone covers an area stretching to 200 miles off the west coast and to the median line between Ireland and the UK in the Irish Sea and Celtic Sea. The area covers approximately 200,000 sq. km. The Zone is a resource of high value in terms of ecological and socio-economic use. It is a very ecologically sensitive area with a wide variety of fauna and flora. It supports an active leisure industry with a large number of blue flag beaches and also commerce including fisheries, marine transport and natural resources.

14.2 RESPONSIBILITY FOR COUNTER-POLLUTION MEASURES AT SEA AND ON LAND

The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, through the Irish Coast Guard has the main responsibility for exercising Central Government's responsibility for counter pollution response at sea arising from spillage or loss of oil, chemical or dangerous substances which threatens pollution of the Irish coastline or related interests. The Irish Coast Guard is responsible for preparedness and response to marine pollution incidents within the Irish Exclusive Economic Zone, initiating, controlling and directing counter pollution operations. In addition, the Irish Coast Guard is responsible for supervising the planning and implementation by Local and Harbour authorities of arrangements for the protection of coastal amenity, fishery and wildlife areas, the removal of oil from the coastline, and in the event of major pollution incidents, the direction and co-ordination of the on-shore response.

14.3 GENERAL COUNTER-POLLUTION POLICY

At Sea: The primary response is by mechanical oil recovery and cargo transfer capabilities. The stated Irish Coast Guard policy on dispersants is that no dispersants will be used without the approval from the Minister through the Irish Coast Guard except in life threatening situations. The decision to use dispersants will be made on a case-by-case basis. It will be based on the real-time evaluation of the likely fate of the oil and on the possible impact of the dispersed oil.

Ashore: Physical recovery is based on mechanical and manual recovery undertaken with the aid of public works equipment.

14.4 PREPAREDNESS

The Coast Guard manages and operates three co-ordination/communication centres at MRCC Dublin, MRSC Malin Head and MRSC Valentia for marine emergency management. MRCC Dublin as well as providing marine search and rescue response services is co-located with the National Maritime Operations Centre and is the centre which co-ordinates the response to marine casualty incidents within the Irish Exclusive Economic Zone. SARMAP, OILMAP and CHEMAP computer modelling programs are available at the three centres as decision support tools. The Irish Coast Guard has contracted five civilian Sikorski S92A Search and Rescue helicopters deployed at four bases around the coast. These aircraft can be used for pollution aerial surveillance during daylight hours. Specialised aerial surveillance aircraft can be contracted at short notice internationally.

14.4.1 Contingency Planning

The Sea Pollution (Amendment) Act 1999 provides the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources with the legislative power to require harbours and ports, oil handling facilities, and maritime local authorities to submit oil spill contingency plans, based on realistic risk assessment, for approval by the

Irish Coast Guard. These contingency plans require risk assessment and a comprehensive breakdown of their risk management facilities - command and control, communications, manpower, equipment, training, and exercises. These contingency plans are part of the overall national plan, also required by the above Act, which is being prepared by the Irish Coast Guard.

14.4.2 Intervention

The Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport has nominated senior officers within the IRCG with warranted authority under national legislation to monitor/intervene in actual or threatened marine pollution incidents for the purpose of preventing, mitigating or eliminating danger from pollution or threat of pollution by oil, or by any substance other than oil. These warranted officers may issue directions to the owner, master, salvor or person in charge of a ship following a maritime casualty to take such actions and do such things as he considers necessary and reasonable for the purpose of preventing, mitigating or eliminating danger from pollution or threat of pollution.

14.4.3 Equipment

The Irish Coast Guard maintains national stockpiles of pollution response equipment at Killybegs, Castletownbere and Dublin. Regular exercises are carried out using these equipment stockpiles. The equipment as far as possible compliments the equipment held at the harbours and ports. This equipment is being added to each year. The equipment is divided into 30% offshore response and 70% on-shore response.

No country has sufficient State equipment to respond to every pollution emergency. However, there are commercial companies who will provide equipment on request and guarantee it will be on-site within 12/24 hours. The Irish Coast Guard has authority to contract such equipment as required.

14.5 ORGANISATION OF RESPONSE IN CASES OF POLLUTION

Overall command and responsibility for the direction of Counter Pollution operations will normally be exercised by the Director, Irish Coast Guard or in his absence by the A/Director Operations. Any oil spills in the marine environment must be reported to the Irish Coast Guard and are forwarded to NMOC/MRCC Dublin, which generates pollution reports and co-ordinates, the initial response. Coast Guard staff will be deployed on-scene as required to assess the severity of the incident and action required.

14.5.1 Strategy for combating at sea

Based on reports received from aerial surveillance, a plan for the combat operation is drafted and executed. The main strategy is to recover floating oil from the sea surface applying mechanical recovery systems.

14.5.2 Strategy for combating on-shore

Local Authorities will remove the oil from the shoreline under the direction of the Irish Coast Guard. Depending on the type of oil, the recovery will be executed by mechanical means, a combination of booming/ recovery systems and manpower.

14.6 DEPLOYMENT OF PERSONNEL AND EQUIPMENT

During a major oil or chemical/dangerous substance spill, the Director may deploy the Irish Coast Guard's Marine Pollution Response team (MPRT) as part of the Irish Coast Guard Incident Command System to assume local command of Counter Pollution operations. This team is made up of Irish Coast Guard and local and harbour/port authority personnel.

The Irish Coast Guard incident command system involves setting up a response centre near to the incident. This response centre consists of three units: at sea pollution response, shoreline pollution response and marine casualty/salvage response. The response centre and each of the units are under the direction and co-ordination of the Irish Coast Guard.

14.7 PERSONNEL TRAINING POLICY

The Irish Coast Guard has provided national pollution management courses for approximately 60 harbour/port and local authority personnel per year for the past number of years. These courses are based on the International Maritime Organization model courses.

14.8 RESEARCH AND TRAINING POLICY

Current research is concentrated on developing oil spill contingency plans and the development of the national equipment stockpile.