

2022 INTERSPILL CONFERENCE

EUROWA: a European mutual assistance system for oiled wildlife emergencies

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In an incident where hundreds or even thousands of marine animals may be affected by an oil spill, the effectiveness of an international oiled wildlife response operation may be crucial in conserving local or regional populations of animals, notably birds. Oil spills can cause significant long-term effects on populations, a risk which can only be countered by having immediate access to resources and work forces of professionally trained responders. This is the philosophy behind EUROWA, a regional European mutual assistance structure and capacity for wildlife emergencies. Rather than having to invest nationally into a preparedness level that can deal with large and complex spill scenarios, countries work together so that they can blend their national resources to create an *ad hoc* multi-national system that can deal with extreme and rare challenges. National investments can be targeted towards building core preparedness which can then be complemented by international expertise.

EUROWA is based on mutual trust amongst its NGO members, underpinned by the EUROWA Charter. Members cooperate on joint international response and collectively create tools, procedures, guidelines and training materials which improve the ability of the group to respond and to pass knowledge onto local responders. This cooperation provides a work force of trained and aligned responders, as well as an equipment stockpile, who can mobilise internationally for an emergency and work alongside local responders educated to the same standards. The

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EUROWA network is currently made up of 9 organisations in 9 European countries (see Figure 1), as well as a number of technical experts who form part of the pool of expertise. The Secretariat of the network is provided by the Sea Alarm Foundation.



1. Centre Vétérinaire de la Faune Sauvage et des Ecosystèmes (CVFSE), France
2. Estonian Fund for Nature (ELF), Estonia
3. Oiled Wildlife Response Network, Ireland
4. Pro Bird, Germany
5. SON-Respons, the Netherlands
6. Submon, Spain
7. Wildlife Rescue Centre Ostend, Belgium
8. WWF Finland, Finland
9. WWF Poland, Poland

Figure 1 – EUROWA Network Member Organisations

The spirit and will to cooperate amongst European oiled wildlife response organisations were born out of several major oil spills in European waters from 2002 to 2008 where expert groups mobilised themselves abroad to join the response effort, working side by side with responders from other countries and local NGO groups. The collaboration was successful, but the expert groups realised that they needed to be better prepared for these situations and started to meet regularly, to exchange methodologies and best practices. This created a sense of community and started the development of common technical principles for international oiled wildlife response.

These processes were boosted by EU-funded projects and from 2009 onwards these joint efforts started to materialise into concrete standards. EUROWA was created in 2015 with support provided by the European Union's Civil Protection Mechanism, which allowed European wildlife groups to establish themselves as what is now known as the EUROWA network – a formal mutual assistance system that European authorities can call on for assistance in case of an incident. A Standard Operating Procedure was developed for these groups to assist in an oiled wildlife incident in Europe, the EUROWA equipment stockpile was established, a portfolio of centralised

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training packages and a series of Handbooks and Manuals were developed. Manuals include the EUROWA joint protocol for oiled seabird rehabilitation, for wildlife responders and veterinarians.

The value of EUROWA as a European mutual assistance system was demonstrated in the Bow Jubail incident in the Netherlands in 2018, where EUROWA experts were heavily involved in designing and operating a temporary facility where over 500 oiled swans were successfully rehabilitated. EUROWA experts, together with responders from the Global Oiled Wildlife Response System (GOWRS), were able to collectively work with local Dutch oiled wildlife response groups (with many individuals that had also undergone EUROWA training) according to available international guidelines (EUROWA standards) and so could quickly develop an effective work force, provide an immediate structure for cooperation and decision-making and give leadership to volunteers.

The current round of EU Civil Protection funding is supporting the EUROWA-2 project (2021-22), coordinated by the Sea Alarm Foundation and assisted by project partners WWF Finland, Submon (Spain) and Royal NIOZ (the Netherlands). EUROWA-2 will deliver a range of products that will help coastal states to develop plans and preparedness systems for oil impacted wildlife. One of the project's main objectives is on working with governments and Regional Agreements to provide them with educational tools via workshops, exercises packages and guidelines to help ensure that wildlife incident scenarios are better understood and better prepared for as part of existing national and international response preparedness systems. The project will make concrete what integrated preparedness and management of wildlife response in European marine pollution incidents means, and how it can be implemented via planning, training and exercises.

The EUROWA network's expertise has traditionally been focussed on aquatic birds. Now for the first time the pool of experts will be expanded to include individuals specialised in the care and treatment of oiled sea turtles. New course modules will also be added to the EUROWA training portfolio, including curricula for sea turtle responders, oiled wildlife response managers and

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scientists involved in risk and impact assessment, charged with evaluating and advising authorities on the effects of marine pollution incidents on seabird populations. The activities and products expected from the EUROWA-2 project are shown in Figure 2.

EUROWA's vision is that European countries can deal effectively with emergencies that threaten and affect marine wildlife. This can be achieved when each country has developed and adopted an integrated marine wildlife response plan and invests in training and exercising the actors of that plan, in cooperation with neighbouring countries for purposes of cost-efficiency and mutual assistance. The EUROWA-2 project marks an important milestone in the development of oiled wildlife preparedness. It will boost the network's capability to provide mutual assistance in case of incidents through targeted new training modules and standards as well as increasing numbers of trained responders. The wildlife response groups and organisations who make up the EUROWA network will be supported through the project in deepening relationships with their national authorities and engaging them in the need to devote more attention to preparedness for wildlife emergencies.

Further reading/information

www.eurowa.eu

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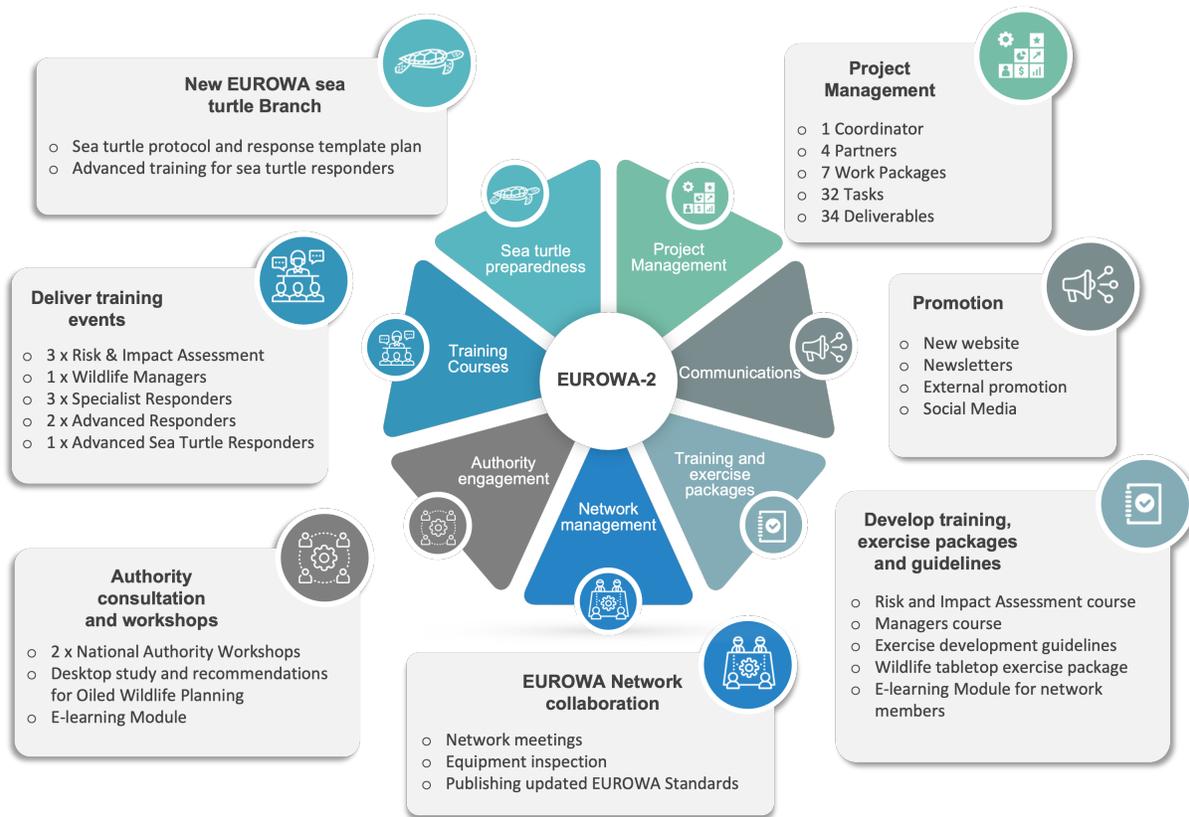


Figure 2 – Activities and deliveries of the EUROWA-2 project (2021-2022, funded by the European Union Civil Protection).