

Oiled wildlife preparedness and response

Details of Sea Alarm's SLA services to Oil Spill Response Members

Under the Service Level Agreement (SLA), a Member of Oil Spill Response Ltd (OSRL) has “access to expert oiled wildlife advice” via the Sea Alarm Foundation (see SLA Nov 2014, section 4.0.G). This is made possible under a contract signed in 2005 between OSRL and Sea Alarm.

Who is Sea Alarm?

Sea Alarm is a small non-governmental organisation with a 3-person team that works to improve global preparedness for and response to oiled wildlife incidents. Sea Alarm's personnel have a unique expertise that includes wildlife incident assessment and management, wildlife planning and preparedness development, response network management and alignment, best practice dissemination, design and development of training and exercises. Sea Alarm's expertise and services are widely known and respected in the community of oil spill responders, intergovernmental cooperation, industry and NGOs. Sea Alarm experts do not handle animals, but as advisers, help to create the environment and conditions that mobilised hands-on experts need to make a difference during an incident. An OSRL Member (“Client”) can contact Sea Alarm via the OSRL Duty Manager (DM).

What does Sea Alarm provide if activated for an oiled wildlife incident?

Under the SLA, Sea Alarm can be activated 24/7 as part of the wider OSRL mobilisation. Under the SLA the full time availability of 2 persons is guaranteed as follows:

1. Full time availability of one Sea Alarm expert for advice and potential mobilisation to the affected site.
2. Full time availability of one Sea Alarm expert for advice and response support. This expert will not be mobilised but provide advice and support from Sea Alarm office in Brussels or OSRL Premises.

Sea Alarm's requested involvement needs to be contracted via OSRL's DM. Depending on circumstances, availability and in respect of Sea Alarm's small size (total of 3 staff members), one additional Sea Alarm expert may be mobilised if needed and if available. This can be agreed for short periods of time, not to compromise Sea Alarm's ability to rotate staff on an incident.

If activated by Client, Sea Alarm staff will act according to the following guidelines:

- Provide management advice to the Client's Incident Management System via the designated Wildlife Branch Director and Wildlife Planning Coordinator (see below) in the position of Wildlife Adviser (the Client and the wildlife response as a whole are best served when Sea Alarm staff are able to act in an advisory role as opposed to a decision-making role within the IMS).
- Work closely with the client to determine the appropriate level of wildlife response and resource needs.
- Pre-assess capabilities and preparedness levels with local government and local responders, maximizing their involvement.
- Assist Client to integrate these local resources into the Incident Management System
- Notify members of its international oiled wildlife expertise network (none of whom are part of the SLA arrangements) to check availability for potential mobilisation, and put them in direct contact with OSRL's DM pending further decision making on level of mobilisation needed.
- Depending on the severity and availability of external response capacity, Sea Alarm staff can
 - provide distant management advice and coach local responders remotely (Level 1 response),
 - mobilise one member of staff as part of an assessment team of 2-4 experts to visit the site to determine which assistance is needed and at what scale (Level 2) and/or
 - Help to mobilise an appropriate team of hands-on response experts that works on site to assist local wildlife response (Level 3).
- Provide guidance to the OSRL DM to agree services and sign contracts between OSRL and external wildlife responders according to a mobilisation plan.
- After contract signature, coordinate the mobilisation of the international wildlife response team, and provide one Sea Alarm staff person to be part of any mobilised team.
- Together with OSRL, co-ordinate mobilisation of stocks of oiled wildlife response equipment from OSRL bases, plus an OSRL Response Specialist to be responsible for use and maintenance on site and to organise reordering and replenishment of consumables.
- Assist with the co-ordination of activities of the international wildlife response team on site and ensure the optimal integration of these activities into the overall oil spill response provided and the wildlife response that is directed and coordinated by local authorities and resources.
- Coordinate downscaling, demobilisation and debriefing towards the end of the response, and completing documentation, reporting and financial administration.

What does a mobilised team of international wildlife response experts do?

The principle aim of oiled wildlife response is to mitigate the effects of oil on wildlife (seabirds, marine mammals and sea turtles). While not a 'hands-on' wildlife organisation, Sea Alarm works in conjunction with an international network of expert groups to lead or support all elements of an oiled wildlife response in cooperation with local authorities, experts and response groups. This may include:

- Initial wildlife response assessment and incident response planning, including discussions with authorities about objectives (e.g. euthanasia, rehabilitation, priority rating for species), preferred strategies and methodologies, response limitations, and decision-making powers.
- Mobilisation of oiled wildlife response equipment (from OSRL or other).
- Hazing operations (techniques to deter wildlife away from oiled areas).
- Search and collection of oiled wildlife (alive and dead) on the beach or coastline.
- Setup of temporary rehabilitation facilities and/or transformation of existing rescue centres to handle large numbers of oiled animals.
- Transport of oiled wildlife to a forward holding centre or rehabilitation facility.
- Triage of animals for either long-term rehabilitation or euthanasia.
- Cleaning and rehabilitation.
- Euthanasia of wildlife as appropriate and authorised by regulators.
- Monitoring and release
- Scientific wildlife impact assessment
- Liaising and working with key representatives of the international compensation regimes (e.g. ITOPF, P&I Clubs, IOPC Fund) to maximise the probability of cost reimbursement.

Who makes up an international team?

Sea Alarm does not have a team of international experts on a retained contract basis, but maintains close contacts with leading wildlife response organisations worldwide. Emphasis will be given to available responders with the required expertise nearest to the incident location as a first wave. It is important to understand that participation of these specialist responders is currently on an ad hoc basis and their services are not guaranteed under the SLA. Subject to availability and requirement, OSRL will contract these specialists on behalf of a Member to deliver the response services needed.

Experts are experienced in different aspects of dealing with oiled wildlife, including managers/staff of permanent wildlife rescue centres (many routinely deal with oiled wildlife), specialists in search and collection of oiled wildlife, wildlife veterinarians, and scientists trained in impact assessment. Each organisation has its own specialism regarding species, and has in turn their own network of external experts who can be identified and mobilised.

What about local expertise and work forces?

No mobilised international experts group can successfully carry out an oiled wildlife response without the explicit assistance of local experts and work forces. Local authorities and NGOs therefore need to be approached by the Client as one of the highest priorities, ideally before international resources are arriving. Without the explicit approval from local wildlife authorities the international experts are not able to carry out any hands-on work. Without the availability of local work forces that can be dedicated to the wildlife response the international experts will not be able to make a difference at any scale.

Sea Alarm develops Country Wildlife Response Profiles, which summarise information to support a national wildlife response. Through this process, Sea Alarm aims to identify any local wildlife responders or scientists who could play a role in an oiled wildlife incident, including key persons from scientific groups, institutes or NGOs with local up to date knowledge on the species and habitats at risk from an oil spill. Sea Alarm would routinely try to contact these persons in the initial stages of an incident. Country Profiles are published at <http://www.sea-alarm.org>.

Client in-country support for mobilised international resources

As is the case for an OSRL mobilisation, Sea Alarm and its international wildlife response team can only be effective if they are provided with key administrative, logistics and financial support from the client to assist smooth running of oiled wildlife operations on site. This includes safety and personal well being for all members of the team.

What does Client need to provide as part of the IMS to integrate international resources?

If not determined by local or national authorities, the Client should seek to assign its own personnel in key decision-making positions for oiled wildlife response. The role of Wildlife Branch Director (who oversees the whole wildlife response and takes overall decision-making responsibility) and the role of Wildlife Planning Coordinator (who acts as a liaison for OSRL's DM and Sea Alarm's adviser in the notification and mobilisation of the response) are both best covered locally, by the Client or other Responsible Party.



Client's Incident Management System should be prepared to accommodate the specific logistic and financial requirements for the full range of wildlife response requirements, which should mean 3-5 dedicated personnel that are made available to Client's Wildlife Branch Director before the arrival of the international resources.

Wildlife response planning

The best guarantee for a fast and effective wildlife response mobilisation is provided by a pre-spill developed wildlife response plan. Such a plan is best integrated with the overall oil spill response plan that a client has in place for its oil exploration, production or transportation activities in a country or area. The wildlife response plan specifies alerting and mobilisation procedure and indicates which local and international resources are identified for a tiered response, so that trained expertise is more readily available. A wildlife response plan has both generic and specific elements and is best based on internationally agreed principles and guidelines (e.g. the 2015 IPIECA-OGP Oiled Wildlife Response Preparedness Good Practice Guidelines, see [http://oilspillresponseproject.org/sites/default/files/uploads/Wildlife response preparedness.pdf](http://oilspillresponseproject.org/sites/default/files/uploads/Wildlife%20response%20preparedness.pdf)). Sea Alarm can assist a client with developing an integrated oiled wildlife response plan and procedures that enable swift mobilisation and optimal use of resources based on tiered response and good practices. These services are not included under the SLA but must be arranged for via separate contracting.

Responding without a pre-spill plan in place

A response without the availability of a pre-spill agreed plan typically will have a large potential for delays and inefficiency due to slow contracting, on-site negotiations, delayed arrivals of key expertise and/or equipment, and the potential counterproductive interference of local groups, inexperienced individuals, opinion leaders and/or media. These complications could mean that the short windows of opportunity to mitigate the impacts of an oil spill on marine wildlife are missed.

Training and exercises

Spill response managers who have to manage the integration of an oiled wildlife response into the overall oil spill response require a minimum basic knowledge of what a wildlife response is and what kind of support and management it requires from an Incident Management System. The functions of Wildlife Branch Director and Wildlife Planning Coordinator need competent personnel who have received dedicated standard training. Together with expert organisations in its network, Sea Alarm offers various training courses for industry personnel. Courses are also best offered pre-spill to local wildlife response personnel (e.g. local wildlife groups, scientists or wildlife authority personnel identified to play a role in the tiered response) including theoretical and practical modules. Courses are tailor-made with regard to the requirements of the region and/or the agreed response plan and could last from 0.5 to several days, depending on the level of knowledge of participants and the level of training required. Sea Alarm also offers assistance with the design and implementation of oil spill exercises in which a wildlife component needs to be integrated. Multi-year training and exercise programmes to build reliable tiered response capabilities are strongly recommended to go hand in hand with the development of an oiled wildlife response plan ([http://oilspillresponseproject.org/sites/default/files/uploads/Wildlife response preparedness.pdf](http://oilspillresponseproject.org/sites/default/files/uploads/Wildlife%20response%20preparedness.pdf)).

For further information, contact:

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| Sea Alarm Foundation Rue du Cyprès 7-B10, 1000 Brussels, Belgium Tel +32(0)22788744 | Hugo Nijkamp nijkamp@sea-alarm.org Mob +32(0)494900012 | Saskia Sessions saskia@sea-alarm.org Mob +32(0)499624772 | Paul Kelway pkelway@sea-alarm.org Mob +32(0)497410368 |
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