

North Sea Commission General Assembly 2003
Cuxhaven, Niedersachsen, Germany

NSC ENVIRONMENT STUDY TOUR
and WORKSHOP SESSION

Thursday 19 June, 2003

The study tour consisted of a visit to the Radar Tower in Cuxhaven and an exercise with the oil recovery ship MS Knechtsand.

At the tower the newly formed German Central Command for Maritime Emergencies (Havariekommando) was presented by Head of Unit Henning Voss. He gave a background to the international co-operation and agreements, such as the Bonn Agreement, between countries and regions to prevent accidents at sea and minimise their consequences, as well as details about the German system to deal with marine disasters and pollution control. (Information about the Bonn Agreement is available at: <http://www.bonnagreement.org/>)

The Federal Republic of Germany and the five coastal states have in the past twenty years done research, development and procurements in this field for more than 200 million €. Beneath the installation of a sophisticated vessel traffic system to assist the masters of the vessels and to avoid dangerous traffic situation, a pilot system for tankers and all vessels with dangerous goods in bulk has been established.

Beside the general pollution control policy, the main strategy of oil spill response of the Federal Republic of Germany and the five coastal states (Bundesländer) is based on four basic principles. These are: Aerial Surveillance, response vessels for high sea operations, response vessels for near shore operations, Oil response equipment for near shore and onshore operations. 20 response vessels in total.

The workshop on board m/s Knechtsand:

At the end of the study tour there was a workshop to allow exchange of experience and views between the participants and the hosts. This was facilitated by Per Hörberg, Region Västra Götaland, Sweden, co-ordinator of the NSC Environment Group. For this occasion the participants had been invited to consider the following questions in advance:

- What is the situation in your home region, when it comes to preventing oil pollution?
- How is your regional authority involved?
- How are other stakeholders involved; ports, local authorities, shipping industry, tourism industry, etc?
- What (if anything) is needed to improve the prevention of oil pollution at sea in your region?
- What (if anything) is needed to improve the prevention of pollution from shipping in general in your region?
- Would you be interested in North Sea co-operation projects in this field?

The tour and workshops included participants from regions in Norway, Scotland, The Netherlands, Germany and Sweden as well as the executive secretary of the Baltic Sea Commission.

One common observation was that, with the exception of the Bundesländer in Germany, none of the NSC member regions have the main responsibility neither for preventing maritime accidents nor for cleaning up after them. These are generally handled by the national level and the local level. On the other hand, it could easily be claimed that all the NSC member regions have a strong interest in preventing such pollution, since they are all more or less responsible for regional development.

The discussion continued to how stricter regulation of maritime safety could be achieved. The difficulty and slowness of international regulation through the IMO (International Maritime Organisation) was set against the limited scope of EU action. There was uncertainty as to what waters could actually be covered by EU regulation, the national waters or the entire Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Generally there was some expectations that the new European Agency for Maritime Safety could promote stronger action, both in Europe and globally.

In connection with this discussion it was mentioned that the international conventions and political fora of OSPAR and HELCOM have great importance for the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, respectively. The meeting of the OSPAR/HELCOM ministers in Bremen June 23-17 would be an opportunity to explore whether stringent safety measures proposed for the Baltic Sea could also be relevant and desirable to adopt for the North Sea.*
(Information about OSPAR is available at: <http://www.ospar.org/eng/html/welcome.html>)

It was pointed out that one should not put to faith only in "technical" solutions like double hulls, but also emphasize factors like good training of crews, good maintenance of ships, good port state control and the designation of safe refuge for ships in distress.

Project proposal:

A proposal for an Interreg project, Safety at Sea, S@S, was presented by Rogaland, Norway. It would aim to deal with issues like collecting best practice, sea transport of hazardous goods, passenger safety (a sometimes neglected field), coastal management and preventive action – all with a focus on the responsibility of the regions. The initiative has so far had positive response from Flanders, Denmark and the UK.

One of the reasons for this Norwegian initiative is the expected increase in transports of oil, radioactive waste and other hazardous goods along the coast of Norway to and from harbours in northern Russia.

* Note: as of June 24th 2003, the CPMR is official observer to OSPAR and is to be represented at OSPAR meetings by representatives from the NSC. However, for practical reasons it turned out to be impossible for any representative to attend the OSPAR meeting in Bremen June 23-27. Information about the outcomes of this OSPAR meeting will be circulated to the NSC Environment Group in due course.

Notes:

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