



Press Release

A regional response for preparedness and prevention against maritime pollution in the Western Indian Ocean

A regional technical committee focused on maritime pollution risks will soon be established. The objective is to update the regional contingency plan and strengthen the capacities of the Western Indian Ocean countries. This was one of the main outcomes of the Regional Consultation Workshop held by videoconference on 5 May 2021 together with eleven States and six organisations. This multi-sectoral consultation was organised by the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) through the EU-funded MASE¹ programme, in collaboration with the signatory countries of the MASE² Agreements.

The technical committee will be comprised of various stakeholders from States and organisations in the region. For instance, it could include representatives of countries in charge of the environment, navigation, defence and maritime affairs, or fisheries. Regional and international organisations, including the IOC, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the Nairobi Convention will also be engaged.

The regional meeting, which aroused great interest among the main stakeholders, provided an opportunity to learn about the levels of preparedness and prevention of countries to deal with this maritime threat.

This information sharing exercise provides a basis for updating the regional oil spill contingency plan adopted in 2011 by nine countries in this zone, and for setting up a common roadmap. This roadmap will ensure better coordination between national plans and the regional contingency plan with the involvement of the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC), the Regional Coordination Operations Centre (RCOC) and the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA). It will eventually lead to the establishment of a permanent risk assessment procedure in the region for effective targeted action.

This action will be conducted in line with the regulations of the International Maritime Organisation and the relevant protocols of the Nairobi Convention. Above all, it will mark the beginning of a decisive stage in the operationalisation of the MASE Agreements.

¹ Regional Maritime Security programme: funded by the European Union to the tune of €42 million since 2012, the MASE programme is implemented by IGAD, COMESA, EAC and IOC. The IOC is responsible for establishing a maritime security architecture based on information exchange and coordination of joint operations at sea

² Signed in 2018 by Comores, Djibouti, France, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles





Addressing capacity gaps through cooperation

With the increased commercial maritime traffic in the area, maritime pollution has become a major economic and environmental security issue. The recent grounding of the Japanese bulk carrier *Wakashio* on the South East coast of Mauritius, which resulted in a major oil spill, is an emblematic example. This ecological disaster confirmed the vulnerability of the region to the risks of maritime pollution. The scale of the pollution also revealed the limited capacities of States and the shortcomings of existing protocols, particularly at regional level. Indeed, collective action is crucial. *"It is essential for our States to have the necessary prevention means against the risks of pollution and the coordinated intervention capacity. This is the purpose of the Maritime Security Architecture that we are currently developing for the Western Indian Ocean Basin region,"* explained Prof. Vêlayoudom Marimoutou, Secretary General of the IOC.

The Maritime Security Architecture developed under the MASE programme, which is based on the two regional centres, makes provision for a counter pollution response at sea. However, as pointed out by Mr Ravishankar Sonea, Permanent Secretary of the Prime Minister Office of the Republic of Mauritius and Chairman of the Steering Committee of the two MASE Agreements, *"the establishment of a regional mechanism for MARPOL must be done in collaboration with the neighbouring States and the technical support of the IMO and the Nairobi Convention for better coordination and efficiency"*.

The European Union, for instance, supports the initiative of the IOC and the countries of the region to adopt shared mechanisms for preventing and responding to marine pollution. Mr Vincent Degert, Ambassador of the European Union, stresses the importance of capacity building through tabletop exercises with regional actors and the need for *"countries to have a minimum capacity to respond to an incident with appropriate equipment, sufficient logistics and competent and trained operators, supported by tried and tested plans."* In addition, the EU is providing additional support to the maritime security mechanism through the Regional Ports Security and Safety of Navigation programme.

Towards an enhanced role of the Regional Centres

Since the signing of the MASE agreements in 2018, several achievements can be noted within the RMIFC and the RCOC. Several table-top exercises and two preventive operations have been conducted to improve coordination and interoperability between the regional and national centres. In this context, a first MARPOL exercise was organised in Madagascar in October 2019, which enabled the identification of capacity gaps. Thus, in the regional response recommended in the MARPOL framework, the RMIFC and the RCOC are called upon to play a leading role in close collaboration with specialised regional centres such as the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) in South Africa, among others.



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The regional meeting was attended by over 100 participants from different ministries and institutions of the seven MASE Agreement countries, as well as from Mozambique, Somalia, South Africa and Tanzania. Representatives of the RMIFC and RCOC, the Nairobi Convention Secretariat, IMO, the European Union Delegation in Mauritius, the European Naval Forces (EU NAVFOR Atalanta), the European Mission in Somalia (EU CAPSOM) and the IOC also took part in this first thematic regional workshop.

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