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PRESS RELEASE

EMSA's MSS Now Operating Around the Clock

From 1st September 2009, the European Maritime Safety Agency's Maritime Support Services (MSS) centre has its operators in place around the clock, 365 days per year, at its new, state-of-the-art monitoring centre in Lisbon. This is a significant step in ensuring that EU Member States have the best possible access to EU ship information and marine pollution monitoring services and emergency response capabilities at all times. On a daily basis, the MSS monitors the SafeSeaNet vessel traffic monitoring system, the EU Long Range identification and Tracking (LRIT) Centre, the CleanSeaNet satellite based pollution monitoring system and multiple sources of information relating to emergencies. It will be the first point of contact for mobilising EU pollution response capacities.

"The new monitoring centre is a major step forward in the improvement of EU vessel traffic and emergency monitoring capabilities," said EMSA Executive Director, Willem de Ruiter. "Having operators physically monitoring each of the systems at all times, night and day, gives us the ability to react very quickly to system problems and emergencies. This is very important to our goal of providing EU Member States with the best possible ship information and marine pollution monitoring services. This, in turn, will contribute to the goal of having consistent maritime monitoring services all around the EU coastline."

Background

The new monitoring centre in Lisbon has been set up and operators have been recruited to enable around the clock operations. It monitors the SafeSeaNet and CleanSeaNet systems, the EU LRIT Data Centre and the emergency system for mobilising pollution response actions. Its main functions are: to act as a permanent helpdesk for users of the system (coastguards, port authorities, etc.); to monitor the availability and performance continuity of the systems; to ensure that the data flow is not interrupted; to verify the quality of the data provided and; to assist Member States in maritime emergencies as and when required. Should significant oil spills occur, it will be the first point of contact to trigger the launch of the EMSA contracted oil pollution response vessel service.

The *SafeSeaNet* system provides an up-to-date picture of vessel traffic (positions, cargoes and incidents) in and around EU waters by receiving information from various data sources and making it available to authorised users in Member States. The information comes from Automatic Identification Systems (AIS), Mandatory Reporting Systems (MRS) and from other maritime information systems operated by EU Member States (plus Norway and Iceland).

The *EU LRIT Data Centre* is the largest of a global network of LRIT data centres which will enable the identification and positioning of all passenger ships, cargo ships of over 300 gross tonnage and mobile offshore drilling units. The system is based on automatically transmitted signals every six hours (via satellite) from vessels all around the globe.

The *CleanSeaNet* system is a European operational system for satellite detection of oil slicks. The service began operating in April 2007 and provides analysed images from ENVISAT and RADARSAT 1 and 2 satellites. It spots hundreds of spills every year, many of which are confirmed by patrol aircraft and vessels from EU Member States. The combination of pollution location by CleanSeaNet and ship identification and positioning information from SafeSeaNet facilitates the identification and pursuit of polluters by the national authorities as necessary.

Sixteen EMSA-contracted oil pollution response vessels are stationed in many different positions around the EU coastline. They are normal commercial vessels which carry out day-to-day operations in a restricted area (eg bunker tankers), which can be rapidly transformed into pollution response vessels capable of cleaning up substantial quantities of oil at short notice. The service can also provide pollution response expertise at the request of Member states.

The EMSA MSS also continually monitors emergency information from many different sources, in order to facilitate rapid response times by coastguards and other competent authorities.

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