



Executive Summary and Evaluation

Maritime Emergency Response Centre Unit

(MERCU)

State of Kuwait, Kingdom of Bahrain, Sultanate of Oman, United Arab Emirates
and Islamic Republic of Iran

Marine Emergency Mutual Aid Centre

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Introduction:

The establishment of the *Maritime* Emergency Response and Salvage Coordination Unit (MERCU) tremendously raises vigilance, preparedness response in the ROPME Sea Area, which risk exposure is at serious to unacceptable level.

The organization of Maritime Emergency Response Centers (MERCU) is fully integrated into the existing structures and procedures for regional co-operation on the protection of the marine environment from pollution.

MERCU's operational concept implements the precautionary approach, aiming at the avoidance of marine environmental pollution, destruction of properties and loss of lives in the first place. Its operations are proactive and strengthen national and regional endeavours to prevent, reduce and combat pollution by oil and other harmful substances in case of emergencies.

The pollution response and emergency towing activities are complemented by search and rescue (SAR) for good reasons. Firstly, the standing-by of SAR in case of incidents is part of the precautionary approach, and secondly, due to the unacceptable high number of lives lost at sea the improvement of SAR endeavours is high on the agenda of the RSA Member States and part of the Master Plan's Risk Reduction Package.

The Steering Committee to implement and enforce MERCU's operational concept consists of the MEMAC Director or his nominee(s), the Member States Pollution Response Officers and the Heads of the Emergency Response Centers and as deemed appropriate.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The MERCU project was adopted at the 15th ROPME council meeting in January 2011 held in Jeddah - Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which stated that "the establishment of the maritime emergency response centers (MERC), (Kuwait, Bahrain, bandar Abbass and Fujairah) in Co-operation and consultation with the host States, with taking into consideration the establishment of another centre in the Sultanate of Oman Coast" and therefore four Emergency and Response Stations in State Of Kuwait, Kingdom Of Bahrain, IR.IRAN (Bandar Abbas) and United Arab Emirates (Fujairah) was approved to serve the MERCU project.

MEMAC was then instructed to conduct a study in order to evaluate the Capabilities and infrastructure at these four locations in terms of Emergency response capabilities and the political will of the concern State to host this Centre and to fully cooperate for effective implementation of MERCU.

MEMAC Nominate Experts within the Region to conduct this evaluation Study. A Questionnaire was prepared by the Experts in co-ordination with MEMAC and circulated to the concern Member States in August 2011, followed by the Visit Schedule.

MEMAC Experts commenced the evaluation visit during the period 2nd – 3rd October 2011 State of Kuwait, 6th – 7th October S. Oman, 9th – 10th October UAE and 12th - 13th K. Bahrain and due visa issuance the visit to IR. Iran was not conducted at the desire time. Accordingly a visit to the IR. Iran arranged and carried out during the period of 13th – 15th November 2011.

State of Kuwait:

A meeting was hosted by Kuwait Environment Public Authority (KEPA) the Focal Point and relevant Stakeholders on the 2nd of October 2011 as planned by KEPA. However the most important government authority (Marine Administration) the Marine Affairs Department - Ministry of Communication did not attend despite of the invitation.

Conclusion:

- Since the approval of MERCU project by ROPME council it is appears that the focal Point did not take the necessary measures in order to disseminate the information regarding MERCU to the different concern Authorities for Sharing their views and to obtain Government Approvals for internal arrangement within the country in order to facilitate the necessary requirement for hosting MERCU
- As per the meeting discussions the questionnaire by the Focal Point (KEPA) to the Relevant Stakeholders was not distributed, therefore as result the attendees were not aware of MERCU project.
- Although the designation of the State of Kuwait to host MERCU was thoroughly discussed in the past few years during MERCU study and the concern authorities, i.e. Focal Point was fully involved and aware of the project, It is the Opinion of MEMAC Experts that the State of Kuwait Level of readiness and commitment for Implementing this Highly important Project is at a very low level and therefore the state of Kuwait may not be an ideal Location for hosting the MERCU.

Recommendation:

- The commitment and dedication from State of Kuwait in order to host the MERCU is highly required otherwise MEMAC may wish to consider the reallocation of MERCU.
- It is apparent that the existing MEMAC communication system with only one Focal Point in the Member State creates difficulties and undue delays for effective implementations for the Marine Projects.

Sultanate of Oman

A meeting was hosted by Ministry Environment and Climate Affairs (MECA) the Focal Point and relevant Stakeholders on the 5nd of October 2011 as planned by MECA. according to the schedule sent to the Focal point for having two days of meeting, There was no meeting on Thursday, since it is not a working days in S. Oman.

Conclusion:

Although S. Oman is not among the approved MERCU four stations, MEMAC experts are of the opinion that S. Oman are very well organized and prepared to be nominated and host the fifth MERCU.

Recommendation:

Taken into account the length of S. Oman's Coast and future development in Doqm port, MEMAC Experts are of the Opinion that S. Oman can be considered to host the fifth MERCU at Doqm port in order to cover whole RSA.

United Arab Emirates:

A meeting was hosted by Ministry of Environment & Water (ME&W) the Focal Point and relevant Stakeholders on the 9nd of October 2011 at Fujairah Municipality Building.

Conclusion:

- There is willingness within UAE focal Point to fully support the MERCU Project.

- Taken into account the strategic Location of Fujairah Port and the availability of the infrastructure, Marine Equipment and facilities, Fujairah port can serve MERCU project in the best possible manner.
- The Surveillance and monitoring capabilities around UAE ports must be improved comprehensively during the implementation of the MERCU project.
- It was noticed that the Oil Sector was not present in meeting despite of their important Role and Responsibly during emergency.

Recommendation:

- The National Oil Spill contingency must be developed as early as possible.

Kingdom of Bahrain

A meeting was hosted by Public Commission for the protection of Marine Resources, Environment and wildlife the Focal Point and relevant Stakeholders on the 13th of October 2011. However the most important government authority (Marine Administration) Department of the General Organization of Ports did not attend despite of the invitation.

Conclusion:

- There is willingness within Kingdom of Bahrain Focal Point to fully support the MERCU Project.

Recommendation:

K. Bahrain Focal Point needs to obtain Government approvals to host the MERCU Project.

Islamic Republic of Iran:

A meeting was hosted by Department of Environment and Ports & Maritime Organization in Bandar Abbas on the 13 - 15 of November 2011.

The meeting was held in the port authority building of Shahid Rajaie Port where the VTS and MRCC are also located.

MEMAC Team remained 3 days in Bandar Abbas. They visited the VTS, MRCC, Oil Spill Stockpile and Department of Environment Laboratories in Bandar Abbas and Hormuz Island.

The trip to Hormuz Island was on board one the SAR boats.

Conclusion:

- There is willingness within Islamic Republic of Iran’s Focal Point to fully support the MERCU Project.
- During the meeting, the IR. Iran National Focal Point representatives declared that the PMO is the Focal Point for MERCU project.
- Port & Maritime Organization has an excellent organization and set such as functional MRCC and VTS skilled manpower. Therefore, Bandar Abbas is the right place to Host MERCU.

Recommendation:

For smooth operations and easy access for personnel and equipment, MEMAC may need to further discuss with the IR Iran to locate the MERCU close to Kish or Qeshm Island.
