

COUNCIL
108th session
Agenda item 15(a)

C 108/15(a)/3
21 May 2012
Original: ENGLISH

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

(a) Relations with the United Nations and the specialized agencies

Note by the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

Executive summary: This document informs the Council of the current financial situation of the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC)

Strategic direction: 7

High-level action: 7.2.3

Planned output: 7.2.3.2

Action to be taken: Paragraph 8

Related documents: None

Background

1 The Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC) was established in 1976 as a United Nations inter-agency project between the UNEP Secretariat for the Barcelona Convention, based in Athens, Greece, and IMO (i.e. the two organizations responsible for the administration of the Centre), through a resolution on the establishment of a Regional Oil Combating Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (ROCC) adopted by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention. To date, there are 22 Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention whilst the name of the Centre changed from ROCC to REMPEC in 1989 when the mandate of the Centre was extended to pollution from hazardous noxious substances and to the field of prevention of pollution from ships in 2002.

2 In this context, all the funding for the operation of the Centre and the delivery of its programme of work approved by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention is provided through the Mediterranean Trust Fund (MTF), which supports the Action Plan for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea (Mediterranean Action Plan – MAP). Contributions to the MTF are made annually by the Contracting Parties. UNEP is the custodian of and administers the MTF. Based on a project document signed between UNEP and IMO, the Organization receives advance payments from the MTF on a quarterly basis for the Centre's operational and capacity-building expenditure. In view of the mandate of the Centre, the Organization has made extensive use of the Centre in order to deliver its own Integrated

Technical Co-operation Programme in the Mediterranean, including activities financed through the Technical Co-operation Fund (TC Fund) and donors (e.g. the SAFEMED projects funded by the European Commission). All activities undertaken by REMPEC are regularly reported to the MEPC and the TCC. This co-operation has been mutually beneficial, and the activities financed by IMO in recent years have substantially contributed to the programme of work of the Centre.

3 IMO's responsibility for the administration of the Centre also signifies that REMPEC's staff members are recruited and contracted through IMO for a fixed-term period and subject to two-year renewals to coincide with the two-year cycle approval of the MAP work programme and budget by the Contracting Parties.

Current financial status and REMPEC staff

4 The project documents have traditionally been biennial, with the last one covering the period 2010-2011, during which UNEP discovered that a significant shortfall existed in the MAP funding. Consequently, the MAP components were immediately requested to cut expenditure as much as possible and, for the 2012-2013 biennia, to cut their budgets and work programmes by approximately 25 per cent. The Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention approved the budget and work programme for 2012-2013 in a meeting held in Paris, France in February 2012, pledging their corresponding MTF contributions. Pending that approval, UNEP had authorized an interim project document for REMPEC covering the period from January to March 2012.

5 UNEP is now limiting the funds that can be made available to REMPEC to the rate of collection of contributions to the MTF from the Contracting Parties. This has created a considerable cash-flow problem with respect to the continued funding and renewal of the contracts of the REMPEC staff. The most recent information in hand is that UNEP has only received 45 per cent of the funding agreed by the Contracting Parties for 2012 and, accordingly, can only authorize expenditure up to that level. As a consequence, funding for the REMPEC staff is presently guaranteed only towards the end of June 2012. While the collection rate from the Contracting Parties will vary from month to month, the Centre's costs funded through the MTF are largely staff-related and, therefore, offer little flexibility, giving the Organization and our staff at REMPEC the prospect of continuing uncertainty for the foreseeable future, and putting the very existence of the Centre at risk.

6 While all the funds due to the MTF for the current biennium are expected to be delivered eventually, in accordance with the commitments by the Contracting Parties, the flow/timing of such payments is unknown, thus making the issue at stake, in the first instance, a cash-flow problem. This situation is naturally unsatisfactory for the REMPEC staff and the continued uncertainty over the funding of staff contracts is not conducive to a productive and motivated workforce, and can only affect negatively the delivery of the Centre's work programme, including the many activities that are not funded by the MTF but by IMO and donors – activities that, nevertheless, contribute to the delivery of the Organization's goals in the region. Finally, the present situation is also administratively burdensome for IMO as it would be difficult to renew contracts on anything more favourable than a monthly basis until at least the end of June 2012.

Action taken so far

7 The Secretary-General, who is responsible for the administration of the Centre, is concerned with this difficult situation and has already expressed his concern to the Executive Director of UNEP and to the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, through the relevant Permanent Representatives to IMO, while at the same time reminding them of their obligations to pay their annual MTF contributions.

Action requested of the Council

8 The Council is invited to consider the information provided in this document and take action as it may deem appropriate.
