



FOLKETINGET
STATSREVISORERNE



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The Danish Ministry of Defence's marine pollution preparedness and response to oil and chemical spills in Danish waters

1. Introduction and conclusion

1.1. Purpose and conclusion

1. This report addresses whether the marine pollution preparedness and response to oil and chemical spills in Danish coastal waters under the Ministry of Defence is adequate. The report answers the following questions:

- Is the level of the Danish Ministry of Defence's marine pollution preparedness and response adequate for dealing with all the sources of pollution required by law?
- Is the capacity of the Danish Ministry of Defence's marine pollution preparedness and response adequate to deal with incidents of pollution?
- Is the level of capacity of the Danish Ministry of Defence's marine pollution preparedness and response adequate to deal with incidents of pollution in due time?

According to DanPilot, the Danish waters are among the world's most densely navigated and characterized by narrow passages and low water depths. According to DanPilot, approx. 70,000 ships pass through the Great Belt and The Sound yearly. Large cargo ships and oil tankers sailing through Danish waters risk colliding with other ships or run aground.

If a collision or grounding rips a hole in a ship's tanks, oil and chemicals can spill into the sea. Oil and chemical spills must be dealt with promptly as they may otherwise have serious consequences for animals and plants, particularly if the spill drifts to the coasts. It can take nature decades to degrade pollution that has not been dealt with effectively. It is, therefore, crucial that the marine pollution preparedness and response under the Ministry of Defence is effective.

2. In its National Risk Profile report from 2022, the Danish Emergency Management Agency assessed that the Danish society should be particularly focused on the risk of maritime incidents. So far, the number of accidents involving oil and chemical pollution in Danish waters has been relatively limited. However, the Danish Emergency Management Agency's assessment indicates an increased risk of marine pollution. The reason is an increase in shipping and the expectation that ships will be bigger in future.

In October 2023, a ferry ran aground off southeastern Sweden and leaked large amounts of oil into the sea. In 2023, the Swedish Coastal Guard expressed concern about an increased risk of oil spills due to the increasing number of old Russian cargo ships transporting oil through the Baltic Sea daily.

DanPilot

DanPilot is an independent public enterprise responsible for guiding vessels safely through Danish waters.

National Risk Profile

The purpose of this report that is published every year is to create awareness among the responsible authorities of major threats to the Danish society.

The biggest oil spill in Denmark occurred in 2001 when an oil tanker and a cargo ship collided and leaked 2,000 tons of oil into the Baltic Sea.

The oil drifted into *Grønsund*, a strait off the island of Falster. It was estimated that close to 20,000 birds died as a consequence of the pollution, and it took eight years to restore the affected areas.



Dead birds in the Grønsund strait after the oil spillage in 2001.

Photo: Lars Gejl/
Ritzau Scanpix

Marine Environmental Protection Act

This act dates back to 1980 but has since been amended. The objective of the act is to prevent and reduce pollution of the sea from ships and oil rigs. The act includes regulations on responses to oil and chemical spillage from ships.

Helsinki Convention and HELCOM

The objective of the Helsinki Convention from 1974 is to protect the Baltic Sea from all sources of pollution. HELCOM is an intergovernmental organisation bridging policy and science on matters related to the environment of the Baltic Sea. HELCOM also makes recommendations to the member countries on their pollution preparedness and response.

3. The Ministry of Defence is responsible for combatting oil and chemical spill in Danish waters. The ministry's legal obligation arises from the Danish Marine Environment Act and the Helsinki Convention. The Ministry of Defence has four ships for containing and collecting spillage. The four environment ships were transferred to the Ministry of Defence from the Ministry of Environment in 1996, and the response task was transferred gradually up to the year 2000. The ships were deemed outdated by the Ministry of Defence in 1996.

Rigsrevisionen criticized the Ministry of Defence's marine environment preparedness and response in its *Report on the audit of the Danish public accounts for 2016*. In response to the issues raised in the report, the minister of defence informed Rigsrevisionen that the ministry was procuring new ships for its marine pollution preparedness and response for delivery in 2021. Following the conclusion of the Danish Defence A-agreement for 2018-2023 in January 2018, the minister of defence withdrew the tender for new anti-pollution ships. The Ministry of Defence has informed Rigsrevisionen that the decision to withdraw the tender was made by the signatory parties to the defence agreement.

Rigsrevisionen took the initiative to do the study in February 2023.



Main conclusion

The Ministry of Defence's marine pollution preparedness and response to deal with oil and chemical spill in the sea is very unsatisfactory. The capacity of preparedness is insufficient and does not meet the requirements of relevant legislation. Therefore, the ministry is not fully capable of protecting the sea and the coasts from the impact of pollution.

The level of the Ministry of Defence's marine pollution preparedness and response is inadequate for dealing with the sources of pollution prescribed by law

The ministry's current four ships cannot handle chemicals or common types of oil that emit toxic gases. The reason is that the ships' interior fittings are unsealed and do not protect the crew against harmful and inflammable gases. Thus, the ministry is not meeting its commitments under the Marine Protection Act and the Helsinki Convention.

The Ministry of Defence's marine pollution preparedness and response does not have the necessary capacity to deal with incidents of pollution

The Ministry of Defence assesses that the preparedness has the required capacity when all four pollution response ships are available. However, the degree to which the ships are under repair due to defects and breakdowns means that they cannot contribute fully to combatting marine pollution incidents. From 2018 up to and including June 2023, the overall capacity of the preparedness was not up to standard 43 % of the time. Thus, the ministry is not in compliance with the requirement of the Helsinki Convention according to which the marine pollution preparedness and response of the contracting parties must have the capability to respond effectively to incidents of pollution. With an inadequate preparedness and response, the ministry is unable to implement the HELCOM's recommendation on being capable of dealing with oil spills of up to 5,000 tons.

The level of capacity of the Ministry of Defence's marine pollution preparedness and response is inadequate to deal with pollution in due time

The ships did not leave harbour in accordance with the objective set by the Ministry of Defence and HELCOM's recommendation fourteen times out of the 49, the preparedness was activated during the period examined. According to the ministry's calculations, the ships can only reach approx. one quarter of the Danish waters within a response time of eight hours, which is not in accordance with HELCOM's recommended timeframe for responding to incidents of pollution.

The Ministry of Defence expects delivery of the first of the new anti-pollution ships in 2029. The new ships will be included in the preparedness in the 2030ies. This means that the challenges facing the marine pollution preparedness and response will be resolved with a delay of 10 to 20 years compared to plan and potentially 40 years after the ministry concluded that the current ships in service were outdated.