

Abstract ID: 2017 - 290**Sharing Good Practice Throughout the Responder Community: Ten Years of the
Global Response Network**

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Abstract

The Global Response Network (GRN) is a collaboration of industry funded Oil Spill Response Organisations (OSROs) created to share good practice for the wider benefit of the oil industry. Created in 2005, the GRN was originally conceived as a mechanism to facilitate the sharing of trained response personnel at a time when the global pool of responders was much smaller than now and spills were becoming less frequent, thanks to improvements in ship design, operation and regulation. Personnel sharing arrangements under the GRN were designed to enable individual responders to gain valuable spill experience more easily and thereby enhance experience levels across the global pool. It was also envisaged that the cooperation among participating OSROs would enable the sharing of specialised equipment resources for the benefit of the collective industry membership.

Although the core membership of the GRN has remained largely unchanged since its creation, the purpose and *modus operandi* of the GRN has evolved considerably in that time. Today the key added value provided by the GRN comes from sharing knowledge and information more than sharing people and equipment. This is particularly evidenced by the industry action which followed in the wake of the Montara (2009) and Macondo (2010) incidents. The international oil industry undertook a Joint Industry Project (JIP) to coordinate this unprecedented effort to apply the lessons from these incidents in order to improve the

management and technical aspects of spill response. Today the challenge is to integrate and harmonise the various outputs from this effort throughout the responder community and the GRN is playing a key role in this.

One way this is being achieved is through the “Confident Ambassador” programme, whereby responders are familiarised with the JIP outputs and the accompanying communications toolkit. A slide deck has been created for OSRO use to help responder organisations achieve deeper understanding of the science of response within their own organisations and, more importantly, to help disseminate consistent messages about industry approaches to oil spill preparedness and response to a wide range of external stakeholders that the responder community engages with.

This paper explores this and other facets of the evolution of the GRN through its first ten years, from a resource enabling organisation to a knowledge and information sharing organisation befitting the post-Macondo paradigm. The paper also considers future trends that may shape the next phase of evolution for the GRN.

1.0 Introduction

The concept of the oil spill response cooperative dates back to the mid 1980s. The principle of sharing response capabilities amongst like-minded risk-bearers began with the establishment of Oil Spill Response Limited (OSRL) in 1985. Five international oil companies, each with global shipping risks, agreed to co-fund the Oil Spill Service Centre, originally founded by BP.

Following the Exxon Valdez oil spill (Prince William Sound, Alaska, 1989), many other cooperatives were established, driven in part by the legislative requirements of the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 legislation in the US and also by the Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response (OPRC) Convention obligations which were being gradually adopted internationally. Some industry funded cooperatives were developed to meet specific geographical areas of risk whilst others evolved with a broader regional or global scope. At the same time commercial organisations were also developing their range and scope of response services to meet the growing global demand for more effective spill response.

Twenty years ago the risk of oil spills was primarily coming from tankers and other sea-borne vessels however the frequency of larger marine spills was already in sharp decline as evidenced by trend analysis of ITOPF statistics gathered over a much longer time frame.

Many not-for-profit response cooperatives were funded by the same international oil companies and so the synergies that could be realised by developing a “co-op of cooperatives” were an obvious prize. An association of industry-owned response cooperatives offered several benefits including:

- The opportunity to share high-capital / low utilisation critical equipment resources
- The opportunity to offer personnel exchanges among collaborating organisations

- The possibility to share information and technical good practice for mutual benefit
- The possibility to develop a “global pool” of responders.

At the time, this last point was the biggest prize. A global pool of responders would be a benefit to the industry as a whole, and could ultimately lead to the concept of a “one stop shop” whereby an oil company could be a member of one cooperative but could call upon the collective resources of many. Furthermore, a global pool of responders offered benefits to the responders themselves, giving the possibility of gaining valuable spill experience through the portal of a collaborating OSRO which they might not otherwise get in an increasingly low-spill-frequency environment.

A broad constitution was developed that enabled the founding members to come together for an inaugural meeting. The GRN sought to build upon a pre-existing informal alliance between three primary actors:

- Oil Spill Response Limited (OSRL)
- East Asia Response Limited (EARL)
- Marine Spill Response Corporation (MSRC)

In 2005 OSRL and EARL were already developing their own bilateral agreement (“The Global Alliance”) as a precursor to a formal merger in 2007. Geographically, the three founding organisations offered an attractive global spread.

EARL was an upgraded tier 2 base formed from the pre-existing Tiered Area Response Capability (TARC) industry stockpile established in Singapore for the Asia-Pacific region.

MSRC had a substantial response capability established under OPA 90 for the US and administered by the Marine Preservation Association (MPA). It provided extensive coverage for the United States to meet the prescriptive requirements of the US legislation.

OSRL, conveniently located mid way between EARL and MSRC, was headquartered in UK and offered worldwide coverage to its membership.

2.0 Development of the Global Response Network (GRN): The early years

The GRN held its inaugural meeting on 16 May 2005 and was established to harness the resources and expertise of spill response organisations globally, working towards the following common objectives.

- *Enhanced utilisation of resources*
- *Co-ordination in preparedness and response activities where beneficial*
- *Sharing of best practices to promote and enhance industry standards*

Response organisations attending the meeting were:

- Oil Spill Response & East Asia Response Ltd. (OSRL/EARL Alliance)
- Australia Marine Oil Spill Centre Ltd. (AMOSC)
- Marine Spills Response Corporation (MSRC)
- Clean Caribbean & Americas (CCA)
- Alaska Clean Seas (ACS)
- ¹Eastern Canada Response Corporation (ECRC)

¹ Sent apologies – unable to attend

Existing MOUs and alliances had previously facilitated spill back-up and information-sharing activities in the spirit of the GRN. Collaborative arrangements were progressively developed within the bounds of an agreed constitution.

From the outset it was understood that the remit of the GRN would be limited to sharing of response personnel, equipment and expertise, primarily outside of contracted spill response activities, to enable the global pool of responders to grow, develop and gain experience. For the oil industry and other observers outside of the GRN there was an obvious temptation to consider the GRN as a single cooperative in which an oil company could conceivably be member of one of the OSROs and have access to the response services of all. The GRN members needed to be careful to allay these misconceptions which were not possible to achieve under the existing framework. The Charter reflects this as follows:

The GRN is not “..... of itself a response organisation, nor does it act as a mechanism by which a spilling party can call on the GRN to activate Members it is otherwise not funding”.

The main barrier was the unique and individual governance that each GRN member had with its Board of Directors. Although there are a few examples of industry board directors who sit on the boards of more than one GRN organisations, for the most part they are unique boards with little overlap.

Some GRN organisations have a very specific geographic scope or a remit to provide response services to meet a specified contingency. In these cases the organisation would be expressly forbidden from allowing its resources to be used for a third-party spill outside of the operating scope of that organisation. This is particularly the case in the USA where the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA 90) places prescriptive requirements on risk bearers to maintain specified minimum skimming and storage capacity within the primary region.

In some aspects the organisations in the GRN could be in competition with each other, either for response services to a third party in an area of overlapping scope or for training or consultancy services. In practice true competition was rarely encountered. In all cases the GRN organisations existed for their own members and funding mechanisms generally provided for ongoing maintenance of the response capabilities regardless of other sources of commercially sourced income. The desire for collaboration and continuous improvement tended to outweigh any commercially motivated rivalry.

The GRN Executive Committee established a pattern of bi-annual face-to-face meetings to further collaboration towards meeting the common objectives. Within the constitution, conditions for membership were developed. Membership was open to response organisations meeting stated criteria:

- Industry-funded response organisation whose prime objectives do not include profit generation
- Have a substantial regional or global scope for response services
- Provide services for multiple companies and operators
- Be willing to collaborate in the sharing of knowledge and resources with no financial gain to the contributing party.

3.0 The Middle Years

By 2010 the GRN was five years old. Since the GRN had been formed OSRL and EARL had formally merged as a single company (OSRL) and Western Canada Marine Response Corporation (WCMRC) had joined the GRN as the seventh member of the organisation. By this time the Australian Oil Spill Marine Centre (AMOSC) and OSRL had also formed a

“bilateral” services agreement, effectively enabling the seamless integration of OSRL response services to supplement those of AMOSC for participants of both organisations to a spill in Australia.

There was agreement amongst the GRN that OSRL and MSRC (as the two largest entities in the GRN membership) should rotate the chairmanship (including some administration services and ownership of the website) on a four year cycle (two years each).

In December 2010 a meeting was convened between the GRN Executive Committee and the Board of OSRL to consider jointly the consequential impact of the Macondo incident on the global oil spill response business in the near and longer term. The members also wanted to explore how resulting industry expectation of the Network might influence and re-shape its remit in the future - potentially on the basis that any governance function should be exercised through industry sponsorship.

4.0 The Macondo Effect

The Macondo incident was a pivotal milestone in the development of the GRN. Every member of the GRN was involved in the incident through the provision of response capability by providing specialist equipment and / or personnel although no attempt was made to use the GRN itself as a coordinating or mobilising body. Instead the participating response organisations were mobilised individually to undertake specific taskings. This is really no surprise as the GRN had never been envisaged or enabled for one-call mobilisation and operational coordination of a collective response effort. The Macondo incident was, however, unprecedented, calling as it did upon an international mobilisation of manpower and equipment, the like of which had not been seen since the Second World War. If using the

GRN as a gateway to access the collective weight of industry-controlled response capability had been down-played before, it was certainly being reconsidered now. This watershed event was the catalyst to radically re-think what added value the GRN could provide.

A case was put that a revised structure for the GRN with industry oversight and accountability could improve the capabilities of the portfolio of response co-operatives as follows:

- Minimise the barriers to rapid response and effective cascading of resources
- Ensure that industry's response capabilities can be clearly documented and communicated to regulators and the public
- Leverage capabilities and compatibility of equipment, personnel, training standards and exercises
- Improve and leverage technical capabilities, equipment evaluation and acquisition
- Ensure best safety and operational practices are quickly shared and adopted
- Optimise cost of global oil spill response business

In the event, the view of the GRN was that Centres of Expertise operating as a network would be more effective in guiding and facilitating mechanics and enabling the required progress. They would feed continuous improvement and deliver models that would meet member expectations. Establishment of global protocols would help to overcome barriers and the stated will of the GRN Executive would enable effective coordination of efforts made. The proposal that expert work groups should be a function of the GRN was strongly supported.

In February 2011 the meeting of the Board of OSRL recorded agreement that industry should take the lead in setting the strategic direction of the GRN and actioned the development of a proposal setting out how the GRN might best be managed, and the engagement with GRN Co-Member Directors to agree on a way forward. By mid-year discussion had ceased as consensus could not be reached on how industry wished to proceed. Meanwhile the International Oil and Gas Producers (IOGP) Global Industry Response Group (GIRG) outputs, identifying good-practice and learning opportunities from the Macondo incident, were emerging. The GIRG made (originally) nineteen recommendations to be taken forward through a three-year Joint Industry Project, each backed with industry leadership and funding. Collectively the GIRG recommendations and subsequent JIP outputs would have a profound impact on all the GRN organisations.

5.0 The “Operational Teams”

To meet the technical challenges that were emerging from the GIRG, the GRN proceeded in setting up its work groups and hence the Operational Teams were born. The teams comprised subject matter experts each focused on a key theatre of operational response activity and providing a forum for exchange of information. The teams included:

- Offshore response (containment & recovery)
- Shallow Water/Nearshore
- Dispersants
- In-situ Burning
- Remote Sensing
- Ice-covered Waters

The concept of the Operational Teams (OTs) was to harness the discipline specialists within each participating response organisation and enable them to develop pockets of expertise to be shared for the benefit of the response community and the wider oil industry they support. Each team was expected to develop as a pool of deep technical expertise at the leading edge of response operations.

Each participating organisation had the opportunity to propose a chair-person to the OT which that organisation feels closest affinity with. After some discussion and negotiation, each of the GRN OSROs were given the responsibility of holding the “chair” for one of the Operational Teams. Each Operational Team also had a sponsor from the GRN Executive Committee. The membership of each Operational Team was comprised of appointed representatives from across the GRN organisations that had expertise or experience pertinent to the theme of the team.

Once each team had been formed, they were given some freedom to determine the Terms of Reference and the accompanying scope that the group would strive to achieve. At this point it was really important to be realistic about the aims of the groups and it was necessary to “reality-check” the ambitions of the teams. Enthusiastic ambition can be a strong force at the forming stage of any team, and whilst it was important not to crush this, it was also necessary to temper the output into achievable, realistic and time-bound goals which took account of two key limitations faced by all the teams:

- The geographical composition of the Operational Team spans multiple time zones. A teleconference comprising a representative from each participating OSRO would span across 18 time-zones from west coast of North America via Europe to the West coast

of Australia. This was very challenging and required careful planning and a lot of goodwill on behalf of the participants.

- The OTs rely on the “sweat equity” of their contributors, all of whom have regular day jobs in their host organisation. Ever since the Operational Teams were formed, it has proven difficult to prioritise GRN development activities over and above the “domestic” priorities that each organisation and individual staff members deal with day to day.

The Norwegian Clean Seas Association for Operating Companies (“NOFO”) joined the GRN in 2011 and became the *de-facto* host of the Remote Sensing OT given their extensive experience in this field. NOFO had already established an operating MoU with OSRL for response services to its members. At the same time preparations for a merger of GRN members OSRL and Clean Caribbean & Americas (CCA) were underway. The formal merger took place in January 2013 and perhaps represented the easiest and most obvious synergy that industry could demand of its response providers. The geographical scope of CCA (central and southern America) was also the area of weakest global coverage for OSRL and so the merger not only made sound logistical sense, it also particularly benefited the industry members who had previously been a subscriber to both organisations.

6.0 A New Charter

On its tenth anniversary in 2015 the GRN Executive Committee executed a new higher level Charter document, largely concerning the work and outputs of the OTs, accessible via an upgraded website and accompanying file management system.

The purpose and objectives for the Operational Teams were given as follows.

- *Ensure a mechanism is in place to activate OT members to provide OT subject matter expertise for the lead GRN OSRO responding to the spill or the spilling party as appropriate.*
- *Maintain the database of key subject matter response resources available worldwide from among the GRN members. Such database to be included on the GRN website.*
- *Exchange information, good practice, and shared learning including an emphasis on safety and environmental practices in key subject matter response operations among members of the OT*
- *Keep a running tab of the major accomplishments or “nuggets” gained from the OT meetings and list on GRN website.*
- *Maintain linkages to various industry initiatives (e.g. API-JITF, IOGP-JIP) providing both input and contributing to wider outcomes as requested and endorsed by the GRN EC.*
- *Assess specifically as a standing agenda item the OT’s contribution to the JIP Outreach and Communication Ambassador Programme to expand thinking and horizons on preparedness and response issues for the wider benefit of the JIP and response communities.*
- *Report on status of objectives twice-yearly to the GRN EC.*

At this point there were nearly 40 individual GRN Operational Team members covering the six functional areas of response, excluding the GRN Executive Committee member who is the nominated sponsor of each team. The new Charter demonstrated a change in focus, perhaps reflecting a wider shift within the response community away from traditional tactical

response techniques and more towards knowledge management. Accordingly the charter had less emphasis on the practical sharing of resource and more on the sharing of expertise.

A key area of value-added collaboration has been in respect of cold weather training. In a bilateral cooperation between East Canada Response Corporation (ECRC) and OSRL, many OSRL responders have attended extended internal training programmes working on ice, in Arctic conditions where they would not otherwise have such a training opportunity to work on ice and in extreme temperatures. In a *quid-pro-quo*, OSRL have supported an ECRC dispersant workshop for offshore operators in Nova Scotia, bringing OSRL's extensive experience of this response technique to a relatively new area of oil spill risk.

The new Charter also enabled the appointment of the Chairman to be extended outside of the original MSRC / OSRL rotation, therefore allowing the Executive Committee members of other GRN organisations to be nominated to hold the position for a fixed period of two years.

The Board of OSRL remains an active supporter of the GRN and minded that consistency of the Secretariat would better support, strengthen and facilitate the Network - agreed in March 2015 to enable OSRL to provide the GRN secretariat function on a permanent basis. This decision was welcomed by the GRN Executive Committee and provides opportunity for the Chair to rotate in principle between all the Member organisations by election on a biennial basis without the burden of needing to provide the secretariat function.

7.0 Outreach and Communication

One of the issues that the GRN was originally conceived to overcome was the recognition that the resource pool of technical expertise on matters of oil spill preparedness and response within the response community is relatively small. Thankfully oil spills are relatively rare events but this does mean that the specialist technical knowledge, often gained from actual spill experience, is hard to come by. Recognising this gap, industry sought to develop the communications skills of its response contractors within the GRN to increase the numbers of effective influencers available to be “confident ambassadors” or knowledgeable representatives of the investment made by the oil industry in developing technical good practice on oil spill preparedness and response in the aftermath of the Montara and Macondo incidents.

At its meeting (March 2015) the GRN Executive Committee considered the impact of the IOGP / IPIECA Joint Industry Project (JIP) outputs for the GRN organisations and specifically how the Outreach and “Confident Ambassador” awareness programme might extend to them. A year earlier OSRL had piloted the concept of the Confident Ambassador. This programme was designed to give all staff (technical and non-technical) exposure to the scan/glance communication materials developed by the JIP woven into a broader appreciation of the industry OSPR issues.

Through the Confident Ambassador programme, “OSPR Advocates” are given the knowledge and confidence to make convincing technical arguments in social situations amongst peers, friends and family as well as professional meetings. The resulting ripple effect, within and outside responder networks is intended to initiate the process of message dissemination by stealth. A Confident Ambassador slide deck pack of scan / glance materials

was integrated into a broader JIP PowerPoint slide deck to help achieve deeper penetration of oil spill preparedness and response issues within individual companies using a similar approach.

The Confident Ambassador programme was soon widened beyond OSRL to encompass all of the industry funded responder organisations in the GRN, thereby substantially increasing the pool of effective influencers. A roll out programme led by industry sponsors through the Oil Spill Working Group of IPIECA led to the development of a three-hour road-show designed to expound principles of technical good practices and also dispel commonly held myths about aspects of OSPR. Special effort was made to maintain consistency of messaging, using tightly controlled slide decks and ensuring that, whenever possible, the delivering industry sponsor could be traced back to one of a core pool of JIP Governance Committee communicators. It was also important however, not to control the delivery of the programme too tightly so that no one outside of the small JIP inner core could disseminate the “JIP story”. It was recognised that the whole purpose of “outreach” is to spread the word throughout extended networks without imposed restrictions and so it was important to strike a balance between the control of message consistency against freedom to disseminate far and widely.

All seven of GRN member organisations benefited from the original industry-sponsor-delivered road show after which they could share the influencing toolkit amongst themselves and use it within their own internal and external training programmes and stakeholder engagements. The GRN organisations were encouraged to develop their own “confident ambassadors” to act as force-multipliers, not only to spread the messages of technical good practise in OSPR but also to dispel the growing tide of mis-information and “bad science” being promulgated through a variety of less credible or poorly researched media sources.

8.0 Looking to the future

In 2016 a survey of the respective Boards of the GRN members was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the model of collaboration and to also consider the appetite for potential future mergers amongst GRN members. Generally speaking the organisations that responded countenanced support for the new 2015 Charter.

The respondents welcomed the introduction of a consistent GRN Secretariat noting this had led to increased efficiency in delivering process and output and driving the business agenda. The respondents confirmed that, in their view, little opportunity exists for further mergers that might further offset the cost to industry of multiple oil spill co-operative investment where common membership is currently a feature.

Looking wider, the world is changing and the response community needs to remain flexible to the evolving demands of the oil industry and the changing risk profile that global trends present. As previously observed, the decline in ship-sourced spills has been counteracted by a rise in frequency of spills from offshore activity and associated infrastructure. In terms of risk profile, this means that historically a spill would typically have been of a finite volume (limited by the capacity of the ship(s) involved) at any location in the ship's trading pattern. The new risk comes more typically from known location and may be of an infinite volume (until the source can be controlled). The JIP 9 report examines how the existing response framework matches the evolving risks and provides an audit protocol by which response organisations can be measured and assessed for comparative effectiveness.

The response community also needs to adapt to the economic paradigm characterised as "lower for longer". This recognises that the oil price may not return to pre-2014 levels for an

extended period and the response community, along with all industry service providers, need to remain cost effective and focussed on delivering value in these economically challenging times. The resignation of Alaska Clean Seas (ACS) in 2016 from the GRN serves as reminder of the austerity and retrenchment felt by at least one OSRO when faced with the ultimatum of needing to focus only on core response activities to the point where they felt they could no longer support OT development programmes.

Despite this setback, the GRN continues to provide a vehicle by which industry funded OSRO can collaborate more readily to deliver improved value for the oil industry and for the wider stakeholder community. Whilst the current framework does not enable the panacea of a One-Stop-Shop, the GRN does enable effective collaboration, sharing good practice and a mechanism for developing deep-technical expertise for responding to oil spills which is in the interests of everyone in the wider OSPR stakeholder community.

Glossary

AMOSC	Australian Oil Spill Marine Centre
API	American Petroleum Institute
CCA	Clean Caribbean & Americas
EARL	East Asia Response Ltd.
EC	Executive Committee (of the GRN)
ECRC	East Canada Response Corporation
GRN	Global Response Network
IPIECA	The global oil and gas industry association for environmental and social issues
IOGP	International Oil & Gas Producers Association
JIP	Joint Industry Project (of IOGP and IPIECA)
JITF	Joint Industry Task Force (of API)

MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSRC	Marine Spill Response Corporation
OSRL	Oil Spill Response Limited
OPA	Oil Pollution Act (1990)
OSPR	Oil spill preparedness and response
OPRC	Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Cooperation Convention (1990)
OSRO	Oil spill response (or removal) organisation
OT	Operational Team (of the GRN)
WCMRC	Western Canada Marine Response Corporation