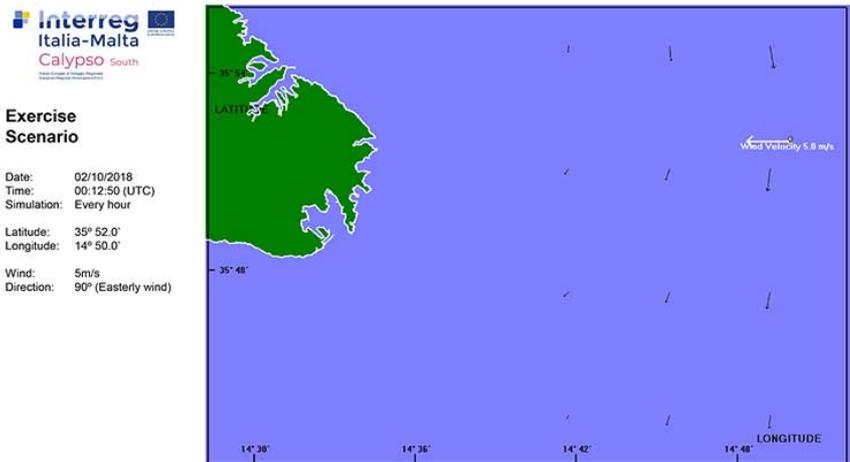




Oil spill scenario east of Malta

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Simulation of the oil spill hitting the Maltese Island from the East; luckily a fictitious case

Tuesday 2 October. A crude oil tanker BLACK GOLD suffered a blackout early this morning while making a pilot station at 35° 52' N, 014° 50' E (12.58 n.miles East of Zonqor Point). A fully loaded 100,000 tonne container vessel bound for the Marsaxlokk container terminal, rams the tanker on her starboard side at a speed of around 16 knots. Two tanks are damaged in black gold, spilling oil at sea. An oil spill emergency response is triggered by Transport Malta, calling all the national response actors to intervene. A strong easterly wind is driving the spill fast towards Malta.

The team of the Physical Oceanography Research Group (PO.Res.Grp) come in support with oil spill bulletins to support the response by predictions on the fate of the spill and the expected beaching of the oil.

Luckily this was only an unreal scenario, being part of the MALTEX 2018 national oil pollution response simulation exercise organised by Transport Malta in collaboration with EMSA (European Maritime Safety Agency). The exercise served to showcase the support that the PO.Res.Grp offers to oil spill response with HF radar observations and numerical models.

The exercise was supported by the CALYPSO South project which targets to establish best practices, and to test the deployment of additional technological assistance by drones and Lagrangian drifters.

Prof. Aldo Drago, leader of the CALYPSO South project partially funded by the Italia-Malta programme 2016-2020, explained the role of the PO.Res.Grp in the national oil spill response team at a project progress meeting held in Malta on the occasion of MALTEX2018. Prof. Drago highlighted how 'the long stretch of research projects in the last 25 years of activity have permitted the PO.Res.Grp (ex Physical Oceanography Unit) to build its reputation among the local stakeholders as a provider of specialised services in operational meteo-marine observations and forecasts'.

The CALYPSO South project will invest 1.5 million Euro to deliver an extension of the current CALYPSO HF radar cluster from four to seven units leading to an extended spatial coverage including the southern approaches to the Maltese Islands, and is committed to improve the quality and consistency in space and time of the data flows to the many users already relying on the system.

Additional numerical models are already being developed to forecast hydrodynamical fields and waves with high resolution with a reach in the Maltese and Sicilian coastal areas. This will impact the services offered to national stakeholders like Transport Malta, Civil Protection Department and Armed Forces of Malta locally, especially for oil spill response and for search and rescue operations.

The project meeting also served to bring Sicilian stakeholders in direct contact with the Maltese counterparts at a dedicated meeting to plan transboundary cooperation and activities.