

## Editorial

In the late 19th century oil transportation took to the oceans. Today, tankers transport most of the oil required for the ever-increasing consumption of modern society. However, despite continuous improvements in safety, they are also responsible for 50% of all the oil spilled into the ocean, with tragic consequences for marine life, coastal environments and local economies. As a consequence of the *Prestige* oil spill, the European Commission has banned single-hull supertankers from crossing European seas, but even with double-hull tankers the problem of how to respond to accidents remains.

The featured article in this issue of *Scientia Marina* is “Sailing the *Prestige* out to sea. An independent analysis” written by A. Garcia-Olivares, J.L. de Pablos and R. Madrigal. After an exhaustive and comprehensive introduction on technical issues related to oil contamination and remediation approaches, it provides a decision tree and a methodology aimed at guiding the authorities to take the best decisions early on during an oil spill crisis. The methodology uses only scientific information that is expected to be available in the first few hours after an accident. Simple models are proposed to quickly evaluate the order of magnitude of economic costs and the ecological risk for the shoreline. The methodology is tested by applying it to the crisis that arose after the *Prestige* accident off the Galician coast (NE Atlantic) in November 2002. Finally, the suitability of including a tanker shelter facility as a refuge port along the Galician coast is discussed and a practical suggestion is made. Although this article mixes general principles and possible responses with aspects that are particular to the *Prestige* oil spill, the proposal of a standardized risk evaluation procedure should be a most valuable tool for decision makers, coastal authorities and society at large. In the interest of minimizing the impact of future spills, we can only hope that they will make use of it.

One other interesting article in this issue of *Scientia Marina* deals with the physics of shallow waves propagating into harbours. The remainder of articles touch on a range of issues encompassing marine organisms, fisheries and plankton, all luckily unaware of the potential threat of an oil spill. Enjoy!

Jordi Font, Associate Editor  
Francesc Peters, Secretary and Associate Editor