

SUNKEN LEGACIES

TACKLING THE TICKING TIME BOMB OF SUNKEN VESSEL POLLUTION

There are an estimated three million sunken and abandoned vessels in the world's oceans, over **8,500 of which have been classified as potentially polluting wrecks**. These vessels contain harmful chemical pollutants, **exploded ordnance**, and a combined reserve of up to 6 billion gallons of toxic heavy **fuel oil**. The majority of these wrecks date back to World War II. Having corroded for over 75 years they are expected to reach 'peak leak' this decade, creating a ticking time bomb hidden under the water. Little is known on the state of these potential polluters and how many are already spilling oil into our oceans.

The IUCN and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP) have called for international cooperation on marine pollution from sunken

vessels, yet little progress has been made to address this emerging threat to our oceans. This is a truly global problem, as the **majority** of WWII-era wrecks lie in the East Asia-Pacific sea area but are registered to foreign nations.

Management of sunken vessel oil leaks has thus far been reactive, with countries responding only after an oil spill has occurred. However, **the economic cost of oil spill clean-up from sunken vessels can be prohibitively expensive for small island developing states (SIDS)**, and there remains the issue of **who's** responsible for this cost. Illegal salvage operations have also been on the rise in recent years, with no care for underwater heritage, environmental impact, or the dangers of chemical pollutants and explosives in sunken vessels to surrounding marine biodiversity and ecosystems.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE: CRITICAL MARINE ECOSYSTEMS AND HUMAN LIVELIHOODS ARE THREATENED BY THE IMPACT OF POLLUTION EVENTS FROM SUNKEN VESSELS. THIS PROJECT WILL ASSESS THE SCALE OF THE ISSUE AND BUILD KNOWLEDGE AND CAPACITY TO PREVENT AND MITIGATE IMPACTS, WITH A FOCUS ON THE PACIFIC AND CARIBBEAN REGIONS.



PARTNERSHIPS

The IUCN, in partnership with SPREP and Major Projects Foundation (MPF Australia), will build capacity of SIDS to assess and mitigate the impact of sunken vessels on marine environments. SPREP has recently been awarded a contract from the Australian government to conduct ground-truthing surveys of priority

sunken vessels in Chuuk Lagoon (Federated States of Micronesia), with MPF as the executing partner.

The IUCN seeks partnerships to expand this work in the Pacific and Caribbean regions. Partners will support SIDS in tackling this urgent issue to preserve essential marine ecosystems and the services they provide to local communities.

SUMMARY

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

There are over 8500 sunken vessels found in the global ocean and currently classified as potentially polluting wrecks. The majority of these WWII-era vessels are expected to reach peak leak in the coming decade.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

We must build regional capacity to respond to this emerging threat by:

- » prioritizing sunken vessels based on classified risks
- » sharing solutions on mitigating and adapting to pollution events
- » developing first-response kits for deployment during leaks

PROJECT BUDGET

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| Development of an international classification scheme | 300 000 CHF |
| Identifying gaps and priorities in sunken vessel mapping and data | 300 000 CHF |
| Assessment of regional needs for mitigation/adaptation measures | 300 000 CHF |
| Testing of mitigation/adaptation technologies for SIDS | 400 000 CHF |
| Staffing, training and workshops | 200 000 CHF |
| TOTAL | 1 500 000 CHF |