

Sunken WWII Shipwrecks of the Pacific and East Asia: The need for Regional Collaboration to Address the Potential Marine Pollution Threat.

Monfils, R., Gilbert, T. and Nawadra S., 2006.

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Oil, chemicals and unexploded ordinances onboard sunken World War II (WWII) warships and merchant vessels pose a real and significant marine pollution risk to the nations of the Pacific and East Asia. A recent project of the South Pacific Regional Environment Program, through its Pacific Ocean Pollution Prevention Program, has highlighted the extent of the risk posed by vessels lost in WWII to Member Governments. Some of these vessels have already begun to leak fuel oil and cargo into the fragile environment of the Pacific atolls.

To assess the primary risks posed by WWII shipwrecks, a Geographic Information System (GIS) database has been developed. This contains details of the types of ships, tonnage and location of over 3,800 vessels lost in the Pacific and East Asia. Although not complete, the Pacific WWII Shipwreck Database totals over 13 million tons of sunken vessels, ranging from aircraft carriers to battleships and including over 330 tankers and oilers. As a major proportion of vessels lost during WWII rest in the East Asian-Pacific area of seas, close collaboration needs to be established between the regional environmental bodies and their affected Member Governments to address the scale of marine pollution risk. Complex maritime jurisdictional issues, along with overlapping claims to Economic Exclusion Zones and the interrelationships of the marine environments in the region, also underscore the need to address the issue on a multilateral basis.

This paper aims to highlight the extent of the risks posed by sunken WWII vessels to fisheries, marine and coastal resources of the Pacific and East Asian regions, as well as the issues of ownership and responsibility for the WWII shipwrecks of the Pacific.

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