

Agenda item 9.3.1: Review and update of the Regional strategy to address marine pollution from World War II Wrecks

Purpose:

This paper aims to:

1. Secure the approval for the review and update of the current regional strategy for addressing marine pollution from World War II wrecks to evaluate its effectiveness and identify associated emerging challenges and potential risks.
2. Provide an update of the FSM World War II Shipwreck Pollution Mitigation Project.

Background:

3. Pollution from Potentially Polluting Wrecks (PPW) is a cross-border problem, affecting global society, the environment and economies. It has serious threats and negative impacts on wildlife, marine ecosystems, coastal communities (food, livelihoods and habitability), human health (Hazardous and Noxious Substances, munitions, chemicals) and locks in high costs for emergency response and remediation. Pro-active action on PPWs will reduce costs and reduce the risk and impact of these threats.
4. The SPREP Regional Strategy to address marine pollution from World War II (WWII) Wrecks was endorsed at the 13th SPREP Meeting, Majuro, Marshall Islands, July 2002. SPREP has since undertaken an initial Hazard Assessment through the identification of WWII wrecks, their location and cargoes potentially still on board, identified appropriate environmental impact assessment mechanisms that can be applied to these sites and have identified risk assessment mechanisms whereby these wrecks can be assessed and level of risk determined.
5. The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2020, at its session in Marseille, France has encouraged the Director General to explore a collaboration with Members with a view to producing a toolkit to evaluate the threat of oil pollution from shipwrecks and to identify possible solutions; and called on State and Government Agency Members to continue to develop and share innovative tools and best practices for pollutant removal from sunken ships having oil or packaged dangerous goods on board.
6. In April 2024, a project called Tangaroa was initiated by Lloyd's Register Foundation. The Ocean Foundation and Waves Group convened a community of experts and agencies to define these standards for use globally. SPREP is actively participating in the series of expert workshops, commenced this year that focuses on development and dissemination of an International Standard to optimise evaluation methodology and engineering interventions. The programme of work that Lloyd's Register Foundation is supporting is closely aligned with the IUCN Resolutions that call for a toolkit to evaluate the threat of oil pollution from shipwrecks, identification of possible solutions and the sharing associated innovation and best practice.

7. The Australian Government partnered with SPREP and the Major Projects Foundation (MPF) with a commitment of AUD\$2.12 million to enhance existing efforts to address the risks to human health and safety, and to the environmental and economic security of nearby Chuuk communities, posed by the oil spills. The project commenced in March 2022 and will conclude in February 2025. Historical and field-based research undertaken by the Major Projects Foundation has identified a total of 25 shipwrecks within Chuuk Lagoon as potential or active pollution threats. At least 15 of these wrecks have been reported as leaking in recent years. Between 2017 and 2023 Japanese Mine Action Service (JMAS) through support of Government of Japan removed approximately 10,307 gallons or 24% of the oil identified in pockets inside the 11 shipwrecks at a cost of approximately USD \$155/gallon. MPF continue to conduct technical surveys, acquiring the data necessary to create 3D models of these wrecks. These 3D models will be examined by a naval architect to assess the structural integrity of the wrecks, the location of their bunker tanks, and their potential to pollute.

Recommendation:

8. The Executive Board Meeting is invited to:
 - 1) **Endorse** a review and update of regional strategy to address marine pollution from World War II wrecks to evaluate its effectiveness and identify associated emerging challenges and potential risks to be completed by 2026;
 - 2) **Support** the active participation and collaboration with Lloyd's Register Foundation, The Ocean Foundation, and Waves Group to finalize the International Standard for evaluating oil pollution threats from shipwrecks; and
 - 3) **Note** the project update of FSM WWII Shipwreck Pollution Mitigation Project and advocate for focusing resources on tackling the most pressing WWII environmental hazards first.