

## Twenty Third SPREP Meeting of Officials

4-6 September 2012  
Noumea  
New Caledonia

### **Agenda Item 11.1: WWII Wrecks in the Chuuk Lagoon – A paper submitted by FSM**

#### **Purpose**

1. To seek support and assistance to prevent future oil pollution from WWII wrecks in the Chuuk Lagoon.

#### **Background**

2. Chuuk is one of the world's best shipwreck diving destinations. Chuuk State relies heavily on its tourism industry to generate revenue and also has a vibrant and strong fishing industry.
3. The Chuuk Lagoon contains over 60 sunken WWII vessels within a 50km wide lagoon. These include tankers, and military and merchant vessels with a history of intermittent oil leakage that has affected island environments.

#### **Chuuk Lagoon (FSM) Strategic Environmental Assessment**

4. All the Chuuk WWII wrecks have been submerged for over 60 years and are starting to break-up and as a result they present a major environmental hazard. Many of these sunken vessels also have unexploded ordinance still on board.
5. Local authorities believe that there are at least six (6) WWII wrecks currently discharging oil within the Chuuk Lagoon.
6. A pilot assessment of leaking wrecks in the Lagoon completed in 2010 aimed at determining the extent of shoreline oiling and potential future oiling from the *Hoyo Maru* (Attachment 1). This investigation indicated that although there was a visual sheen on the surface of the water and no evidence of oil on the shoreline of Fefan island at the time of inspection, computer modelling of possible direction and impacts of further spills from the *Hoyo Maru* clearly indicated that the shorelines of Fefan Island would be most dramatically affected by any future oil discharge from the *Hoyo Maru*.
7. The FSM Government is currently seeking assistance from the international community on removal of oil from the *Hoyo Maru* and other Japanese vessels sunk in Chuuk Lagoon.

### **Pilot Intervention - *USS Mississinewa***

8. The *USS Mississinewa* lying in Ulithi Atoll, Yap State, was remediated in 2002 by the US Navy with the salvage of approximately 9 million litres of heavy marine fuel at an estimated cost of US\$6M.
9. Importantly, the value of the salvaged oil was able to partially offset the cost of vessel remediation.
10. This led to the development of the Pacific Strategy of WWII Ship Wrecks (Attachment 2) that was approved at the 13th SPREP Meeting in 2002 and the development of the WWII Wreck Database.
11. The regional WWII Wreck Strategy is being implemented in two phases:
  - Phase one (completed) which involved data collection and a desk top environmental risk ranking of the sunken vessels
  - Phase two (ongoing) is to involve detailed site assessment and remediation of high risk wrecks.
12. The 2003 (14<sup>th</sup>) SPREP Meeting determined that WWII Wreck Phase Two activities be implemented bilaterally between the vessel flag state and the coastal state with SPREP providing technical advice upon request.

### **Pilot Intervention Strategy: FSM**

13. It is proposed that a detailed environmental risk assessment be carried out of major vessels sunk in Chuuk Lagoon. This assessment would determine the status, and the risks and costs associated with retrieving oil contained in priority wrecks in the lagoon.
14. It is noted that there is no funding currently available at SPREP to support this activity but that there may be other sources of funding to support in country implementation, as outlined in point 8 above, for example.

### **Impacts on other Pacific island countries**

15. There are over 3800 WWII vessels in the WWII Wreck Database representing over 13 Million Tonnes of shipping lying on the seabed. Of these, 857 vessels are located within SPREP Members' EEZ's.
16. PNG, the Solomon Islands and Palau along with the FSM are most at threat from the pollution risk presented from WWII ship wrecks due to the presence of a high number of large vessels and oil tankers.

### **Recommendations**

17. The Meeting is invited to:
  - **Endorse** the proposed pilot activity in FSM to minimise future oil pollution from WWII Wrecks;
  - **Endorse** a detailed assessment of the *Hoyo Maru* to determine the extent of the vessel's hull corrosion and amount of oil left in board; and
  - **Call** on partners and donor agencies to provide assistance where possible to ensure staged removal of oil.