

The Malta Manifesto

A Call to Action on Polluting Wrecks

Our Shared Ocean – Our Shared Challenge

A global, toxic legacy of shipwrecks containing vast quantities of oil, munitions, and hazardous materials has been left by two World Wars. We know that these wrecks are deteriorating, accelerated by climate change impacts. Many are becoming unstable. Some are leaking and causing harm now. We know that illegal salvage has torn apart hull structures, disturbed cargoes, damaged cultural heritage and released oil. We know that many of these wrecks lie close to vulnerable coastal communities, vital fishing grounds, fragile ecosystems in protected areas and world heritage sites. We are entering a decade of severely heightened risk of catastrophic damage caused by leaking oil – damage to natural and cultural heritage that cannot be fully remedied. The harm to human wellbeing and the economic cost will also be enormous.

The time for concerted, unified action is now. As we approach the 100th anniversary of World War II in 2039, we must commit to resolving this toxic legacy of conflict. People and planet must be protected.

We know how to manage the risk posed by these wrecks. We need urgently to marshal the resources and the collective will to put that knowledge to use at scale.

Our Vision

We envision a world where international cooperation has transformed these environmental and safety hazards into a dynamic inventory of managed sites, where communities and ecosystems vulnerable to these threats are protected through timely assessment, monitoring and proactive intervention.

Our Principles

1. **A Precautionary Approach - Prevention Before Crisis:** Proactive intervention costs significantly less than an emergency response to catastrophic pollution events.
2. **Global Responsibility, Local Agency:** The challenge demands international coordination with locally led decisions. No nation should face these threats alone. Those most affected should have the strongest voice in finding safe solutions.
3. **Global Expertise, Local Knowledge:** local knowledge, comprehensive data and sound science must guide all actions.
4. **Equitable Burden-Sharing:** Nations that played no role in creating this crisis face some of the most severe threats. All stakeholders should contribute to solutions. Financial constraints must not prevent action.
5. **Sustainable Solutions:** Long-term management systems must outlast any single initiative or funding cycle.

Our Call to Action

We call upon governments, industry, the research community and civil society to unite in addressing this challenge through these critical pathways:

1. Advocacy

Wrecks can be safety hazards and at the same time support local biodiversity, they can have significant heritage value and importance as war graves. We call for policy solutions at national and international levels that both address this complex reality and assure timely action.

2. International Collaboration and Standards

We call for the support of nations and international agencies for the development and adoption of globally recognized assessment protocols and intervention standards that enable necessary action even in disputed area and waters beyond national jurisdiction .

3. Resilience and Response Capacity

We call for maximum permitted use of existing programmes, policy frameworks and resources through securing inclusion of polluting wrecks in regional and national planning for resilience and response to oil spills. This is in addition to developing new protocols.

4. Empowerment

We call for awareness raising and provision of training, tailored to local needs and circumstances, to enable communities to shape management efforts and participate safely in response activity.

5. Financing

We call for national resources to be augmented by targeted multilateral finance and innovations such as an International Trust Fund . We call for management of polluting wrecks to be included in standardised due diligence that safeguards investment in our oceans via mechanisms such as Marine Protected Areas, Blue Bonds and Habitat Restoration projects.

6. Increase Access to Technological Innovation and Survey Platforms

We call for large-scale access to cost-effective and easily deployable, technology for assessment monitoring and remediation. We call for collaboration with Research Vessel operators to increase data acquisition opportunities. We call for intense collaboration with industry and research sectors to enhance existing capabilities, lead the necessary technology acceleration and democratise solutions.

7. Increase Access to Data

We call for the widest possible sharing of data and archive material to establish baseline information, enable assessment of vulnerability and increase assurance that appropriate management options will be selected through locally informed, evidence-led decision making.

The Cost of Failing to Act Decisively

If we do not act with urgency and ambition, the inevitable costs are multifaceted and severe:

- Toxic leakage into marine food chains with human health implications.
- Destruction of tourism, coastal livelihoods and fishing grounds leading to long-term economic loss and hardship.
- Contamination of sensitive ecosystems and marine protected areas causing profound damage to biodiversity and the health of our oceans.
- Disproportionate impacts on vulnerable coastal communities with limited emergency response capacity.
- Increased costs for cleanup and severe health risks to people involved in cleanup operations where training and safety equipment is inadequate.
- International disputes over responsibility and reparations, complicating diplomatic relations.

We know how to avoid these devastating outcomes.

Commitment to Action

Join us in committing to building upon the knowledge and expertise already highlighted by Project Tangaroa to lead and inspire, marshalling the resources required to put that knowledge to use at scale in order to make substantial progress towards comprehensive global polluting wreck management by 2039.

By acting now we can avoid immense harm to people and to nature. We can honour our obligation to heal historical environmental wounds and our responsibility to future generations, who deserve safe and healthy oceans free from the toxic legacies of past conflicts