



AS IT IS

US Expert: Images Show Chinese Ship Waste Endangering Reefs

July 13, 2021

Chinese ships have dropped human waste and wastewater for years in a disputed area of the South China Sea, a U.S.-based expert said Monday. The dropping of waste has caused **algae** to grow. The underwater plants have damaged **coral reefs** and threatened the fish population in the area.

Satellite images over the last five years show how human waste, and other wastewaters have built up and caused algae in a group of reefs in the Spratlys area. In this place, Chinese fishing ships have **anchored** in large groups, said Liz Derr. She heads Similarity Inc., a software company that creates artificial intelligence technologies that help experts examine satellite images.

Derr said that in a single day last month, at least 236 ships were spotted in the **atoll**, internationally known as Union Banks. She gave that information at a Philippine online news discussion about China's actions in the South China Sea.

“When the ships don't move, the **poop** piles up,” Derr said.

The Chinese ships then dump the human waste “onto the reefs they are occupying,” she explained.

Derr warned that schools of fish reproduce in the reefs that are being damaged. This could cause the fish population in the area to drop sharply.

Chinese officials did not immediately react to Derr's description of the environmental damage. They have said in the past that they have taken steps to protect fish and the environment in the South China Sea.

In addition to Chinese forces, Vietnamese forces have also occupied some areas in Union Banks. The Philippines also has claimed Union Banks as its territory. The Philippines, however, does not have ships in the atoll.

Eduardo Menez is the Philippines' Department of Foreign Affairs Assistant Secretary. He said the findings would have to be investigated by Philippine officials before his government would decide whether to make an official protest.

China is growing more aggressive about pressing its territorial claims of the sea. The claims are creating conflict with Japan, India, Vietnam and the Philippines.

In March, Philippine officials found more than 200 Chinese fishing ships at Whinsun Reef in Unions Banks. They demanded that the ships leave the area. China ignored the demand for weeks, while continuing to say it owned the reef. The Philippines argued that Whinsun Reef lies well within an internationally recognized area where it has full rights to fish and **drill** for resources. It added that a 2016 ruling denied China's claims to the waterway.

A few people held a protest Monday in front of the Chinese Consulate in Manila to note the fifth anniversary of the ruling. China ignores the ruling and continues to go to the area. The protesters criticized Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte for refusing to demand that China accept the ruling. Duterte has sought closer ties with China.

I'm Susan Shand

The Associated Press reported this story. Susan Shand adapted it for Learning English. Ashley Thompson was the editor.

Words in This Story

algae – *n.* simple plants that have no leaves or stems and that grow in or near water

coral - *n.* a hard material formed on the bottom of the sea by the remains of small creatures

coral reef - *n.* a long line of coral that lies in warm, shallow water

atoll - *n.* an island that is made of coral and shaped like a ring

anchor - *v.* to keep a ship or boat from moving by using an anchor

poop - *slang* human waste

tribunal - *n.* a kind of court that has authority in a specific area

drill - *v.* to make a hole in something with heavy equipment

We want to hear from you. Write to us in the Comments Section, and [visit our Facebook page](#).
