

# Philippines to seek damages for US navy ship mishap

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This handout photo taken on January 17, 2013 and released on January 18, 2013 by the Philippine Western Command (WESCOM) shows the US Navy minesweeper USS Guardian after it ran aground on the Tubbataha Reef in the western Philippine island of Palawan. The Philippines will seek damages from the US after a navy ship ran aground on a coral reef in a protected marine reserve, an official said Friday.

The Philippines will seek damages from the United States after a navy ship ran aground on a coral reef in a protected marine reserve, an

official said Friday.

The USS Guardian remained trapped on the Tubbataha Reef, about 130 kilometres (80 miles) southeast of the western island of Palawan, on Friday, even after most of its crew members were removed in a bid to get it refloated.

Philippine officials said the 224-foot (68 metre) minesweeper, based in Susebo, southern Japan, was destroying coral in the [Unesco World Heritage Site](#) where entry is restricted and permits are required.

Philippine Foreign Undersecretary Raul Hernandez said the United States, the country's main defence ally, had provided some information on the incident but that Manila would conduct its own probe.

"We are now asking our government agencies to investigate the incident and make an assessment on the damage caused by this and the [legal obligation](#)," he said.

The penalty would depend on the amount of damage caused by the ship, he said.

The superintendent of Tubbataha [marine park](#), Angelique Songco, said the ship was lying on about 10 metres of coral and that strong winds and waves were pushing it along the reef, causing further damage.

"The winds are getting stronger, the waves are getting larger and the hull is destroying the reef," she told AFP.

She questioned why the ship, which had just made a port call in Subic Bay in the Philippines, was passing through Tubbataha.

"There was an absence of good faith here. They did not even report (the

grounding.) Our rangers just discovered them there. I don't know what they wanted," she said.

The US Navy should be liable for entering the marine reserve without a permit, damaging corals and for non-cooperation with local officers, she said, adding that the fine would depend on the extent of the damage.

The local office of the environmental group the [World Wildlife Fund](#) also criticised the US navy, saying it was "both baffling and lamentable" that the USS Guardian would enter Tubbataha without a permit.

The Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment said: "This incident shows us how the United States military forces have brazenly disrespected our laws and damaged our country's environment and national treasures."

Tubbataha is popular among divers for its walls of coral and diverse ecosystem that environmentalists say rivals that of the Great Barrier Reef in Australia.

The [US Navy](#) said the USS Guardian was on its way to an unidentified "port of call" when the incident occurred.

The Philippines, which once hosted large US military bases, has been improving its defence ties with the United States in recent months as a counterweight to increased Chinese aggression.

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