



**PRESS RELEASE**

July 11, 2023

## **Massive Effort to Protect the Environment and Historical Wrecks Takes Place off Lampedusa**

*During an eight-day expedition that wrapped up on June 29<sup>th</sup>, volunteer divers from five countries removed ghost gear from ships sunken during WWII in the Mediterranean Sea between Italy's Lampedusa Island, and Tunisia.*

[Healthy Seas](#) teamed up with [Ghost Diving](#) and [SDSS](#) for a third consecutive year, bridging environmental and historical conservation, with the support of Hyundai Motor Europe that is providing funding for the implementation of Healthy Seas cleanup and education activities around the world since 2021.

"Wrecks provide excellent habitats for marine life, acting as a reef and providing shelter. At the same time, it is on wrecks that fishing nets get most often snagged. It is estimated that 640,000 tons of fishing gear are lost or abandoned annually in the world's seas and oceans leading to the suffering and death of millions of marine animals," says Pascal van Erp, Healthy Seas deputy director and Ghost Diving founder.

The team focused on one particular shipwreck that has yet to be identified. A ship sunken during the Battle of Convoys, still containing several aerial bombs and vehicles. By recovering a huge net, weighing approximately 700 kgs, divers unveiled its structure making it a safer space for marine life but also more accessible for other divers. After examining the material and structure of the net, it is believed that it originated in Egypt. It will be upcycled into new nets.

This mission also aimed at documenting various wrecks as cultural monuments. By collecting over 12,000 photos and applying photogrammetric techniques, 3D virtual models are created to make the wrecks accessible to scientists and the wider public. SDSS Founder, Mario Arena: "Since 2007 when our team began exploring the wrecks at this location, we are continuously running into fishing nets. The collaboration with Healthy Seas and Ghost Diving is allowing us to make progress in our historical discoveries."

The team was made up of GUE technical divers from Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, Greece and Lebanon with thousands of dives in their resumes. Due to the limited space on board, they used so-called rebreathers to reduce the number of tanks, and increase safety during these long and deep dives.

"Due to the remoteness of the location dived, as well as the sparse supplies on board, we consider this to be our most unique project. We look forward to returning again next year to



continue protecting the environment and the wondrous submerged historical wrecks found in this part of the Mediterranean,” said Pascal van Erp.

--End of Message--

#### **Photos & Video Reel:**

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/6q0e4m52810jfs57m29z7/h?rlkey=zx8aiwyrndndmlbj3slxdr71hi&dl=0>

#### **About Healthy Seas**

Healthy Seas is a non-profit organisation with a mission to remove waste from the seas, in particular fishing nets, and ensure marine litter will become a valuable resource. Nylon fishing nets are regenerated into ECONYL® yarn, a high-quality raw material used to create new products, such as socks, swimwear, sportswear or carpets, while other types of plastic nets are also reused, becoming jewelry, accessories or provided for research and education purposes. Since its founding in 2013, Healthy Seas has collected over 905 tons of fishing nets and other marine litter with the help of volunteer divers and fishers.

<https://www.healthyseas.org/>

#### **About Ghost Diving**

Ghost Diving is an international non-profit organization of volunteer technical divers specialized in the removal of lost fishing gear and other marine debris since 2009. To this day, the Ghost Diving team has carried out diving projects independently or in collaboration with several international environmental and/or diving organizations like: Healthy Seas Foundation, Greenpeace, WWF, Global Ghost Gear Initiative and Global Underwater Explorers.

<https://ghostdiving.org/>

#### **About SDSS**

SDSS is an international non profit organization founded in 1999 and based in Italy.

Their mission is the study, research, enhancement, dissemination and protection of the historical, cultural, biological and environmental submerged heritage. Their main activity consists of the documentation, with different systems and methodologies of submerged sites such as historical wrecks, archeological sites, peculiar underwater habitats and sites of concerns for environmental instability, in collaboration with researchers and institutions.

<https://sdss.blue/>

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