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TITLE: Offshore Coral Reef Damage, Overfishing, and Paths to Peace in the South China Sea

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ABSTRACT:

Offshore coral reefs of the South China Sea are subject to complex overlapping sovereignty claims by up to six regional nations. Escalating tensions have led to widespread structural reinforcement of military outposts on many reefs via dredging and filling. Satellite images indicated at least 160 km² of coral reef damage, including 17 km² of essentially permanent damage from filling and channel/harbour dredging, and 143 km² of decadal-scale damage from dredging for building materials and giant clam harvesting. This damage will exacerbate the growing regional overfishing problem. Options to lessen tensions include (1) the establishment of a Greater Spratly Islands Peace Park, and (2) the collaborative management of fisheries, the environment and mineral resources across the entire Sea. Both options require freezes on extant claims and activities in support of claims. No matter how it is achieved, regional peace would greatly enhance fisheries stability and economic growth among all claimant nations.

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