

Yachties warned not to put down anchor on reef

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Minerva Reef - Source: ONE News

Yachties are being warned to stay away from Minerva Reef, a popular anchoring spot in the Pacific, as tension between Tonga and Fiji rises over who owns it.

Minerva Reef is part of Fiji's exclusive economic zone but has been claimed by Tonga for decades.

In 1972, Tongan King Taufa'ahau Tupou published a declaration claiming the reef as belonging to Tonga. This was recognised by the South Pacific forum later that year.

However the Tongan government is now warning yachts to avoid the area after Fiji ordered away a number of vessels away from the reef and announced it would use whatever force necessary to protect the territory.

"The best thing to do is not to go there for the time being until we get our differences solved with Fiji," Samiu Vaipulu, Tonga Deputy Prime Minister told ONE News.

Rod Alley from the Centre for Strategic Studies said Fiji was using this dispute to "flex their muscles" and to "show their neighbours that Fiji can stand in its own corner and declare its interests."

The reef is popular because its position means boats can anchor there and wait out bad weather.

"There's upwards of 400 boats a year coming into New Zealand from the islands...I would say at least half of them would consider Minerva Reef as a stop," David Howie, Yachting website editor told ONE News.

It is suspected the conflict is based around valuable underwater mineral deposits and fishing rights.

Fiji and Tonga have now gone to the United Nations for help to avoid a potentially serious situation.

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