

# Radioactive Contamination: Japan Plans to Dump Water from Fukushima Plant into the Pacific Ocean

A million tons of contaminated water will be released in two years' time

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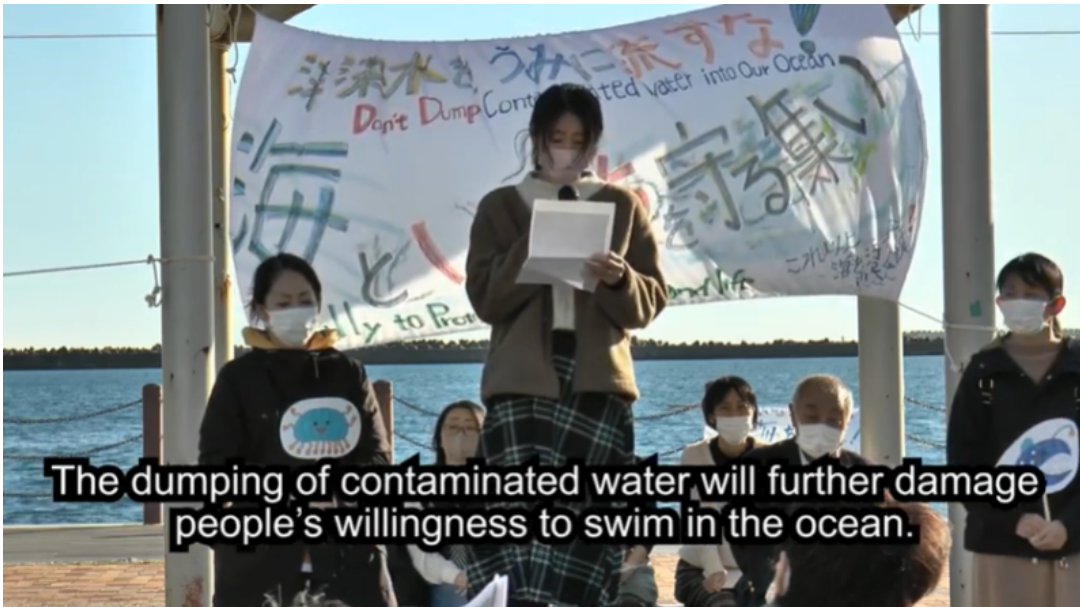
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*People in coastal communities in Japan, joined by voices from around the world, denounced a new governmental plan to dump contaminated water from the site of the Fukushima nuclear disaster into the Pacific Ocean. Local communities and other nations in the Pacific Ocean fear the dumping will poison the environment and cripple local fishing and tourism industries that have struggled to recover from the March 2011 nuclear accident on Japan’s northeast coast for over a decade.*

According to a [government plan](#) released on December 28, 2021, Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) will start releasing 1 million metric tonnes of radioactive water from the Fukushima plant into the Pacific Ocean in 2023. The plan, which is still being developed over the coming months, states that an [undersea tunnel](#) will be built to pump the water out to the sea. Funds have also been reserved to compensate local fishing and tourism industries for potential “reputational damage.”

In March 2011 an earthquake and tsunami caused three nuclear reactors operated by TEPCO in Fukushima to [meltdown](#). Over the years, groundwater flowing through the plants was contaminated with radioactive content. In order to prevent this water from reaching the ocean, it was pumped from the reactor buildings into large tanks that now dominate the reactor installation.



A Screenshot from the [YouTube video](#) of the [Manhattan Project for a Nuclear-Free World](#) featuring Japanese mothers from the townships of [Okuma](#) and [Futaba](#) protesting the plan to dump radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean.

As of December 2021, at least 1 million tonnes of contaminated water are stored in the tanks inside the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station.

While highly radioactive contaminants are removed, the stored water that the Japanese government is planning to pump out to sea still contains significant amounts of [tritium](#), a radioactive element that some experts say is harmless when diluted in seawater.

The Japanese government's plan to pump the contaminated water has been in the works since 2020. Greenpeace said in April 2021 that it [collected](#) 183,000 signatures opposing the plan to discharge water from the Fukushima plant.

Also in April 2021, South Korean civil society groups [issued](#) a statement condemning TEPCO's plan, noting, "even if diluted the total amount of radioactive material thrown into the sea remains unchanged. If the radioactive wastewater is discharged, it will be an irrevocable disaster not only for marine ecosystem but for the human."

The issue was tackled during the Pacific Islands Forum Foreign Ministers Meeting in July 2021, and the body made the following [declaration](#):

Forum Foreign Ministers noted the concerns surrounding the seriousness of this issue in relation to the potential threat of further nuclear contamination of our Blue Pacific and the potential adverse and transboundary impacts to the health and security of the Blue Pacific Continent, and its peoples over both the short and long term.

In November 2021, TEPCO said its radiological impact assessment [showed](#) minimal impact on the environment:

The assessment found that effects of the discharge of [ALPS \(Advanced Liquid Process System\)](#) treated water into the sea on the public and the environment is minimal as calculated doses were significantly less than the dose limits, dose targets, and the values specified by international organizations for each species.

TEPCO assured the public that it is continually [updating](#) its scientific studies regarding the plan to release processed water into the Pacific. But doubts remain about their [reports](#), mostly because [there still are few concrete plans](#) about how and where the contaminated water will be dumped, making it difficult for outside observers to assess the risk.

The [Pacific Collective on Nuclear Issues](#), which represents civil society organizations based in Oceania, refutes the veracity of these studies. It also has a [message](#) for TEPCO and the Japanese government:

The Pacific is not and must not become the dumping ground for nuclear wastes.

The Collective considers that TEPCO, and the relevant Japanese Government agencies, have wrongly prioritised convenience and costs over the short term and long term environmental and human cost of their planned actions.

Japanese residents have also consistently expressed concern about TEPCO's plan.

Greenpeace [interviewed](#) fisherman Ono Haruo from the township of Shinchi in Fukushima, who echoed the sentiments of the local population:

Fish are finally starting to return after ten years, but if they now pour tritium into the water, no matter how much they dilute it, who's going to buy those fish? Who wants to eat poisoned fish?

The ocean is our place of work. Can you imagine what it feels like for that to be intentionally polluted?

It'll be 30 or 40 years before we see the effects. The causal relationship will have become unclear and it'll be impossible to prove anything. What's going to happen to the future of our children, our grandchildren? It's not even clear who will take responsibility.

A group of mothers in Iwaki city, Fukushima, [participated](#) in a protest in November 2021 opposing the plan to dump contaminated water into the ocean. The townships of Okuma and Futaba, which host the stricken Fukushima Daiichi complex, have experienced almost complete depopulation over the past decade.

In spring 2022, the International Atomic Energy Agency will evaluate and report on plans has on the Fukushima water treatment, while stakeholders will [continue](#) to engage authorities about the controversial plan of TEPCO.

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*Featured image: Water tanks holding contaminated water in front of the reactor buildings at Fukushima Daiichi. Photo Credit: [Susanna Loof / IAEA](#). Image license: Attribution 2.0 Generic ([CC BY 2.0](#))*

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