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Russian Trawler Full of Fuel Sinks Off Canary Islands Coast

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The Oleg Naydenov trawler full of fuel has sunk off the coast of Gran Canaria.

MADRID — A Russian fishing trawler full of fuel has sunk off the coast of Gran Canaria, in the Canary Islands, sea rescue authorities said Wednesday as they checked to see if there had been any spillage.

The Oleg Naidenov, which made headlines last year when it was detained in Senegal for illegal fishing, sank late Tuesday, some 15 nautical miles south of Gran Canaria, one of the most southerly islands in the Spanish archipelago off the northwestern African coast near Morocco.

It caught fire over the weekend in the island's port of Las Palmas when it was ready to set sail, the port authority said. The ship was towed away from the area to keep the fire under control and was on its way back when it sank.

"The Marine Rescue Service has mobilized anti-pollution resources to check whether there has been any [fuel] spillage and to act if necessary," the unit, part of Spain's Public Works and Transport Ministry, said in a statement.

The trawler, which could have had up to 1,400 tons of fuel on board according to data from Greenpeace, sank to a depth of about 2,400 meters, south of the beach of Maspalomas, which is famed for its sand dunes.

Spain suffered its worst ever environmental disaster in 2002 when the Prestige oil tanker sank off the northwestern coast.

The Oleg Naidenov was detained by Senegal for more than two weeks in January 2014 on suspicion of illegal fishing. The captain insisted that the trawler had been legally fishing in waters belonging to neighboring Guinea-Bissau. The vessel and its crew of more than 60 Russians were released after the company that owned the trawler paid a $1 million deposit for possible fines.

That was not the first time the Russian-flagged vessel had been accused of fishing illegally in Senegalese waters. The Greenpeace environmental group put the Oleg Naidenov on a blacklist of vessels accused of poaching in West African seas after it documented it fishing in Senegalese waters in February 2012.

(Reuters, MT)

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