Bungle sees diesel fall to Antarctica's pristine sea floor

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Russia and India have belatedly disclosed a botched Antarctic fuel transfer operation that sent more than 150 tonnes of diesel fuel to the polar sea floor.

A group of Indian container-sized tanks filled with Russian diesel were left on an ice shelf that later broke off, a report said.

Some of the tanks were later seen precariously hanging on an iceberg, but all have now been declared lost.

Despite strict environmental rules in Antarctica, the accident was only admitted in a report to a closed meeting of Antarctic Treaty nations in Brussels last week, more than a year after it happened.

"Clearly it was a terrible incident," said Jim Barnes, the director of the environmental NGO the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition. "In an increasingly warming Antarctica, it can't be a complete surprise that another piece of ice shelf broke off."

The Joint Investigation Report of Breaking of Ice Barrier at Leningradsky Bay in April 2012 tells how the Russians were unable to break through floating pack ice near Novolazarevskaya station, south of Africa.

Instead they reached an ice shelf at the edge of the frozen continent used as an access point by the nearby Indian Maitri base.

The Indian base agreed to pump about 200 tonnes of diesel fuel from the Russian icebreaker Akademik Federov into 10 empty tanks on top of the ice shelf and about 800 metres from its edge.

When a Russian traverse team arrived three weeks later to drag the tanks to their base, they found only three remaining after a two kilometre long section of the shelf had calved away.

This story was found at: http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/environment/bungle-sees-diesel-fall-to-antarcticas-pristine-sea-floor-20130602-2njoh.html