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Consumer advocacy group wants Peru to claim treasure found near **Spain**

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Peruvian consumer rights advocates urged Peru's government Monday to claim some \$500US million in gold and silver coins found in a sunken galleon off the coast of **Spain** last year.

Some 17 tons (15.4 metric tons) of coins were discovered by a Tampa, Fla.-based treasure-hunting company, **Odyssey Marine** Exploration, when it raised a shipwreck west of the Straits of Gibraltar in May 2007.

Spain's government also claims ownership of the wreck and its contents and has sued Odyssey, which hauled away the treasure.

But the Association of Peruvian Consumers and Users said the South American nation also has a right to the booty, since it believes the coins were made with Peruvian metals and minted in Lima.

"This gold was stolen from the Incas," said Jaime Delgado, the consumer group's president.

A spokeswoman for Peru's National Institute of Culture said the government could take legal action if its own research finds the coins are of Peruvian origin.

But David Avellar Neblett, a maritime lawyer in Florida, said **Spain's** claim would still likely override Peru's because legal precedent establishes that warships and other state vessels and their cargo remain national property after submerged.

Lawyers for Odyssey and **Spain's** government told a federal magistrate judge in Tampa on Monday that they are still exchanging information, which means that the case may not go to trial until next year.

The galleon is thought to have been sunk in a naval battle with Britain off the coast of Portugal in 1804.

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