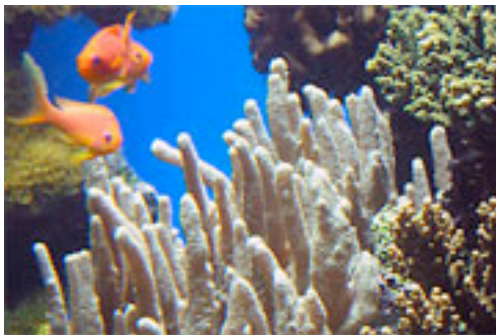




UN report calls for greater research on marine ecosystems beyond territorial waters



3 November 2009 – Greater scientific research is essential to better understand the potential impact of activities on marine biodiversity beyond the coastal areas that fall under national jurisdiction as the more remote areas are just as vulnerable, says a new United Nations **report**.

While most human activities and pressures on marine biodiversity continue to be in coastal areas, more attention is being paid to the vulnerability of species and ecosystems outside these areas, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon writes.

According to the UN Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, pressures from different types of human activities, such as destructive fishing practices, pollution and human-induced climate change, have resulted in the degradation of marine habitats, the over-exploitation of biological resources and increasing loss of biodiversity.

Marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction – which are resources shared by all States – is even more vulnerable to such pressures. Because no single State or individual has any property rights over those resources, notes the Division, access to them is open to everyone with the consequence that there is limited incentive for their conservation or sustainable use.

“It is vital to continue and strengthen efforts aimed at the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction,” Mr. Ban states in his report.

He points out that while various efforts have been initiated at the global level to address this issue, knowledge about marine biodiversity, particularly beyond areas of national jurisdiction, remains scarce.

“While there is an increasing demand for scientific knowledge, it has been reported that marine biodiversity is the subject of many fewer research and protection efforts than those carried out for the terrestrial environment.

“As a result, there is limited understanding of ocean ecosystems beyond areas of national jurisdiction, in particular deep-sea ecosystems, and about the vulnerability, resilience and functioning of the associated marine biodiversity,” he states, adding that sustained marine scientific research activities are therefore essential.

The report also underlines the importance of marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction for healthy, functioning marine ecosystems, economic prosperity, global food security and sustainable livelihoods.

Among the factors putting these areas at risk are limited, albeit expanding, knowledge of the richness and resilience of biodiversity in some areas of the oceans; the absence of regular monitoring programmes; and limited capacity to implement and enforce relevant instruments.

Therefore, the report calls for “timely policy guidance” by the General Assembly to ensure the application of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and other relevant instruments with respect to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction.

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