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East Asia's economy could suffer if seas are not protected, says UN report



19 February 2010 – East Asia's economically viable coastal habitats and ecosystems are under threat from pollution, alien invasive species and other factors which could impact the region's poverty levels unless urgent action is taken, the United Nations Environment Programme (**UNEP**) said in a new report.

"With nearly three quarters of the region's population depending directly or indirectly on coastal areas, and with 80 per cent of the region's GDP linked to the coastal natural resources, the time must be right for factoring the marine environment into the centre of economic planning," **said** UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner.

The East Asian Seas State of the Marine Environment report said economically important coastal habitats and ecosystems are under pressure as 40 per cent of coral reefs and half of all mangroves have already been lost. Coral reefs generate an estimated \$112.5 billion and mangroves \$5.1 billion annually.

The East Asian Seas – which includes the region between China, the Republic of Korea and Australia – have some of the world's highest concentrations of shipping and fishing vessel activity. They account for 50 per cent of global fisheries production and 80 per cent of global aquaculture production.

"These ocean ecosystems are a critical lifeline for the region's economies and people. You can say that the health of these oceans and their ecosystems is very much tied to the economic health of these countries and well-being of their citizens," said Chou Loke Ming, author of the report produced by UNEP's Coordinating Body of the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA).

Mr. Ming noted that the East Asian Seas account for 30 per cent of the world's seas under national jurisdiction and called on the governments in the region – which also include Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam – to have a major role in maintaining effective stewardship of the marine environment.

The report recommended a more systematic and integrated approach to managing coastal and oceanic issues, including improved data collection and management, and economic incentives to encourage private sector involvement in environmental protection efforts.

"Such actions can support better decision-making, national assessments of coastal and ocean resources and conditions, [and] enhanced public private partnerships" the report stated.

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