PACIFIC CORAL TRIANGLE

'AT RISK OF COLLAPSE'

The Coral Triangle, a roughly triangular marine zone in the Indo-Pacific region that is considered to have the world's richest concentration of marine biodiversity, is facing potential ecological collapse due to heavy pressure inflicted by human activities, according to a new report.

The warning appears in a collaborative study, 'Reefs at Risk Revisited in the Coral Triangle', produced by a consortium led by the World Resources Institute, a global environmental think-tank based in Washington DC, United States.

It serves as a status report on the wellbeing of coral reefs in or near the six countries comprising the triangle.

The study aimed to identify where reefs are most threatened and to provide baseline data to help groups establish and prioritise specific

management strategies, Kathleen Reytar, a lead author of the study, told*SciDev.Net*.

According to the report, 85 per cent of reefs in the Coral Triangle are directly threatened by local human activities such as overfishing, the use of poisons and dynamite in fishing, watershed-based pollution (fertilisers, pesticides and other runoff from the land), and coastal development.

When combined with developments related to global warming, the percentage of threatened reefs rises to more than 90 per cent, the report says.

In a single human lifetime, we have inflicted a crisis on the oceans greater than anything we have ever done to the rainforests, but because people can't see what is happening under the oceans, we are allowing this to continue, said Maurice Knight, a contributor to the report, and chief of party for the Coral Triangle Support Partnership, an Indonesia-based civil society consortium.

However, the report's authors believe that reef degradation in the Coral Triangle area can be checked and even reversed, for example through the extended use of marine protected areas (MPAs).

Knight pointed out that some countries, such as the Philippines, have an extensive network of MPAs, which involve fishing restrictions that can include a complete ban on all types of fishing, restrictions on types of fishing methods or gear, or other types of constraints.

For example, Indonesia, the world's biggest archipelago, established its first MPAs in the 1970s, and now has over 17 million hectares of designated MPAs the most extensive in the world.

Marine protected areas, including no-take areas [protected areas where fishing is completely prohibited] that serve as fish nurseries, are essential to maintain the health of reef fish populations, and the reefs themselves, said Knight, although he also warned that just establishing fish nurseries is not enough.

Source: http://www.scidev.net/global/biodiversity/news/pacific-coral-triangle-at-risk-of-collapse-.html