

## Protecting oceans is important to keeping planet cool

Increased protection for the world's oceans and coastal areas is a vital part of the fight against global warming and saving millions from disaster, according to the IUCN World Conservation Union.

'Governments and the conservation community need to step up marine protection if we are to support the global effort to tackle climate change,' said IUCN director general Julia Marton-Lefevre at a summit on ocean conservation here.

The group of the world's leading marine experts is focussing on the development of a system of marine protected areas (MPAs) and how marine reserves can counter climate change and other threats to the marine environment.

Currently, only one percent of the world's oceans are protected.

Last week, a UN panel of 2,500 scientists from around the world issued a report on global warming that was six years in the making and that projected drastic changes in marine life and ocean levels from rising temperatures.

'A sea temperature rise of 1 to 3 degrees Centigrade will be enough for a major decline in coral reefs, unless corals adapt to warmer waters,' Marton-Lefevre said, quoting the findings of the report.

Coral reefs, representing just one facet of marine life, have suffered a 20 percent loss and another 50 percent face immediate or long-term danger of collapse, the scientists said. Coral reefs are vital for protecting coastal areas from storms, and impact the livelihoods of 100 million people around the world, according to an IUCN estimate.

An example of an area threatened with virtual extinction is the Republic of Maldives, a chain of 26 atolls about 700 km southwest of Sri Lanka, IUCN said.

Eighty percent of its islands are no more than one metre above sea level, and face total extinction within 100 years at the current rate of ice melt that is raising sea levels. The republic is home to 360,000 people.

Warming oceans are also blamed for powering the increasing intensity of cyclones and hurricanes that wreak devastation on coastal areas.

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