

Theme 3 : Coastal Zone Management

Sensitive Coastal Marine Ecosystems

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My definition of these ecosystems is that they are generally more productive than the coastal seas, support a complex trophic organisation, sustain a high biodiversity including some endemic species and are highly susceptible to interference from human activities. This category can include a broad range of ecosystems but what immediately comes to mind are such ecosystems as coral reefs, mangroves and salt marshes that have borne, and continue to bear, the brunt of human activities in various forms.

We know a lot about why they are important. To begin with, they occupy only an insignificant fraction of the world's ocean area but, in terms of biological productivity, surpass even the most productive coastal waters. Secondly, unlike in other ecosystems, most of what is produced here is directly used (or exploited) by mankind, a fact facilitated by accessibility. Thirdly, the biodiversity is unusually large in such ecosystems (in fact, that is what makes them tick), with a large gene pool that can, with a rational management, do wonders for the welfare of mankind. Finally, as the Commission is well aware,

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population pressure and increasing dependence on the marine resources, do not augur well for their sustainability.

Proper management and sustainable development of these ecosystems are the issues, among

others, facing the Commission. The seriousness of the issues, however, varies in intensity since some governments have already begun to

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address them whereas others have not. Nonetheless, some questions can still be asked:

- Is there adequate scientific input to meaningfully address the issues? If not, how much more we need and, in what areas? When do we graduate from preaching to practice?
- What mechanisms have we developed until now for a sustainable development of these resources? Were they beneficial?
- Do our management plans provide for socio-economic considerations and rights of the traditional users?
- How far have we been successful in promoting non-invasive and optimal-exploitative uses?
- How well do the member states integrate into the global efforts on better management of these ecosystems?
- What sort of eco-technologies do we need for a sustainable development?

My questions have a national bias, because I am unsettled by the haphazard manner in which these issues are addressed to by various agencies and scientific communities. Frankly, I would like to see a more sensible and non-pretentious approach. Can the Commission help?

