

Urgent changes needed to stem tide of damage to marine ecosystems

February 23 2016, by David Stacey



Current approaches to managing marine ecosystems are failing to tackle their alarming degradation, according to an international research team that includes scientists from The University of Western Australia.

Professor Gary Kendrick, from UWA's School of Plant Biology and UWA's Oceans Institute, said the research, published in *BioScience Oxford Journal*, had identified flaws in current practices that focused on restoring marine ecosystems to their original state.

"These common global practices are not sustainable in the long-term because marine ecosystems have already undergone centuries of modification through human activity," Professor Kendrick said.

Marine ecosystems were being degraded at alarming rates, many faster than they could be restored, due to exploitation by humans, he said.

"There are more benefits in trying to improve the overall health of marine ecosystems rather than trying to restore them to their original natural state, which is not achievable in the long term," Professor Kendrick said.

"Restoration management can be achieved by highlighting the costs and benefits to communities from restored versus non-restored marine ecosystems.

'When planners fail to address the impact that communities have on ecosystems or disregard their values in the planning process, people will often ignore reserve boundaries, leading to the failure of reserves to protect marine resources and diversity.

'We can help this process by creating alternative incentives to conserve and restore ecosystem services and improve their sustainable supply.'

Professor Kendrick said [marine ecosystems](#) played a crucial role in supporting human well-being, from our food supply and coastal protection, to the regulation of the earth's climate.

"It is therefore important that we look at ways to improve their survival into the future," he said.

Ecological restoration would not provide a substitute for the conservation of ecosystems, but where ecosystems were already heavily degraded, it was necessary and a more effective management strategy, he said.

Provided by University of Western Australia

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