

Changes to our oceans pose serious concerns – Media Release

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New Zealand's oceans, coasts, and marine wildlife are under growing pressure, according to the first national report from the Ministry for the Environment and Statistics New Zealand about the marine environment.

Our marine environment 2016, released today, identifies three top areas of concern:

- Global greenhouse gas emissions are causing ocean acidification and warming – changes that will continue for generations.
- Most of our native marine birds and many mammals are threatened with or at risk of extinction.
- Our coasts are the most degraded of all marine areas, due to sediment and nutrients washed off the land, introduced marine pests, and seabed trawling and dredging.

Statistics NZ also released the companion report, *New Zealand's marine economy: 2007–13* today. It showed that the marine economy contributed 1.9 percent, or \$4 billion, to our gross domestic product (GDP) in 2013, about the same as the 2 percent contribution in 2007.

Government Statistician Liz MacPherson said the economy and environment reports complemented each other, and provided a wider picture of our relationship with the marine environment.

“We’re a maritime nation. Having healthy and resilient oceans is important for all New Zealanders and for our economy. Today’s marine environment report shows that our marine environment is facing a number of serious challenges,” she said.

Secretary for the Environment Vicky Robertson said our oceans are facing multiple, and cumulative pressures that have been building over generations. They are pressures from both land and sea-based human activities.

She said the report shows that one of the biggest challenges for our oceans comes from global greenhouse gas emissions.

“Our waters have become more acidic from absorbing excess CO₂. This affects the creatures that live there. Among other things, ocean acidification makes it more difficult for shellfish, like pāua and mussels, to form shells.

“Climate change is also warming the ocean and causing sea-level rises, which impact not only on fish but also other wildlife and our own coastal communities.”

Ms Robertson said the report shows that some marine wildlife and coastal habitats are in a fragile state.

“Ninety percent of our native seabirds and shorebirds are threatened with or at risk of extinction. More than a quarter of our native marine mammals are threatened with extinction.

Fishing bycatch, introduced predators, and habitat change are among a raft of reasons for the poor state of much marine wildlife.”

Ms Robertson said where we have identified the challenges and worked together on addressing the issues, we are seeing results. For example, changes in fishing practices in recent years have eased some pressures on the marine environment.

“The number of seabirds caught by commercial fishing bycatch almost halved from around 9,000 in 2003 to 5,000 in 2013. The improvements are likely to be helped by mitigation measures, such as bird-scaring and sea lion exclusion devices.

“By shining a light on the issues through this report we are able to focus on the most pressing and urgent areas to address. It also gives us a better understanding of the size of the challenges ahead. We now have to come together to focus on what each of us can do to protect its future,” Ms Robertson said.

Ms MacPherson said offshore minerals (mainly oil and gas) were the largest contributor to the marine economy, at \$2 billion in 2013. Shipping contributed \$980 million and fisheries and aquaculture contributed \$896 million.

The marine economy provided 102,400 jobs, mostly in shipping, and fishing and aquaculture.

Ms MacPherson said *Our marine environment 2016* used the most up-to-date data available.

“National data on many marine issues are limited, but the report also draws on scientific literature and expert opinion.

“Another theme that came through in producing this report is how much we don’t know about our marine environment,” she said. “The environmental reporting programme is working to improve our data over time. However, New Zealanders need to consider the costs of delaying action in the absence of perfect information.”

The report is the first since the Environmental Reporting Act was enacted in June 2016. The next report – about fresh water – will be out in April 2017.

Ends

More information

Full report and infographic: <http://www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/marine-environmental-reporting/our-marine-environment-2016>

Indicator pages: http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/environment/environmental-reporting-series/environmental-indicators/Home/Marine.aspx

For media enquiries, hi-res copies of the infographic, or photos of spokespeople, please contact: Marina Skinner, Statistics NZ, 021 792 260

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Authorised by Liz MacPherson, Government Statistician, and Vicky Robertson, Secretary for the Environment, 27 October 2016