

Regional initiatives to protect coral reefs

After this year's APEC meeting in Sydney, Indonesian Prime Minister Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono announced Pacific Rim endorsement of an initiative to protect the 600 million hectare Coral Triangle. The six Asia-Pacific countries bordering the zone are involved.

The Coral Triangle – spanning eastern Indonesia, the Philippines, Timor Leste, the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and parts of Malaysia – is regarded as the world's richest area of marine biodiversity, with 75 per cent of all known coral species and around 3000 species of fish.

However, with the region also being home to 120 million people, most of whom depend on fishing for their livelihood, pollution and overfishing are a serious threat to its coral reefs.

Rili Djohani, Director of the Indonesia Program at the Nature Conservancy – a leading global NGO – says the initiative's goal is not only to maintain the area's unique

biodiversity but also to ensure sustainable use of its resources far into the future.

Scientists estimate the Coral Triangle is home to 500–600 coral species, 1600 reef fish species and almost every invertebrate marine group. In contrast, the coral reefs of the Caribbean have about one-ninth of the number of coral and reef fish species.

Closer to home, the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies recently published a 'Consensus declaration on coral reef futures' endorsed by more than 50 scientists. The scientists unanimously called on all societies and governments to 'immediately and substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions'.

Professor Terry Hughes, Director of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies, said the world has a 'narrow window of opportunity' to save coral reefs from the destruction caused by extreme climate change.



Coral reefs in the Asia-Pacific region are under threat from pollution, overfishing and climate change. ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies/Joshua Cinner

'Local action can help to rebuild the resilience of reefs, and promote their recovery. It is critically important to prevent the replacement of corals by algal blooms, by reducing runoff from land and by protecting stocks of herbivorous fishes,' he said.

Deputy Director of the ARC Centre, Professor Ove Hoegh-Guldberg from the University of Queensland, said reefs

'cannot be climate-proofed except via reduced emissions of greenhouse gases.'

'Without targeted reductions, the ongoing damage to coral reefs from global warming will accelerate and soon be irreversible.'

Both Hughes and Hoegh-Guldberg are contributing authors to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Fund to save forests for carbon sequestration

The World Bank has announced it will set up a new fund to subsidise developing countries to protect and replant tropical forests for carbon sequestration.

The Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) is on the agenda for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change being held in Bali in December, where representatives of 180 countries are shaping a global agreement to succeed the Kyoto Protocol after its expiry in 2012.

The facility has attracted

interest from a number of developing countries including Indonesia, Brazil and several in Africa's Congo River basin.

Deforestation accounts for 20 per cent of total global greenhouse gas emissions – more than all the world's cars, trucks, trains and airplanes combined.

The World Bank says that creating economic value for tropical forests will help developing countries generate revenue for poverty alleviation while conserving natural resources such as fresh



Under the World Bank scheme, developing countries will be funded to protect their tropical rainforests such as this one in Papua New Guinea. ensis

water, food and medicines that the forests provide local populations.

'It will involve a lot of work on the ground with countries to establish both a physical and institutional infrastructure to demonstrate that they actually avoid deforestation,' said the manager of the World Bank's carbon finance unit, Joelle Chassard.

Participating countries will need to determine the present state of their forests in order to measure future deforestation rates. They will also have to establish the carbon content of forests with different trees and different sequestration rates.

The US\$300 million fund will initially be used to finance emission reductions and help prepare countries with the necessary tools to monitor the forests.