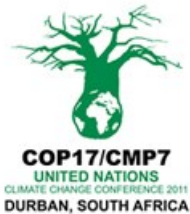


Oceans 'ignored' on COP17 agenda

By [Kemantha Govender](#)

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DURBAN: The world's oceans, often referred to as the heart and lungs of the planet, are under stress and scientists are calling for immediate action. "Often forgotten in such discussions are the oceans and the enormous and diverse resources they provide, including food and other resources," said Dr Carol Turley from Plymouth Marine Laboratory in the UK.



Turley, speaking during a side event at COP17, said this was the most ignored ecosystem at COP17. Also, the potential for undiscovered biodiversity was too great to be sidelined.

In a world where food security was already under threat due to climate change, scientists feel it would be worth exploring the ocean for new sources of food.

The oceans cover nearly three quarters of the earth's surface and contain 96 percent of its living space. Oceans also provide around half of the oxygen and are becoming an increasingly relied upon source of protein for a rapidly growing population. Almost a billion people rely on protein from marine life.

But Turley said three stressors - ocean acidification, warming and deoxygenation - are producing a very worrying combination which is threatening the oceans.

A United Nations report said at least 40 percent of the oceans were 'heavily affected' by human activities. Sixty percent of the world's major marine ecosystems have been degraded or are being used unsustainably.

Ocean acidification is directly caused by the increase of carbon dioxide levels, while ocean deoxygenation is the reduction of dissolved oxygen in seawater.

The world's oceans are said to be warming as a direct consequence of increasing temperature due to the greenhouse effect.

Research indicates that many parts of the world's oceans are likely to experience more than one of the environmental stressors at the same time. Ocean warming is likely to have direct effects on the physiology of marine organisms.

Food security from fisheries will suffer even more.

"What is really missing is the joint perspective, where the full and combined effect of two or all three stressors acting at the same time is investigated," said Turley.

Policy researcher Joe Appiott said governments have included the issue around oceans on their agenda for Rio+20, which will take place next year.

There will be an Oceans Day during COP17, where leading experts will make addresses on the subject.

South Africa's Water and Environmental Affairs Deputy Minister Rejoice Mabudafhasi will also make an address during the event.

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