

# Grave concern over pollution, dwindling coral reef



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Barbados stands to suffer severe consequences if there is no improvement soon in the declining coral reef stock in the region.

In addition, local authorities have expressed grave concern about overfishing, littering and indiscriminate dumping, which they say could cause further damage to an already fragile ecosystem.

The issue of protecting the underwater ecosystem and the general environs came up for discussion on Friday as officials gathered at the UN House in Christ Church for the Barbados Ridge to Reef Assembly 2019 under the theme **Challenges, Interactions and Opportunities for the Green and Blue Economies**.

Minister of Maritime Affairs and the Blue Economy Kirk Humphrey insisted that while countries have agreed to cap rising temperatures at 1.5 degrees Celsius, above pre-industrial levels, this was still too high for small island states who did not create the problem.

"I have a concern about this 1.5 (degree Celsius) to stay alive jargon. That is cool but it is not real for us. That is really an international conversation. I do not know why the Caribbean would choose this mantra. Most of our fish are already at their thermal maximum capacity, most of the reef is already there. One point five is too much for the Caribbean," he said.

"They say we are in the fourth phase of the industrial revolution . . . and unless we demand and command that space for ourselves we will find ourselves not benefiting in the fourth industrial revolution in the same way we didn't benefit in the first, second or the third. So this 1.5 degree conversation is not the conversation we are having in the ministry. Enough is enough is the conversation we are having in the ministry," said Humphrey.

He said work was continuing in relation to the menacing Sargassum seaweed issue plaguing the island.

Humphrey also pointed out that while the ministry had started to build and deepen partnerships with international agencies, he wanted local and regional fisherfolk, the wider private sector and civil society to play a greater role in protecting the land and sea.

"For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction," he warned.

"If we continue to not pay the necessary attention to things that we should, there is going to be severe consequences for all of us," he told the gathering, which included private sector officials and representatives from the UN, Canada and the UK.

"It would be an understatement to say that the ocean is in serious peril, and the consequences of such are dire, they are severe for all of us . . . the ocean generates a great deal of the oxygen that we breathe . . ." he added.

Citing research that showed dwindling coastal areas, which is responsible for about 90 per cent of marine life, Humphrey said he sensed "real tragedy if we do not apply some great degree of interest and tenacity resolving the issues that we face".

Furthermore, he said, "it is going to take a significant amount of commitment from all of us to be able to tackle the situation that we are facing".

While crying shame on larger industrial nations for being major contributors to the destruction of coral reefs, Humphrey said "the reality is that climate change is real and countries in the region are dealing with the issues that we did not cause".

David Bynoe, National Coordinator of the GEF Small Grants programme of the UNDP, insisted that coral reef restoration was needed.

"A shocking and very disturbing fact is that the average live coral cover within Caribbean coral reefs is declining alarmingly," he said, adding that only eight percent of the region's underwater ecosystem was covered with live coral reef.

He suggested that a "ridge to reef approach" was a necessity in the overall management of the region's ecosystem.

A ridge to reef approach is considered one that emphasizes the inter-connections between the natural and social systems from the mountains and hills, to coastal watersheds.

"This calls for actors within Government, the private sector and civil society to have a shared vision for sustainable development. That is very important," said Bynoe, who added that continuous education of the population was also critical.

Meanwhile, Dominique Tudor, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the civil society environment services company Eco Rebel Barbados, expressed concern about continued dumping in gullies across the island.

She also pointed out that waste collected from the shorelines around Barbados consisted mostly of plastics and devices used in the fishing process.

"Littering, this is the number one source of ocean pollution and land pollution, and as I said, it affects our economy, impacts our health and impacts our general livelihood," she warned, adding that while cleaning up was necessary, every individual could play a role by simply stop littering.

"That is what I am trying to do, work actively to turn off the litter tap, because without doing that all the cleaning up we do are pointless. That is the last thing we should be doing, cleaning up," said Tudor. **(MM)**

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