

Australian fish heading south

MICHAEL BYRNES
REUTERS

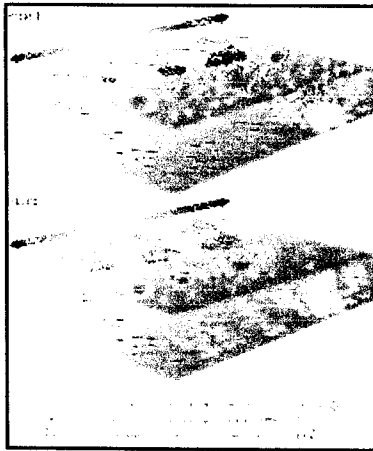
SYDNEY, Australia — Global warming is starting to have a significant impact on Australian marine life, driving fish and seabirds south and threatening coral reefs, Australia's premier science organization said on Wednesday.

But much more severe impacts could occur in coming decades, affecting sea life, fishing communities and tourism.

In particular, warmer oceans, changes in currents, disruption of reproductive cycles and mass migration of species would affect Australia's marine life, particularly in the southeast.

Already, nesting sea turtles, yellow-fin tuna, dugongs and stinging jellyfish are examples of marine life moving south as seas warm, the report by the government-backed Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization said.

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(CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research)

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"It's not a disaster for the ones that can move south. It is for the ones that can't move south," lead author of the report, Dr Alistair Hobday, told Reuters.

"If you're at the tip of Tasmania, you've got nowhere else to go," he said, referring to Australia's southern island state, the last major part of Australia before the Antarctic.

Atlantic salmon, which are farmed in Tasmania, face a bleak future. Salmon-farming businesses would become largely unviable as the ocean warmed the predicted one to two degrees over the next 30 years, Dr. Hobday said.

Fisheries and aquaculture are worth more than \$2.5-billion (Australian) a year the report, "Impacts of Climate Change on Australian Marine Life," says. It is the first major study in the Australian region to combine the research of climate modelers, ecologists and fisheries and aquaculture scientists.

Coral in the Great Barrier Reef off Australia's northeast coast may be hit by more frequent bleaching events, every two or three years compared with five or six years at present.

"You would basically get hit with a hammer every couple of years. Nobody responds well to that," Dr. Hobday said.

Worse, oceans are becoming more acidic as carbon dioxide increases in the atmosphere. This will adversely affect many organisms that use calcium carbonate for their skeletons and shells, including corals and mollusks.

Turtles under threat

Turtles are especially vulnerable to warming, with warm weather causing increased female hatchlings, the report said.

Changing ocean food production because of warming could also affect other species already battling low numbers by restricting their food supply, the CSIRO report, which was prepared for the Australian government, said.

Its release comes two days before the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change adopts a major report on the impacts of global warming.

Australia's southeast will be hit hardest, with the Tasman Sea suffering the greatest ocean warming in the southern hemisphere, the CSIRO report, citing the UN climate panel, said.

The result is likely to be a decline in fish along Australia's eastern seaboard.

"These species have become adapted to a particular set of conditions and the speed at which the ocean is changing is faster than they have experienced," Dr. Hobday said.

One result would be that Australian fishing industries would have to move south.

Tourism was also likely to be hard hit, the report said, highlighting the multibillion-dollar economic value of the nation's reefs.

An expected increase in human migration to the Australian coast over the next 10 to 20 years because of warming temperatures would also add to pressure on the oceans, Dr. Hobday said.

This would be accompanied by rising sea-levels and ensuing greater coastal erosion.

"You'll have cliff-side mansions crashing into the ocean," he said, adding that Australia needs to reduce its greenhouse gases and pollution and to better protect coastal areas.

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Phillip Crawley, Publisher

1. This news article is about global warming affect on the Australian coast line.
2. The fish in the area are slowly migrating south toward the Antarctic. This is causing great concern for the fish and the economy of Australia.
3. Most of the fish species off the coast of Australia.
4. If the fish move the fishing industry will be hit hard. Tourism will also be affected by the move.
5. Yes, it is from a reputable science journal.
6. How fish adapt to climate changes and migration patterns of the fish
7. The only real thing that a fish ecologist could do is record what is happening and make sure people know about it.