

An Overview of the Coastal Ecosystems of Southeast and East Asia

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The coastal ecosystems of the East Asian Seas contain some of the most diverse ecosystems in the world. Found in the Indo-west Pacific region, its coastal areas are home to at least 10 % of the world's population. The total contribution to the world's fishery of this region is estimated to be no less than 20%. This region has been an important tourism destination especially in relation to its beautiful beaches and coral reef areas. Its coastal ecosystems integrity as a typhoon buffer against erosion and other calamities has been highly underestimated, including its other ecosystem values. Human induced stresses pose the greatest threats to these ecosystems. Increasing population growth in many areas of major coastal development show that issues associated with these changes are habitat modification, overexploitation of its resources and pollution.

A synoptic summary of the coastal resource management problems associated with these ecosystems highlights some of the root causes showing conflicts of interests, access and tenure arrangements and inequitable resource allocations. Despite the highly political and social basis of the realities faced by the coastal ecosystems of East and Southeast Asia, the scientific and conservation challenges in the understanding and sustainable use of these ecosystems may hold one of the important keys to their solutions.

One of the major hotspots in the region that is highlighted is the disputed Spratly's area located in the South China Sea. Learning from the lessons derived from the cooperative arrangements in integrated coastal management initiatives of the coastal states of this region, indicate that engaging in joint marine scientific investigations and marine conservation efforts are promising future avenues.