

Conservation group calls for marine protected area status for Musandam

Report says increasing pressure on reefs from human interference may lead to coral destruction

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A wildlife and environmental research and conservation group has called for giving Musandam peninsula a marine protected area (MPA) status, as growing human interference in the area could result in severe destruction of the precious coral reserves.

With a high coral coverage of nearly 60 per cent, a value well above what is encountered in most reefs in other areas worldwide, Musandam has in its stewardship what are probably the best reefs of the region. However, there is pressure on the reefs from diving and fishing communities resulting in low average numbers of some fish and invertebrate populations, suggesting that any additional stress may lead to coral die-off, a study by Biosphere Expeditions has revealed.

The expedition led by Dr Matthias Hammer, who founded Biosphere Expeditions in 1999, surveyed five different sites in



north Musandam over a week in October 2012, and the report was published in May this year. The expedition, which has been surveying the area since 2009, was able to compare the results with past surveys and come out with the latest report.

Dr Hammer told *Muscat Daily* that the main threats for the reefs are unsustainable development and human encroachment

(tourism, overfishing, overuse or others). "These factors can be controlled on a national level. Other threats, which are basically beyond individual government control, are climate change and with it ocean acidification, sea level rise and the warming of the seas," he said.

He added that according to the report, the reefs are currently in a good state, but there are

clear signs that they could be on the brink. "Overfishing is a serious issue, as it is almost everywhere in the world's oceans, and I would be loath to open up the area to more 'sustainable' tourism and development. These things are very hard to get right and it's usually the reefs, or nature in general, that loses out. For this natural jewel in Oman's crown, I would urge extreme caution."

Based on the findings, the report further stated, 'We therefore continue to recommend that an MPA, or a network of MPAs, is created in north Musandam. We also urge rapid action before what is at the moment still a unique natural treasure for Oman is degraded and lost.'

On the question whether he had received any positive signs



Photo courtesy: Biosphere Expedition

butterflyfish population, there is still a worryingly low number of groupers and sweetlips. Many of the fish populations in the region are heavily fished, and concerns that fishing efforts have exceeded optimum levels for most species are now receiving some attention from local communities,' the report said.

The time to act and make the area an MPA is now, while the reefs can still support a diversity of organisms because of this numbers of fish and invertebrates are able to recover, it said. "If more habitat is lost or degraded before protection is implemented, there is a good chance that fish and invertebrate populations will not be able to recover from their current very low numbers and that the current high coral coverage will be lost. As a result, the decrease in some fish and invertebrates families are likely to have future negative impacts on substrate composition and the reef ecosystem as a whole."

The next stage, said Dr Hammer, is to get formal support in terms of funding and written commitments. "Given funding and government support, we could then extend our efforts from small-scale to more comprehensive surveys (including for example, fisheries landings, stakeholder consultations, etc) and a roadmap towards an MPA."

MoSD plans sending report to UN on discrimination against women

Our Correspondent
Muscat

To address discriminations against women in the country, the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) recently held a meeting which decided to submit a new report on all the issues and the progress concerning women in the sultanate, to the United Nations (UN).

During his speech, H E Sheikh Mohammed bin Said bin Saif al Kalbani, Minister of Social Development, exhorted all participants to draw an action plan before submitting the report.

He also noted various achievements by women in Oman under the guidance of the UN and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, said Riad al Siyabi, a senior official in the MoSD. The meeting also discussed various articles of the UN convention such as measures on social and cultural conduct of men and women, maternity-related issues, responsibility of



Participants at the training session on marital guidance, conducted by the Ministry of Social Development (Supplied photo)

men and women in bringing up children and legislations to combat all forms of trafficking of women, Riad said.

Women's political rights, right to hold public offices and participate in the work of international organisations, the right to a nationality, rights of their children, social security and protection of health during and after pregnancy, equality between men and women before the law, matters relating to marriage and family relations, custody of children and equality in property

rights, will be covered in the new report, which will be submitted to the UN Secretary-General's office, the official said.

The meeting also reviewed the progress achieved by the ministry regarding women in the country from 2011 to 2013.

Meanwhile, MoSD is conducting a training session on marital guidance under the Directorate General for Family Development's department of counselling. The meeting will continue till the end of this month.

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Infertility, PCOs on the rise in Oman

Maryam Khan
Muscat

Cases of infertility in women and polycystic ovaries (PCOs) are on the rise. Late marriages, unhealthy lifestyles, poor food habits, obesity, tobacco use are said to be leading causes of infertility. A large number of cases have come to light in Muscat over the last eight years, said Dr Bindu Kumari, specialist gynaecologist at Al Raffah Hospital.

If a woman is unable to conceive for a year after marriage, it can be called a case of infertility.

During her practice, Dr Bindu said, each day two to three patients were found to be infertile. She added that the number of cases could be more as not all patients seek consultation.

"The problem of infertility is not just among women, but also in men." According to her, the key causes of infertility in Oman are late marriages, a sedentary lifestyle, an increasing number career-oriented women start-



Dr Bindu Kumari

ing families at a later age, pelvic infections, lack of exercise, unhealthy eating habits and use of tobacco in any form.

In cases of infertility, the first step is a change in lifestyle, followed by medical or surgical help if required. In case of PCOs, Dr Bindu said blood profile tests can reveal the problem, and that earlier the medical help is sought, the better the outcome is for the patient.