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REVIEW ARTICLE

ECOLOGICAL IMBALANCES IN THE COASTAL AREAS OF PAKISTAN AND KARACHI HARBOUR

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ABSTRACT: The marine environment of Pakistan has been described in the context of three main regions: the Indus delta and its creek system, the Karachi coastal region, and the Baluchistan coast. The creek system is overgrown, does not receive adequate discharges of freshwater. On site observations indicate that freshwater continues flowing into them during the lean water periods and dries the mangrove there. A major factor for the loss of mangrove forests as well as ecological disturbances in the Indus delta is loss of the all-flood resulting in erosion of its mouth.

The ecological disturbance has been aggravated by allowing cattle to browse the mangroves. The loss branches and muds, having been detached of leaves are left for firewood. Evidence is presented to show that while indiscriminate removal of its mangrove area is responsible for the loss of large tracts of mangrove forests, overharvesting of fisheries resources has depleted the river of some valuable fishes that were available from the delta area.

Municipal and industrial effluents discharged into the Lyari and Malir rivers are responsible for land-based pollution at the Karachi coast and the harbour. The following are the three major areas requiring land-based pollution and whose environmental conditions have been examined in detail: (1) the Malir channel, located on the estuary of the Lyari river and serving as the main harbour, has vast areas forming its western and eastern boundaries characterised by mud flats and mangroves. The discharge of industrial wastewater from the S.I.T.E. and municipal effluents from the southern and central districts into the Lyari has turned this river into an open drain. This, in turn, has caused a negative impact on the environment of the port, fish harbour, and the adjacent beaches. (2) The Clari creek receives industrial and municipal effluents from the Malir river as well as from several industries and power stations. The highly degraded discharges from the Malir have negatively impacted the environment in this creek. (3) The coastline between the Malir channel and Clari creek where the untreated municipal effluents are discharged by the southern districts of Karachi, is responsible for the degraded environment of the Clari creek, and also of the beaches and the harbour.

The Baluchistan coast is relatively safe from land-based pollution, mainly because of the lack of industrial, urban or agricultural activity, except the Hingol river system where some agricultural activities have been initiated.

The marine environment of Pakistan encompasses a coastline stretching from the eastern edge of the Indus delta to Owatar Bay at Ras Pasnah where the Dasht river discharges into the sea. It also includes the Exclusive Economic Zone extending over 320 Km into the Arabian Sea. A number of man-made processes have been initiated during the last 60 years causing an imbalance in the ecosystem of the coastline. The areas of concern with regard to marine pollution are the creek system, the Karachi coast, and the Baluchistan coast (Ahmed, 1979; Beg, 1979; GOP, 1986).

THE INDUS DELTA

The creek system which in the past formed the channels of the Indus delta seems inactive now because the river has migrated to the east and has been dyked to flow in a fixed course. By all standards, the water in the creek system should be highly saline, but it is not. A large and intricate network of canals flows from the dyke. The water that flows into the fields from adjacent canals is also purged by tube wells into the riverine area. The end of each channel is marked by a swamp where the water stagnates over a wide area and flows slowly into the sea. This stagnation is deliberate,

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