

Sustainable Marine Environment and Habitat: Who is Responsible?

Marine environments offer different opportunities for varied aspects of human activities. On the one hand, these opportunities can be in terms of diversified natural and man-made resources both within and beneath the seabed. On the other hand, the activities are always on the increase, their importance must be geared towards effective and sustained uses of the ocean. There are different United Nations chapters and other regional national and local regulations and drivers that have been at the forefront of championing the course of sustainable marine environments. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Rio Declaration are a part of such declarations for the utmost administration and use of the seas and oceans of world.

For the Asia Pacific region, in Malaysia for instance, two of the agencies involved in the regulation and management of the marine environment and waters resources are the Department of Environment and the Marine Department of Malaysia.

These regulations are inherently important for both coastal and deep-sea navigations, as Malaysian waters serve as part of the global seaborne lanes for the transportation of goods and services. For example, the Strait of Malacca is one of busiest world lanes.

Sustainable use of the marine environment has been on the increase in many respects in Malaysian waters. However, the dumping of sediment on the Great Barrier Reef in Australia to pave the way for dredging activities for the expansion of a coal port has also recently been announced (31 January 2014).

But some of these regulations are not properly obeyed by some participants.

Examples of some unsustainable marine activities that are distinctive to maritime areas, including Malaysian waters, are: dumping of sediment materials at undesignated areas, either from dredged materials or otherwise, sand mining and filling, reclamation, coastal accidents and disasters, sea accidents and coastal area degradations.

In the case of these global trends of unsustainable use of the oceans, one of the questions that should come to mind is "Who is Responsible"?

In my view, it is the responsibility of all agencies and stakeholders, both private and public, with regulations that must be strictly obeyed and adhered to. It is also partly the responsibility of the stakeholders to ensure that there is adequate human capacity, training, and re-training in the face of information and communication technology.

For example, cases in which single beam surveys were used in some Asia Pacific regions by hydrographers where multibeam echo sounders should have been used for their hydrography campaigns should not be tolerated. The relevant authorities requesting for the survey for dredging work need to play their part in demanding that multibeam echo sounders must be used for the survey. Furthermore, the hydrographers can play their role in recommending that relevant authorities carry out multibeam surveys.

As such, hydrographers should be seen as part of the bedrock for sustainable marine environments. This is also one of the responsibilities of hydrographers.