TAFI Media Release

TASMANIAN AQUACULTURE AND FISHERIES INSTITUTE
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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

Galapagos marine species threatened by El Niño, overfishing and climate change

Ocean warming and over-fishing are threatening the coastal wildlife of the Galapagos Islands, a new report by a team of international scientists led by Associate Professor Graham Edgar of the Tasmanian Aquaculture and Fisheries Institute (TAFI) at the University of Tasmania has revealed.

The report shows that the Galapagos Islands – arguably the world's most celebrated environmental treasure – has suffered major biodiversity losses due to a combination of severe oceanographic heating events and over fishing, with several species of marine plants and animals believed to have become extinct and many others seriously threatened.

The report has been published in the scientific journal *Global Change Biology* (DOI: 10.1111/j.1365-2486.2009.02117.x).

The report, which involved an international team of scientists led by, Assoc Prof Edgar outlines the massive impact that the increasing ocean temperatures associated with strong El Nino events have had on the archipelago.

Coupled with fishing, tourism and other human activities, these recent impacts have changed Darwin's living laboratory forever.

The report follows a major scientific meeting, convened by the Ecuadorian Ministry of Environment, the Galápagos National Park Service, Conservation International, WWF and other organisations, to assess the vulnerability of the Islands to climate change.

Experts established that the El Nino weather cycle, possibly aggravated by global climate change, and combined with other human impacts has systematically impoverished the Galápagos marine environment in just a few decades.

The scientists that co-authored the report hope that the findings will demonstrate the urgency of taking action so that delegates at the international climate conference in Copenhagen later this month make tough commitments to adequately finance both measures to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to urgently address the climate adaptation needs of vulnerable communities and ecosystems.

Assoc Prof Edgar said for a marine biologist, Galapagos is the most remarkable location on the planet.

“It is the only place worldwide with a coexisting mix of tropical species such as corals and hammerhead sharks and cool-water species such as fur seals, kelps and penguins,” he said

“Despite recent biodiversity losses, this global aquatic treasure remains less disturbed by human activity than most other regions globally, with much hope for the future.

“The Galapagos National Park Service is presently applying innovative management practices that involve local fishers and tourist operators, with decisions informed by findings of collaborating local and international marine scientists, many based at the Charles Darwin Foundation.”

More information can be found at:
http://www.wiley.com/bw/journal.asp?ref=1354-1013&site=1

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