

The Western Star

Corner Brook, NL
3°C
Wind: 19 Km/h
Humidity: 60 %
Feels like -1°C
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Newfoundland waters among those 'heavily affected' by humans: report

ST. JOHN'S
JAMIE BAKER
 The Telegram

Waters near St. John's and areas around the Bay of Fundy in Nova Scotia are among the most adversely affected by human activity in the entire Western Atlantic Ocean, a new study has found.

By combining information on 17 different types of at-sea activities, including various kinds of fishing, climate change, shipping, and pollution, a California based research team discovered that almost half of the world's oceans have now been "heavily affected" by humans.

Despite its reputation as a pristine marine environment, Atlantic Canada was not spared scrutiny in the study.

"Along with hotspots of very high impact off of the U.S. Eastern seaboard, especially around New York City, the waters around Nova Scotia and Newfoundland are heavily impacted," said Carrie Kappel of the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS) at UC Santa Barbara, California, where the study was carried out.

"This is because these areas are subject to high levels of a variety of different types of artisanal and commercial fishing - both demersal, or bottom fishing, and pelagic, or open water fisheries - runoff of inorganic pollutants from land and ocean-based pollutants from ships at sea, commercial shipping activity, and invasive species," she said.

Kappel said the waters around the province and Nova Scotia were also of particular interest, not just because of the activity taking place, but the sensitivity of the area itself.

"There are ecosystems in this region, such as rocky reefs, that are vulnerable to the impacts of a lot of these activities," she said.

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The study involved 19 scientists. From the global perspective, the study found that more than 40 per cent of the world's oceans have been "heavily affected" by humans. Less than four per cent was listed as being "relatively untouched."

Kappel said the idea to undertake the project came about as a result of a simple question: Where are the last great places in the oceans and where should a person go scuba-diving next, while it's still relatively pristine?

Of all the factors included in the research, Kappel said it was clear that climate change was the biggest factor, followed by fisheries activity and commercial shipping in terms of overall impact.

For the fishing component, Kappel said the team replied data from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, which had been processed by the University of British Columbia's Sea Around Us Project. She said fishing activities were divided into five categories, namely: Demersal habitat-modifying; demersal non-habitat-modifying low bycatch; demersal non-habitat-modifying high bycatch; pelagic low bycatch; and pelagic high bycatch

Fisheries were assigned to the five categories based on gear type, species targeted and what is known about how the fishery impacts habitat and non-target species. "Bottom trawl fisheries, in particular, were classified as demersal habitat-modifying," Kappel explained. "In general, the ecological impact of demersal habitat-modifying fisheries is worse than those that don't modify habitat ... so they got a higher impact score when they were included in our model."

25/02/08

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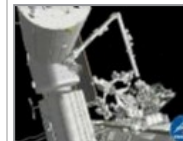
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