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A Growing Threat to Ecosystem Stability and Human Livelihoods

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Introduction

Species diversity and abundance are continuing to diminish as a result of widespread human influences on the waters. Protecting biodiversity and the essential ecosystem services it supports has become a priority for the scientific community, resource managers, and national and international policy agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, as awareness of the benefits that healthy marine ecosystems provide to people grows. Reduced species richness or abundance can jeopardise ecosystem services like fisheries and nutrient cycling, as well as compromise overall ecosystem stability and resilience [1].

These decreases have been seen in a variety of marine habitats, and they can occasionally result in significant changes in food web dynamics. Climate change, overfishing, and pollution are all factors that have contributed to many of these changes. However, due to a lack of capability and financial support for conservation and management, resources must be directed to locations where investment can best preserve high levels of marine biodiversity and the ecological services they provide.

Description

In terrestrial and marine ecosystems, identifying priority locations such as 'hotspots, high-biodiversity wilderness areas, or other categorizations such as ecoregions has been critical for conservation planning. Despite its value in terrestrial conservation, finding spatially explicit zones of high biodiversity linked with either high or low human influence for marine ecosystems has never been done. To uncover emerging patterns as a vital input to reaching global marine biodiversity conservation goals, we merged the most comprehensive worldwide collection of species distribution data currently available with high-resolution data on human effects [2].

Many ecological and socioeconomic factors may be used to identify areas with high conservation value, but relative levels of biodiversity and human influence are two of the most significant factors to consider when prioritising conservation efforts. We concentrated our research on two key biodiversity indicators: species richness and species endemism, which are not always geographically congruent. Both of these diversity indicators are regarded to be significant for different reasons. Although dynamics differ by ecosystem and species, marine communities with more species diversity are more resilient to environmental stress than communities with fewer species [3].

Due to limited human or environmental disruptions, endemic or range-restricted species are often regarded to be at greater risk of extinction. Endemism-rich areas must be protected in order to minimise biodiversity loss and sustain genetic variety. Although earlier research has looked at peaks in marine species richness for a few taxa, we used finer-scale data and two endemism measures to produce spatially explicit maps of diversity that were categorised by degree of effect. For planning objectives, many conservation activities require data at these smaller scales.

There are two techniques to selecting sites that may be noteworthy due to the presence of unique species. Range rarity is one method for identifying the highest populations of somewhat uncommon or range-restricted species. This method has already been used to identify priority conservation sites in terrestrial and marine ecosystems [4,5]. The alternative method is to find sites where species with limited ranges exist, regardless of the number of species present. We'll refer to this method as 'proportional range rarity' since it splits range rarity values by species richness.

Conclusion

We may give complementary insights on the places that may be essential for safeguarding endemic species by integrating both endemism measures. We found locations where species richness and these two endemism metrics peaked across taxonomic groups, then combined those findings with a high-resolution model of estimated cumulative human impacts to create a spatially explicit roadmap for prioritising specific places and types of impacts for marine conservation action.

Acknowledgement

Not applicable.

Conflict of Interest

Not applicable.

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