

Preface

The critical stage of the aquatic environment has become widely more apparent not only for experts and scientist, but also for the general public. Freshwater depletion, pollution, habitat destruction and the unsustainable exploitation of living resources are serious transboundary problems that have developed over a fairly short timeframe. Global climate change will also result in unpredictable transformations that will alter the Earth's freshwater and marine ecosystems.

Actions to reverse this negative trend are urgently needed. More than a billion people lack access to safe drinking water, depleted freshwater resources and the subsequent salinity problems impact negatively on agriculture and food production and overfishing threatens the vitality of large fish stocks. The UN Millennium Development Goals target these problems and have set forth an ambitious schedule to reduce them by 50% by 2015. UNEP is committed to work for the fulfillment of these goals.

The present report is one in a series of regional assessment carried out under the GIWA project. The East China Sea is unique in many respects and this is reflected in the assessment. The drainage basin of the East China Sea is one of the most densely populated areas on the Earth. Approximately 300 million people live in this area. Industrialisation and

economic growth has been remarkably high during the last decades. One of the largest rivers on Earth, the Yangtze River, discharges into the East China Sea; and Shanghai at its mouth is one of the largest metropolises in the world. The infrastructure development in the river basin is also unique in its size. The Three Gorges dam is one of the largest dams ever constructed and so is the south-to-north water transfer scheme intended to bring water into the drought prone Yellow River basin and the parched north. Thus both the anthropogenic influences as well as the freshwater to marine interactions is more dominant in this region than in most other regions assessed by GIWA.

The laboratory for estuarine research at the East China Normal University has studied these problem areas for a long time. GIWA has been able to draw on this accumulated experience.

The aim of this report is to give a better understanding of the driving forces in society that lead to environmental pressures and the causal relationships that underlay the deterioration of the aquatic environment. It is my hope that this report will be seen as a roadmap to sustainability and lead to the actions necessary to overcome the environmental challenges we all face.

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