

UN warns of rising seas, storm surges

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The same oceans that nourished human evolution are poised to unleash misery on a global scale unless the carbon pollution destabilising Earth's marine environment is brought to heel, warns a draft UN report obtained by AFP.



Destructive changes already set in motion could see a steady decline in fish stocks, a hundred-fold or more increase in the damages caused by superstorms, and hundreds of millions of people displaced by rising seas, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) "special report" on oceans and Earth's frozen zones, known as the cryosphere. As the 21st century unfolds, melting glaciers will first give too much and then too little to billions who depend on them for fresh water, it finds.

Without deep cuts to manmade emissions, at least 30% of the northern hemisphere's surface permafrost could melt by century's end, unleashing billions of tonnes of carbon and accelerating global warming even more. The 900-page scientific assessment is the fourth such tome from the UN in less than a year, with others focused on a 1.5-Celsius cap on global warming, the state of biodiversity, and how to manage forests and the global food system.

All four conclude that humanity must overhaul the way it produces and consumes almost everything to avoid the worst ravages of climate change and environmental degradation.

Governments meet in Monaco next month to vet the new report's official summary. The final advice to policymakers will be released on September 25.

Extreme events

By 2050, many low-lying megacities and small island nations will experience "extreme sea level events" every year, the report concludes.

Even if the world manages to cap global warming at two degrees Celsius, the global ocean waterline will rise enough to displace more 250 million people.

The report indicated this could happen as soon as 2100, though some experts think it is more likely to happen on a longer timescale.
