

Lewis & Clark College

Department of Biology

0615 S.W. Palatine Hill Road

Portland, Oregon 97219-7899

Phone 503-768-7510

Fax 503-768-7688

E-mail clifton@lclark.edu

www.lclark.edu



10/21/12

To Whom It May Concern:

It has been my great fortune to visit Tanzania five times in the last eight years. In addition to extraordinary safaris to Ngorogoro Crater, Tarangire, and Serengetti, I have also enjoyed the northern coast of the country, particularly the ostensibly protected coral reefs surrounding Maziwe Island, just southeast of the Pangani River.

As a tropical marine biologist who has studied coral reef fishes around the world for more than 30 years, I find Maziwe's reefs to be vibrant and healthy. During my visits I have recorded over 400 species of fish for the region and noted countless species of invertebrates. Given the important role that coral reefs play, both in terms of promoting and maintaining some of the highest levels of biodiversity on the planet, as well as providing an invaluable resource for humans, this reef system truly represents one of Tanzania's greatest national treasures.

That said, I must share some alarm concerning the increased fishing activity and destructive harvesting practices I observed during my most recent visit. Despite Maziwe's protected status as a marine reserve, I noted fishing boats and net use on Maziwe's reefs each of the four days I visited the reef. While snorkeling I heard nearby dynamite blasts, including one that was close enough to hurt my ears. I also encountered a spear-fisherman who had several fish and an octopus on his stringer and noticed that the reef fish I was attempting to photograph were much more skittish than my last visit in 2009. Finally, while walking on Maziwe Island I encountered the track of a nesting turtle that had obviously been flipped over and dragged to the shoreline, presumably to be taken away by boat.

I am concerned that these different harvesting activities will have lasting and deleterious impacts on the coral reefs of northern Tanzania. Multiple studies from around the world have demonstrated the efficacy of marine protected zones. Protected fish are more abundant and larger. Slow growing corals within reserves avoid the hazards of destructive practices like dynamite and dragging nets. If given sufficient time, these healthy and prospering ecosystems can then repopulate surrounding, unprotected areas with bountiful fish populations that can sustain higher levels of harvest from fishermen. In short, we know that marine protected areas are a vital component of sound resource management strategies, and I worry that at the levels of harvest activity that I recently observed, the wonderful natural bounty of your coastal waters may be shifting towards ecological collapse.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions regarding my observations and concerns.

Sincerely Yours

Dr Kenneth E. Clifton – Ph.D.

clifton@lclark.edu