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The Caribbean is well known for its rich biodiversity especially as associated with coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass beds and has been described as a major biodiversity "hotspot". Like most tropical islands, the Caribbean territories are environmentally fragile, being especially vulnerable to both internal and external interference. The human impacts on environments in the Caribbean are significant, because of high population densities, poverty and in many cases the absence of sanitary facilities. Pollution and contamination in coastal and marine environments is common to most of the islands from agriculture, domestic/municipal areas, the tourism industry, shipping and marine transport and heavy industry (mainly Trinidad). Much of the research, management and education programmes to effect sustainable use of biodiversity and conservation are carried out by state agencies, with a more recent emergence of private sector interest and support. The forces promoting protection and conservation of biodiversity are not consolidated and as yet, not powerful enough to influence major policy decisions in favour of effective policies. Government agencies continue to be ineffective due to: inadequate funding, low technical capacities, obsolete policies, and weak management of available resources. The gap in decisive leadership by governments remains a significant impediment to achieving substantive progress in marine biodiversity conservation. Many of the Caribbean islands are signatory to the various multilateral environmental agreements most of which relate directly or indirectly to conservation of terrestrial and marine biodiversity. However, a number of issues impede the achievement of the biodiversity policy goals. These include Inappropriate legislative and policy framework for marine issues; Weak marine pollution policy; Inadequate institutional linkages; Weak implementation of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs); Weak enforcement regime; Limited stakeholder involvement and sensitization; and Inadequate consideration of technical aspects. This paper presents the wider Caribbean as a case study and highlights issues in one of the wealthier Caribbean nations-Trinidad and Tobago. This twin-island state is located a few kilometres off NE South America (10=80 N) and has a thriving offshore oil and gas industry. Given the number of significant ongoing marine investigations in the region we are still a long way from realizing biodiversity conservation goals in the Caribbean.

MARINE BIODIVERSITY INFORMATION RESOURCES TO SUPPORT ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AND DECISION-MAKING - THE MARINE LIFE INFORMATION NETWORK.

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The Marine Life Information Network (MarLIN) pioneered the use of the internet to provide information resources to support marine environmental management, protection and conservation in the UK through its dedicated website (www.marlin.ac.uk). Initiated by the Marine Biological Association (MBA) in 1998, MarLIN has over ten years experience of providing information tailored to the needs of policy and decision makers, environmental managers, conservation agencies and the general public. Policy makers and marine environmental decision makers are making increasing demands on scientists to answer questions regarding ecosystem structure and function, short and long term management, marine spatial planning, the likely effects of human activities on marine biodiversity and the likely changes in biodiversity and ecosystem services as a result on climate change, introduction of non-natives and other impacts both natural and anthropogenic. In many cases, especially emergency response, decision makers need almost instant access to information. Using MarLIN as an example, the presentation will explore how the Web can be used to disseminate information on marine biodiversity to support decision and policy making in the UK and Europe. The presentation will demonstrate several resources designed to answer the above questions, including background information on species and habitats, sensitivity mapping, on-line databases of human impacts and seabed indicator species. Furthermore, examples will be presented of how data (from a variety of sources) and information can be integrated to develop decision support systems such as marine spatial planning GIS, biodiversity mapping and biodiversity hotspot mapping. Future developments, as we move towards a more integrated 'semantic' Web, will be put forward.

ERASMUS MUNDUS MASTER OF SCIENCE IN MARINE BIODIVERSITY AND CONSERVATION.

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The Erasmus Mundus Master of Science in Marine Biodiversity and Conservation (EMBC) is offered by a University consortium consisting of 6 partners : group I : Ghent University (Belgium), University of Bremen (Germany), University of the Algarve (Portugal), group II : University Pierre et Marie Curie - Paris 006 (France), University of Oviedo (Spain) and University of Klaipėda (Lithuania). The study programme is divided in 3 thematic modules : (1) Understanding the structure and function of marine biodiversity , (2) Toolbox for investigating marine biodiversity,(3) Conservation and Restoration of marine biodiversity. Student mobility is an integral part of the Master : students start in one of the three group I Universities (Gent, Bremen or Algarve) for 2 semesters; for the third semester, students move to one of the group II Universities (Paris, Oviedo or Klaipėda). The research project for the thesis work is performed in one of the partner institutions (including institutes of the MarBEF- NoE).