

CHAPTER 6 - LIVING BY THE OCEAN





THE SEA IS ONE

The sea, like the rest of the planet, is one whole rather than many small parts. Nothing can be done to part of the sea without consequences for the whole. Good consequences include those from a marine reserve, set up by villagers to improve their fish yields. Within the reserve, all fish are protected. None are caught. They thrive, have many young, and these swim out of the reserve and into the nets of surrounding villagers. Those that stay inside the reserve are always safe and provide a reservoir of reproducing fish. Reserves like this have been set up in Bazaruto in Mozambique, and in Mafia Island in Tanzania. On the other hand, a factory polluting the water around it can have negative effects, perhaps causing the death of fish miles away. If the factory does not join in with efforts to help protect the fish, they may not succeed.

Though immense the marine environment is fragile. Each ecosystem functions in a particular and sensitive way. Coral reefs for example are home to so many different creatures they have been described as underwater rainforests. The brightly coloured fish talk to each other with sign language, using their colours and movements to signify

moods and intentions. Corals (Scleractinia) are made up of a hard skeleton housing many tiny animals known as polyps. These polyps fed on zooplankton. Tiny symbiotic algae also live inside the coral tissue. These help the coral to form. They can only grow however, if enough light reaches them.

Sediment from soil erosion, described in Chapter 3, washes into the sea and spreads out. Light cannot pass through soily seas, so the coral reefs die. Understanding and protecting coral is a crucial part of marine conservation.

