

Dynamite Fishing Resurfaces in Tanzania

Reef Location: Tanzania

Country: Tanzania

Author: Sue Wells

Tanzania, on the central eastern coast of Africa, is home to an extensive network of coral reefs whose biodiversity and beauty support major artisanal fishing and tourism industries. Roughly two-thirds of the country's 1,000 km coastline harbors fringing and patch reefs along a narrow continental shelf and several offshore islands. Unfortunately, Tanzania is also the only country in Africa where dynamite fishing still occurs on a large scale.

This devastating form of fishing first appeared in Tanzania in the 1960s, and by the mid-1990s had become a serious problem. A high-profile national campaign involving hotel operators and the media brought international pressure and donor attention to the issue, and the navy was enlisted to assist with enforcement. This campaign, along with close community and peer group control, succeeded in pushing out dynamiters for over two decades, particularly in southern Tanzania. Also in the north, blasting was rare for a few years between 1997 and 2003.

However, since 2003, dynamite fishing has returned with increasing vengeance. Over the last few years, tourists have reported unpleasant experiences of having heard blasting while diving, which is damaging to Tanzania's image as an emerging diving destination. Most of the blasting tends to be concentrated along the northern coast in Tanga and west of Pemba Island, on the central coast near the capital of Dar es Salaam, and in the south near Mtwara. The Tanzanian Dynamite Fishing Monitoring Network, a voluntary network of marine conservationists and the private tourism and fisheries sector, has accumulated an extensive list of blasting observations since 2004.

One reason for the increase in blast fishing is that explosives are cheap and easily accessible to fishers. Bombs are usually sourced from mining, demolition, and road construction enterprises or constructed from scratch using fertilizers and diesel. At new sites one blast can lead to a catch of up to 150 to 400 kg of fish (a profit of US \$400 to \$1800 in market sales), which is a lucrative short-term profit despite the long-term destruction left behind.

The increase in dynamite fishing is not for a lack of laws in place. Adequate anti-dynamiting legislation and prosecution procedures exist on paper. Responsibility for enforcement lies with the Fisheries Division and District governments, and a mechanism for involvement of villagers in fisheries management has been established for several years. The World Bank and GEF have funded US \$63 million toward a Marine and Coastal Environment Management Project to support the Fisheries Department and local authorities. These authorities possess blacklists of dynamiters, who are individuals generally known to the communities and to local government. However, because of corruption within the Fisheries Department and the political connections of dynamiters, most escape prosecution or major fines. The penalties imposed in the handful of recent convictions in Tanga and Dar es Salaam were all far below the legal minimum sentence. The message of leniency against dynamiters has thus led to widespread cynicism and hesitation among villagers to turn them in.

To put an end to blast fishing, top level political will within the country and a collective zero-tolerance policy at all levels is needed. Importantly, there is also need for much greater pressure from donors, international NGOs that support conservation work in Tanzania, and the international community as a whole. Dynamite fishing was halted in the 1990s in Tanzania with far fewer resources, and so it should certainly be possible now. Fortunately, some of Tanzania's reefs are still pristine—but they will not remain so for long if this destructive fishing practice is allowed to continue.

References

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