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Presence of caryophylliid corals in biofouling community settled on artificial settlement collectors in Colombo Port

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Colombo Port is situated in the middle of East-West maritime route. Being one of the busiest port in Asia, Colombo Port is unreservedly exposed to marine bio-invasions. The present study was to investigate biofouling community within the port. Biofouling organisms were investigated from seven sampling locations using artificial settlement collectors. These collectors were submerged in four different depths where first set was 1 m below the water surface and others setting at 1 m intervals. Monthly samples were collected from October, 2014 to March, 2017. Fouling organisms were identified morphologically using fine morphological features and their percentage cover was also assessed. Three species of caryophylliid corals were recorded from five of the sampling locations (i.e. New Pilot Station; Colombo International Container Terminal; Passenger Jetty; Bandaranayke Quay; Unity Container Terminal within Colombo port. They are *Nomlandia californica*, *Paracyathus stokesii* and *Phyllangia americana* belonging to order Scleractinia, sub order Caryophylliina and family Caryophylliidae. They are small, encrusting and predominately do not show symbiotic relationship with algae. With continuous dredging, pollution and fresh water inputs, recruitment of corals in such a disturbed habitat is rare. Present findings indicated that their abundance of coral species within the Colombo Port is substantial. Therefore, it is necessary to implement management measures in these artificial environments to conserve coral species that are recruiting. Further, extensive work on coral recruitment within the port is imperative to understand their distribution and native or introduced status within the country waters.

Keywords: caryophylliid corals, Colombo Port, settlement collectors

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