



Australian Government

Great Barrier Reef
Marine Park Authority

Coral bleaching

Updated: 1 April 2016

Extensive in-water and aerial surveys show the most severe bleaching is in the far northern sector of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Bleaching is less severe towards the southern part of the Reef.

Bleaching occurs when live corals are stressed from overheating. If the waters cool down soon, the corals can survive, but if the corals remain stressed for many weeks, they will die off.

Although there was substantial cloud cover and rain over parts of the Reef in March, this did not have a sufficient cooling effect on sea temperatures to relieve heat stress.

The bleaching event is still unfolding, and the full extent and severity of bleaching may take several weeks to become clear.

Reef-wide assessments and analyses of bleaching will take several weeks to complete.

The most severe bleaching continues to be in the far northern sector between Cooktown and the tip of Cape York.

Bleaching has also intensified in the area between Cooktown and Townsville.

The least affected area is the southern-most section of the Marine Park, below Mackay, with only minor bleaching detected.

A map is available summarising the observed bleaching.

The northern third of the Reef continues to experience the most heat stress, with recorded sea surface temperatures of 1-2 degree Celsius above average.

The central part of the Reef is generally about one degree Celsius above average, while temperatures in the southern part are about 0.5-1 degree Celsius warmer than average.

Frequently asked questions

Find answers to your questions about bleaching on the Reef.

Current conditions on the Reef

Summary and detailed information on sea surface temperature, tropical cyclones, rainfall levels and flood plumes to date.

Coral bleaching resources

Coral bleaching resources: Image gallery, bleaching infographic, informative video and observed bleaching map.

Coral bleaching fact sheet

Find out how and why coral bleaching occurs.

Coral Bleaching Response Plan

The Coral Bleaching Response Plan was developed to meet the challenge of responding to coral bleaching events.

Sea surface forecasts

Australia's Bureau of Meteorology provides information on sea surface temperatures for monitoring coral bleaching.

ReefTemp

ReefTemp Next Generation is a set of high resolution mapping products that provide information on coral bleaching risk for the Great Barrier Reef region.

Information for reef managers

Our e-library contains publications on reef health and management, including the 2014 Outlook Report and strategic assessment.

Student and teacher resources

Educational materials, including teaching units and a poster series, for primary and secondary school students.