



Coral bleaching

Updated: 2 June 2016

Diver teams are undertaking a final round of surveys to assess the extent and severity of coral bleaching and mortality.

The final leg of surveys is taking place off Cape Grenville in the remote far northern part of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

Overall, there continues to be severe bleaching from the tip of Cape York down to some reef areas offshore of Townsville.

Preliminary findings from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Australian Institute of Marine Science show approximately three quarters of coral on the Reef has survived to date.

The vast majority of the impact is in the northern third of the Reef, from Port Douglas to Cape York, with the central and southern regions escaping significant mortality.

Further surveys are scheduled for October to assess recovery rates of live bleached corals.

- A map is available of average mortality levels at individual reefs to date.
- A map is available summarising the observed bleaching.

Coral mortality to date:

Far Northern Management Area:

From the tip of Cape York to just north of Lizard Island, coral mortality on reefs ranges from very high (50 per cent or more) to low levels (between 0.1 and 9.9 per cent).

Based on the results of in-water surveys to date, the average coral loss is 50 per cent in this area.

Cairns/Cooktown Management Area:

Between Lizard Island and Tully, coral mortality on reefs ranges from high (between 30 and 49.9 per cent) to low levels (between 0.1 and 9.9 per cent).

Based on the results of in-water surveys to date, the average coral loss is 16 per cent in this area. (*Note: Surveys around Lizard Island were conducted in March. More recent reports indicate mortality levels are likely to be higher in this management area.*)

Townsville–Whitsunday Management Area:

Between Tully and the Whitsundays, coral mortality on reefs ranges from medium levels (between 10 and 29.9 per cent) to no mortality.

Based on the results of in-water surveys to date, the average coral loss is 3 per cent in this area.

Mackay/Capricorn Management Area:

South of Mackay, no bleaching-induced mortality has been detected.

Sea surface temperatures

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

According to the Bureau of Meteorology, the Reef recorded its highest average sea surface temperatures for February, March and April since records began in 1900.

Reef waters are still warmer than average for this time of year.

As of 31 May 2016, sea surface temperatures for most of the Marine Park are between 0.5 degrees and 1.5 degrees Celsius above the May average (using a baseline from 2002–2011).

Frequently asked questions

Find answers to your questions about bleaching on the Reef.

Coral bleaching resources

Coral bleaching resources: [Image gallery](#), [bleaching infographic](#), [informative video](#) and [map of observed bleaching](#).

Responsible reef practices – Spearfishing

Fishers and spearfishers should consider leaving plant-eating fish to help control seaweed and enable coral larvae to settle and create new colonies.

Student and teacher resources

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

Coral bleaching fact sheet

Find out how and why coral bleaching occurs.

Eye on the Reef program

Eye on the Reef is a monitoring program that enables anyone who visits the Reef to contribute to its long-term protection.

Report your sightings

Download the free Eye on the Reef smart phone app from iTunes/Google play app store or you can use the desktop app to report your Reef sightings.

Coral Bleaching Response Plan

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

Sea surface temperatures

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.

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CLIMATE CHANGE

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[Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report](#)

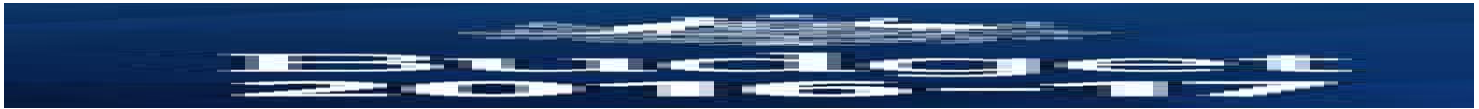
OUT ON THE WATER

[Legislation, regulations and policies](#)

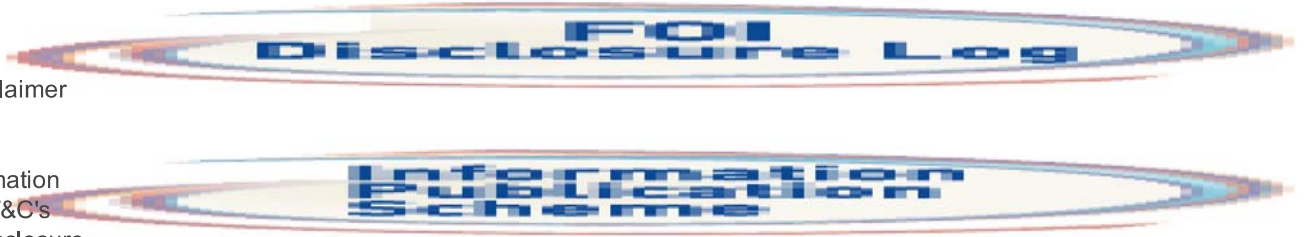
- Zoning
- Plans of management
- Site specific management
- Caring for the Reef
- Field Management Partners

NEWS AND RESOURCES

- Latest news
- Reef in Brief e-newsletter
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