



Saving Reefs Worldwide
Research Education Conservation

Reef Check Foundation Public Comment: USCRTF Meeting November 3, 2005 Koror Palau

In the early 1980s, our colleague Dr. Peter Glynn predicted that the frequency and intensity of bleaching events would increase, threatening coral reefs throughout the world. His prediction was correct. In 1998, the world suffered a catastrophic bleaching event that killed about 10% of the world's corals in a few months. This year, 2005, is the hottest year ever recorded and probably in the past 1000 years. As a result, a mass of warm water buildup in the Caribbean is currently threatening the coral reefs of dozens of islands, including US territories. How are we going to work together to respond to this emergency?

It is now 12 years since the 1993 meeting in Miami on Global Health of Coral Reefs that laid the foundation for ICRI, USCRTF, GCRMN and Reef Check. Thanks to NOAA, there is now an excellent on-line system available to track sea surface temperature. However, the only network of teams available to monitor the results of bleaching throughout the Caribbean using a standardized method is comprised of volunteer Reef Check teams, a part of the GCRMN. Many do not have the resources to immediately carry out surveys and document the extent of this potential catastrophe that threatens the second most biodiverse ecosystem in the world. Without additional resources, it is likely that after this bleaching event is over, we will not have a clear picture of the extent of the damage and combination of conditions that led to some reefs dying and others living, and therefore, how to plan and prepare for future bleaching events.

I would like to formally sound the alarm that the very ecosystem that the US CRFT was established to protect is facing an extremely serious threat as I speak. While the SE Asian tsunami and recent series of hurricanes in the Atlantic were dramatic and damaged reefs, the potential damage from bleaching is geographically much larger and mortality can be much greater. A number of recent scientific publications have indicated that bleaching threatens the very existence of coral reefs.

I would like to request that the US CRTF take immediate and strong action and dig deep to find the resources needed to work with NGO partners to document the effects of this catastrophic bleaching event. In addition, I urge the US CRTF to allocate more long-term resources to the existing GCRMN/Reef Check monitoring teams so that we will be better prepared to document future bleaching events. This is the only way that we will be able to create better predictive models and guide resource management in the face of increasing global temperatures and more frequent and severe bleaching events.

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