



## CAN-030-Coral Bleaching-World's Oceans

[Join us to save coral reefs](#)

Vic Ferguson

The World Federation for Coral Reef Conservation 281.971.7703 P.O. Box 311117 Houston Texas 77231

6.4.15

Global Biodiversity Disaster



[Gregor Hodgson](#)

Executive Director at Reef Check Foundation

Oct 7, 2015

**[The 3rd Global Coral Bleaching \(GCBE3\) event since 1997 is underway!!!](#)**

It started slowly in 2014 and will last through 2016. It has already bleached and killed large areas of coral reef in many parts of the world, including Hawaii, American Samoa and Florida. Based on satellite data and climate models, the US National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration's Coral Watch Program predicts this to be the worst event in history. Parts of the Pacific and Caribbean are bleaching now and will experience peak bleaching in October/November. During the early part of 2016, Australia and the Western Indian Ocean will be threatened with the hottest water on record.



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Reef Check is a global marine conservation organization that has trained field teams that monitor coral reefs in 90 countries using a standard method for 19 years. Reef Check scientists predict that as much as 25% of the remaining reefs in the world could be lost over the next 12 months. The degree and extent of the damage will likely affect food security and economies of dozens of developing countries; Small Island Developing States are particularly vulnerable. The immediate damage to tourism and fisheries could run into billions of dollars and could affect a billion people.

This is a global biodiversity emergency because coral reefs are the second highest diversity ecosystem on earth after rainforests. They are found throughout the tropics and they are invaluable because they supply fish and shellfish, protect the coast from wave erosion, are a focus of coastal tourism, and have immense genetic diversity that has only just been tapped for drugs such as Ara-C, a potent drug used to fight childhood leukemia.

There is an urgent need to improve field tracking of the 3rd Global Coral Bleaching Event and quickly deploy more teams and more frequently to measure the actual damage to the reefs. Corals bleach if the water heats up above the normal seasonal temperature range. If the bleaching continues for too long, then the corals die. NOAA models predict more severe damage to coral reefs in many parts of the world during the remainder of 2015 and into 2016. The 1998 event killed at least 11% of the world's coral reefs and in areas such as the Maldives, some 90% of the corals were killed.[1] Many reefs in the Caribbean were damaged during a regional bleaching event in 2005[1] and over 70% of corals were killed on reefs in parts of Thailand during GCBE2 in 2010.[2]

On September 9, 2015, Drs. Gregor Hodgson (Reef Check) and Mark Eakin (NOAA) organized a meeting in Washington DC to bring together senior staff from international NGOs, the government and funding agencies to present the evidence and to ask them to form a Coral Reef Coalition to oversee the emergency response to GCBE3. The group agreed to work together on the following goals:

- Provide funding to Reef Check and other field teams to pay for gas and boat time now so that the actual extent of damage to coral reefs can be quickly tracked in a standard format and the accuracy of model predictions can be checked.
- Promote the use of GCBE3 to raise the profile of coral reef damage as a lever in the climate change debate.
- Urgent/important to track management success or failure globally because resilience-based protections may be ineffectual in the face of GCBE3.
- Make the data on bleaching and management immediately available via the Coalition's multi-branded [Global Reef Tracker database. data.reefcheck.us/](#)
- High priority to track coral/algal adaptation trajectory so that we know where adaptation is helping protect corals.
- Increase PR on coral reef loss via multilingual social media, streaming TV.
- Create an X-prize approach to test solutions to bleaching.



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The new Coral Reef Coalition requests donors and partners to help pay for and implement the emergency plan for responding to this growing global biodiversity crisis.

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*The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing"....**Edmund Burke***