



GCRMN: MEDIA RESPONSES TO STATUS OF CORAL REEFS OF THE WORLD: 2008

- There were a number of opportunities for media access to Status 2008. The most successful was that organized by IUCN Gland IPCC meeting in Poznan, Poland (Appendix #1), with Olof Linden as key person who gave many media interviews (stated as about 40). Some of the coverage is listed below in Appendix #2:
- The Poznan press arrived at considerable success because IUCN conducted a dialogue in advanced between their Communications team and selected members of the press and media, based often on personal relationships. The Status 2008 findings were linked to the hot media issue of the moment (climate change) at the meeting in Poznan where there was a very strong media presence. The IUCN Director General personally hosted the conference and fielded questions at the press conference, supported by a senior scientist in Olof Linden to answer the more scientific questions. The media were provided with photos, recorded sound bites, film footage and interview access and some printed copies of the book were available (but snapped up very quickly). This illustrates that IUCN is seen as a source of sound scientific knowledge and opinion
- The media were not specifically invited to the launch in the Washington DC National Aquarium on 09 December, and approximately 8 media representatives attended a conference at the Australian Embassy on 10 December. This was organized in lieu of events scheduled and cancelled by NOAA within in the US Congress buildings for Congress members and staff.
- There was some media coverage at a release in Berlin organized by Georg Heiss on 09 December; and
- A radio interview in Townsville was released on 09 December that generated considerable news coverage throughout Australia and some media responses.

Many of the regional nodes of the GCRMN have also released the Status 2008 reports at local events, however, the extent of media coverage is not known.

The scheduled media event in Paris in December was cancelled; another media event was suggested by the French Government in early February 2009. This evolved into an electronic media advisory, which resulted in an excellent article in Le Monde with great graphics (the last one in Appendix #2)

Media release at IPCC meeting in Poznan, Poland, organized by IUCN Gland with Olof Linden as key person. There was extensive coverage:

Reuters: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/environmentNews/idUKTRE4B92SS20081210>

AFP: <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5h2Et06EpzAo7cBncjzaf8Dd8DsGA>

Associated Press: <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/12/10/europe/EU-Poland-Climate-Coral.php>

Bloomberg News: <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601081&sid=a5LmlZgOzoPQ&refer=australia>

Le Monde: <http://www.lemonde.fr/web/depeches/0,14-0,39-37850710@7-37,0.html>

France 24: <http://www.france24.com/en/20081210-fifth-worlds-corals-already-dead-say-experts>

International Herald Tribune: <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/12/10/europe/EU-Poland-Climate-Coral.php>

Sydney Morning Herald: <http://news.smh.com.au/world/fifth-of-worlds-corals-already-dead-say-experts-20081210-6vy1.html>

The Age, Australia: <http://news.theage.com.au/world/fifth-of-worlds-corals-already-dead-say-experts-20081210-6vy1.html>

Brisbane Times: <http://news.brisbanetimes.com.au/world/fifth-of-worlds-corals-already-dead-say-experts-20081210-6vy1.html>

Independent, South Africa:

http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=31&art_id=nw20081210132414546C669715

Actualites : <http://www.actualites-news-environnement.com/19146-recifs-corail-changement-climatique.html>

The Hindu : <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/holnus/008200812101721.htm>

24Dash: <http://www.24dash.com/news/Environment/2008-12-10-One-fifth-of-the-worlds-coral-reefs-are-dead-say-scientists>

The New York Times: http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2008/12/10/science/AP-EU-Poland-Climate-Coral.html?_r=1&partner=rss&emc=rss

CNN: <http://www.cnn.com/2008/TECH/science/12/10/coral.destruction/index.html?iref=24hours>

MSNBC: <http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/28156581/>

CTV, Canada:

http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20081210/environment_poland_081210/20081210?hub=SciTech

The Guardian, UK: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/dec/10/road-to-copenhagen-poznan>

The Irish Times: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2008/1211/1228864662736.html>

HLN, Belgium: <http://www.hln.be/hln/nl/2662/Coral-Sea/article/detail/541243/2008/12/10/Vijfde-koralen-is-dood.dhtml>

Forbes: <http://www.forbes.com/feeds/ap/2008/12/10/ap5803875.html>

The People's Daily, China:

<http://meltwaternews.com/rrr.asp?url=http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90781/6551216.html>

Times of India:

<http://epaper.timesofindia.com/Default/Layout/Includes/ET/ArtWin.asp?From=Archive&Skin=TOI&BaseHref=TOICH/2008/12/11&ViewMode=HTML&GZ=T&EntityId=Ar01704&AppName=1>

Digital Journal: <http://www.digitaljournal.com/article/263317>

3 News, New Zealand :

<http://www.3news.co.nz/ScienceTech/Story/tabid/412/articleID/83879/cat/73/Default.aspx>

Kentucky News: <http://www.kentucky.com/512/story/621958.html>

Terra Daily:

http://www.terradaily.com/reports/Climate_a_fifth_of_worlds_corals_already_dead_say_experts_999.html

G Magazine: <http://www.gmagazine.com.au/news/625/great-barrier-reef-gone-20-years>

Le journal de developpement durable: <http://www.developpementdurablejournal.fr/spip.php?article3751>

Adelaide now: <http://www.news.com.au/adelaidenow/story/0,22606,24785339-912,00.html>

Red Orbit:

http://www.redorbit.com/news/science/1609136/greenhouse_gas_emissions_killing_worlds_coral_reefs/index.html

Interia, Poland: <http://biznes.interia.pl/wiadomosci/swiat/news/iucn-ograniczenie-emisji-co2-uratuje-rafy-koralowe.1225852.4201>

Green Report, Italy: http://www.greenreport.it/contenuti/leggi.php?id_cont=16984

All based on release, "Time running out on coral reefs as climate change becomes increasing threat," below: http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2008-12/nh-tro121008.php

Media release in Natural History Museum in Berlin organized by Georg Heiss: with 2 national newspaper reports, 1 national radio station, others will follow.

<http://download.naturkundemuseum-berlin.de/presse/Zustandsbericht.pdf>

and http://www.bmu.bund.de/pressemitteilungen/aktuelle_pressemitteilungen/pm/42744.php

Appendix #1 – IUCN Press release

Fifth of corals dead: only emission cuts can save the rest, says IUCN

Poznan, Poland, 10 December, 2008 (IUCN) – The world has lost 19 percent of its coral reefs, according to the 2008 global update of the world's reef status.

The report, released by the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, of which IUCN is a member, shows if current trends in carbon dioxide emissions continue, many of the remaining reefs may be lost over the next 20 to 40 years. This will have alarming consequences for some 500 million people who depend on coral reefs for their livelihoods.

Climate change is considered the biggest threat to coral reefs today. The main climate threats, such as increasing sea surface temperatures and seawater acidification, are being exacerbated by other threats including overfishing, pollution and invasive species.

"If nothing changes, we are looking at a doubling of atmospheric carbon dioxide in less than 50 years," says Carl Gustaf Lundin, Head of the IUCN Global Marine Programme, one of the organizations behind the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network. "As this carbon is absorbed, the oceans will become more acidic, which is seriously damaging a wide range of marine life from corals to plankton communities and from lobsters to seagrasses."

Encouragingly, 45 percent of the world's reefs are currently healthy. Another sign of hope is the ability of some corals to recover after major bleaching events, caused by warming waters, and to adapt to climate change threats.

However, the report shows that, globally, the downward trend of recent years has not been reversed. Major threats in the last four years, including the Indian Ocean tsunami, more occurrences of bleaching, outbreaks of coral diseases and ever-heavier human pressures, have slowed or reversed recovery of some coral reefs after the 1998 mass bleaching event.

"The report details the strong scientific consensus that climate change must be limited to the absolute minimum. If nothing is done to substantially cut emissions, we could effectively lose coral reefs as we know them, with major coral extinctions," says Clive Wilkinson, Coordinator of the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network.

Corals have a higher chance of survival in times of climate change if other stress factors related to human activity are minimized. Well-managed marine protected areas can also boost the health of coral reefs, but proper enforcement is difficult, especially in remote areas where the most pristine reefs are found.

“Ten years after the world’s biggest coral bleaching event, we know that reefs can recover given the chance. Unfortunately, impacts on the scale of 1998 will reoccur in the near future, and there’s no time to lose if we want to give reefs and people a chance to suffer as little as possible.” says **Dr David Obura, Chair of the IUCN Climate Change and Coral Reefs working group and Director of the Coastal Oceans Research and Development in the Indian Ocean Programme (CORDIO) in East Africa.**

A new report on the state of Indian Ocean coral reefs, launched today by CORDIO, an organisation aligned with the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, states an overall trend of continued degradation, only alleviated by signs of recovery in some areas.

“With this report, the far-reaching degradation of Indian Ocean coral reefs has become evident,” says **Olof Linden of the CORDIO network and Professor at the World Maritime University (WMU), Malmö, Sweden.** *“To save coral reefs, we must focus on helping corals to adapt to climate change and on diverting people away from destructive practices such as overfishing.”*

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Benefits of coral reefs

Coral reefs provide food, coastal protection, building materials and income from tourism for half a billion mostly poor people. The fish they provide is their main source of protein; the reefs themselves have proved to be an effective natural barrier against storm surges; and diving tourism is an important source of income.

Ocean Acidification

Briefing paper: http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/ocean_acidification_fact_sheet_08cropped.pdf

About IUCN

IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, helps the world find pragmatic solutions to our most pressing environment and development challenges by supporting scientific research; managing field projects all over the world; and bringing governments, NGOs, the UN, international conventions and companies together to develop policy, laws and best practice.

The world's oldest and largest global environmental network, IUCN is a democratic membership union with more than 1,000 government and NGO member organizations, and almost 11,000 volunteer scientists and experts in some 160 countries. IUCN's work is supported by over 1,000 professional staff in 60 offices and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world. IUCN's headquarters are located in Gland, near Geneva, in Switzerland.

www.iucn.org

About the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN)

The GCRMN is a network of people, governments, institutes and NGOs in more than 80 countries, and includes many partners: CORDIO (Coastal and Oceans Research and Development in the Indian Ocean), Reef Check, CARICOMP (Caribbean Coastal Marine Productivity Program), Project AWARE and AGRRA (The Atlantic and Gulf Rapid Reef Assessment). All reports are available through www.ReefBase.org.

The GCRMN is an operational unit of the International Coral Reef Initiative and was formed in 1996 with support from the US government to encourage ecological and socio-economic monitoring in countries throughout the world and provide the essential data for better coral reef management and increased awareness of the global problems facing coral reefs, especially climate change. For more information: Clive Wilkinson, email: clive.wilkinson@rrrc.org.au

www.gcrmn.org

About CORDIO

CORDIO, Coastal and Oceans Research and Development in the Indian Ocean, is a network of partners that focusses on building capacity for monitoring, research and action to promote healthy and productive coral reefs. CORDIO works in 14 countries of the Indian Ocean, covering East Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa), South Asia (India, Sri Lanka, Maldives), Southeast Asia (Thailand, Indonesia) and the Indian Ocean islands (Seychelles, Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros, Reunion), and has been active since 1999. CORDIO supports biophysical monitoring and research on coral reefs, participatory monitoring of artisanal fisheries (biological, resource and socio-economic), education and awareness raising, and policy development. Its primary goal is to conserve biodiversity in the context of improved livelihoods and sustainable development, of people directly dependent on coastal and marine resources.

www.cordioea.org

About ICRI

International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) is a partnership among governments, international organizations, and non-government organizations. It strives to preserve coral reefs and related ecosystems by implementing Chapter 17 of Agenda 21, and other relevant international conventions and agreements. [The secretariat of the Initiative is currently co-host by the governments of Mexico and the United States.](#)

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Appendix #2: Selected text from some of the media reports:

1. Reuters: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/environmentNews/idUKTRE4B92SS20081210>

Climate change may cause more coral extinction

Wed Dec 10, 2008 1:08pm GMT

By Anna Mudeva

POZNAN, Poland (Reuters) - The world has lost about a fifth of its corals and many of the remaining reefs could die in the next 20 to 40 years unless humans reduce greenhouse gas emissions, a report said on Wednesday. Further coral loss will have alarming consequences for some 500 million people who depend on reefs for their livelihood, said the report by the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN) presented at a December 1-12 U.N. conference on global warming. "Climate change must be limited to the absolute minimum to save corals," Julia Marton-Lefevre, head of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) which is a member of the GCRMN, told a news conference. "If nothing is done to substantially cut emissions, we could effectively lose coral reefs as we know them, with major coral extinction," she said. The impact of the main climate threats, such as rising sea surface temperatures and seawater acidification, is being strengthened by other negative factors like overfishing, pollution and invasive species, said the report. As emissions of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide increase, oceans absorb more of them and become more acidic, and this is damaging a wide range of marine life from corals to plankton and from lobsters to seagrasses, it said. Scientists cannot say how much of the coral loss in recent years has been caused by global warming but agree that climate change is the biggest threat to reefs.

The report said one encouraging sign was the ability of some corals to recover after major "bleaching" events -- when colorful algae living in corals die off -- and to adapt to climate change. But the global trend of recent years of a worsening environment for corals has not been reversed, it said. Coral reefs offer economic and environmental benefits to millions of people, including coastal protection from waves and storms and as sources of food, pharmaceuticals and jobs.

2. AFP: <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5h2Et06EpzAo7cBncjzaf8Dd8DsGA>

Fifth of world's corals already dead, say experts

Dec 10, 2008

POZNAN, Poland (AFP) — Almost a fifth of the planet's coral reefs have died and carbon emissions are largely to blame, according to an NGO study released Wednesday. The report, released by the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, warned that on current trends, growing levels of greenhouse gases will destroy many of the remaining reefs over the next 20 to 40 years. "If nothing is done to substantially cut emissions, we could effectively lose coral reefs as we know them, with major coral extinctions," said Clive Wilkinson, the organisation's coordinator. The paper was issued on the sidelines of the December 1-12 negotiations on a new

global treaty on climate change, taking place under the UN flag. Half a billion people around the world depend on coral reefs for food and tourism, according to a common estimate. Experts say the coral die-off has several causes, including local pollution, overfishing and invasive species. But, they say, rising ocean temperatures caused by the greenhouse effect, and acidification, caused by the ocean's absorption of carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere, are probably the biggest triggers. "If nothing changes, we are looking at a doubling of atmospheric carbon dioxide in less than 50 years," said Carl Gustaf Lundin, head of the the global marine programme at the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, an umbrella network for more than a 1,000 NGOs and government groups. "As this carbon is absorbed, the oceans will become more acidic, which is seriously damaging a wide range of marine life from corals to plankton communities and from lobsters to seagrasses." Nearly half of global coral reefs are still healthy, but the overall downward trend shows no sign of stopping, the study found. It added, though, that the damage could be braked by strong conservation measures, such as properly policed marine parks.

3. AFP News Briefs List

Fifth of world's corals already dead, say experts

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4. International Herald Tribune: <http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2008/12/10/europe/EU-Poland-Climate-Coral.php>

20 percent of world's coral reefs destroyed, conservation group warns
.The Associated Press, Published: December 10, 2008

POZNAN, Poland: The world has lost nearly one-fifth of its coral reefs and much of the rest could be destroyed by increasingly acidic seas if climate change continues unchecked, an environmental group warned Wednesday. Global warming and the rising temperature of the oceans are the latest and most serious threats to coral, already damaged by destructive fishing methods and pollution, the International Union for Conservation of Nature said. "The world has lost about 19 percent of its coral reefs during the last 20 years," said IUCN's director general, Julia Marton-Lefevre, on the sidelines of the 190-nation U.N. talks on a new climate change treaty. "If current trends in carbon dioxide emission continue, many of the remaining reefs will be lost in the next 20 to 40 years," she told reporters. "Climate change must be limited to the absolute minimum if we want to save coral reefs. We need to move forward and substantially cut emissions," she said.

Today in Health & Science

Increasing carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, which fuels global warming, is raising the level as well as the temperature of the oceans, said Olof Linden of the World Maritime University in Malmo, Sweden. That makes the water more acidic, adversely affecting reef-building coral that rely on calcification to build their shells. A report by the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, of which IUCN is a member, said all the world's coral reefs could be considered threatened if current forecasts from the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and coral reef experts are heeded.

5. Sydney Morning Herald: <http://news.smh.com.au/world/fifth-of-worlds-corals-already-dead-say-experts-20081210-6vy1.html>

Fifth of world's corals already dead, say experts
December 10, 2008 - 10:53PM

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that on current trends, growing levels of greenhouse gases will destroy many of the remaining reefs over the next 20 to 40 years. "If nothing is done to substantially cut emissions, we could effectively lose coral reefs as we know them, with major coral extinctions," said Clive Wilkinson, the organisation's coordinator. The paper was issued on the sidelines of the December 1-12 negotiations on a new global treaty on climate change, taking place under the UN flag. Half a billion people around the world depend on coral reefs for food and tourism, according to a common estimate. Experts say the coral die-off has several causes, including local pollution, overfishing and invasive species. But, they say, rising ocean temperatures caused by the greenhouse effect, and acidification, caused by the ocean's absorption of carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere, are probably the biggest triggers. "If nothing changes, we are looking at a doubling of atmospheric carbon dioxide in less than 50 years," said Carl Gustaf Lundin, head of the the global marine programme at the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, an umbrella network for more than a 1,000 NGOs and government groups. "As this carbon is absorbed, the oceans will become more acidic, which is seriously damaging a wide range of marine life from corals to plankton communities and from lobsters to seagrasses." Nearly half of global coral reefs are still healthy, but the overall downward trend shows no sign of stopping, the study found. It added, though, that the damage could be braked by strong conservation measures, such as properly policed marine parks.

6. The Age, Australia: <http://news.theage.com.au/world/fifth-of-worlds-corals-already-dead-say-experts-20081210-6vy1.html>

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7. The New York Times: http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2008/12/10/science/AP-EU-Poland-Climate-Coral.html?_r=1&partner=rss&emc=rss

1 / 5 of Coral Reefs Already Lost, Much More Feared

[Skip to next paragraph](#)POZNAN, Poland (AP) -- The world has lost nearly one-fifth of its coral reefs and much of the rest could be destroyed by increasingly acidic seas if [climate change](#) continues unchecked, an environmental group warned Wednesday. Global warming and the rising temperature of the oceans are the latest and most serious threats to coral, already damaged by destructive fishing methods and pollution, the International Union for Conservation of Nature said. "The world has lost about 19 percent of its coral reefs during the last 20 years," said IUCN's director general, Julia Marton-Lefevre, on the sidelines of the 190-nation [U.N.](#) talks on a new climate change treaty. "If current trends in carbon dioxide emission continue, many of the remaining reefs will be lost in the next 20 to 40 years," she told reporters. "Climate change must be limited to the absolute minimum if we want to save coral reefs. We need to move forward and substantially cut emissions," she said. Increasing carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, which fuels global warming, is raising the level as well as the temperature of the oceans, said Olof Linden of the World Maritime University in Malmo, Sweden. That makes the water more acidic, adversely affecting reef-building coral that rely on calcification to build their shells. A report by the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, of which IUCN is a member, said all the world's coral reefs could be considered threatened if current forecasts from the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and coral reef experts are heeded.

8. CNN: <http://www.cnn.com/2008/TECH/science/12/10/coral.destruction/index.html?iref=24hours>

By Matthew Knight

LONDON, England (CNN) -- The world has lost almost one-fifth of its coral reefs according a new report released by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Coral reefs could be wiped out in 30-40 years according to a new report. Compiled by the [Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network](#), the report has brought together the work of researchers from 15 countries with data stretching back 20 years.

It's not just climate change -- which raises ocean temperatures and increases seawater acidification -- which is damaging reefs. In some parts of the world overfishing, pollution and invasive species are proving equally harmful. Scientists are warning that reef destruction will have alarming consequences for around 500 million people who rely on coral reefs for their livelihood. Left unchecked, remaining reefs could be completely wiped out by 2050, the report says. Professor Olof Linden from the World Maritime University in Malmo, Sweden, told CNN: "We see a great and imminent threat of more reefs being lost."

Speaking from the U.N. Climate Conference in Poznan, Poland, Professor Linden said that the 19 percent figure is an average. "For many developing countries like Sri Lanka and countries in East Africa the percentage of damage is much worse. Sometimes three times as high in some places," he said.

"In these areas we have local effects like dynamite fishing and other destructive fishing techniques combined the threat of coral mining, unmanaged tourism and all kinds of pollution from agriculture."

But overall the biggest threat to reef survival is climate change. "The most destructive climate event to impact the coral reefs so far," said Linden, "was the 1998 El Nino which caused major coral bleaching and disrupted ecosystems all over the planet." Scientists say reefs have recovered somewhat from those bleaching events. But the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, coupled with coral disease and human effects, have slowed their recuperation. Coral reefs not only provide an income and food for those who live near them, but are also effective natural barriers against storm surges. Despite the report's pessimism, researchers see some encouraging signs. Forty-five percent of the world's reefs are currently in good health and the hope remains that damaged reefs can recover and adjust to the changing conditions. "We must focus on helping corals to adapt to climate change and on diverting people away from destructive practices such as overfishing," Linden said.

9. The Guardian, UK: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/dec/10/road-to-copenhagen-poznan>

Fifth of world's coral reefs dead, say marine scientists

Climate change linked to warmer and more acidic seas pose biggest threat to coral survival, says report

Plight of the coral reefs.

A fifth of the world's coral reefs have died or been destroyed and the remainder are increasingly vulnerable to the effects of [climate change](#), a new study says. The Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network says many surviving reefs could be lost over the coming decades as CO2 emissions continue to increase. "If nothing is done to substantially cut emissions, we could effectively lose coral reefs as we know them, with major coral extinctions," said Clive Wilkinson of the GCRMN. The report, released today at UN climate talks in Poznan, Poland, said warmer and more acidic seas posed the biggest threat in future. Other threats include overfishing, pollution and invasive species – as well as natural hazards, such as the earthquake that triggered the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, which forced reefs from the water. Corals are crucial to the livelihoods of millions of coastal dwellers around the world. The UN's Millennium Ecosystem Assessment says reefs are worth about \$30bn annually to the global economy through tourism, fisheries and coastal protection. "If nothing changes, we are looking at a doubling of atmospheric CO2 in less than 50 years," said Carl Gustaf Lundin, head of the International Union for Conservation of Nature's global marine programme, which is one of the organisations behind the GCRMN. "As this carbon is absorbed, the oceans will become more acidic, which is seriously damaging a wide range of marine life from corals to plankton communities and from lobsters to seagrasses." The report found that some 45% of the world's reefs are currently healthy, and that some retain the ability to recover after major bleaching events, such as the one caused by the El Niño event in 1998, and to adapt to climate change threats. But, globally, the downward trend of recent years has not been reversed. David Obura, chair of the IUCN climate change and coral reefs working group, said: "Ten years after the world's biggest coral bleaching event, we know that reefs can recover – given the chance. Unfortunately, impacts on the scale of 1998 will reoccur in the near future, and there's no time to lose if we want to give reefs and people a chance to suffer as little as possible."

10. Un cinquième des récifs coralliens a déjà disparu, le reste est en grand danger

LE MONDE 19 02 09 (19 February 2009)

Les perspectives sont sombres pour les récifs coralliens, qui figurent parmi les écosystèmes les plus riches, mais aussi les plus fragiles de la planète. L'Initiative internationale pour les récifs coralliens (ICRI) et l'Initiative française pour les récifs coralliens (Ifrecor) ont rendu public, mercredi 18 février, le bilan mondial de leur état. Ce travail, réalisé tous les quatre ans, mobilise quelque 400 chercheurs de 96 nationalités.

Selon leurs observations, le monde a définitivement perdu 19 % de ses récifs, 15 % risquent de disparaître dans les dix ou vingt prochaines années, et 20 % supplémentaires sont menacés de disparition dans les vingt à quarante ans si rien ne change. Et ceci sans même tenir compte des effets du réchauffement climatique, qui constitue une menace pour la totalité de ces écosystèmes.

Les coraux abritent une vie foisonnante : un tiers des espèces marines décrites en dépendent. Leur survie est donc un enjeu pour la préservation de la biodiversité mondiale. Elle est aussi cruciale pour les 500 millions d'êtres humains qui en tirent leur alimentation. "Ils rendent d'autres services aux hommes, en protégeant les côtes

contre les assauts de la mer, et en permettant le développement du tourisme", explique Bernard Salvat, le spécialiste des récifs coralliens qui représente la France à l'ICRI. Selon une estimation du Programme des Nations unies pour l'environnement (PNUE), chaque kilomètre carré génère entre 81 000 et 488 000 euros de revenus.

Ces récifs subissent plusieurs types de pressions liées aux activités humaines et à l'augmentation de la population. La principale cause de leur dégradation est la destruction du couvert végétal à terre, qui, générant un afflux de particules dans les eaux, étouffe les coraux. Les polluants chimiques ou bactériologiques y aboutissent également.

BLANCHISSEMENT

La surpêche et l'utilisation de méthodes destructrices, comme la pêche au cyanure ou à l'explosif, contribuent également largement à leur mauvais état. Les récifs sont aussi détruits par la construction de ports ou de marinas, les prélèvements de sable pour le bâtiment, le piétinement des touristes...

Le réchauffement climatique, qui provoque leur blanchissement, constitue l'autre grande menace. Quand la température de l'eau augmente, les coraux expulsent des algues microscopiques qui leur fournissent leur nourriture et leur donnent leurs couleurs. Cependant, après 1998, année marquée par un important blanchissement, certains récifs ont "bien récupéré", note le rapport. Mais ce gain a été anéanti par les pertes consécutives au tsunami de 2004 et au blanchissement de 2005, qui a surtout touché les Caraïbes. Les coraux ne survivraient pas à des épisodes répétés comparables à celui de 1998.

Si la situation est alarmante, l'engagement des autorités progresse partout dans le monde, notent les experts. Les pays développés touchés par ce problème (Etats-Unis, Australie, Japon) établissent des aires marines protégées. La France, qui possède un dixième des récifs mondiaux, a obtenu le classement des récifs calédoniens au Patrimoine mondial de l'humanité. Dans le Sud-Est asiatique, particulièrement concerné, l'Indonésie anime une initiative baptisée "Triangle de corail". "La prise de conscience est importante dans les pays en développement, mais ils manquent dramatiquement de moyens financiers et de ressources humaines", constate M. Salvat. Et, partout, le respect et le contrôle des mesures de protection restent problématiques.

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La situation des récifs coralliens dans le monde

