# Coral Triangle could die by century's end: WWF

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Various kinds of corals grow in the marine protected area of Honda Bay located in Palawan island in western Philippines, 2008. Environmental group WWF said that climate change could wipe out the world's richest ocean wilderness by the end of the century without drastic cuts in greenhouse gas emissions.

Coral reefs could disappear entirely from the Coral Triangle region of the Pacific Ocean by the end of the century, threatening the food supply and livelihoods for about 100 million people, according to a new study from World Wildlife Fund.

Averting catastrophe will depend on quick and effective global action on climate change coupled with the implementation of regional solutions to problems of over-fishing and pollution, according to The Coral Triangle and Climate Change: Ecosystems, People and Societies at Risk, a WWF-commissioned study presented at the World Oceans Conference in

Manado, Indonesia today.

"This area is the planet's crown jewel of coral diversity and we are watching it disappear before our eyes," said Catherine Plume, Director of the Coral Triangle Program for WWF-US. "But as this study shows, there are opportunities to prevent this tragedy while sustaining the livelihoods of millions who rely on its riches."

The report offers two dramatically different scenarios for the Coral Triangle, which is comprised of the coasts, reefs and seas of the countries of Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Timor Leste. The Coral Triangle occupies just one percent of the Earth's surface, but is home to fully 30 percent of the world's coral reefs, 76 percent of reef-building coral species and more than 35 percent of coral reef fish species. It is also serves as vital spawning grounds for other economically important fish such as tuna.

"In one scenario, we continue along our current climate trajectory and do little to protect coastal environments from the onslaught of local threats," said Queensland University Professor Ove Hoegh-Guldberg, who led the study. "In this world, people see the biological treasures of the Coral Triangle destroyed over the course of the century by rapid increases in ocean temperature, acidity and sea level, while the resilience of coastal environments also deteriorates under faltering coastal management. Poverty increases, food security plummets, economies suffer and coastal people migrate increasingly to urban areas."

The report also highlighted opportunities to avoid a worst-case scenario in the region through significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and international investment in strengthening the region's natural environments, solutions that would help to build a resilient and robust Coral Triangle in which economic growth, food security and natural environments are maintained.

"Climate change in the Coral Triangle is challenging but manageable, and the region would respond well to reductions in local environmental stresses from overfishing, pollution, and declining coastal water quality and health," Hoegh-Guldberg said.

Even under the best case scenario however, communities in the region can expect to experience dramatic losses of coral, rising sea level, increased storm activity, severe droughts and reduced food availability from coastal fisheries. But effective management of coastal resources would mean the communities would remain reasonably intact and more resilient in the face of such hardships.

WWF officials said world leaders have a role to play in helping Coral Triangle countries strengthen management of their marine resources and through international action on climate change.

"We must forge a strong international agreement to bring about sharp reductions in greenhouse gases at the UN Climate Conference at Copenhagen in December," Plume said.

Source: World Wildlife Fund