

# Sea of the living dead

September 26 2012

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Credit: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/silkebaron/5122118643/>

(Phys.org)—The world's coral reefs have become a zombie ecosystem, neither dead nor truly alive, and are on a trajectory to collapse within a human generation according to an academic from The Australian National University.

Professor Roger Bradbury, an ecologist from the Crawford School of Public Policy in the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific, said overfishing, [ocean acidification](#) and pollution are pushing [coral reefs](#) into oblivion.

"The scientific evidence for this is compelling and unequivocal, but there seems to be a collective reluctance to accept the logical conclusion—that there is no hope of saving the global coral reef ecosystem," he said.

"There is no real prospect of changing the trajectory of coral reef destruction in less than 20 to 50 years. In short, these forces are unstoppable and irreversible.

"By persisting in the false belief that coral reefs have a future, we grossly misallocate the funds needed to cope with the fallout from their collapse. Money isn't spent to study what to do after the reefs are gone."

As well as being a loss for [global conservation](#), Professor Bradbury said that it would be a disaster for the hundreds of millions of people in poor [tropical countries](#) like Indonesia and the Philippines who depend on coral reefs for food.

"It will also threaten the tourism industry of rich countries with coral reefs, like the United States and Australia," he said.

"Coral reefs will be the first, but certainly not the last, major ecosystem to succumb to the [Anthropocene](#) – the new geological era now emerging.

"That is why we need an enormous reallocation of research, government and environmental effort to understand what has happened so we can respond the next time we face a disaster of this magnitude."

**More information:** An opinion piece by Professor Bradbury is published in The New York Times: [www.nytimes.com/2012/07/14/opi...oral-reefs.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/14/opi...oral-reefs.html?_r=0)

Provided by Australian National University

Citation: Sea of the living dead (2012, September 26) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-09-sea-dead.html>

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