

Hawaii to come up with management plan to help coral reefs

November 17 2015, by Caleb Jones



In this Oct. 26, 2015 file photo, fish swim over a patch of bleached coral in Hawaii's Kaneohe Bay off the island of Oahu. State officials are outlining a management plan for Hawaii's coral reefs, which have suffered a second consecutive year of damaging bleaching. Experts are worried continued stress could kill portions of the reef which are critical parts of the ecosystem and the state's tourist economy. (AP Photo/Caleb Jones, File)

The state of Hawaii is gathering information from the scientific community and local stakeholders to create a comprehensive coral reef

management plan, but officials said Monday they will not yet impose a requested moratorium on collecting aquarium fish.

Officials said that after gathering more information they hope to be able to start implementing a management plan by the end of 2016. Their goal is to emphasize resilience and restoration of reefs that are suffering in the face of global warming.

In response to a request from the State Office of Environmental Quality Control to temporarily halt the taking of Hawaii's plant-eating reef [fish](#) for use in aquariums, officials said commercial collection of those species does not have a significant impact on the overall health of the state's [coral](#) reefs.

"We don't have science showing a strong nexus right now between [aquarium](#) fish trade collecting and the health of our coral reefs," State Department of Land and Natural Resources chair Suzanne Case said. She added that data gathered from the management plan will help address that issue.

Environmental groups had urged the state to consider the moratorium in response to this year's extensive [coral bleaching](#) event in the islands.

Inga Gibson, the Hawaii state director of the Humane Society, said the state should do more to protect fish that live on the reefs, especially the herbivores that help keep the reef healthy.

"We believe that the department needs to go further," Gibson said. "A few months ago the department took the stand to enact an emergency moratorium on the collection of sea cucumbers, and those are taken in much smaller numbers than those fish collected for the aquarium trade."

William Walsh, an aquatic biologist with the state, said the grazing and

excavating species of fish that actually help the reefs, including parrot fish, are the ones taken least for aquariums. He said he anticipates Hawaii's management plan will address protection of those fish, but contends a blanket ban on aquarium fishing is not the answer.

"We have a lot of in-depth monitoring going on," Walsh said. "Banning aquarium collecting would have zero effect" on the reefs.

Matt Ross, a commercial aquarium fisherman on Oahu, said fishermen rely on the ocean for their livelihood and have a vested interest in conservation. "It's not the problem contributing to coral bleaching," he said. "This is an emotional issue that's being driven by animal rights groups, it's not a conservation issue. They feel that it's inhumane to take a fish and keep it as a pet."

University of Hawaii's Institute of Marine Biology director Ruth Gates, one of the world's leading coral reef researchers, said that while any disruption in the reef ecosystem can be damaging, there is not a strong link between the aquarium trade and the bleaching being seen around Hawaii.

"I think the types of problems that we're facing are probably a little bit beyond the aquarium fishing trade," she said. "The problem is a big one, we're talking about global warming-related issues right now."

Gates added that while aquarium fishing may not be a major issue in Hawaii, it is a contributor to the failing health of many coral reefs around the world where fishermen come in and take all the fish from a particular reef.

"That type of fishing is not allowed here," Gates said of Hawaii.

This summer, the state's coral reefs suffered a second consecutive year

of bleaching, a process in which the coral expels its symbiotic algae in reaction to hot ocean waters.

When coral loses its algae, it also loses the nutrients the plant provides, and consecutive years of bleaching can kill coral.

In early October, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said that [coral reefs](#) worldwide were experiencing bleaching.

Scientists say about 30 percent of the world's population of coral has perished as a result of above-average temperatures, El Nino's effects and acidification.

© 2015 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Hawaii to come up with management plan to help coral reefs (2015, November 17) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-11-hawaii-coral-reefs.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.