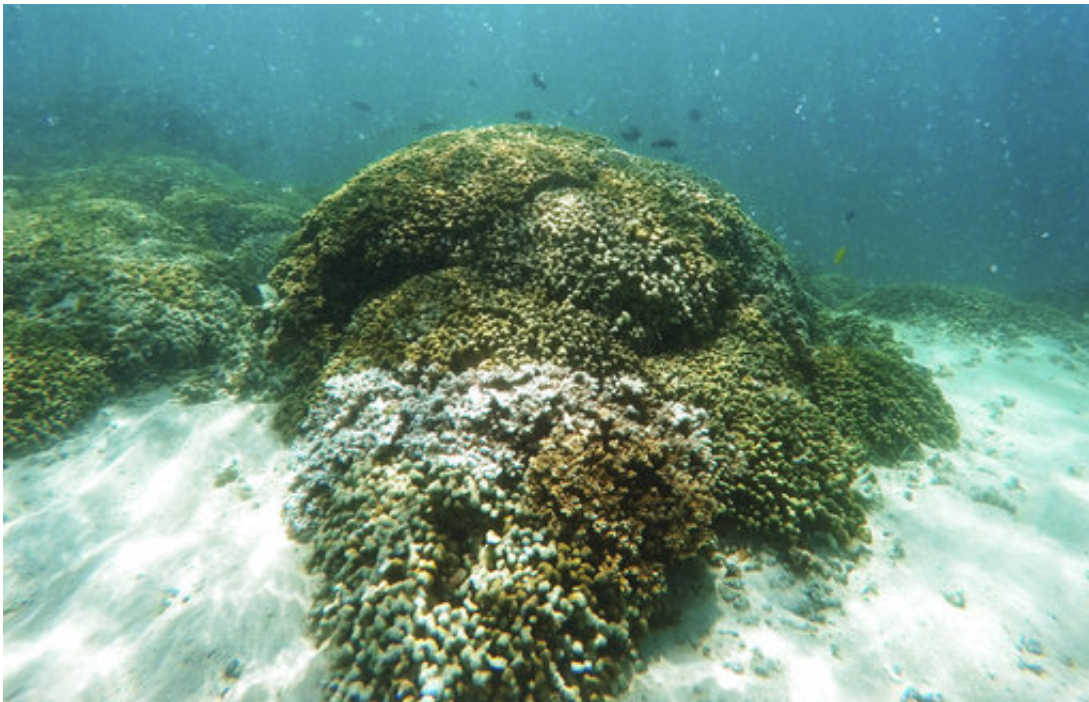


# Scientists: Half of Hawaii's coral reefs bleached in 2014-15

November 3 2017

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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. Nearly half of the Hawaii's coral reefs were bleached during heat waves in 2014 and 2015 and fisheries close to shore are declining, a group of scientists told state lawmakers. (AP Photo/Caleb Jones, File)

Nearly half of Hawaii's coral reefs were bleached during heat waves in 2014 and 2015 and fisheries close to shore are declining, a group of scientists told state lawmakers.

The scientists from the Nature Conservancy briefed the lawmakers on Thursday about what they called an unprecedented situation for Hawaii's [sea life](#).

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration officials said 56 percent of the Big Island's coral were bleached, along with 44 percent along West Maui and 32 percent around Oahu.

The scientists said more severe and frequent bleaching is predicted.

"In the 2030s, 30 to 50 percent of the years will have major bleaching events in Hawaii," said Kuulei Rogers of the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology.

When ocean temperatures rise, coral expel the algae they rely on for food. This causes their skeletons to lose their color and appear "bleached."

Coral can recover if the water cools. But they die if [high temperatures](#) persist. Eventually reefs degrade, leaving fish without habitats and coastlines less protected from storm surges.

As for Hawaii's fish, University of Hawaii researchers compiled data for 15 years and found a 90 percent decline in overall catch from the last 100 years, which includes fish such as ulua, moi and oio.



This June 2007, file aerial photo shows Midway Atoll, one of the farthest in the string of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands with long stretches of pristine atolls and coral reefs. Nearly half of the Hawaii's coral reefs were bleached during heat waves in 2014 and 2015 and fisheries close to shore are declining, a group of scientists told state lawmakers. (Burl Burlingame, Honolulu Star-Bulletin via AP, file)

"What we found was pretty overwhelming," University of Hawaii scientist Alan Friedlander said. "About 40 percent of the species will be classified as overfished. The correlations are more people, less fish."

Friedlander suggested expanding marine reserves and said gear restrictions and size limits help, but bag limits and quotas don't work.

Those who fish argued against more regulations.

"If the fishermen don't stand up and come down here and fight for fisherman's rights now, we'll lose more than we can possibly ever imagine," said Makani Christensen of the Hunting, Farming and Fishing Association.

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