CIRCUMTROPICAL CORAL REEF BLEACHING IN
1987-1988

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The most widespread and intense bleaching ever reported in the tropical and subtropical western Atlantic and possibly the most extensive in Australia occurred in 1987-1988. Bleaching also occurred in 5-9 other, widely separated areas in the Pacific and Indian oceans. In the Atlantic, south Florida, the Bahamas, and the northern Caribbean were the most severely bleached areas. Bleaching occurred there and in parts of eastern Colombia and off Texas from summer through fall of 1987. In late fall to early winter, recovery began in these areas, while bleaching began in much of the remaining Caribbean at that time. More than 80 species of coral reef animals, representing 2 phyla and 13 orders, and including the most important reef building corals, bleached in the West Indies. Many coral animals worldwide suffered necrotic tissue damage and/or death. Almost all parameters of the events differed greatly between localities, within localities, and among species. High variability may be the most common factor. The differences may indicate that each event was unique. Overall, elevated to slightly elevated seawater temperatures may have been a unifying stress, but synergistic effects differed in each event. The coral reefs are fragile systems that may be the first indicators of long-term impacts stressing the ocean and the planet.
REEFS ‘88

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