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## **NOAA Releases Report on U.S. Deep-sea Coral Ecosystems**

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) released a new report today, *The State of Deep Coral Ecosystems of the United States*. The peer-reviewed report, prepared by NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program, documents the biology, distribution, and types of deep-sea corals on the continental shelves and slopes of the US including its US Caribbean and Pacific territories. The report can be found on-line at [www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/dce.html](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/dce.html).

Dr. Lance Morgan, Vice President for Science for Marine Conservation Biology Institute (MCBI), called the report “a significant advance in our understanding of these ecosystems and the threats they face. Few people, even marine scientists, know that the majority of coral species live in the deeper, colder, and darker depths of the ocean, or that some of these form reefs that are similar to shallow waters in appearance, species richness and importance to fisheries.” Morgan notes that “deep-sea corals are long-lived, slow growing and fragile, and are also threatened by destructive fishing practices, especially bottom trawling.”

The major threats to deep-sea corals highlighted in the NOAA report include bottom trawling and dredging. Other potential threats include interactions with fishing gear such as longlines, traps or pots, and deep drop fishing, the harvest of precious corals for the jewelry trade, minerals resource exploration and extraction activities, invasive species, and climate change. Threats to deep-sea corals are highest in the waters off Alaska, the West Coast, and the Northeast and Southeast USA.

The conservation of deep-sea corals has been a focus of much recent policy work in the international and national arenas. Last year MCBI released “*Status of Deep Sea Corals in US Waters*”, the first report documenting where deep sea corals are found, the activities that threaten these unique, long-lived habitats, and current management strategies (found at: [http://www.mcbi.org/what/coral\\_science.htm#status](http://www.mcbi.org/what/coral_science.htm#status)). In 2006 MCBI submitted a scientists' statement to the United Nations on the need to protect Deep-Sea Coral and Sponge Ecosystems in international waters which included 1,452 signatories (found at: <http://www.mcbi.org/what/dscstatement.htm>).

“Next steps for the US government include implementation of the deep-sea coral language in the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act,” said Steven Lutz, lead author of the NOAA report's Caribbean chapter and Ocean Policy Analyst for MCBI. “This

language establishes a Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program at NOAA, authorizes the US Regional Fishery Management Councils to restrict the use of destructive types of fishing gear within deep sea coral areas, and includes deep-sea corals in provisions combating illegal fishing on the high seas. More mapping activities are needed so that we can save these corals. NOAA's Deep Sea Coral Report is a volume of useful information for management and education, and directs us in the right direction, towards conservation and science-based stewardship."

Internet resources:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Deep Coral Report: [www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/dce.html](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/dce.html)

MCBI: <http://www.mcbi.org>

MCBI Status of Deep-Sea Corals Report: [http://www.mcbi.org/what/coral\\_science.htm#status](http://www.mcbi.org/what/coral_science.htm#status)

Deep-Sea Coral Scientist Statement: <http://www.mcbi.org/what/dscstatement.htm>

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