

Mote Marine Laboratory / Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary  
**Coral Bleaching Early Warning Network**  
**Current Conditions Report #20230913**



Updated September 13, 2023

**Summary:** Based on climate predictions, current conditions, and field observations, the threat for mass coral bleaching within the FKNMS is currently **HIGH**.

**NOAA Coral Reef Watch Current and 60% Probability Coral Bleaching Alert Outlook September 11, 2023 (experimental)**

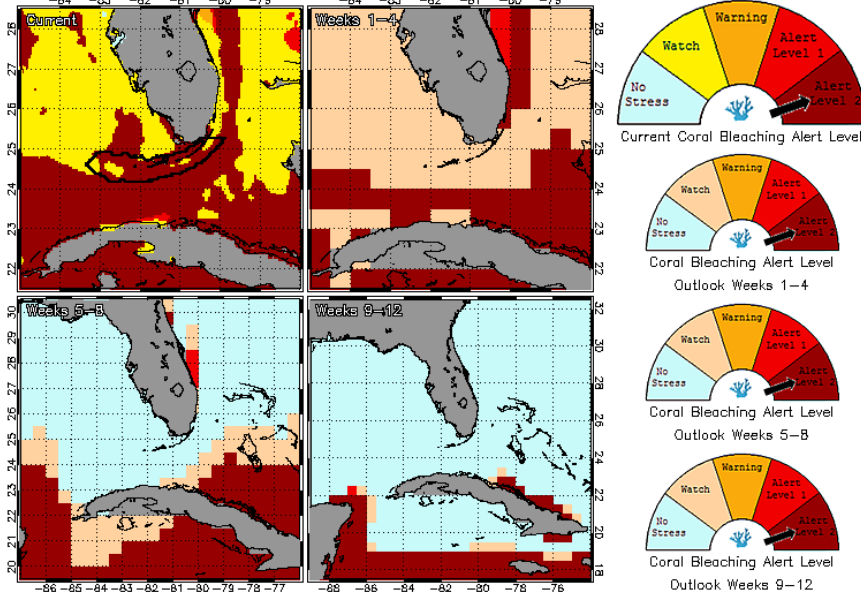


Figure 1. NOAA's 5 km Experimental Current and 60% Probability Coral Bleaching Alert Outlook Areas through mid-December 2023. Updated September 11, 2023.

[https://coralreefwatch.noaa.gov/product/vs/gauges/florida\\_keys.php](https://coralreefwatch.noaa.gov/product/vs/gauges/florida_keys.php)

**Weather and Sea Temperatures**

According to the newly released NOAA Coral Reef Watch (CRW) experimental 5-kilometer (km) Satellite Current and 60% Probability Coral Bleaching Alert Area, most areas of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary are under a bleaching Alert Level 2, which means significant bleaching expected; mortality likely and the potential exists for continual bleaching alerts if sea temperatures remain elevated in the next few weeks and months (Fig. 1).

Recent remote sensing analysis by NOAA's CRW program indicates that the Florida Keys region continues to experience elevated thermal stress. NOAA's experimental 5 km Coral Bleaching HotSpot Map (Fig. 2), which illustrates current sea surface temperatures compared to the average temperature for the warmest month, shows sea surface temperatures are currently elevated slightly above normal in the Florida Keys. NOAA's experimental 5 km Degree Heating Weeks (DHW) map, which illustrates how much heat stress has built up over the past 12 weeks (Fig.3), indicates extreme accumulated temperature stress is still evident in the Florida Keys region.

NOAA's Integrated Coral Observing Network (ICON), which provides near real time *in-situ* wind data at Sombrero and Sand Key Reef, as well as Mote Marine Laboratory (MML) and Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory (PMEL) *in-situ* temperature data confirm that temperatures have hovering close to 30°C over the past two weeks (Fig.4), likely due in part to winds from Hurricane Idalia and other isolated storms during this period (Fig. 5). Mote Marine Laboratory will continue to monitor the NOAA HotSpot maps, DHW maps, and ICON sea temperature data from NOAA monitoring stations on a weekly basis for the remainder of the bleaching season.

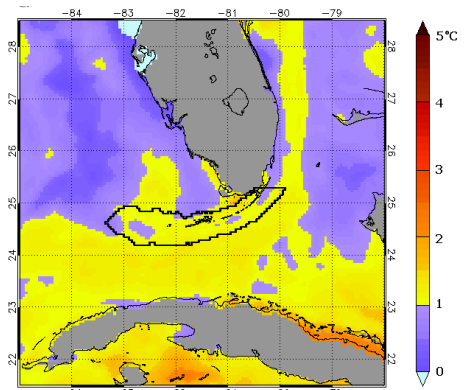


Figure 2. NOAA's Experimental 5km Coral Bleaching HotSpot Map for Florida September 11, 2023. NOAA Coral Reef Watch Website

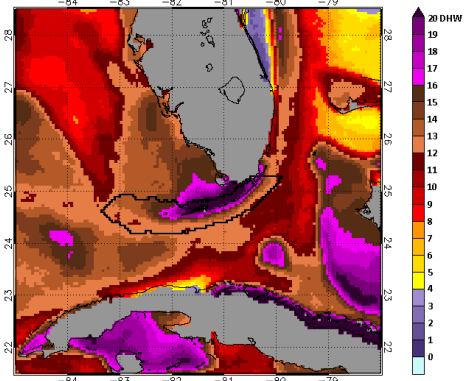


Figure 3. NOAA's Experimental 5km Degree Heating Weeks Map for Florida September 11, 2023. NOAA Coral Reef Watch Website

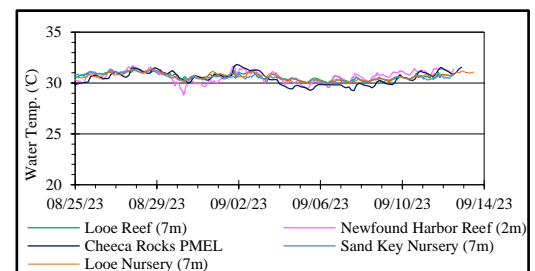


Figure 4. *in-situ* sea temperature from NOAA/ICON monitoring stations (August 25-September 13, 2023).

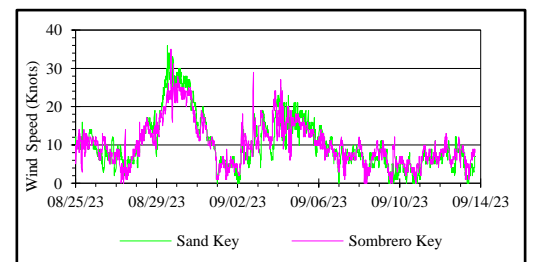


Figure 5. Wind speed data from NOAA/ICON monitoring stations (August 25-September 13, 2023).



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**Current Coral Conditions**

A total of 39 BleachWatch Observer reports were received during the past two weeks (Fig. 6), with 10 reports indicating isolated colonies exhibiting signs of paling or partial bleaching, and 29 reports of extensively bleached reefs (Fig. 7 & 8).



Figure 7. Completely bleached *Porites* spp. near Tennessee Reef on 8/27/2023.

The majority overall percentage of corals exhibiting signs of thermal stress was 76-100% with a few sites offshore throughout the FKNMS of up to 50%. Nearly all species including Brain corals, Encrusting/Mound/Boulder corals, Flower corals, Branching/Pillar corals, Fleishy corals, and Leaf/Plate corals showed signs of thermal stress at all sites and recent mortality at a several inshore and mid-channel sites. A few observations of corals regaining some zooxanthellae. Other observations included bleaching and mortality of *Palythoa* spp., Fire coral, and Gorgonians (Fig. 9) as well as several reports of coral disease, mainly the Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD), Rapid Tissue Loss Disease (RTL) and Black Band Disease (BBD) (Fig. 8).



Figure 8. Bleached *Orbicella faveolata* with Black Band Disease at Basin Hill, Pennekamp SP on 9/8/23

Continued field observations are needed as widespread coral bleaching could potentially develop if environmental conditions continue to be favorable. Please remember to report even if there is no bleaching at your site. Report at [www.mote.org/bleachwatch](http://www.mote.org/bleachwatch).

**BleachWatch Reports for August 25-September 13, 2023**

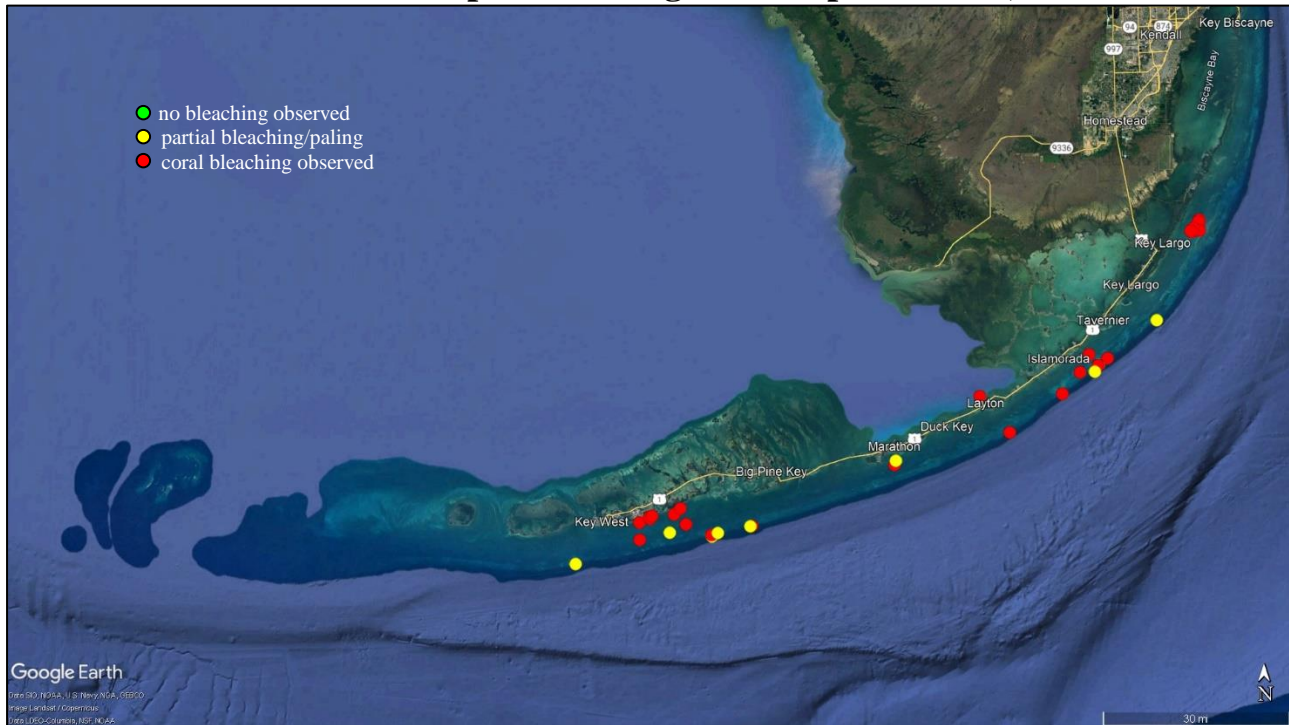


Figure 6. Overview of BleachWatch observer reports submitted from August 25-September 13, 2023

**For more information about the BleachWatch program,  
 or to submit a bleaching observation, contact:**

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<http://www.mote.org/bleachwatch>

**FUNDING THANKS TO....**

