

Mote Marine Laboratory / Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary  
**Coral Bleaching Early Warning Network**  
**Current Conditions Report #20230927**



Updated September 27, 2023

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

**NOAA Coral Reef Watch Current and 60% Probability Coral Bleaching Alert Outlook September 25, 2023 (experimental)**

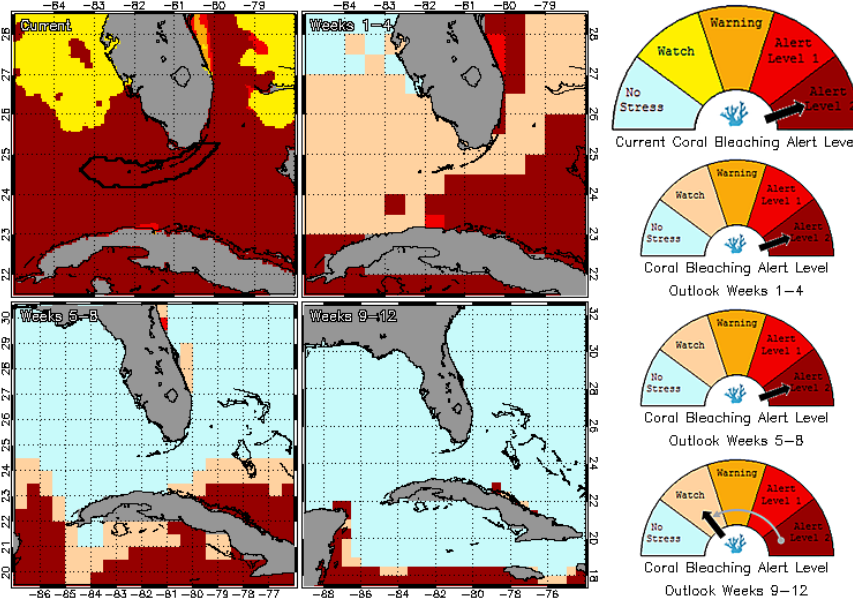


Figure 1. NOAA's 5 km Experimental Current and 60% Probability Coral Bleaching Alert Outlook Areas through end of December 2023. Updated September 25, 2023.  
[https://coralreefwatch.noaa.gov/product/vs/gauges/florida\\_keys.php](https://coralreefwatch.noaa.gov/product/vs/gauges/florida_keys.php)

**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, all areas of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) are still 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 for the next few weeks (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 been well above 30°C over most of the past two weeks (Fig.4), likely due in part to light winds 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.

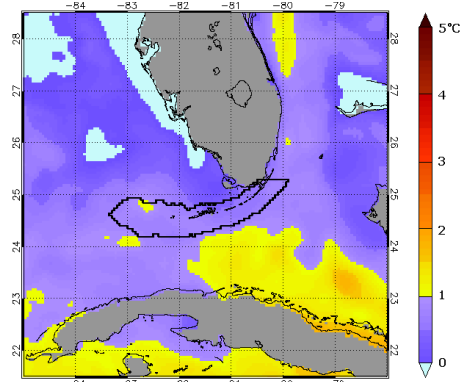


Figure 2. NOAA's Experimental 5km Coral Bleaching HotSpot Map for Florida September 25, 2023.

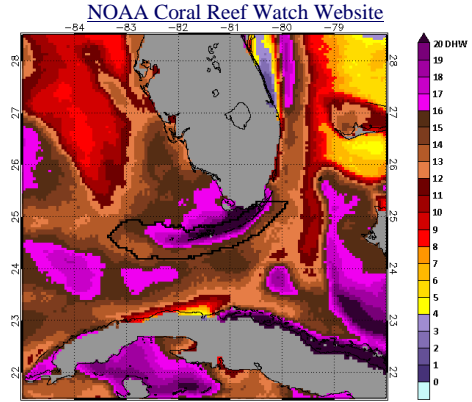


Figure 3. NOAA's Experimental 5km Degree Heating Weeks Map for Florida September 25, 2023.  
[NOAA Coral Reef Watch Website](https://coralreefwatch.noaa.gov)

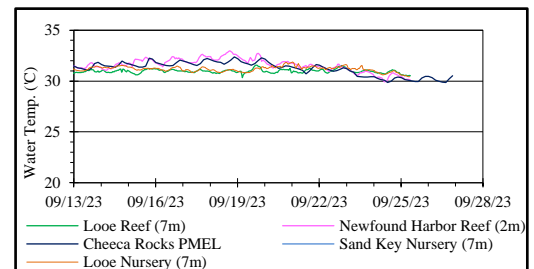


Figure 4. *in-situ* sea temperature from NOAA/ICON monitoring stations (September 13-27, 2023).

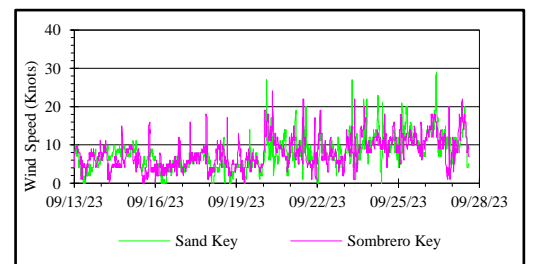


Figure 5. Wind speed data from NOAA/ICON monitoring stations (September 13-27, 2023).



# Coral Bleaching Early Warning Network

## Current Conditions Report #20230927



### Current Coral Conditions

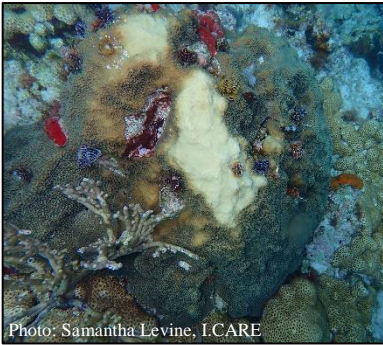


Photo: Samantha Levine, I.CARE

Figure 7. Partially bleached *Orbicella faveolata* potentially regaining color at Molasses Reef on 9/22/23.

A total of 30 BleachWatch Observer reports were received during the past two weeks (Fig. 6), with 25 reports indicating isolated colonies exhibiting signs of paling or partial bleaching (Fig. 7), and 5 reports of extensively bleached reefs (Fig. 8). 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, Fleshy corals, and Leaf/Plate corals showed signs of thermal stress at all sites and recent mortality at a several inshore and mid-channel sites. Several observations of



Photo: MML

Figure 8. Completely bleached inshore patch reef off Boca Chica on 9/14/2023.

corals regaining some zooxanthellae. Other observations included bleaching and mortality of *Palythoa spp.*, Fire coral, and Gorgonians 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).

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 September 13-27, 2023

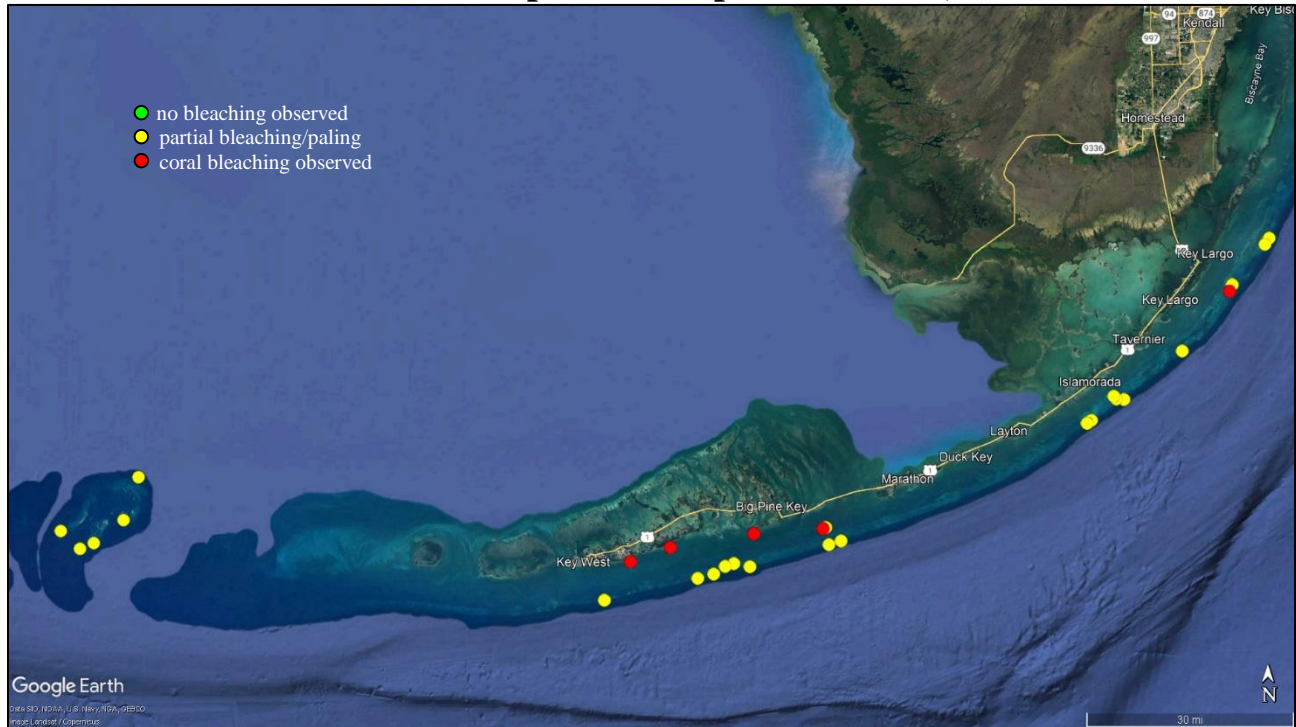


Figure 6. Overview of BleachWatch observer reports submitted from September 13-27, 2023

**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....

