



## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

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MINISTER OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT**

### **EARLY WARNING OF POSSIBLE MASS CORAL BLEACHING IN MALAYSIA**

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The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Coral Watch Programme issued a “Bleaching Watch” notification for Malaysia on 2 May 2016. This notification indicates that sea surface temperatures in some of Malaysia’s waters are above average, and that Malaysia’s coral reefs may have been, or soon will be, exposed to thermal stress and that coral bleaching is a possibility.

Coral bleaching is a major threat to the health of coral reefs and deserves serious attention due to the implications for marine biodiversity, coral reef fisheries and tourism in Malaysia.

NOAA's Coral Reef Watch Programme publishes satellite data on sea surface temperatures, providing an indication of current reef environmental conditions to quickly identify areas at risk of coral bleaching. Continuous monitoring of sea surface temperature at global scales provides researchers and stakeholders with tools to understand and better manage the complex interactions leading to coral bleaching. When bleaching conditions occur, these tools can be used to trigger bleaching response plans and support appropriate management decisions.

Bleaching is a natural response of corals that are under stress. The term 'Mass Bleaching' describes the large scale phenomenon of many species of corals bleaching simultaneously over a significant spatial scale. A sustained rise in seawater temperature is one of the most common reasons for mass coral bleaching. Anthropogenic impacts can also contribute to mass bleaching events.

Following the mass coral reef bleaching event of 2010, the Department of Marine Parks Malaysia established the Coral Reef Bleaching Response Committee (CRBRC) to respond effectively to future bleaching events. The Committee is monitoring the situation and consulting with stakeholders to develop appropriate management responses, in order to protect Malaysia's valuable coral reefs.

The CRBRC will begin surveys of coral reefs to monitor the situation in the country, and track the onset of any bleaching. Action plans to respond to such an event have already been prepared. The Committee will provide further information as it becomes available, and will work to ensure all stakeholders are kept fully informed of the changing situation.

The Department of Marine Parks Malaysia (DMPM) has published the first Malaysian Coral Reef Bleaching Response Plan as a guide for monitoring and managing future bleaching events and communicating with stakeholders on pre-determined steps that need to be carried out during the mass coral reef bleaching. The Plan defines a number of actions that should be taken in the event bleaching monitoring reaches certain "trigger points". Data are taken from local monitoring sources and sea surface temperature satellite data.

For further information, please see the attached FAQ or contact the Committee's Secretariat at [bleaching@reefcheck.org.my](mailto:bleaching@reefcheck.org.my)