



15 July 2014 - Most Caribbean coral reefs may disappear in the next 20 years, primarily due to the loss of grazers in the region, according to the [latest report](#) by the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network ([GCRMN](#)), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the United Nations Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)).

There is only about one-sixth of the original coral cover left in the Caribbean, a decline of more than 50 per cent since the 1970s. "The rate at which the Caribbean corals have been declining is truly alarming," said Carl Gustaf Lundin, Director of IUCN's Global Marine and Polar Programme. "But this study brings some very encouraging news: the fate of Caribbean corals is not beyond our control and there are some very concrete steps that we can take to help them recover."

Whilst climate change has badly affected Caribbean corals and continues to be a major threat, well-managed reefs have bounced back suggesting that climate change is not the main determinant of current Caribbean coral health and that good management practices can save larger areas of reef if tough choices are made.

Climate change does pose a serious threat by making oceans more acidic and causing coral bleaching, yet the report shows that the loss of parrotfish and sea urchin - the area's two main grazers - has, in fact, been the key driver of coral decline in the region. Reefs protected from overfishing, as well as other threats such as excessive coastal pollution, tourism and coastal development, are more resilient to pressures from climate change, according to the report.

The Caribbean is home to 9 per cent of the world's coral reefs, which are one of the most diverse ecosystems on the planet. Caribbean reefs, spanning a total of 38 countries, are vital to the region's economy. They generate more than US\$ 3 billion annually from tourism and fisheries and over a hundred times more in other goods and services, on which more than 43 million people depend.

"The Caribbean coral reefs thread along thousands of kilometres of coastline, providing a source of food and livelihood for millions. Unfortunately, these valuable ecosystems are under mounting pressures from human activities which contribute to the degradation and damage of sediment and pollution to coastal waters." said UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director, Achim Steiner.