

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment and Energy portfolio

Question No: 323

Hearing: Additional Estimates

Outcome: Agency

Program: Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

Topic: Bleaching events since 1928

Hansard Page:

Question Date: 6 March 2017

Question Type: Written

Senator Roberts asked:

Until recently bleaching was thought to be a modern phenomenon. Is it true that there have been 16 bleaching events since 1928? If not true, what is the number?

Answer:

Globally, mass coral bleaching was first recorded in the early 1980's in the Caribbean, the far eastern Pacific, isolated areas of the Pacific, and the Great Barrier Reef. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration officially recognises three global coral bleaching events. The first occurred in 1998, the second in 2010, and the third and current ongoing event which began in 2015.

On the Great Barrier Reef, significant coral bleaching was first observed and documented during the summer of 1981-1982. Since then, severe coral bleaching events have occurred during 1997-1998, 2001-2002, 2005-2006, 2008-2009, 2010-2011, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017. The 2008-2009 and 2010-2011 bleaching events were caused by freshwater inundation, while the other bleaching events were caused by sustained higher-than-average sea surface temperatures.