

COMMUNITIES NEAR REEFS WITH THEIR ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

Matt Gorstein, NOAA / NCCOS

Peter Edwards, The Baldwin Group at NOAA Office for Coastal Management

NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program, in partnership with the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science, is leading an effort to incorporate social and economic monitoring into a new, integrated national monitoring plan for US coral reef jurisdictions. The National Coral Reef Monitoring Program includes three components—biological, climate, and socioeconomic. The socioeconomic component includes gathering information on population change, use of coral reef resources, and knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of coral reef resources and management. The overall goal of the socioeconomic monitoring component is to track relevant information regarding each jurisdiction's social and economic structure in order to investigate both the impacts of society on coral reefs, and the contributions of healthy corals to nearby communities.

Social scientists are using indicators developed in consultation with stakeholders, partners and other scientists. Data is being collected through surveys of residents in the US coral reef jurisdictions and from existing socioeconomic secondary sources such as the US Census and local government agencies.

Surveys are administered every 5-7 years to monitor changes in residents' knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of coral reefs as well as changes in the socioeconomic characteristics of coral reef-adjacent communities. The information will be used by jurisdictional resource managers, educators, and other key partners for monitoring changes in coral reef dependent communities to ensure effective management, education/outreach, and conservation programs. NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program will use the information to evaluate and improve the results of programs designed to protect coral reefs.

Survey work and data collection have already been completed in South Florida, American Samoa, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico while efforts in Guam, the US Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands are in initial stages of development. Initial results for the surveyed jurisdictions show a widespread general support for coral reef management initiatives and an above average familiarity with the various threats posed to coral reefs. Respondent perceptions concerning the change in the condition of marine resources over the last 10 years have been largely negative, indicating that residents of these coral reef-adjacent communities have observed a recent decline in the quality of marine resources such as water quality, the amount of coral, as well as the amount and diversity of fish. Results will be presented to highlight the role of social monitoring and the inclusion of local knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions in resource management.