

CORAL DISEASE: BASELINE SURVEYS IN THE ANDAMAN SEA AND GULF OF THAILAND

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ABSTRACT: Within the last decade, coral disease has become an issue of concern around the world. However, little is known about the presence of coral disease in Thailand. This pilot study aimed to establish a baseline for future long-term monitoring comparison on reefs of southern Thailand. A total of 87 surveys were conducted from November 2007 to August 2008 using the semi-quantitative Belt Method. Disease occurred on 66% of reefs surveyed in the Andaman Sea and 77% of reefs surveyed in the Gulf of Thailand in levels ranging from rare (0–3 cases per survey) to abundant (25–50 cases per survey). It is important to note that while disease was observed on a high percentage of reefs, the relative frequency of disease observations within a reef was low in comparison to the Caribbean or Great Barrier Reef. About 29% of reefs or 25 sites exhibited disease in levels above rare, all of which were located off heavily developed beaches and/or heavily toured areas. Overall, eight coral genera, comprising 18+ species, were observed to be affected by four disease categories: pink line syndrome, white syndrome, black band disease and the Thai aspergillois variant. This broad-based disease survey is the first of its kind in Thai waters. Increased awareness and future long-term monitoring of coral disease is needed to fully understand disease dynamics on the reefs of Thailand.

Key Words: coral disease, baseline survey, Belt Method, Andaman Sea, Gulf of Thailand
