

Waves of Awareness

Hawai'i is a beautiful place that holds a culture and landscape unparalleled from the rest of the world. There is a sense of beauty and serenity that I personally connect my home to, grateful for everything it offers. Yet, the terrifying reality is that the beauty of Hawai'i is not everlasting and is greatly being put at risk. Coral reef ecosystems not only keep our native marine species alive, but also the human population. However, many do not realize that the urgency to save the coral reefs is quickly approaching and if we do not put an end to coral bleaching, the only people we will have to blame for the consequences will be ourselves.

As a child, I had never been educated about the bleaching of the coral reefs. Though this issue may not have been as important as it is today, the lack of education and awareness about this matter is what has allowed residents of Hawai'i to take for granted what is given to us as a result of the coral reefs. Coral reefs are complex creatures that make their own food, act as barrier of protection from natural disasters, house hundreds of various marine species, provide food sources for humans, and act as a sponge for greenhouse gas emissions. They play such a vital role in the contributions of human welfare, yet the human race fails to treat to treat it accordingly.

The topic of coral bleaching is something that was only brought to my attention in my sophomore year of high school. I had attended a screening of the film *Chasing Coral* simply out of curiosity. After leaving the documentary however, I found that the film had left a immense impact on me, one I genuinely didn't expect. The documentary was primarily focused around a group of divers who sought to capture the bleaching of the coral reefs and bring awareness to the fact that coral reefs are dying at concerning rates. They discovered that the root of the problem stems from carbon dioxide that is being released into the atmosphere and produces large amounts of heat. 93% of this heat is being absorbed by the ocean, which regulates the average

surface temperature of the Earth. Without this absorption of carbon dioxide, the average surface temperature would be 125 degrees Fahrenheit and make Earth unsuitable for human life.

Moreover, coral cannot withstand a slight increase of temperature in their habitats, even as little as one or two degrees Celsius. This shift in temperature causes the coral to essentially lose its ability to produce food and die of starvation in a matter of weeks.

Many do not realize that once the coral reefs are gone, they are gone forever. According to recent statistics, it was discovered that almost half of the coral reef population in Hawai'i were devastated by heat waves that occurred in 2014 and 2015. As the effects of global warming are only expected to get worse in upcoming years, the likelihood of remedying this growing problem are slim. It is expected that 50 years from now, only 10% of the world's coral population will exist. Thus, there is no time to waste spreading the importance of this issue through those who it will affect most: the future generations of Hawai'i.

The solution I propose to prevent coral bleaching is the creation of a statewide awareness of the issue through screenings of various documentaries, presentations by experts on this issue, and direct education about the matter through the teachers of Hawai'i. Adults and children must come together to prevent the bleaching of corals for the sake of the world's future. The reason why coral bleaching isn't highly discussed in society is simply because our committees lack the awareness to enact action. For example, many of Hawai'i's population is unaware to the fact that products such as sunscreen contain chemicals that protect humans from the dangerous UV rays of the sun, but pose deadly threats to the flourishing of the coral reefs. If this kind of awareness had been spread to communities 30 years or earlier, we can only imagine the positive effects and differences that would be in place in our environments today.

Clarence T.C. Ching had a vision to help future generations. The solution of promoting awareness in our keiki allows them to take control of their own futures and contribute to

something larger than themselves. As Kofi Annan once said, "Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family." The saving of the coral reefs is not a goal that is out of our reach. It will only take the awareness of a few to begin something great. This problem can forever be laid to rest, but is not something that be solved on its own. The time is now to act, and not wait for something to be taken away from us before we truly appreciate what we used to have. Adjusting our lifestyles in small ways would literally save the world.