

**A CORAL REEF IN TRANSITION: THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE
FINGER CORAL, *PORITES PORITES*, ON TELEPHONE POLE REEF, SAN
SALVADOR ISLAND, BAHAMAS**

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This study focused on the health of *Porites porites* at Telephone Pole Reef, San Salvador Island, Bahamas. Until about 1993, *P. porites* was the dominant coral species on the reef. The rise of *P. porites* followed the dramatic decline of the former coral dominant *Acropora cervicornis*, which disappeared almost entirely in the early 1980s due to white band disease. Since 1993, the number of *P. porites* colonies in excellent condition has declined more than 50%, and nearly 30% of all colonies on the reef today are completely dead. The fleshy green macroalgae, *Microdictyon marinum*, is flourishing on the reef today, in part due to the extensive die-off of the sea urchin herbivore, *Diadema antillarum*. The negative effects of overfishing, bleaching, and macro-borer sponges likely also are contributing to the rapid demise of *Porites porites*. How the disappearance of *P. porites* will affect Telephone Pole Reef is currently unknown, but as of yet there is no indication of a new coral dominant to succeed *P. porites*.