



The Ocean Agency/XL Catlin Seaview Survey via AP

This May 2016 photo shows coral that has bleached white due to heat stress in the Maldives. Coral reefs, unique underwater ecosystems that sustain a quarter of the world's marine species and half a billion people, are dying on an unprecedented scale.

Scientists race to prevent wipeout of world's coral reefs

Associated Press

SOUTH ARI ATOLL, Maldives — There were startling colors here just a year ago, a dazzling array of life beneath the waves. Now this Maldivian reef is dead, killed by the stress of rising ocean temperatures. What's left is a haunting expanse of gray, a scene repeated in reefs across the globe in what has fast become a full-blown ecological catastrophe.

The world has lost roughly half its coral reefs in the last 30 years. Scientists are now scrambling to ensure that at least a fraction of these unique ecosystems survives beyond the next three decades. The health of the planet depends on it: Coral reefs support a quarter of all marine species, as well as half a billion people around the world.

"This isn't something that's going to happen 100 years from now. We're losing them right now," said marine biologist Julia Baum of Canada's University of Victoria. "We're losing them really quickly, much more quickly than I think any of us ever could have imagined."

Even if the world could halt global warming now, scientists still expect that more than 90 percent of corals will die by 2050. Without drastic intervention, we risk losing them all.

"To lose coral reefs is to fundamentally undermine the health of a very large proportion of the human race," said Ruth Gates, director of the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology.

Coral reefs produce some of the oxygen we breathe. Often described as underwater rainforests, they populate a tiny fraction of the ocean but provide habitats for one in four marine species. Reefs also form crucial barriers that protect coastlines from the full force of storms.

They provide billions of dollars in revenue from tourism, fishing and other

Victor Bonito/The Ocean Agency/Reef Explorer Fiji via AP
In this March 2016 photo a snorkeler swims above coral that has bleached white due to heat stress in Fiji.The Ocean Agency/XL Catlin Seaview Survey via AP
This March 2016 photo shows coral bleached white by heat stress in New Caledonia.

commerce, and are used in medical research for cures to diseases including cancer, arthritis and bacterial or viral infections.

"Whether you're living in North America or Europe or Australia, you should be concerned," said biologist Ove Hoegh-Guldberg, director of the Global Change Institute at Australia's University of Queensland. "This is not just some distant dive destination, a holiday destination. This is the fabric of the ecosystem that supports us."

And that fabric is being torn apart.

"You couldn't be more dumb ... to erode the very thing that life depends on — the ecosystem — and hope that you'll get away with it," Hoegh-Guldberg said.

Corals are invertebrates,

living mostly in tropical waters. They secrete calcium carbonate to build protective skeletons that grow and take on impressive colors, thanks to a symbiotic relationship with algae that live in their tissues and provide them with energy.

But corals are sensitive to temperature fluctuations, and are suffering from rising ocean temperatures and acidification, as well as from overfishing, pollution, coastal development and agricultural runoff.

A temperature change of just 1.8 to 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit can force coral to expel the algae, leaving their white skeletons visible in a process known as "bleaching."

Bleached coral can recover if the water cools, but if high temperatures persist for months, the coral will die. Eventually the reef will

degrade, leaving fish without habitats and coastlines less protected from storm surges.

The first global bleaching event occurred in 1998, when 16 percent of corals died. The problem spiraled dramatically in 2015-2016 amid an extended El Nino natural weather phenomenon that warmed Pacific waters near the equator and triggered the most widespread bleaching ever documented. This third global bleaching event, as it is known, continues today even after El Nino ended.

Headlines have focused on damage to Australia's famed Great Barrier Reef, but other reefs have fared just as badly or worse across the world, from Japan to Hawaii to Florida.

Around the islands of the Maldives, an idyllic Indian Ocean tourism destination, some 73 percent of surveyed reefs suffered bleaching between March and May 2016, according to the country's Marine Research Center.

"This bleaching episode seems to have impacted the entire Maldives, but the severity of bleaching varies" between reefs, according to local conditions, said Nizam Ibrahim, the center's senior research officer.

Worst hit have been areas in the central Pacific, where the University of Victoria's Baum has been conducting research on Kiribati, or Christmas Island, in the Republic of Kiribati. Warmer water temperatures lasted there for 10 months in 2015-2016, killing a staggering 90 percent of the reef.

Baum had never seen anything like it.

To make matters worse, scientists are predicting another wave of elevated ocean temperatures starting next month.

The speed of the destruction is what alarms scientists and conservationists, as damaged coral might not have time to recover before it is hit again by warmer temperatures.

Trump earned \$153M and paid \$36.5M in taxes in 2005

By JILL COLVIN and JEFF HORWITZ
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump earned \$153 million and paid \$36.5 million in income taxes in 2005, paying a roughly 25 percent effective tax rate thanks to a tax he has since sought to eliminate, according to highly sought-after tax documents disclosed Tuesday night.

The pages from Trump's federal tax return show the then-real estate mogul also reported a business loss of \$103 million that year, although the documents don't provide detail. The forms show that Trump paid an effective tax rate of 24.5 percent, a figure well above the roughly 10 percent the average American taxpayer forks over each year, but below the 27.4 percent that taxpayers earning 1 million dollars a year average, according to data from the Congressional Joint Committee on Taxation.

The form were obtained by journalist David Cay Johnston, who runs a website called DCReport.org, and reported on MSNBC's "The Rachel Maddow Show." Johnston, who has long reported on tax issues, said he received the documents in the mail, unsolicited.

Trump's hefty business loss appears to be a continued benefit from his use of a tax loophole in the 1990s, which allowed him to deduct previous losses in future years. In 1995, Trump reported a loss of more than \$900 million, largely as a result of financial turmoil at his casinos.

Tax records obtained by The New York Times last year showed the losses were so large they could have allowed Trump to avoid paying taxes for up to 18 years. But Trump's 2005 filing shows another tax prevented him from realizing the full benefit of those deductions.

The bulk of Trump's tax bill that year was due to the Alternative Minimum Tax, a tax aimed at preventing high-income earners from paying minimal taxes.

The AMT requires many taxpayers to calculate their taxes twice — once under the rules for regular income tax and then again under AMT — and then pay the higher amount. Critics say the tax has ensnared more middle-class people than intended, raising what they owe the

federal government each year.

Were it not for the AMT, Trump would have avoided all but a few million dollars of his 2005 tax bill.

Trump's campaign website called for the end of the AMT, which is expected to bring in more than \$350 billion in revenues from 2016 to 2025.

As a candidate and as president, Trump has refused to release his tax returns, breaking a decades-long tradition. Although he initially promised to do so, he later claimed he was under audit by the Internal Revenue Service and said his attorneys had advised against it — though experts and IRS officials said such audits don't bar taxpayers from releasing their returns.

The White House pushed back even before the release of the documents Tuesday night, saying that publishing the information was illegal.

"You know you are desperate for ratings when you are willing to violate the law to push a story about two pages of tax returns from over a decade ago," the White House said in a statement issued on condition that it be attributed to an anonymous official, although the president has decried the use of anonymous sources.

The unauthorized release or publishing of federal tax returns is a criminal offense, punishable by a fine of up to \$5,000 and up to five years in jail. But Maddow argued that MSNBC was exercising its First Amendment right to publish information in the public interest.

Trump long insisted the American public wasn't interested in his returns and said little could be learned from them. But Trump's full returns would contain key details about things like his charitable giving, his income sources, the type of deductions he claimed, how much he earned from his assets and what strategies Trump used to reduce his tax bill.

The issue was a major point of attack from his election rival Hillary Clinton, who suggested Trump had something to hide.

The White House has not said whether or not the president plans to release his returns while he's in office. More than 1 million people have signed a White House petition urging the president to release them.

Reports: Kushner family company in possible Chinese deal

NEW YORK (AP) — The company owned by the family of President Donald Trump's son-in-law is reportedly negotiating to sell a \$400 million stake in a New York City skyscraper to a Chinese insurer with ties to that country's ruling party.

The New York Times is reporting that a company run by Jared Kushner's father is hammering out a deal with Anbang Insurance Group for a stake in the family's building at 666 Fifth Avenue. Bloomberg News also reported on the deal. Jared Kushner is married to the president's daughter Ivanka and is a senior adviser to the president.

The deal would unite two politically powerful families in both countries and raise conflicts of interest questions.

A White House spokeswoman tells the Times that Jared Kushner previously sold his interest in the building.



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