



Precious Corals

- Black coral harvesting in Hawaii has been largely confined to state waters (0–3 miles from shore) because gear constraints have restricted divers to waters less than 80 meters, even though managed species of black corals are known to occur at depths of 100 meters.
- Since 1980, virtually all of the black coral commercially harvested around the Hawaiian Islands has been from the Auau Channel, located between Maui and Lanai. A survey of the bed has showed that harvesting between 1975 and 1998 has had no significant effect on recruitment. However, black coral in a few areas (for example, “Stonewall” off Lahaina, Maui), which are easily accessible with conventional scuba and were intensely harvested in the 1970s, have not shown signs of recovery.
- Harvesting pressure in the near future is possible:
 - Increased demand for out-of-state raw black coral aggressively pursued by Hawaii coral processors or a decrease in imports of cut and polished black coral from Taiwan could increase the demand for Hawaii’s black coral.
 - The introduction of new technology, such as mixed-gas scuba and affordable, manned submersibles and remotely operated vehicles, have extended the length of time and maximum depths of local harvesting to five hours at 2,000 feet.
- Recognizing the potential for greater pressure on the resource, the Hawaii Division of Aquatic Resources (HDAR) has established a mandatory minimum size limit of 3/4-inch base diameter for harvested black coral.
- The Council in October 1999 agreed to a more conservative size limit. Data indicate that a 48-inch tree height or 1-inch base diameter is the minimum acceptable harvesting size limit for maximum sustainable yield should harvesting pressure increase. An “either/or” minimum size of 48-inch tree height or 1-inch base diameter would take into account variations in growth forms and reduce the negative economic impact of minimum size regulations on harvesters. Exemptions would be granted to anyone who reported a landing of black coral to HDAR during the past five years. Exempt divers would have to adhere to the state size limit and could harvest by hand only.
- The Council also acted to (1) suspend the harvest quota for gold coral at the Makapuu Bed until additional information is available on the impact of harvesting on the bed; (2) establish the harvest quota for pink coral at Brooks Bank at 200 kg; and (3) suspend harvest of gold coral at Brooks Bank until additional scientific information is available on the impact of harvesting on monk seal foraging habitat.