

Coral Reefs and What Ruins Them



Zafer Kizilkaya

A healthy reef often appears, at first glance, to be an empty reef with only a few of the colorful fish usually associated with coral reefs swimming around. That is because the fish are hiding, trying to avoid becoming a meal for predators like this red snapper. [More Photos >](#)

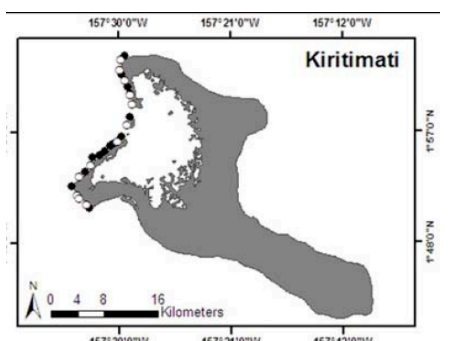
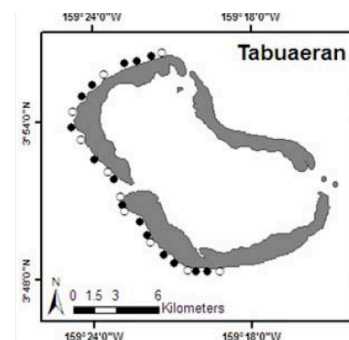
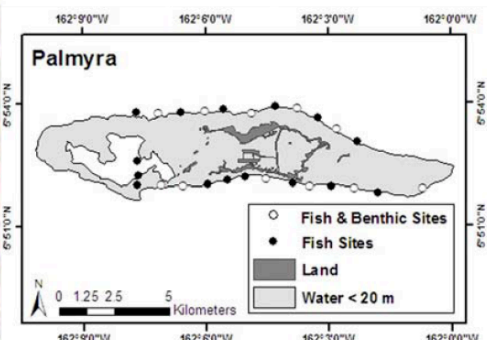
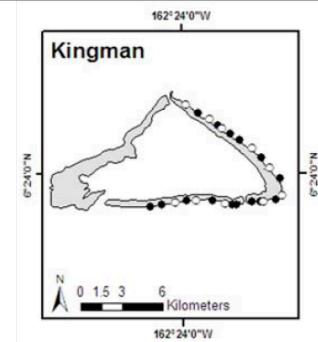
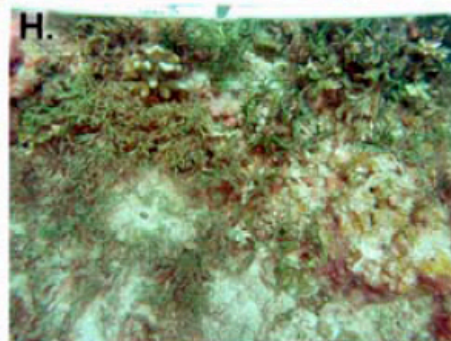
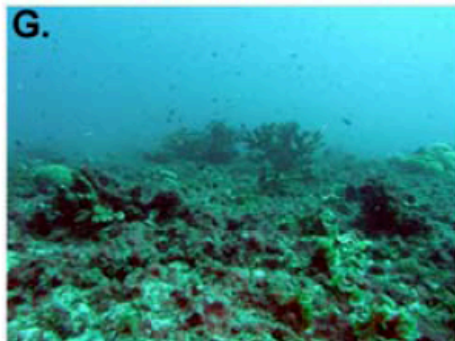
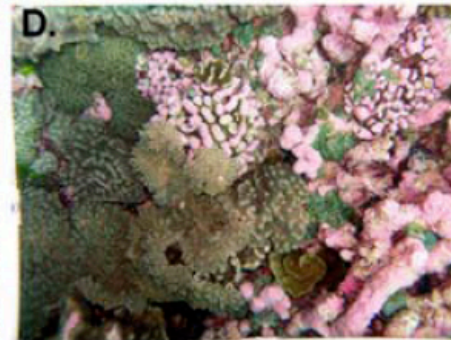
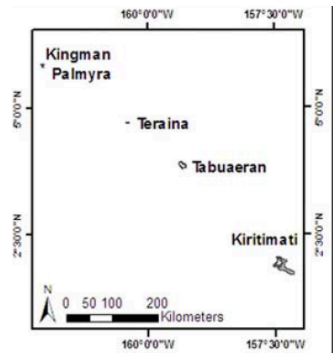
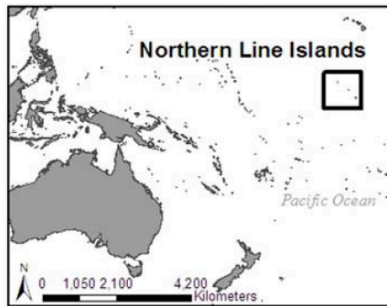
By [CORNELIA DEAN](#)

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But for Dr. Sala, the reefs are like “ecological machines” whose parts include plants, fish, corals and microbes. “You can hit the system with a disturbance, but the system comes back,” he said. But if pieces — like big predatory fish — are removed, he said, “the machine is going to malfunction.”

As a result, he said, the new work “is an argument for marine reserves large enough to include healthy populations of top predators.”



Knowlton &
Jackson,
Plos Biology
6:215-220