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# A review of selected indicators of particle, nutrient and metal inputs in coral reef lagoon systems

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**Abstract** – This review presents environmental and biological indicators of the impact of three major categories of inputs in coral reef lagoons i.e. particles, nutrients and metals. Information was synthesized to extract well established indicators together with some interesting new concepts currently under development, and to provide the reader with an assessment of their respective advantages and drawbacks. The paper has been organized according to the capacity of three categories of indicators to respond either in a specific or a non specific way to a given source of input. The first section focuses on abiotic indicators which main interest is to respond instantaneously and in a truly specific way to a given source of input. The second and third sections present informations on bioindicators either at the sub-individual level or at the individual to community level, indicator specificity generally decreasing as a direct function of biological or ecological complexity. This review showed that even though significant work has already been done on coral reef ecosystems, much more scientific studies are still needed to answer the growing local demands for simple and truly validated tools to be used in environmental surveys. It is further stressed that, due to the biological and environmental diversity of coral reef lagoons, a preliminary step of on-site validation must be considered as an absolute prerequisite when indicators are planned to be used in the frame of a local environmental monitoring programme.

**Key words:** Coral reef / Lagoon / Sediment load / Eutrophication / Metals / Pollution / Abiotic indicators / Bioindicators / Biomarkers

**Résumé** – Cette synthèse bibliographique présente les caractéristiques environnementales et biologiques pouvant être utilisées comme indicateurs des effets de trois grandes catégories d'apports exogènes dans les milieux récifo-lagonaires : les particules, les éléments nutritifs et les métaux. Les données de la littérature ont été analysées pour en extraire des indicateurs reconnus ainsi que de nouveaux concepts en cours de développement, et afin d'examiner leurs avantages et inconvénients respectifs. L'article a été structuré selon la capacité de trois types d'indicateurs à répondre de manière spécifique ou non spécifique à l'une des trois catégories d'apports cités précédemment. En premier lieu, les indicateurs abiotiques qui ont pour principal intérêt de répondre instantanément et spécifiquement à l'un des trois types d'apports, puis les bio-indicateurs respectivement considérés à l'échelle infra-organisme ou à une échelle allant de l'organisme à la communauté. La spécificité de ces indicateurs diminuant en fonction de l'augmentation de la complexité biologique et écologique. Bien qu'il existe déjà un nombre important de travaux portant sur les systèmes récifo-lagonaires, un effort scientifique majeur reste nécessaire pour répondre à des demandes croissantes de définition d'outils simples et validés pouvant être utilisés dans le cadre de la surveillance de l'environnement. De plus, et compte tenu de la diversité biologique et environnementale des lagons et des récifs coralliens cette étude montre que l'utilisation d'indicateurs, dans le cadre de programmes de suivi environnementaux à l'échelle locale, passe par une phase préliminaire indispensable de validation sur site, des indicateurs sélectionnés.

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# 1 Introduction

Monitoring coastal zones to assess and control environmental stress is a worldwide issue that receives growing attention. Coral reefs and coral reef lagoon ecosystems are known for their extreme biodiversity and trophic complexity and they will respond to environmental stress in a complex way. Additionally, background environmental information in those tropical systems is often weaker and sparser than in temperate systems. Such specificities and the hitherto need for adapted response in term of environmental monitoring must be taken into account. This paper specifically focuses on 3 major terrigenous and anthropogenic inputs that rank among the most acute and widespread causes of environmental alteration i.e. particles, nutrients and metals. It is aimed at synthetically presenting some existing or promising indicators of environmental stress related to those 3 major inputs in coral reef lagoon environments.

As a general definition, we may retain that an indicator is a sign or signal that relays a complex message, potentially from numerous sources, in a simplified and useful manner and that its primary uses are to characterize current status and to track or predict significant change (Jameson et al. 1998). Indicators include a measure, an index of measures, or a model that characterizes the studied systems, coral reef and coral reef lagoon ecosystems in the present case, or one of their critical components. Physical and chemical signals may serve as indicators of specific anthropogenic influences. Direct measurement of environmental stress however requires knowledge of critical or threshold levels of stress (Hughes 2002), a prerequisite that is often far from clearly established especially as environmental conditions in human impacted coral reef lagoons display significant temporal and spatial variability. Biological responses to environmental conditions form another category of indicators known as bioindicators. A bioindicator is an anthropogenically-induced response in biomolecular, biochemical, or physiological parameters that has been causally linked to biological effects at one or more of the organism, population, community, or ecosystem levels of biological organization (Mc Carty and Munkittrick 1996). Bio-indicators and to a lesser extent environmental indicators received considerable attention in the past and a large number of relevant article and book references can be found in the literature (reviews in Kaiser et al. 2001; Market et al. 2003). Published works specifically dealing with indicators in coral reef and coral reef lagoon environments are much rarer and mostly refer to bioindicators (Linton and Warmer 2003; Garzon-Ferreira et al. 2005) and more rarely to environmental indicators (Moss et al. 2005), the concept of ecological indicator being apparently more commonly used in coral reef management research (Castro 2001; Hugues 2002). Analysis of the existing literature showed that a concise review on indicators of the fate and impact of particle, nutrient and metal inputs in coral reef ecosystems was missing. This statement was further confirmed by environmental managers who claimed to be confronted with confuse and incomplete informations when digging the literature for indicators adapted to their specific and precise needs. This paper hence was designed to fill this gap and has been organized in 3 sections regrouping (i) abiotic environmental indicators of the origin and fate of specific anthropogenic input

sources, (ii) indicators at the organism level ranging from biochemical to bioenergetic responses and (iii) indicators at the population and community level responding to environmental stress on a long term basis. For each of these sections a distinction was made between indicators providing a specific or a non-specific response to one of the 3 sources of inputs.

## 2 Abiotic environmental indicators

Physical and chemical descriptors of environmental conditions come in such numbers that environmental impact assessment studies are often overburdened with irrelevant data, the main defaults being that:

- The specificity of analytical methods requested to analyze tropical lagoon waters are often poorly mastered especially by unspecialized analytical contractors (i.e. nutrient analytical techniques unadapted to oligotrophic waters).
- The importance of temporal variability which can be extreme in coral reef systems is often neglected leading to potentially inconsistent definition of background environmental conditions.
- Data interpretation is often hastily presented and poorly mastered.

Therefore, environmental managers may feel lost in a maze of irrelevant information from which they are unable to extract efficient and cost effective indicators of environmental quality truly adapted to the problem they are confronted with. Here we propose a deliberately short listed selection of parameters together with a brief overview of their main advantages and disadvantages (Table 1).

### 2.1 Abiotic environmental indicators of particle inputs

#### Suspended load versus turbidity

Suspended particle matter (SPM) inputs directly affect light penetration and sedimentation rates, two factors that strongly influence the equilibrium of coral reef ecosystems (Woolfe and Larcombe 1999). Filtration of water and weighing of the filtered material, a technique initially designed to assess suspended loads in turbid waters, has been largely applied to marine water. Application of this apparently simple method to tropical marine water with low suspended load may prove far from satisfactory and must be regarded with caution. On a technical point of view glass fibre filters must be averted because they may lose weight during the sample treatment process hence strongly impacting the calculation of suspended load. In situ optical turbidity measurement (transmissometry, back-scattering) has been increasingly used during the past decades and an intercomparison exercise concluded that in waters with low SPM concentrations, turbidity measurement was more accurate than filtration-weighing techniques (Mc Girr 1974). A special mention goes to particle backscattering which offers a wide measuring range adapted to the study of land-ocean transects and benefits from a single optical surface for which automated cleaning systems have been designed to prevent fouling hence allowing for long term *in situ* deployment (Ridd and Larcombe 1994).

Table 1. Abiotic indicators.

| Descriptors                                      | Techniques                                  | Technical references   | Advantages  | Major drawbacks  | Recommendations  | Location of studies on reef lagoons   | References   |
|--|---|--|---|--|--|---|--|
| <b>Particles inputs</b>                          |   |  |   |  |  |   |  |
| Suspended particulate matter                     | Filtering                                   | Strickland and Parsons 1972  | Simplest and most frequently used method but often discarded in scientific papers                     | Strong variability mainly derived to the low retained weight versus much higher filter weight          | Filteration of a large volume of water<br>Weighing in strictly dry conditions  | French Polynesia  | Blanchot et al. 1989   |
| Turbidity in situ                                | Light transmission or backscattering        | Mc Girr 1974   | High frequency data acquisition (profiling)<br>Continuous recording (with automated cleaning systems) | Signal depending on particle optical properties  | Local calibration needed to derive SPM load from NTU ( $1 \text{ NTU} \approx 1 \text{ mg L}^{-1}$ )                               | French Polynesia<br>New Caledonia<br>Papua New Guinea<br>Great Barrier Reef | Adjeroud, 2000<br>Ouillon et al. 2004<br>Thomas et al. 2003<br>Orpin et al. 2004       |
| Vertical particle flux                           | Sediment traps                              | Butman 1986<br>Butman et al. 1986  | Integrative information   | Combined primary and secondary flux in shallow water   | To be used in depth greater than 15 m<br>Trap aspect ratio $\geq 2.5$  | French Polynesia  | Charpy and Charpy-Roubaud 1991<br>Schrimm et al. 2002                                  |
| Sediment carbonates                              | Acid dissolution or CHN analysis            | Masse et al. 1989  | Simple assessment of lagoon (carbonate) vs. terrigenous (non-carbonate) sediments                     | Ineffective for carbonated land masses   |  | New Caledonia<br>Venezuela<br>Florida<br>Comoro islands                     | Clavier et al. 1995<br>Bastidas et al. 1999<br>Gaccia et al. 2003<br>Masse et al. 1989 |
| Acoustic mapping                                 | Acoustic ground discrimination system       | Hamilton et al. 1999   | High data acquisition rate<br>Real time mapping<br>Additional information on benthic habitats         | Local validation needed<br>Response function of sensor   | A new area of technical development with strong potential for environmental studies  | Great Barrier Reef<br>Philippines<br>New Caledonia                          | Hamilton et al. 1999<br>White et al. 2003  |
| <b>Inorganic and organic nutrient inputs</b>     |   |  |   |  |  |   |  |
| Dissolved and particulate nutrients in the water | Various techniques                          | Strickland and Parsons 1972<br>Raimbault et al. 1990<br>Holmes et al. 1999 | Precise technique<br>Direct assessment of nutrient levels   | High environmental variability<br>High technical skill<br>Sophisticated equipment                      | Priority to nutrient limiting primary production<br>Techniques adapted to low concentrations ( $\text{NO}_3^-$ , $\text{NH}_4^+$ ) | Bahamas<br>French Polynesia<br>French Polynesia                             | Lapointe et al. 2004<br>Pages et al. 2001<br>Charpy et al. 1997                        |
| Nutrients in sediment (particles and pore water) | Various techniques                          | Strickland and Parsons 1972  | Moderately simple   | Most of the degradation process occurs at the sediment-water interface<br>Same as above                | Poor indicator of trophic status   |   | Charpy-Roubaud et al. 1996   |
| Vertical particulate nutrient flux               | Sediment trap and various nutrient analysis | See vertical particle flux, dissolved and particulate nutrients            | Same as for suspended particulate matter  | Same as for suspended particulate matter<br>Alteration of organic material<br>Bias due to resuspension | To be used in depth greater than 15 m  | Japan<br>French Polynesia   | Hata et al. 2002<br>Schrimm et al. 2002  |

Table 1. Continued.

| Descriptors                          | Techniques  | Technical references   | Advantages  | Major drawbacks   | Recommendations  | Location of studies on reef lagoons  | References   |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|---|---|--|--|--|
| Benthic metabolism and nutrient flux | Various in situ and ex situ techniques                    | Yates and Halley 2003<br>Viollier et al. 2003<br>Grenz et al. 2003 | Truly mirroring the benthic trophic status  | Complicated techniques requiring strong technical skill and equipment                           |  | Japan<br>Kenya<br>New Caledonia<br>Great Barrier Reef  | Hata et al. 2002<br>Mwashote and Jumba 2002<br>Clavier and Garrigue, 1999<br>Grenz et al. 2003<br>Rasheed et al. 2004<br>Clavier et al. 2005 |
| <b>Metal inputs</b>                  |   |  |   |   |  |  |  |
| Dissolved metals                     | Diffusive gradients in thin films (DGT) integrative resin | Zhang and Davison 2000<br>Webb and Kcough 2002                     | Simple handling<br>Integrated information<br>Low contamination risk<br>Potential alternative to bioindicators | Complex analysis generally requiring ICP-MS detection<br>New tool in need of additional testing | Complex analytical step to be contracted with a qualified laboratory               | Not applied yet in coral reef environments<br>Experimental work underway in New Caledonia (Thébault pers. comm.) |  |
| Dissolved metals in pore water       | DGT integrative resin                                     | Fones et al. 2001  | Simple handling<br>Integrated information<br>Low contamination risk   | Id.   | Id.  | Not applied yet in coral reef environments   |  |
| Metals in the sediment               | Total mineralization                                      | Loring and Rantala 1972  | Time integrated information   | No indication on the bioavailable metals  | Good indicator of metal inputs<br>Poor indicator of the potential effects on biota | Great Barrier Reef<br>Torres straight<br>Fiji<br>Florida Keys<br>Venezuela<br>Philippines                        | Haynes and Johnson 2000<br>Haynes and Kwan 2002<br>Morisson et al. 2001<br>Gaccia et al. 2003<br>Bastidas et al. 1999<br>David 2002          |
| Bioavailable metals in the sediment  | Sequential extraction                                     | Tack and Verloo 1999<br>Rauret et al. 1999                         | Time integrated information   | Not directly related to bioavailable metals<br>Complex technical steps                          | Moderately good indicator of the potential effects on biota                        | Great Barrier Reef<br>French Polynesia (Tahiti)<br>New Caledonia   | Reichelt and Jones 1994<br>Esslemont 2000<br>Harris 1998<br>Fernandez et al. 2002<br>Fichez et al. 2005                                      |

## Vertical particle flux

Particle vertical flux measurement provides a dynamic assessment of deposition process which is directly related to environmental stress. When combined with additional chemical analysis of the settling particles it further provides information on the flux of contaminants reaching the benthic boundary layer. However, sediment traps used to assess the vertical particle flux have been demonstrated as hydrodynamically intrusive their design strongly influencing collecting efficiency (Asper 1987; Gardner 2000). Furthermore, the validity of data acquired in shallow and hydrodynamically active environments has been questioned as sediment traps indistinctively collect primary (non resuspended) and secondary (resuspended) fluxes and great caution must be taken when using this technique to assess particle settling fluxes in coastal environments (McComb 2001).

## Sediment composition

Terrigenous indicators in coral reef lagoon sediments may be inferred from a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the skeletal composition (Masse et al. 1989). Lagoon sediments are essentially originating from: coastal terrigenous inputs, barrier reef inputs and authigenic benthic and pelagic productions (Chevillon 1996). Autochthonous benthic production is essentially represented by molluscs, foraminifers and *Halimeda* bioclasts. Influence from the barrier reef is evidenced by the presence of non free-living coral debris, specific foraminifera species or hard grounds calcareous algae, while coastal terrigenous influence is materialized by lithoclasts.

When coral reefs develop along non calcareous land, a second and much simpler way to detect terrigenous versus non terrigenous inputs in lagoon sediments is to measure their carbonate content. In such conditions, carbonates exclusively originate from reef and lagoon origins and the non carbonate fraction is essentially composed of terrigenous particles plus some biologically formed silicate and organic material. The contribution of biogenic silicate and organic material has been evaluated to around 10% of total sediment in atoll lagoons (Chevillon 1992) so it is possible to consider that in lagoon sediments the fraction of non carbonate material in excess of 10% of the carbonate material can be attributed to allochthonous inputs of terrigenous material.

Very recently, Acoustic Ground Discrimination Systems (AGDS) have been used as a mean to rapidly map sediment and habitat distributions (Hamilton et al. 1999) and this new technique already largely used on fishing boats certainly will be increasingly involved in rapid environmental surveys of silting areas.

## 2.2 Abiotic environmental indicators of nutrient inputs

### Nutrients

Even though they can't be used alone to establish the trophic status of a coral reef system (Koop et al. 2001) nutrient concentrations still stand as a key parameter to environmental surveys (Table 1). Nutrients come in various dissolved and particulate forms and in environmental assessment studies priority should obviously be given to the inorganic nutrient forms

that are limiting to primary production. In coral reef lagoons as in most coastal zones, phosphorus and nitrogen generally are the main factors limiting primary production (Smith 1984) but in lagoons with significant oceanic water inputs nitrogen generally is the essential limiting factor. In such a trophic context ammonia ( $\text{NH}_4$ ) would stand as best candidate to trace reduced nitrogen inputs especially those delivered by waste water release while nitrate + nitrite ( $\text{NO}_3 + \text{NO}_2$ ) would stand as best candidates to trace oxidized nitrogen inputs such as those originating from run-off or intensive fertilizer use. Silica is rarely presented as a limiting nutrient in coral reef lagoons so, unless specific justification for its measurement can be provided, it is of limited relevance to environmental monitoring.

### Nutrient in sediments and nutrient vertical particle flux

Benthic biodiversity, biomass or metabolism, have been tentatively linked with quantitative approaches of sediment organic and inorganic nutrient load. However, deposited sediments are the end products of a succession of degradation processes and studying non conservative tracers such as nutrients is of limited sense to assess the impact of anthropogenic inputs. In coral reef environments like in almost all coastal systems, most of the energetic exchanges between settling material and benthic biota take place at the water-sediment interface and little energy remains below the sediment surface as shown by the very low organic matter content of lagoon sediments (Brunskill et al. 2002) hence quantification of bioreactive compounds in sediments must be considered as a poor indicator of trophic status.

Measuring the flux of incoming nutrients attached to settling particles collected by sediment traps is a much more complicated but much more meaningful way of quantitatively assessing the impact of nutrient inputs. Such techniques have mostly been used in studies assessing reef budget and export of nutrients (Table 1) in coral reef environments of more than 20 m depth but are also conducted in unpublished environmental assessment studies or environmental monitoring including large scale initiatives such as the USGS Coral Reef Studies in Hawaii or the Coral Reef Evaluation and Monitoring Programme in Florida. Reserves concerning the use of sediment traps in coastal environments have been addressed in the "vertical particle flux" section.

The measurement of nutrient fluxes at the water-sediment interface is another powerful integrative indicator of nutrient inputs and trophic status as benthic biota is strongly depending on the flux of organic and inorganic nutrients reaching the benthic boundary layer (Sorokin 1993). The respective interests and limits of *in situ* versus *ex situ* techniques (Table 1) in coral reef environments have been recently discussed but each technique requires extensive technical skill and equipment limiting this type of approach to very detailed environmental assessment studies.

## 2.3 Abiotic environmental indicators of metal inputs

### Metals in the water

The quantitative determination of dissolved trace elements in sea water is a critical issue and direct determination is

generally impossible because of the high amount of major elements. Analytical techniques increasingly rely on ion exchange resins but due to the technical complexity of those techniques and the ambient variability in metal concentrations a review on those methods is beyond the scope of this article. However, an interesting technical development have been recently derived from ion exchange resins to produce an *in situ* trace metal preconcentration device known as DGT, for Diffusive Gradients in Thin films (Zhang et al. 2002). A DGT allegedly retains free inorganic ions and labile organic species, i.e., those forms that are considered as the most bio-available to marine organisms even though the concept of a bioavailable fraction is in itself still part of a fierce debate (Meyer 2002). By providing a proxy to *in situ* dissolved bioavailable metal concentrations, the DGT technique could represent an alternative or at least a complement to bio monitoring of trace metals in coral reef environments.

### Metals in sediments

Bulk metal concentrations in sediment provide information on metal inputs but do not directly relate to a potential impact on the biota. Various geochemical methods based on selective extraction procedures have been proposed to assess the bioavailable fraction (see review in Tack and Verloo 1995) and severe criticisms have been raised mainly due to lack of selectivity, the diversity of existing approaches or the absence of comparative studies and subsequent absence of true validation. Recently, a European Community initiative proposed a standardized sequential extraction method associated with the distribution of certified reference material (Rauret et al. 1999). Practically, metal analysis in sediment requires significant technical skill and is altogether expensive and time consuming especially if selective extraction is considered. As a consequence such geochemical approaches must be limited to specific cases where human impacts such as mining activities or industrial spillage occur and hence where identification of inputs and distribution of bio-available metals is essential.

## 3 Indicators at sub-organism level

### 3.1 Sub-organism bioindicators of nutrient inputs

#### Nutrient ratio and nitrogen stable isotopes

N/P ratio in algae tissue is known as a time integrated indicator of nutrient uptake and of the relative availability of nitrogen and phosphorus to the algae (Horrocks et al. 1995) but this parameter is very variable in tropical algae or seagrasses (Yamamuro et al. 2003) and should be used with great care

Marine, terrigenous and anthropogenic nutrient input sources may have significantly different nitrogen stable isotope signatures. Even though fractionation may occur along the food chain,  $\delta^{15}\text{N}$  ratios in tissues generally reflect the respective influences of those sources. Curiously, little work has been done in coral reef systems and most of it dealt with scleractinian corals (Mendes et al. 1997; Heikoop et al. 2000) and very rarely with other groups such as algae (Grice et al. 1996), seagrasses (Yamamuro et al. 2003) or crustacean (Risk and Erdemann 2000). Stable isotope analysis is a sophisticated tool but, due to the paucity of reliable alternative, it should be considered as a potentially valuable indicator of nutrient inputs.

### 3.2 Sub-organism bioindicators of metal inputs

#### Metal bioaccumulation in soft tissues

The use of bioaccumulating species to monitor the distribution and temporal variations of bioavailable metals (and other chemicals) in estuarine and coastal environments offers many advantages. By definition, bioaccumulating organisms have high metal concentrations in their tissues, a factor which strongly lowers analytical constraints. Bioaccumulators also provide a time integrated measurements of the bioavailable and potentially toxic fraction of metals (Rainbow 1995). However, many biotic factors such as age (hence size and growth rate) and physiological condition (related to reproduction and trophic status) influence bioaccumulation and must be studied before a reliable interpretation of the data can be reached (Langston and Spence 1995).

Ideal biomonitors must fulfil many ecological and biological criteria (Rainbow 1995; Langston and Spence 1995), thus drastically limiting the number of potential candidates. Numerous studies have been conducted in temperate systems and bivalves (oysters and mussels) have been selected as key biomonitors within the frame of national and international programmes such as the Mussel Watch (O'Connor et al. 1994). Few studies have been conducted to establish metal baseline levels in biota and to identify suitable biomonitors in tropical regions (Peters et al. 1997). A bibliographic study (Table 3) showed that most studies were conducted in South East Asia, Northern Australia, India as well as Brazil and southern Mexico, whereas many other tropical areas such as the Pacific and Caribbean islands suffered from an obvious lack of knowledge. Consequently, laboratory experiments and *in situ* validation of biomonitors are urgently needed in many tropical regions to identify bioaccumulating species and to define the biological processes governing metal accumulation. It is important to remind the reader that a proper assessment of environmental contamination must be based on a multi species biomonitoring and that in tropical systems known for their huge biodiversity investigations generally have to be conducted at a local scale. Economic costs inherent to the local development of such studies on bioindicators certainly represent the main limitation to their use in tropical countries.

#### Skeletal composition as proxy to metal inputs

Since the early seventies and the work by Livingston and Thompson (1971), many studies focused on the use of marine skeletons (e.g. scleractinian corals, bivalves) as proxy to environmental contamination by heavy metals. Calcifying organisms such as corals and bivalves incorporate metals in the carbonate frame, generally as a function of their concentration in the environment. Moreover, most coral and bivalve species are known to form periodic banding patterns and the analysis of metals in growth bands provide a way to reconstruct the evolution of heavy metal concentrations over long periods of time for corals (century with week to annual resolutions), and shorter periods for bivalves (years with day to seasonal resolutions). Many studies have been conducted in tropical environments using scleractinian corals (Table 2), generally to assess the potential effect of industrial activities, e.g. ore mining and

**Table 2.** Bioindicators at suborganism level (+ Refer to papers in last column).

| Descriptors   | Techniques                                      | Technical references                     | Advantages  | Major drawbacks   | Recommendations   | Tropical target species  | References  |
|---|---|--|---|---|---|--|---|
| <b>Bioindicators of nutrient inputs at sub-organism level</b> |   |  |   |   |   |  |   |
| Nitrogen stable isotopes                                      | Stable isotope ICP-MS                           | +  | Rare indicator to trace nutrient inputs   | High technical skill and equipment<br>Terrigenous vs. marine stable isotope signatures generally less marked in tropical than temperate systems   | Identification of endpoint sources signatures   | Scleractinian corals<br><br>Algae<br><br>Crustacean  | Mendes et al. 1997, Heikoop et al. 2000<br><br>Grice et al. 1996<br><br>Risk and Erdemann 2000  |
| <b>Bioindicators of metal inputs at sub-organism level</b>    |   |  |   |   |   |  |   |
| Metals in soft tissues  | Various sampling and analytical techniques used | Langston and Spence 1995<br>Rainbow 1995 | True indicators of bioavailable metals<br>Temporal integration<br>Bypass most technical problems encountered when analysing metals in the water | Non absolute tools that require preliminary local investigation<br>Possible differences in the regulation of different metals<br>Complex physiological response due to symbiotic algae (giant clams, scleractinian corals)<br>Taxonomic confusion | Use a combination of bioindicator to assess multiple sources of metal contamination<br>When available prefer microwave extraction to classical heating techniques | Multiple<br>Algae<br><br>Sponges<br>Scleractinian corals<br><br>Soft corals<br><br>Echinoderms<br><br>Molluscs | Breau 2003<br><br>Denton and Burdon-Jones 1986<br>Ramirez et al. 1990<br>Serfor-Armah et al. 2001<br><br>Patel et al. 1985<br><br>Hanna and Muir 1990<br>Esslemont 2000<br><br>Denton and Burdon-Jones 1986<br>Glynn et al. 1989<br>Jaffé et al. 1992<br><br>Laboy-Nieves and Conde 2001<br>Rojas et al. 1998<br>Maven et al. 1995<br><br>Cheung and Wong 1997<br>Jaffé et al. 1998<br>Raymont and Barry 2000<br>Romco et al. 2000<br>Hung et al. 2001<br>Khristorova et al. 2003 |
| Skeletal proxies  | Various sampling and analytical techniques used | +  | Temporal integration<br>Yearly to daily resolution depending on species growth rate   | High technical skill and instrumentation  | Cautious determination of growth rate and banding pattern periodicity<br><br>Cautious sampling to avoid metal contamination                                       | Ascidians<br>Scleractinian corals  | Monniot et al. 1984<br>Bastidas and Garcia 1999<br>Fallon et al. 2002<br>David 2003<br>Runnalls and Coleman 2003<br>Inoue et al. 2004<br>Ramos et al. 2004  |



Table 2. Continued.

| Descriptors   | Techniques  | Technical references      | Advantages   | Major drawbacks  | Recommendations  | Tropical target species                                 | References  |
|---|---|---------------------------|--|--|--|---|---|
| Bioassays   | Gametes and larval sensitivity to metals                | Rumbold and Snedaker 1997 | Early detection of metal contamination             | Experimental procedures<br>High technical skill  | To be used in complement to other longer term bio-indicators | Scleractinian corals<br><br>Echinoderms<br><br>Molluscs | Reichelt-Brushett and Harrison 2000<br>Negri and Heyward 2001<br>Kobayashi 1994<br>Ringwood 1992<br>Ringwood 1991, 1993 |
| <b>Non specific bioindicators at sub-organism level</b> |   |                           |  |  |  |   |   |
| <b>Biochemical markers</b>                              |   |                           |  |  |  |   |   |
| Heat Shock Proteins                                     | Molecular characterization                              | Sanders 1993              | Temperature dependent                              | High technical skill and instruments   |  | Scleractinian corals                                    | Tom et al. 1999<br>Downs et al. 2000<br>Rossi and Snyder 2001   |
| RNA/DNA ratios  |   | +                         |  | High technical skill and instruments   |  | Scleractinian corals                                    | Meesters et al. 2002  |
| Lipid concentrations                                    | Colorimetric titration                                  | +                         |  |  |  | Scleractinian corals                                    | Harriot 1993  |
| Protein and free amino-acid concentrations              | HPLC  | +                         |  | High technical skill and instruments   |  | Scleractinian corals                                    | Kendall et al. 1987   |
| ATP concentrations                                      | Bioluminescence   | +                         |  | High technical skill and instruments   |  | Scleractinian corals                                    | Fang et al. 1987  |
| <b>Cytological markers</b>                              |   |                           |  |  |  |   |   |
| Lysosomal stability                                     | Neutral red retention assay on blood and hepatopancreas | Lowe et al. 1995          | Most widely used sub cellular unspecific biomarker | High technical skill   |  | Never used in tropical conditions                       |   |
| <b>Physiological markers</b>                            |   |                           |  |  |  |   |   |
| Condition indices                                       | Biometric   | Nicholson 1999            | Simple   | Moderately sensitive   |  | Never used in tropical conditions                       |   |
| Stress on stress response                               | Survival to air exposure                                | Varego et al. 1995        | Simple   | Moderately sensitive   |  | Never used in tropical conditions                       |   |
| Energy balance  | P.R. Scope For Growth                                   | Widdows et al. 1995       | Good sensitivity                                   | Almost no existing work on tropical species<br>Complex physiological response due to symbiotic algae (giant clams) |  | Molluscs  | Bourdclin 1996<br>Elfving et al. 2003   |
| <b>Structural markers</b>                               |   |                           |  |  |  |   |   |
| Diseases incidence and virulence                        | Observation, tissue analysis                            | Harvell et al. 1999       | Ecological relevance<br>Simple techniques          |  | Interest for environmental monitoring program                | Octocorallian   | Garzon Ferreira and Zea 1992<br>Smith et al. 1996<br>Nageikerken et al. 1997  |

processing (Bastidas and Garcia 1999; Fallon et al. 2002). Numerous papers have been published on the use of temperate bivalve shells as proxy to environmental changes (Labonne et al. 1998; Szefer et al. 2002) but no conclusive results have been presented for tropical bivalves even though target species such as giant clams received some significant attention.

### Bioassays

Bioassays have been widely used to assess bioavailability and toxicity of chemical contaminants in aquatic environments (Widdows et al. 1995). Bioassays largely rely on biological responses or endpoints (lethal or sub lethal effects as well as behavioural responses) in organisms (adults, juveniles or embryos/larvae) or gametes experimentally exposed to field-collected or in situ effluents, seawater, sediments or aqueous extracts of sediments. Since early-life stages are known to be more sensitive to contaminants than adults, bioassays involving gametes, embryos, and larvae of marine invertebrates (generally bivalves and sea urchins) or fishes have been preferentially developed. Embryos and larvae can be experimentally obtained from in vitro fertilization using gametes released by mature adults. Non expensive, short-term (i.e. generally 24 h to 48 h) experiments can be conducted to test environmental samples, providing quick results generally expressed as percentages of inhibition of fertilization or embryo-larval development delay as well as morphological abnormalities, settlement success or even lethality. These physiological and morphological biomarkers are generally not specific of a given source of contaminant input.

Such toxicity tests conducted for known concentrations of several contaminants (mostly metals, hydrocarbons and pesticides) have recently been developed in tropical and subtropical regions to identify suitable target-species and establish related benchmarks, a necessary step to define bioassays suitable for ecological risk assessments (Peters et al. 1997). However, very few works involving *in situ* bioassays or laboratory exposure to field-collected seawater or sediment samples have been conducted to date in coastal tropical and subtropical waters (Rumbold and Snedeker 1999; Nascimento et al. 2000).

Bioassays allow for an early detection of environmental stress and are by definition of high ecotoxicological relevance. They also are of ecological relevance at the population level when early life stages and reproductive endpoints are studied. However, the biological sensitivity to a specific pollutant varies from one species to another and is also a function of the development stage. A realistic assessment of biological impacts of chemical contamination therefore implies the use of different target-species, life stages and endpoints. Existing studies demonstrated bioassay to be of great potential in understanding and assessing biological effects of chemical toxicants inputs in tropical coastal ecosystems and significant additional efforts are strongly needed.

### 3.3 Sub-organism non specific bioindicators

Biomarkers reflect stress exposure or effects at molecular, cellular or physiological levels. Biodiversity loss, widespread mortality and other population-level effects manifest themselves long after biochemical dysfunction, physiological

abnormalities, growth or reproduction impairment, and ecologically important changes have occurred as a result of environmental degradation. Non-specific (generic) biomarkers hence may represent the earliest signs of ecological alteration. Biomarkers are employed within the framework of many temperate marine ecosystems monitoring networks but their use in tropical coastal waters is surprisingly scarce. Valuable early warning tools may be derived from biological responses to environmental stress and an overview on generic biomarkers is presented.

### Biochemical markers

Downs et al. (2000) recently proposed a Molecular Biomarker System (MBS) to characterize the physiological status of corals (*Montastrea faveolata*) challenged by heat stress and bleaching that included several molecular parameters considered as generic biomarkers. Among them, the so-called families of "Heat Shock Proteins (HSP)" are ubiquitous chaperones found in all phyla, essential for cellular function, and well known to be up-regulated after exposure to several stress (Sanders 1993; Table 2). The role of these stress proteins in marine organisms was first established as a physiological response to temperature changes in molluscs (Sanders 1988). Molecular characterization of HSP in corals is recent (Tom et al. 1999), and mainly linked to stresses such as intra or inter-specific competition for space (Rossi and Snyder 2001) or experimental heat shock (Downs et al. 2000). The sole field study of HSP in corals revealed that samples taken from a stressed area (hypersedimentation and combined pollution) had a higher HSP90 level than those from a non-stressed area (Wiens et al. 2000). Similar studies have been successfully conducted on sponges, either experimentally (Kozioł 1998) or in the field (Perez 2001). Unfortunately, tropical sponges have never been studied but HSP certainly is a promising generic biomarker for assessing the health of reef invertebrates.

Other biochemical signatures have been identified in scleractinian corals as indicators of stress and especially of sediment/turbidity stress, even though they cannot be considered as truly specific (Table 2).

### Cytological markers

Lysosomal stability is one of the most widely used sub-cellular generic biomarkers. The lysosome-rich (digestive) cells of the molluscan hepatopancreas are frequent targets for the toxic action of many environmental stressors and lysosomes are thus considered as indicators of pollutant-induced cell injuries (Moore 1990). Degradation of lysosomal membranes has been quantitatively related to stress exposure of several tropical molluscs, among which the green mussel *Perna viridis* (Cheung et al. 1998; Nicholson 1999) is broadly distributed in the Indo-Pacific. Effects of perturbation have been measured along a well defined pollution gradient either on indigenous populations (Cheung et al. 1998) or on transplanted individuals (Nicholson 1999). Among the different available techniques, the neutral red retention assay on blood and hepatopancreas cells (Lowe et al. 1995) is well standardised and applied in several monitoring programmes.

**Table 3.** Indicators at organism to population levels (+ Refer to papers in last column; Unspec. Unspecific of a given input).

| Descriptors  | Techniques  | Technical references  | Advantages  | Major drawbacks  | Recommendations   | Tropical target group/species   | References   |
|--|---|-----------------------|---|--|---|---|--|
| <b>Bioindicators of particle inputs at organism to population levels</b> |   |                       |   |  |   |   |  |
| Coral cover / coral diversity  | Census / taxonomy   | +                     | Related to key biological target                          | Unspecific   | Related to the use of unspecific bioindicators  | Scleractinian corals  | Adjoroud 1997<br>Brown et al. 2002   |
| <b>Bioindicators of nutrient inputs at organism to population levels</b> |   |                       |   |  |   |   |  |
| Phytoplankton biomass  | Fluorometry (recommended)   | Lorenzen 1966         | Precise and simple technique                              | No absolute threshold<br>Strong spatial and temporal variability | Background levels to be carefully established at local scale                              | Phytoplankton   | Sorokin 1995<br>Charpy 1996  |
| Phytoplankton production   | <sup>14</sup> C   | Steemann-Nielsen 1951 | Directly linked to eutrophication                         | Complex techniques<br>Use of radioactive tracers                 | Scientific expertise only   | Phytoplankton   | Furnas et al. 1990<br>Delesalle et al. 1993<br>Charpy 1996   |
| Phytoplankton class size   | Filtration<br>Microscope<br>Flow cytometry                            | +                     | Increase in plankton size as a function of trophic status | Time consuming techniques  |   | Phytoplankton   | Charpy and Blanchot 1998<br>Delesalle et al. 2001  |
| Benthic algae abundance  | Abundance<br>Growth rate<br>Production                                | +                     | Requires moderate skill                                   | Poor specificity<br>Also a function of herbivory activity        | Ambiguous indicator<br>To be used with caution preferentially as part of temporal surveys | <i>Enteromorpha</i> spp.<br><i>Dictyosphaeria cavernosa</i><br><i>Sargassum</i> spp.<br>Crustose coralline algae<br>Cyanobacteria | Fong et al. 1993<br>Stimson et al. 2001<br>Schäufelke 2001<br>Fabricius and De'ath 2001<br>Thacker et al. 2001 |
| Bulk benthic algae biomass   | Biomass   | +                     | Simple  | Poor specificity<br>Also a function of herbivory activity        | Ambiguous indicator<br>To be used with caution preferentially as part of temporal surveys | Benthic algae   | Hugues 1994<br>Hugues et al. 1999  |
| Coral cover  | Census  | +                     | Related to key biological target                          | Unspecific   | Related to the use of unspecific bioindicators  | Scleractinian corals  | Birkeland 1977<br>Mc Cook 1999<br>Mc Cook et al. 2001  |
| <b>Non specific bioindicators at organism to population levels</b>       |   |                       |   |  |   |   |  |
| Morphology   | Coral morphology triangle, skeletal density, etc.                     | +                     | Simple  | Unspec.  | +   | Scleractinian corals  | Atkinson et al. 1995<br>Steven and Broadbent 1997<br>Barnes et Lough 1992                                      |
| Growth   | Growth of adult colonies or transplants, tissue regeneration, etc.    | +                     | Moderately complicated<br>Experimental perspectives       | Unspec.  | +   | Scleractinian corals  | Guzman et al. 1994<br>Meesters and Bak 1993  |
| Metabolism   | Fecundity, recruitment rates, vitality index, reef health index, etc. | +                     | Rapid response to stress                                  | Unspec.  | +   | Scleractinian corals  | Ward and Harrison 2000<br>Miller and Barimo 2002<br>Gomez et al. 1994<br>Ginsburg et al. 1996<br>Hodgson 1999  |

Table 3. Continued.

| Descriptors                      | Techniques   | Technical references   | Advantages  | Major drawbacks                       | Recommendations   | Tropical target group/species   | References  |
|----------------------------------|--|------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Bioerosion                       | Occurrence, surface, growth forms of borers and assessment of bioerosion | +                      | Integrative response at community level   | Unspec.                               | +   | Cyanobacteria<br>Clionid sponges<br>Polychaetes<br>Sipunculids  | Cuet et al. 1988<br>Holmes 2000<br>Holmes et al. 2000<br>Hutchings and Peyrot-Clausade 2002   |
| Population structure             | Size frequency, demographic structure etc.                               | +                      | Integrative response at community level   | Unspec.<br>Mid to long term responses | +   | Soft bottom macrofauna  | Frouin 2000<br>Jameson et al. 2001  |
| Group community structure        | Diversity index, rarity index, inventory, etc.                           | +                      | Integrative response at community level   | Unspec.<br>Mid to long term responses | +   | Scleractinian corals<br>Parasites<br>Soft bottom macrofauna<br>Benthic alga<br>Sponges<br>Scleractinian corals<br>Parasites | Bak and Meesters 1999<br>Meesters et al. 2001<br>Morand et al. 2000<br>Frouin 2000<br>Jameson et al. 2001<br>Stimson et al. 2001<br>Schaffelke 2001<br>Fabricius and De'ath 2001<br>Alcolado 1994<br>Done 1995, De'Vantier et al. 1998<br>Cribb et al. 2000<br>Morand et al. 2000 |
| Field survey of dominant species | Permanent quadra, Manta tow survey, line intercept transects, etc.       | +                      | Moderate systematic knowledge generally required                                | Unspec.                               | +   | Sponges and scleractinian corals  | English et al. 1997<br>Wilkinson and Cheshire 1990  |
| Inter-community dominance ratio  | Field survey of surface coverage and data statistical treatment          | +                      | Low systematic knowledge generally required                                     | Unspec.                               | +   | Scleractinian corals/<br>Sponges<br>Scleractinian/ Benthic algae  | Zea 1994<br>Mc Cook 1999<br>Miller et al. 1999  |
| Global community structure       | Remote sensing   | Andréfouet et al. 2003 | Large scale mapping of reef health<br>Increasing resolution with new satellites | High technical competence             | A technique boosted by technical improvements and with strong development potential | Global community  | Andréfouet et al. 2003<br>Bouvet et al. 2003  |

## Physiological markers in molluscs

Environmental stress depletes energy reserves and therefore has a depleting effect on growth that can be estimated through several indicators. "Condition indices" are probably the easiest parameter to obtain as it only requires measurement of basic biological parameters such as shell length, shell weight and soft tissue weight. It has been widely applied to bivalves and to green mussels (Cheung et al. 1998; Nicholson 1999). The "stress on stress response" (Viarengo et al. 1995), which consists in measuring the survival of mussels to air exposure, also represents a valuable and easy indicator of pollution-induced environmental stress but has never been applied to tropical species. The physiological response termed "Scope for Growth" (SFG) represents a more accurate and sensitive way of assessing the global health of green mussels (Widdows et al. 1995). SFG reflects the balance between processes of energy acquisition and expenditure providing information on the energy status of an organism. It has been demonstrated that the SFG technique, which is standardized and routinely applied in European monitoring programmes, could be readily applied to indigenous tropical bivalve species (Widdows et al. 1995).

## Diseases

Diseases, partial mortality or bleaching are often related to environmental problems (Harvell et al. 1999) and could also be considered as generic biomarkers. Studies have been mostly conducted on biodiversity "key-species" that are essential contributors to the architectural, trophic and functional complexity of reef ecosystem.

Octocorallians and especially sea fans from temperate and tropical ecosystems are subject to several types of anthropogenic and natural stressors inducing damages on parts of or whole colonies. Effects include cortex injuries (necrosis) caused by deposits of algae or mucilaginous aggregates, boring species actions and pathogen infection due to dystrophic crisis (Smith et al. 1996; Nagelkerken et al. 1997). Unusual freshwater discharge, sedimentation and associated pollutants, mechanical impacts by fishing lines, nets, divers and anchors also count as major sources of perturbations (Perez et al. 2000). Data on incidence (i.e. percentage of colonies affected) and virulence (i.e. degree of mortality within each colony) are used to determine the extent of impact on sea-fan populations (Feral et al. 2003).

Scleractinian corals also present disease answer to particle, nutrient and metal inputs (Nugues 2002). Coral bleaching could be included as one form of disease but considering its essential linkage to global warming this topic is treated in other contributions to the present journal issue.

## 4 Indicators at organism to population levels

### 4.1 Indicators of particle inputs at organism to population levels

#### Scleractinian corals

Sedimentation and turbidity are known stressors for corals, and most studies have shown negative impacts of these factors

at the colony, population, and community levels (Bak and Meesters 1999; Meesters et al. 2001). Sediment inputs reduce coral growth and calcification rates (Riegel et al. 1996), affect coral physiology and metabolism (Riegel and Branch 1995) and disturb reproductive patterns and settlement/recruitment processes (Gilmour 1999). As corals ability to adopt sediment resistant growth forms and sediment rejection behaviours vary from one species to another (Stafford-Smith 1993) particle inputs will cause changes in species composition and richness, living coral coverage, and other diversity indexes such as Shannon H' and Pielou J' (Adjeroud 1997; Brown et al. 2002). However, some studies have pointed out that corals were more resistant to sedimentation than expected, and that sedimentation/turbidity may have localized or negligible effects (McClanahan and Obura 1997). Recent studies even suggested that sediment could be a possible additional source of food for corals (Anthony 2000).

Corals are also sensitive to a variety of other environmental factors, and these factors can co-vary and have synergistic effects, so the descriptors presented above cannot be considered as specific indicators of particle inputs as a single source of perturbation (Edinger et al. 2000). Additional physiological studies on the response of coral species to sediment stress are necessary in order to identify more precisely sediment tolerant vs. sediment-intolerant species (McClanahan and Obura 1997).

### 4.2 Indicators of nutrient inputs at organism to population levels

#### Plankton

Phytoplankton populations are strongly related to water quality and provide early response to environmental stress and more specifically to changes in nutrient inputs. Plankton answers to nutrient inputs have been studied in temperate marine and estuarine systems and key species indicating eutrophication have even been identified (Livingston 2001). Plankton studies in coral reef lagoons are far less common and additional information will be generally required locally before associating phytoplankton to environmental surveys.

Natural factors such as the residence time of water significantly affect phytoplankton biomass and diversity even in pristine atoll lagoons (Delesalle and Sournia 1992) so strong differences naturally exist from one site to another. Furthermore, identifying environmental alteration as a function of biomass, diversity or production is not straightforward as gradients normally exist within a given system, especially where coral reef lagoons are bordering land masses. Such variability in nutrient and phytoplankton distribution can lead to conflicting interpretation (Kinsey 1991) but long term studies demonstrated the potential of simple parameters such as phytoplankton biomass to assess water quality degradation in coral reef lagoon systems (Weber and Weber 1998).

Phytoplankton production is the true biological answer to eutrophication but, thanks to its measurement easiness, biomass is often used as a substitute indicator of trophic status. Chlorophyll *a* and its by-products such as pheopigments may be considered as the most common parameters measured to assess phytoplankton biomass. In oligotrophic systems plankton

primary producers present specific species composition with a dominance of small picoplankton cells (Charpy and Blanchot 1998; Delesalle et al. 2001). Anthropogenic inputs of nutrients and subsequent eutrophication will rapidly result in favouring the development of larger cells such as diatoms or dinoflagellates depending on silica limitation (Jacquet et al., in press). Therefore, detailed study of species composition or more simply of size class composition can be of great interest in surveying potential eutrophication effects.

## Benthic algae

Coral reef algae are primary producers and inorganic nutrients evidently limit their development. Some evidence of a direct control of photosynthetic production and growth rates by inputs of inorganic nitrogen and phosphorus have been given (Lapointe 1997; Larned 1998) but recent works tend to question the direct relationship between nutrient and algal development due to the combined effect of additional factors (Mc Cook 1999). In the GBR, *Sargassum* growth was stimulated by nutrient additions but saturation occurred above a threshold corresponding to fringing reef concentrations (Schaffelke and Klumpp 1998) and cross-shelf differences in nutrient levels did not correlate with difference in *Sargassum* growth (Mc Cook 1999). The ENCORE experiment concluded to the lack of relationship between nutrient inputs and primary production or growth of the epilithic algal community (Larkum and Koop 1997). Other studies conducted at reef scale also demonstrated that algal communities from the Florida Keys were nutrient replete (Miller et al. 1999). During the last decade several studies tried to define nutrient concentration thresholds beyond which benthic algal blooms would occur (Lapointe 1997) but this concept is no longer accepted due to increasing acknowledgment of the strong diversity of coral reef community answers to strongly diverse ambient trophic conditions (Szmant 2001).

Certain algae such as *Enteromorpha* spp. (Fong et al. 1993) or *Dictyosphaeria cavernosa* (Stimson et al. 2001) have been reported to significantly develop in response to anthropogenic nutrient inputs. The foliose macroalgae *Sargassum* spp. is also known to have a high nutrient demand and to use a large range of nutrient sources (Schaffelke and Klumpp 1998; Schaffelke 2001). Such species with physiological capabilities to overgrow coral reefs in the presence of nutrient inputs can be considered as indicator of water quality. Conversely, nutrient may have deleterious effects on one of the more important group of reef algae such as crustose coralline algae (Fabricius and De'ath 2001) but opposite effects have also been reported (Smith et al. 2001).

Increase of tissue production (growth) rarely leads to the increase of the standing crop (tissue biomass, algal abundance) (Hatcher 1997). Accumulation of algal biomass only occurs when production exceeds total losses including herbivore grazing but increase in algal biomass has often been interpreted as a consequence of nutrient enhancement while it could result of reduced herbivore activity (Hughes et al. 1999). While most existing studies provide support for the importance of the herbivore activity in affecting algal cover, few of them demonstrate clearly the effect of nutrient enrichment at population

or community levels. The overrun of benthic algal communities on coral reefs, is no longer widely interpreted as indicator of nutrient increase alone but rather as a consequence of a cascading of various factors (Mc Cook 1999; and Coral Reef 2001 special issue "Community dynamics and coral reef algae"). Even in well documented cases of anthropogenic eutrophication, nutrient increases are probably not the only cause of algal blooms (Cuet et al. 1988; Stimson et al. 2001). Therefore, evidence of direct nutrient effect on algal blooms is weak and there is scant evidence that algal cover may directly reflect nutrient inputs so benthic algae should be considered as non specific indicators of environmental alteration (see next section).

## Scleractinian corals

A wide range of nutrient impacts have been reported, from little or no impacts to major changes in coral reef community structure (Naim 1993; Lapointe 1997; Koop et al. 2001; Szmant 2002). Some authors proposed threshold nutrient levels above which coral reefs would become degraded (Lapointe 1997) but the true magnitude and extent of the impacts of nutrient enrichment often depends on complex local factors (see previous section on Abiotic factors). Nutrient enrichment is generally considered to be mainly an indirect stress, as it first influences benthic and planktonic algae (Lapointe 1997). Elevated phytoplankton populations reduce light penetration which may in turn affect coral nutrition, growth, and survival (Kinsey and Davies 1979). Increased production in the water column often favours the growth of benthic filter-feeders which out compete corals for space (Birkeland 1977). As benthic algae increase in biomass, they colonize coral skeletons, overgrow living corals, and form thick mats which kill all underlying organisms by blocking light and trapping sediment (Mc Cook 1999; Mc Cook et al. 2001). Direct physiological effects of nutrient enrichment on growth, reproduction rate or settlement/recruitment rates have also been demonstrated for some coral species (Ferrier-Pagès et al. 2001; Harrison and Ward 2001; Cox and Ward 2002). Because algal blooms on coral reefs are generally controlled by a complex interactions of bottom-up (nutrient enrichment) and top-down (grazing) factors, caution have to be made when identifying which factors is responsible for the bloom (Hughes et al. 1999; Szmant 2002). It is also important to point out that an increase in nutrient level is not always associated with a decreased growth rate and increased mortality of coral colonies (Lough and Barnes 1997; Steven and Broadbent 1997).

Living coral coverage, sometimes associated with the ratio of living/dead coral coverage, or the ratio between algal/living coral coverage are the most commonly used descriptor of nutrient enrichment impact on coral populations. However, no detailed case-studies were conducted to validate the robustness and usefulness of these potential indicators. As for indicators of the sediment/turbidity stress, additional physiological studies on the response of coral species to nutrient stress are necessary in order to identify more precisely nutrient tolerant vs. nutrient-intolerant species.

### 4.3 Non specific bioindicators at organism to population levels

Bioindicators of multiple stresses at community level are presented and discussed in another article in the present journal issue and the following section focus on the way organisms and communities unspecifically respond to particle, nutrient and metal inputs.

#### Soft-bottom macrofauna

Sediment macrofauna communities integratively, orientedly and rapidly respond to various natural or human-induced disturbances even though they seldom discriminate between the true natures of the disturbance (Warwick 1993). The definition of numerical indices with well defined threshold values directly usable by stakeholders is generally inapplicable to macrobenthic indicator but large categories of environmental stress conditions, such as polluted, moderately polluted or unpolluted, can be defined (Warwick and Clarke 1993). Most concepts on macrobenthic indicators have been derived from studies of temperate ecosystems and applications to coral reef lagoons are scarce and a causal relationship may not automatically apply to different geographical areas (Keough and Quinn 1991).

Many taxa have been used as positive or negative indicators of anthropogenic inputs (Wilson and Jeffrey 1994). Polychaetes are globally considered as resistant to contaminants, followed by molluscs and crustaceans, echinoderms being considered as the most sensitive (Omori et al. 1994) but because Polychaetes are largely dominant and present a strong internal diversity in pollution sensitiveness it is a key taxa to marine environmental quality assessment (Pocklington and Wells 1992). Considering total macrobenthic community may prove uninformative so it is generally more effective to focus on phylum, family, genus or species levels and to work on high taxonomic levels (Olsgard et al. 1998). Among the wide range of diversity indices related (Warwick and Clarke 1995) very few have been used in tropical systems. Using such indices to identify anthropogenic impacts requires comparison between sites subject to contrasted disturbance conditions (Keough and Quinn 1991). The meta-analysis based on combined case studies of higher taxonomic levels to provide global insight on ecological functioning (Warwick and Clarke 1993) still has to be tested in different coral reef systems.

Production (P) is considered as a key integrative parameter of benthic ecosystem functioning (Warwick and Clarke 1993). When direct measurement is not available P may be assessed as  $P = (\text{Biomass}/\text{Abundance})^{0.73}$  some adaptation in the exponent value being reported as a function of taxa or ecosystem. The trophic status also is an informative parameter, especially when considering polychaete populations (Frouin 2000), as a stressed system tend to have a simpler energy flow pathway than an unstressed one (Diaz 1992). In coral reefs, the lack of knowledge on species biology currently restrains those studies to systems rather than population level. At the system level, complex indicators such as the Sediment Quality Triad (Long and Chapman 1985), the Benthic Indices of Biotic Integrity (B-IBI) (Weisberg et al. 1997) or the EQUATION

Index (Ferreira 2000) have been based on a combination of parameters dealing with sediment toxicity, chemistry and macrofauna community.

In conclusion, efficient benthic indicators should be based on higher taxonomic level and combine quantitative variables, preferentially biomass, with functional parameters such as trophic status and Jameson et al. (2001) recently proposed a framework for definition of such coral reefs multimetric indices. The following step now is to gather sufficient data to establish statistically and ecologically meaningful standardized numerical indices (Engle et al. 1994) usable on a local to regional basis.

#### Benthic algae

Previous section dealing with benthic algae and nutrient inputs demonstrated the complexity of the relationship between different sources of stress and shifts in benthic algal community structure (Hughes et al. 1999; Mc Cook 1999). On Hawaiian reefs with low natural algal cover and reduced fishing pressure, algal abundance and community composition (coralline crust algae vs. fleshier groups) were controlled by a combination of bottom-up (nutrient inputs) and top-down factors (grazing pressure) (Smith et al. 2001). Moreover, the combined actions of nutrient inputs, increased turbidity, competition with introduced species, or herbivores grazing are synergistic and may result in alteration of algae population as demonstrated by the recent overgrowth of *Dictyosphaeria* in some parts of the Kaneohe Bay (Stimson et al. 2001).

Several environmental factors changed the dynamics of coral reef algal communities since the middle of the past century and led to dramatic phase shifts from coral-dominated to algal-dominated coral reefs. The lack of reliable macroalgae indicators of nutrient levels and our own expertise lead to recommend the use of benthic algae as non specific bioindicators. Temporal and spatial surveys should be simultaneously conducted on impacted and non impacted control sites using parameters on the diversity and abundance of algal cover vs. coral cover, with special attention to large brown algae (e.g. as *Sargassum* spp., Dictyotales), crusting coralline algae (CCA), and opportunistic species such as green algae (e.g. *Enteromorpha/Ulva* complex), or cyanobacteria.

#### Sponges

Sponges have some interesting potential as bioindicators of environmental conditions in marine ecosystems (Perez 2000). Sponge communities or species proved to be very sensitive to environmental crises in temperate as well as in tropical ecosystems (Alcolado 1994; Holmes et al. 2000). It has been demonstrated that inputs of inorganic and organic nutrients (natural or anthropogenic) stimulate sponge dominance in coral reef systems (Wilkinson and Cheshire 1990) but combined inputs of nutrients and suspended particles have been identified as the key factor allowing for sponges to outgrow algae (Zea 1994). Clionid sponges (Demospongiae, Clionidae), well known for their bioeroding activity on corals (Schönberg and Wilkinson 2001), are considered as the taxa with highest bioindicative

potential. Carbonate boring clionid sponges living in symbiosis with zooxanthellae are "r" strategy opportunist species and under special environmental conditions they may develop as encrusting or massive form after extensive bioerosion of the calcareous substratum. Tropical bioeroding sponges have been used to reveal the combined effects of particle and nutrient inputs on Caribbean reefs (Holmes 2000), Indian Ocean (Cuet et al. 1988) and Pacific reefs (Holmes et al. 2000). Bioindicators related to coral reef sponges are summarized (Table 3).

### Scleractinian corals

Species or generic richness, species diversity and rarity indexes, density/abundance of colonies, living coral coverage, living/dead coral coverage, or algal/coral coverage rank as the most common indicators used to detect changes in coral reef "health" (Done 1995; DeVantier et al. 1998). Many descriptors or multimetric indexes have also been proposed as indicators of coral reef 'health' (references, Table 3). Even coral bleaching may be a consequence of anthropogenic inputs of particle, nutrient and metals (Jones 1997) but considering its major linkage to global warming bleaching is discussed in another part of this journal issue.

Critical analysis of published and unpublished information demonstrated that instead of targeting a single indicator it was necessary to combine three different and complementary indicators: one indicating the diversity of the area (for corals, the generic richness is sufficient), one estimating the abundance/biomass (density of colonies and/or living coral coverage for example), and one estimating the potential for recovery (by studying the density of recruits/juveniles). Information on recruitment patterns is essential because recolonization after a perturbation directly depends on the number of potential colonizers (Done 1995) and because recruits or juveniles are usually more sensitive to pollution than adults (Wittenberg and Hunte 1992). Information from those three indicators could further be merged to calculate a multimetric integrative index making intercomparison of coral reef "health" assessments easier.

Additionally, remote sensing applications have been increasingly directed toward the characterization and survey of coral reef evolution due to a combination of anthropogenic influences including particle, nutrient and metal inputs (Andréfouët et al. 2003). The use of this technique yielding large scale environmental assessment is further discussed in the present journal issue but its potential as an indicator of particle, nutrient and metal inputs, combined or single, has to be underlined.

### Fishes

There has been surprisingly little work on the effects of anthropogenic inputs on coral reef fishes. Fishes are interesting candidates as bio-indicators (Karr et al. 1986; Barbour et al. 1999), as they are long-lived (integration of disturbance long-term effects) and easy to sample. One major drawback is that fish are expected to integrate the cumulative effects of multiple stressors (Ganasan and Hughes 1998) and it may be difficult to identify the real cause of an observed pattern, especially on coral reefs subject to various disturbances

(Jones and Syms 1998; Chabanet et al. 2005). A second limitation to the use of fishes as indicators arises from their mobility hence the need to select relatively sedentary reef fish species. Coral reef fishes are very diverse either in term of taxonomic composition, behaviour or life history traits hence providing structural and functional bioindicative responses. Many reef fishes specialise on one narrow type of food, and for example predator of sessile invertebrates may be particularly sensitive indicators of pollution since their prey bioaccumulate pollutants. Structural and functional indicators may further have different ecological significances when considered at population or community levels.

At *population-level*, disturbances are expected to cause changes in fish density, biomass or size distribution. It has been demonstrated that the abundance of parasite feeders (cleaner fish) increased in some polluted sites as anthropogenic inputs favoured parasites (Grutter 1997). It was also suggested that decrease in the distribution of strict coral feeders, such as butterflyfishes (Chaetodontidae), could reveal sub-lethal stress on corals (Hourigan et al. 1988; Crosby and Reese 1996) but in spite of numerous studies (Chabanet et al. 2005) such a relationship has not been clearly established (Erdmann 1997; Jameson et al. 1998). One may also expect changes in sex ratios, behaviour, growth, and mortality rates. Many fish species (e.g., Labridae and Scaridae) are harem and change from female in their first life stages to more brightly coloured dominant males when their age, size or social organisation increase. Anthropogenic inputs may affect their growth and consecutively their sexual organisation (e.g., earlier sex reversal, lower sex ratio). Changes in the feeding or social behaviour may also occur for some species, such as corallivorous butterflyfishes (Crosby and Reese 1996) a change in coral preferences or feeding rates being indicative of coral stress. Some territorial damselfishes (Pomacentridae) "cultivate" a patch of turf algae, excluding all other herbivorous fish from that area and growth, density, or size distribution of these species may be modified in response to the enhanced growth of such algae patches due to nutrient inputs (Chabanet 1994). Other grazing fish however respond in different ways to eutrophication (Koop et al. 2001).

At the *community-level*, studies are more numerous but still insufficient to allow for reliable generalizations. Some authors mentioned the probable role of terrestrial runoff gradients for explaining the diversity and abundance of reef fish communities (Williams and Hatcher 1983; Russ 1984), but none provided a clear quantification of this influence. Letourneur et al. (1998) and Grimaud and Kulbicki (1998) observed that diversity, abundance, and biomass of commercial reef fishes were correlated with a decreasing terrestrial influence. Considering ground discharge, some studies showed a significant decrease in total fish abundance (Harmelin-Vivien 1992; Chabanet et al. 1995; Khalaf and Kochzius 2002) when others observed an opposite trend (Grigg 1994; Letourneur et al. 1999; Bozec et al. 2005). In most of these studies the number of fish species has proved to be an inappropriate indicator of anthropogenic inputs, except for Harmelin-Vivien (1992) who observed a decrease in species richness due to the magnitude and duration of stress. The fish trophic structure seems to be more sensitive, as increases in abundance of herbivores and detritivores (Khalaf and Kochzius 2002) or plankton and suspended-particle



feeders (Grigg 1994; Bozec et al. 2005) were observed sometimes above the system carrying capacity as a result of water enrichment by organic matter.

## Parasites

The intimate relationship between parasites and their hosts as well as their great species richness and life cycle diversity, has lead people to consider parasites as biological indicators for many years (see reviews in Overstreet 1997; Marcogliese and Cone 1997). Parasite populations can either increase or decrease when facing environmental changes depending on their life cycle and the nature of the environmental change. They can either be used at a spatial or temporal scale, and quantitatively (variation of the number of parasite counted within one host species) or qualitatively (variation in the species richness or in the parasite community structure).

Macro parasites may have a simple life cycle using one single host or a complex life cycle requesting several host species. Simple life cycle parasites such as monogeneans and crustaceans are mostly external parasites in direct contact with the fish environment and water conditions may considerably influence the survival or the proliferation of such parasites. They also are much more host specific, i.e. one parasite species can only be found on one host species, hence more sensitive to changes in environmental conditions. Environmental stressors, such as wastewater or industrial pollutants can result in an increase in fish parasites due to a decrease in immunological defences and a lesser resistance to infections (Steedman 1991; MacKenzie et al. 1995).

Macro parasites with complex life cycles depend on the presence of intermediate hosts to complete their life cycle and to survive locally. Consequently, they strongly reflect the local disappearance of one species potentially revealing more chronic problems within the studied ecosystem. Some works reported that pollution correlated with the decrease in abundance and prevalence of complex life-cycle parasite species, most certainly due to the disappearance of one of the intermediate hosts (MacKenzie et al. 1995).

Finally, micro parasites such as Trichodinid appeared to be consistently associated with host stress induced by water conditions (Lafferty 1997) but they are much more difficult to use in routine surveys.

One of the major points in using parasites as biological indicators is related to the complexity of their systematic. New species are often discovered when considering regions or host species that were not previously studied for parasitological purposes. These problems could be partially solved by using the whole parasite community as a bioindicator.

## 5 Conclusion

Considering the spreading and accelerating degradation of coral reefs and coral reef lagoons a more extensive use of carefully selected indicators of environmental status is strongly needed and represents a major challenge for the new century. This paper provides synthetic information on existing indicators and their validation in coral reef lagoon environments

and investigates some promising ongoing research tracks that should provide new and efficient environmental monitoring tools in the near future.

Coral reef lagoons are very complex and variable ecosystems and their structure and functioning may significantly differ from one site to another. Therefore, environmental monitoring requires significant adaptation to the local specificities of each considered system and it is absolutely necessary to identify indicators and define indicator responses specifically adapted to local environmental conditions. Fixing the limits within which a specific or a generic indicator may reveal various levels of environmental degradation is an essential step that will generally require onsite adaptation and environmental managers must be fully aware of this essential need to locally validate and calibrate indicators. This review also stressed that proper environmental surveys could not rely on a single indicator but that selecting a combination of adapted indicators was an essential step to obtain relevant information. Combining non specific bioindicators of ecosystem degradation with abiotic indicators specifically identifying the sources of perturbation further appeared as necessary to the selection of adapted environmental management actions.

Unfortunately, this review also clearly demonstrated that the present scientific background still is largely insufficient to propose unambiguous indicators in answer to all the complex environmental issues arising in the tropical coastal zone. Our knowledge on environmental indicators in tropical systems is largely deficient when compared with the existing scientific background in temperate systems demonstrating that much more scientific work is required. Combined fundamental and applied research is necessary and the constant pressure from environmental manager to obtain cost-effective indicators is obviously a major force driving science to environmental application. Considering the considerable economic investment that has been devoted to development and the global awareness regarding coral reef environmental status worldwide the present level of scientific and technical ignorance is unacceptable and a significant reinforcement in environmental sciences is an absolute prerequisite to the true achievement of environmental management.

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