Ningaloo Reef

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance*

Why in News?

New survey finds nearly 70% of corals at UNESCO-listed Ningaloo Reef have died because of Australia's longest and most intense marine heatwave.

Recent findings of the study

- Scientists said that between their initial analyses in August 2024 and May 2025, they observed severe bleaching and estimated that 30-90% of corals across the region had been affected.
- In an assessment published in August, coral bleaching-related mortality in northern and central Ningaloo was estimated at 31-60%.
- A few resilient species, including Veron's tube coral (*Echinopora ashmorensis*) and lesser knob coral (*Cyphastrea microphthalma*), have persisted.
- However, populations of once-dominant species such as staghorn corals (*Acropora tenuis*, *Acropora millepora*, *Acropora spicifera*) and the thin birdsnest coral (*Seriatopora hystrix*) have died.
- Researchers also found many coral branches now infested with sponges, algae, and other organisms, reducing the reef's diversity and structural stability.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, bleaching-level heat stress affected 84.4% of the world's coral reef area, with mass bleaching documented in at least 83 countries and territories.

Ningaloo Reef

- It is one of the world's largest and most pristine fringing coral reef systems, located along the north-west coast of ***Western Australia.***

- It is a ***fringing reef,*** and the reef lies very close to the shore, making it easily accessible.
- **Biodiversity Hotspot -** Whale sharks (world's largest fish), Manta rays, dolphins, dugongs and Humpback whales (seasonal migration).
- **Protection Status -** Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site (2011).
- Part of the Ningaloo Coast UNESCO World Heritage area.
- **Managed by -** The Government of Western Australia with strict conservation rules.
- **Environmental Concerns**
    - Climate change and coral bleaching
    - Rising sea temperatures
    - Tourism pressure (though managed more carefully than the Great Barrier Reef)
    - Ocean acidification

Reference

Down to Earth | Ningaloo Reef

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