HARMFUL ALGAE NEWS No. 72

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Florida’s West Coast *Kareния brevis* bloom – Spring 2023

On the morning of 6 March 2023, the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NOAA) issued an alert warning of “moderate to high risk of respiratory irritation” due to a *Kareния brevis* bloom along the southwest coast of Florida. This was no surprise to the many beachgoers who walk Florida’s shorelines every day and frequently see dead fish washed up on the beaches during harmful algal blooms (HABs). The city or municipal government of the small towns along the west Florida coast routinely budget for beach clean ups during the nearly annual harmful algal blooms. But dead fish are especially problematic during peak holiday seasons or, in this case, spring break week(s) when schools recess and many visitors flock to Florida’s wide, warm beaches. The “halo” effect of HABs can cause significant losses in revenue as the news, often exaggerated, is broadcast.

In an interview with the Washington Post (reported by A. Ajaga) Dr. Rick Stumpf (NOAA) noted that *K. brevis* cells often accumulate inshore in late summer and are pushed offshore to the mid shelf area of Florida’s west coast by winter winds associated with high-pressure systems [1,2] the persistent northerly winds do not occur *K. brevis* cells remain inshore. Stumpf speculates this is what happened in March 2023. It should be noted that while *K. brevis* blooms are known to occur at all seasons of the year, there are times when they are more frequent. High inshore cell concentrations are affected by wind patterns of frontal systems, hydrographic conditions like upwelling and in turn, nutrients upwelled to the surface waters [3]. Stumpf added “If you have a year where we don’t get those persistent northerly winds pushing it out it [HABs] can hang around. And that’s what’s happening this year.”

Florida’s coast lines are some of the most closely observed marine areas. A number of State, Federal and non-governmental organizations and university programs contribute their resources to help forewarn citizens, public health officials, resource managers, property owners and tourists of conditions that are conducive to HABs (see below). These agencies also have willing volunteers who serve as citizen scientists and help crowd source data along vast stretches of the 1,062 km west Florida coastline. The most recent reports of the spring 2023 *K. brevis* blooms show a decline in the cell concentrations nearshore and no reports of surface

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**Featured article**

Florida’s West Coast *Kareния brevis* bloom: Spring 2023,

*Patricia Tester* .............................................. 1

**Cyanobacteria and other**

*Toxic and non-toxic HABs*

Human microbial pathogens and cyanotoxins ........................................... 3

*Red tide of* *Tripos furca* in aquaculture areas in Penang Strait, Malaysia ........................................... 4

*Bloom of Pyrodinium bahamense* by seafood processing plant, SE Gulf of Mexico ........................................... 5

**Networking, Conferences and International Cooperation**

16th IOCC FOOD 2023 ........................................... 6

ICES-IOC WGHABD 2023 ........................................... 7

IOC-UNESCO WS on Early Warning System (EWS) for HABs in Morocco ........................................... 8

*HAB session at 6th Xiamen Symposium on Marine Environmental Sciences* ........................................... 9

**NEW! Red Tides Archives**

Let my people go,

*Tim Wyatt* ........................................... 10

**Forthcoming events** ........................................... 13
Content

Feature article
Florida’s West Coast Karenia brevis bloom: Spring 2023, Patricia Tester

Cyanobacteria and other Toxic and non-toxic HABs
Human microbial pathogens and cyano blooms
Red tide of Tripos furca in aquaculture areas in Penang Strait, Malaysia
Bloom of Pyrodinium bahamense by seafood processing plant, SE Gulf of Mexico

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