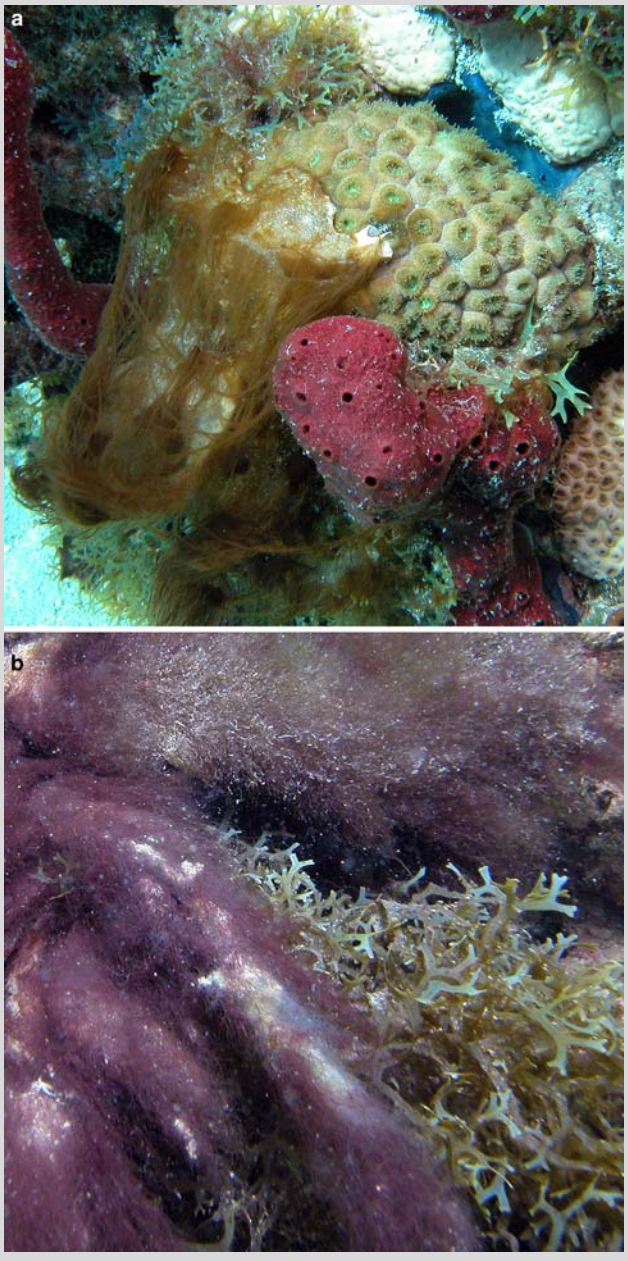

Fig. 1a *Lyngbya confervoides* overgrowing *Montastrea cavernosa* in the Florida Keys, USA. **b** *Lyngbya* sp. overgrowing brown algae (*Dictyota* sp.) in Bocas Del Toro, Panama

Marine benthic cyanobacteria overgrow coral reef organisms

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Some marine cyanobacteria have a positive role for corals as nitrogen fixing symbionts (Lesser et al. 2004). Cyanobacteria can also have negative effects on corals through disease (e.g. black band disease, Rützler and Santavy 1983) and settlement inhibitors for coral larvae (Kuffner and Paul 2004). Some researchers including Hallock (2005) have noted that "cyanobacteria are becoming increasingly prominent on declining reefs...". Even so, there is little experimental evidence for the ecological consequences of overgrowth by often-persistent cyanobacterial blooms on the benthic community. During recent research (2004–2005) on different Caribbean coral reefs (including Bahamas, Belize, Florida, Panama, and St John, US V.I.) we have noted a frequent occurrence of benthic cyanobacteria overgrowing a variety of reef organisms (Fig. 1). It is often difficult to determine if cyanobacteria are overgrowing dead organisms or actively killing the live ones that they overgrow, illustrating our lack of knowledge of the impact of cyanobacteria on coral reef organisms.

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Reef sites

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