OC Overview for the Week of April 30, 2018

Australia Pledges Millions of Dollars in Bid to Rescue Great Barrier Reef

Australia's Environment Minister, Josh Frydenberg, pledged AU $500 million (US $379 million) to help the reef. Of these funds, AU $200 million would go to improving water quality, partially through reducing fertilizer runoff. AU $100 million would go directly to restoration and adaptation efforts (via New York Times). However, Australia is still planning to re-open many of its marine parks to fishing.

In world first, Hawaii passes ban on coral-harming sunscreen chemicals

On May 1, Hawaii state legislators passed a bill believed to be the world's first ban on sunscreens that contain coral-harming chemicals. The bill now heads to Hawaii Governor David Ige for signature. It would prohibit the sale in Hawaii of sunscreens containing oxybenzone or octinoxate, both commonly used as UV absorbers in sunscreen products. The chemicals have been found to damage coral larvae and cause coral bleaching, among other significant impacts. The Hawaiian ban would take effect January 1, 2021 (via NPR).

Drones can take scientists to strange new places—like inside whale snot

Iain Kerr of Ocean Alliance is testing the effectiveness of drones to collect DNA samples through expelled whale snot. Drones are slowly becoming more commonplace in science; Ocean Alliance already uses drones to detect infrared light and both NOAA and Ocean Alliance use drones to listen for whale sounds. Though still being tested, using drones for DNA sampling could save researchers money and be less invasive upon marine mammals than current practices (via Popular Science).

Local kelp forests are giving way to barrens of sea urchins. Divers want to fight back.

Sea urchins are spreading at an alarming rate along the California coastline. Scientists speculate this growth stems from a reduced population of a major urchin predator, the sea star, and a rise in oceanic temperatures. In response to this population surge and temperature change there's been a major reduction to one of their main food sources, kelp. However, as kelp density declines less biodiversity thrives off the coast and sea urchins are left with little food, causing malnourishment among their growing population (via Monterey County Weekly).