

GLOBAL CORAL REEF ALLIANCE

A non-profit organization for protection and sustainable management of coral reefs

Global Coral Reef Alliance, 37 Pleasant Street, Cambridge, MA 02139, USA

Telephone: 617-864-4226

617-864-0433

E-mail: goreau@bestweb.net

Web site: <http://www.globalcoral.org>

February 13 2009

Thomas J. Goreau, PhD

President, Global Coral Reef Alliance

PUBLIC COMMENTS FOR THE 21ST MEETING OF THE UNITED STATES CORAL REEF TASK FORCE (USCRTF)

Washington DC, February 25 2009

We are already most of the way through a human-caused global warming mass extinction of coral reefs, and IMMEDIATE action to reduce atmospheric CO2 is needed. The reefs of the world have already lost most of their corals and ecosystem services, and the next record temperature years will wipe out most of what is left. Barring unpredictable events like asteroid impacts, or repeated volcanic eruptions greater than any since Mt Tambora in 1814, this will happen in the next few years.

The USCRTF has the overwhelming responsibility to forcefully promote direct action to protect and restore corals, and to urgently reverse course from the last 8 years of asleep-at-the-wheel denial, delay, deception, obfuscation, monitoring and assessment “to find out if there is a problem”, promotion of straw men and red herrings, and focus on bogus PR hype.

Because USCRTF could not openly discuss the significance of the global warming data, they were reduced to pointing to far more remote threats like ocean acidification, and because they refused to take steps to reduce the factors now killing corals, they promoted irresponsible fables of “resilience”, the panglossian feel-good fiction, unsupported by any long term observation of reefs, that no matter what we did to them, reefs would sprout back all by themselves.

USCRTF must take the lead and stop previous frittering away time finding reasons to avoid action, letting more reefs die. We cannot afford to keep fooling ourselves any more without deliberately sacrificing THE most climate-sensitive, nutrient-sensitive, disease-sensitive ecosystem, and future marine biodiversity, shore protection, tourism, and fisheries resources of over 100 countries.

USCRTF needs to change course with regard to the following specific points:

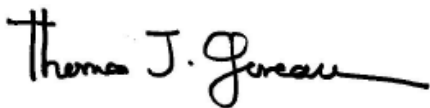
1) USCRTF must live up to its own founding mandate not to engage in or permit

projects that damage coral reefs. The Global Coral Reef Alliance and Cry of the Water have petitioned USCRTF repeatedly for years to live up to its own mandate and require all its members to stop doing projects that damage coral reefs or issue permits for such projects. We have been stonewalled every single time! The mandate of USCRTF says that all public petitions and written requests must be responded to, but USCRTF simply refused to respond at all. Leading members of USCRTF told us privately that to ask their members to live up to their own mandate is “beyond our competence”! Until USCRTF, charged to coordinate national, state, and county coral reef protection, follows its own mandate and stops projects known to damage reefs, why should they expect anyone else to? Leadership must begin at the top. USCRTF urgently needs to make its principles clear, after 8 years of winking at reef destruction projects funded and permitted by “responsible” federal, state, and county agencies.

2) USCRTF should immediately abandon the scientifically irresponsible claims that coral reefs are “resilient” systems that can bounce back all by themselves from any damage. All long-term coral researchers can attest to the fact that coral reefs are the most fragile and vulnerable of marine ecosystems. This contrived political fiction merely served to justify inaction on reducing stresses known to kill corals, or accepting responsibility for restoring what has been destroyed as a result. USCRTF threw huge sums of money at unprincipled groups who repeated these bogus claims, and blacklisted those who pointed out their absurdity.

3) USCRTF must recognize that marine organisms respect no political boundaries, and the vast bulk of coral reefs are in developing countries. This is a truly global issue that needs a global response by directly supporting bottom-up community-based coral reef management and restoration efforts. USCRTF needs to take the lead in protecting all remaining coral reefs, and in funding restoration of those that are now so severely degraded as to have lost almost all their corals and ecosystem services, instead of contriving excuses to pretend there is no problem.

Coral reefs cannot withstand more wasted years. We are counting on your immediate leadership NOW!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas J. Goreau". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Thomas J. Goreau, PhD
President, Global Coral Reef Alliance