

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: URGENT CALL FOR ACTION

GLOBAL REPORTS

Support to International Initiatives and Diplomatic Efforts

- ICRI's Renewed Call to Action: U.S. Support of Priority Actions
- Background Information on ICRI and the Renewed Call to Action

REGIONAL REPORTS

- Wider Caribbean Region: Report of the Subgroup
- South East Asia Region: Report of the Subgroup
- Pacific Region: Report of the Subgroup

FOCAL ISSUE REPORTS

- Unprecedented Coral Bleaching and Mortality
- International Trade in Coral and Coral Reef Species: Report of the Trade Sub-Group
- Appendix A: Primary Importers and Exporters of Coral Species
- Appendix B: Foreign National Laws Pertaining to Coral Trade/Harvest and Destructive Fishing Practices
- Appendix C: U.S. Laws Pertaining to Coral Trade/Harvest and Destructive Fishing Practices
- Appendix D: Draft educational/outreach materials for marine aquarium hobbyists
- Appendix E: List of International Trade Subgroup Members
- Appendix F: References

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY INTERNATIONAL CHARGE OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 13089

The Secretary of State and the Administrator of the Agency for International Development, in cooperation with other members of the Coral Reef Task Force and drawing upon their expertise, shall assess the U.S. role in international trade and protection of coral reef species and implement appropriate strategies and actions to promote conservation and sustainable use of coral reef resources worldwide. Such actions shall include expanded collaboration with other International Coral Reef Initiative ("ICRI") partners, especially governments, to implement the ICRI through its Framework for Action and the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network at regional, national, and local levels.

URGENT NEED TO REDUCE GLOBAL THREATS TO REEFS

Human activities threaten the majority of coral reefs in all regions of the world. The 1998 *Reefs at Risk* study found that almost 60% of the world's coral reefs are potentially threatened by human activity - ranging from coastal development and destructive and over-fishing practices to overexploitation of resources, marine pollution and runoff from inland deforestation and farming. Reef Check surveys conducted in 1997 and 1998 found that most reefs are severely over-fished, with most organisms of high commercial-value missing. In addition, the recent global impacts of catastrophic events, such as widespread coral bleaching and mortality and increased storm intensity, compound the more localized human impacts that place reefs at risk.

URGENT NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL ACTION

Key recommendations for action by the U.S. to address key threats were developed by the International Working Group and have been incorporated into the draft report of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, *The National Action to Conserve Coral Reefs*. This draft report of the International Working Group is presented in support of *The National Action Plan* to implement the Executive Order.

Strategic U.S. actions to reduce global threats from human activities include:

- Exercise global leadership in the international arena in shaping and developing environmentally sound and comprehensive ocean and coral reef policy.
- Forge strategic partnerships in concert with other governments, non-governmental groups, and the public and private sectors to address international threats.
- Build capacity to manage and conserve reef ecosystems and their watersheds in the Wider Caribbean, Pacific, South East Asia, East Africa and the Middle East regions.
- Support the creation and management of coral reef Marine Protected Areas, particularly those that contain substantial ecological (*i.e.* no-take) reserves.
- Address the impact of global climate change and coral bleaching on reefs and people.
- Address the impact of international trade in coral reef species and the U.S. role.

SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

ISSUE: Expand Cooperation with Partners of the International Coral Reef Initiative Through Implementation of ICRI's Framework for Action and the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network.

As founder of the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) in 1994, the U.S. has been a leader in every phase of its development and implementation. ICRI is a partnership among nations and organizations seeking to implement Chapter 17 of Agenda 21, and other international Conventions and agreements for the benefit of coral reefs and related ecosystems. The Initiative was established in order to stop and reverse the global

degradation of coral reefs and related ecosystems. The ICRI partnership and approach thus far has been to mobilize governments and a wide range of other stakeholders in an effort to improve management practices, increase capacity and political support, and share information on the health of these ecosystems. ICRI has helped reshape the international scientific and management communities and the public dialogue on the urgency to protect coral ecosystems. Key developments that guide our international strategy include action priorities of ICRI's Renewed Call To Action and its Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network.

Proposed Actions and Strategies to Address Key Issues: The U. S. Coral Reef Task Force provides an excellent platform for targeted and coordinated U.S. support to ICRI and the conservation and sustainable use of coral reef resources worldwide, while ICRI can provide an international forum for gaining support and implementing international activities of the Task Force. Key recommendations include:

- Strengthen the International Coral Reef Initiative and implement its Renewed Call to Action, and support the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network and link it with the national monitoring program.
- Foster improved coordination with other bilateral assistance programs, multi-lateral development banks, and private foundations to strategically leverage funding and increase effectiveness.
- Support ICRI's goal of bringing coral reefs and sustainable fisheries issues into the work program of relevant international conventions, organizations and bodies such as CBD, CITES, UNEP, UNDP, IOC, IMO/IHO, ICLARM, IUCN, WCMC, World Heritage and Ramsar Conventions, WTO, FAO, Law of the Sea, and the Global Programme of Action.
- Support the stated needs and priorities of the Small Island Developing States and Alliance of Small Island States by identifying potential areas of cooperation on coral reef conservation issues.
- Support counterpart funding for the United Nation Foundation's International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN).
- Work with U.S. States and territories to expand coral reef conservation within the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean, and highlight the ecological and economic connections between U.S. reefs and international reefs.

REGIONAL REPORTS

ISSUE: Need for Strategic Approach to Wider Caribbean Region

The island and continental countries of the Wider Caribbean, including Mexico and Central America, share an enclosed basin which is home to some of the world's most important coral reef resources. These reefs are of vital importance to marine tourism and the economic base of the region. Almost two-thirds of the reefs are potentially at risk from human activities. Key threats to reefs throughout the region are land-based sources of pollution, unsustainable tourism and coastal development, marine pollution, poverty,

and overfishing. Almost 25% of the oil transported worldwide by sea passes through the region.

Proposed Actions and Strategies to Address Key Threats: The task force will pursue opportunities to promote greater coordination among U.S. agencies and donor institutions, and support a strategic, integrated approach within the region. The interagency working group will work to refine the list of issues to be addressed, develop cost-effective interventions, and seek partnerships with other donors, regional institutions, and key non-governmental groups and local government agencies. Key recommendations include:

- Support integrated coastal zone management. Implement the Cartagena Convention Protocol (Land based Source Pollution Protocol) to address pollution of the marine environment from land-based activities. Identify innovative practices for coastal zone management, watershed management and sustainable tourism and demonstrate their effectiveness.
- Enhance effectiveness of existing marine protected areas; assist in the development of new marine protected areas, with substantial no-take reserves and of national and regional importance; and support the implementation of a network of marine protected area managers.
- Address safe and ecologically sound navigation, working with relevant international and regional organizations.
- Work with international and domestic partners to implement the Tulum Declaration to support Meso-American coral reefs.
- Ratify the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles, with follow-on legislative push by the Agencies.
- Create and support a permanent interagency committee to coordinate USG coral reef efforts for the wider Caribbean.
- Implement the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network and other valuable assessment activities in the wider Caribbean.
- Develop and implement conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity including fisheries, focused on management of critical habitat

ISSUE: Need for Strategic Approach to South East Asia Region

Coral reefs in South East Asia are severely threatened or already degraded due to destructive fishing practices (including blast and cyanide-fishing), overfishing, land-based sources of pollution, and coastal population pressures. A pressing need in the region is to stop the spread of destructive fishing practices. Economic declines in the region have increased human pressures on coral reef resources.

Proposed Actions and Strategies to Address Key Issue: Actions to address unsustainable coral trade and destructive fishing and to evaluate the causes and consequences of coral bleaching which has severely impacted this region are key

components of USCRTF work in South East Asia. Ongoing development programs, which address sustainable coastal management and sustainable cities, contribute to the long-term viability of reef ecosystems in this region.

- Build capacity in integrated coastal management, law enforcement, fisheries management and pollution prevention.
- Address unsustainable trade and destructive fishing/collection practices on reefs and in mangroves, through work with international partners, local communities, the private sector, non-governmental groups, and consumers (See International Trade Section).
- Reduce land-based sources of marine pollution from coastal development, agricultural practices, industrial activities, inland deforestation and mangrove deforestation.
- Promote sustainable cities, sound coastal development, and watershed management to reduce urban pollution.
- Enhance effectiveness of existing marine protected areas; assist in the development of new marine protected areas, with substantial no-take reserves and of national and regional importance; and support the implementation of a network of marine protected area managers.
- Support expanded intra-regional and international exchanges.
- Work through the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum to eliminate destructive fishing practices.

ISSUE: Need for Strategic Approach to Pacific Region

Issues such as climate change, sustainable forests, fisheries and coral ecosystems have unique relevance to small island nations. The social, cultural and economic prosperity of the Pacific islands is directly dependent upon the health of coral reef resources which provide protein needs, linkages to cultural identity, products for trade (curio and aquaria), foundations for ecotourism, and environmental services like coastal protection. While this region's reef ecosystems may be in the best condition globally, coral reefs near human populations are threatened by negative impacts from land-based human activities and over-fishing (even on some reefs distant from settlements), and coral bleaching events raise alarm about long-term consequences of potential global climate change.

Proposed Actions and Strategies to Address Key Issue: Existing programs and interests among Task Force members provide the foundation for a broader more integrated U.S. regional engagement, including the expertise of the U.S. States and Territories in the region. The task force will pursue opportunities to minimize destructive fishing practices, build capacity, improve marine education and training, support coral reef research and monitoring, and improve management of marine resources and protected areas. Key recommendations:

- Build strategic partnership with the South Pacific Region Environmental Program (SPREP) to implement the regional Coral Action Plan and other SPREP programs of direct relevance to coastal ecosystems, including expanded support for the GCRMN.
- Support expanded intra-regional and international exchanges.
- Support local Coral Reef Initiatives in Micronesia.
- Reduce threats to coral ecosystems by building capacity in integrated coastal management and sustainable fisheries management and through other regional strategic alliances.
- Address trade pressures from live food fish and aquarium trade through capacity building (See International Trade Section).

FOCAL ISSUE REPORTS

ISSUE: Unprecedented Coral Bleaching and Mortality

The mass coral bleaching and mortality events of 1998 appear to be the most severe and extensive ever documented. Simultaneously, tropical sea surface temperatures were the highest on modern record, topping off a 50 year trend for some tropical oceans. The geographic extent, increasing frequency, and regional severity of mass bleaching events are a likely consequence of a steadily rising baseline of marine temperatures, perhaps driven by anthropogenic global warming. The rise in sea temperature and consequent coral bleaching events pose a significant threat to coral reef ecosystems and the human populations which depend on them for subsistence and economic livelihood, particularly small island developing states. Based on these findings, the U.S. Department of State released a report entitled, "Coral Bleaching, Coral Mortality, and Global Climate Change" to the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force in March of 1999. In response, the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force passed a resolution stating that biodiversity conservation can no longer be achieved without consideration of the global climate system and urging agencies to address the impacts of global climate change on the natural resources they manage.

Proposed Actions and Strategies to Address Key Threats:

- Further the U.S. commitment to strengthen the implementation of the ICRI Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network and ReefCheck to provide baseline data, rapid response assessments, and annual monitoring of coral reef health, coral bleaching and mortality events, and the economical and socio-economic consequences of reef decline. This commitment will require active partnership of Task Force members, drawing upon their financial resources and technical expertise at regional and global levels.
- Task Force Endorsement of the resolution and recommendations for priority action resulting from the NOAA/ICLARM meeting on remote sensing and the Convention on Biological Diversity experts meeting on coral bleaching.

- Expand the opportunities for Task Force member agencies to address the causes and consequences of coral bleaching and mortality events, in domestic and foreign policy fora.

ISSUE: International Trade of Coral and Coral Reef Species

The United States currently is the number one consumer of live coral and marine fishes for the aquarium trade and of coral skeletons and precious corals for curios and jewelry. The taxa harvested for curios are primarily branching corals, many of which suffered catastrophic mortalities during the coral bleaching event of 1997-1998. In 1997, the U.S. imported approximately 80% of all the live coral in international trade representing at least 420,000 pieces. Commercial harvest of corals causes localized destruction of coral reefs, including increased erosion and loss of critical habitat. That same year, the U.S. imported over 90% of the live rock in international trade. Live rock is essential for reef habitat providing vital substrate and contributing to the total biomass. Although illegal in most countries, the use of cyanide to stun and capture fish alive is widespread, and is driven by the lucrative, growing and largely unregulated trade in live reef food fish and the marine aquarium industry. Cyanide not only causes extensive internal damage to the target fish, but also harms reefs by killing non-target coral reef species. More than half of the aquarium fish imported from the major exporting countries into the U.S. are captured using cyanide.

Proposed Actions and Strategies to Address Key Threats:

As a major consumer of coral reef species that may be driving unsustainable harvest, the U.S. has a critical responsibility to address the trade. The following actions are offered to address these concerns:

- Expand and strengthen capacity building efforts in countries with coral reefs to enforce relevant laws and regulations, collect trade data, and develop and implement sustainable management plans, certification schemes, and alternative harvest practices such as aquaculture and coral farming.
- Expand support for retraining from destructive practices to more sustainable capture and harvest methods. Programs to develop viable certification methods, which may eventually be able to verify sustainably harvested exports and inform consumers in the United States, will supplement these programs.
- Continue to actively participate in international fora such as CITES and ICRI and regional fora to address concerns relating to coral reef species trade and to raise global and regional awareness.
- Continue consultations with coral exporting countries and other stakeholders to gather more information regarding the nature and extent of the problems associated with trade in coral reef species, and discuss possible approaches to solving the problems.

- Improve domestic law enforcement of illegal coral reef species trade.
- Work with various stakeholders to develop public education and awareness materials.
- Evaluate the need for legislation that might restrict commerce of certain coral reef species to address the concern that U.S. consumer demand may be driving unsustainable harvest of some coral reef species.

ISSUE: Destructive Fishing Practices - blast, cyanide and the live-food fish trade

Destructive fishing practices are widespread on coral reefs throughout the world, and are spreading to other countries. The use of cyanide to stun and capture live coral reef fishes for export is a serious threat to some of the world's richest coral reefs, as the cyanide also kills corals and many other coral reef organisms. Driven by the lucrative and unregulated international trade in marine aquarium fishes and live reef food fishes, cyanide fishing is unlike other destructive fishing (e.g., blast fishing), which is primarily a subsistence activity.

In some regions of Malaysia, up to 90% of reefs have been reported as destroyed by blast-fishing. In 1995, the annual volume of the live reef food fish trade in Asia was estimated to be between 20,000 and 25,000 metric tons (mostly groupers and large wrasses) with an annual retail value of approximately \$1 billion. The total annual volume of the marine aquarium fish trade, approximately 10 to 30 million specimens comprising hundreds of species, represents an annual retail value of approximately \$200 to \$750 million.

Proposed Actions and Strategies to Address Key Threats: Agencies of the USCRTF will redouble long-standing efforts to draw attention to destructive fishing practices and support sustainable alternative practices. Close cooperation with governments and with non-governmental groups and fishing communities will be essential to action and commitment on the part of live reef fish exporting countries and regional and global cooperation among trade partners in implementing the sustainable fishing recommendations, such as those of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) on cyanide fishing. Key recommendations include:

- Supplement current development assistance programs for coastal zone management which foster community stewardship of reef resources with support for retraining from destructive practices to more sustainable capture and harvest methods, support for alternatives to wild capture such as mariculture, and support for cyanide detection programs.
- Work with regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, managers and scientists, the private sector and consumers to combat destructive fishing practices, develop sustainable management practices, improve trade data collection, and promote aquaculture and certification methods.

- Address coral reef, mangrove and sustainable fisheries issues in relevant international conventions, organizations and bodies.

KEY DELIVERABLES

The following list of achievements has been possible only through a diverse array of strategic national and international partnerships. These diverse mechanisms include:

- Capacity-building and technical assistance through bilateral programs such as major programs in coastal zone management and marine park management.
- Strategic partnerships with non-governmental organizations to implement assistance programs such as addressing destructive fishing.
- Building upon and strengthening the coral reef agendas of international and regional organizations such as the United Nations Environment Programme's Regional Seas, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, and SPREP.
- Collaboration with global conventions such as Ramsar, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.
- Strengthening the role of science for sound management and to better understand the relationship between climate change and coral bleaching.

Support of the International Coral Reef Initiative and Diplomatic Efforts:

- Significant policy coordination at global level, and major funding through UNEP to the Regional Seas Programs for the GCRMN and regional ICRI coordination. (State: FY99 \$490,000)
- Commitment to significant high-level consultations with the French Government as they assume the ICRI Secretariat, to assist them in promoting the ICRI global agenda.
- Support for ICRI's Framework for Action and Renewed Call to Action