

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	pg. ii
I. OVERVIEW – ECOSYSTEMS AT RISK AND THE ROLE OF TRADE	pg. 1
II. KEY THREATS OR ISSUES AND THE U.S. ROLE	pg. 3
A. Destructive Fishing Practices	
1. Cyanide Fishing	
2. Other Destructive Fishing Practices	
B. Overexploitation of Resources	
1. Coral and Live Rock	
2. Coral Reef Fish and Invertebrates for the Marine Aquarium Trade	
3. Coral Reef Fish for the Live Food Fish Trade	
4. Seahorses	
5. Giant Clams	
6. Queen Conch	
7. Marine Animals for the Jewelry and Curio Trades	
III. CURRENT U.S. ACTIVITIES TO ADDRESS THREATS	pg. 13
A. International Capacity Building	
B. Participation in International Fora	
C. Domestic Activities	
IV. PROPOSED STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS	pg. 19
1. Active Participation in International Fora	
2. Continue Consultations with Exporting Countries	
3. Expand Capacity-Building Efforts in Exporting Countries	
4. Improve Domestic Enforcement of Illegal Coral Reef Species Trade	
5. Raise Domestic Consumer Awareness	
6. Improve U.S. Collection, Reporting and Monitoring of Trade	
7. Develop Additional Measures Including New Authorities	
APPENDICES	pg. 25
A. Primary Importers and Exporters of Coral Species (1997 CITES import data)	
B. Foreign National Laws Pertaining to Coral Trade/Harvest and Destructive Fishing Practices	
C. U.S. Laws Pertaining to Coral Trade/Harvest and Destructive Fishing Practices	
D. Draft educational/outreach materials for marine aquarium hobbyists	
E. List of International Trade Subgroup Members	
F. References	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many coral reef species and resources are harvested globally for commercial purposes, including food fish, the aquarium trade, live fish markets, construction materials, curios, jewelry, pharmaceuticals and traditional medicines. International trade in coral, reef fish, live rock, and other coral reef animals are activities that contribute to the decline and degradation of reefs, primarily through the use of destructive collection practices and overexploitation of resources.

The Executive Order (#13089) for the Protection of Coral Reefs charged the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force with analyzing and addressing the United States's role in the international trade of coral reef species. The analysis found that the U.S. 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. Thus, American consumers of coral reef products may inadvertently be contributing to the worldwide decline and degradation of reefs.

There is already strong international concern that some coral reef species are threatened or may become threatened through trade. Those species are listed under the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and include 2000 species of hard (stony) corals, black coral, giant clams, Queen conch, and sea turtles.

Although the U.S. is the largest importer of coral and live rock, the U.S. either prohibits or strictly limits the extraction of hard corals in most of its own federal, state and territorial waters, due to widespread concerns that these animals are vulnerable to overexploitation. Coral extraction also leads to the loss of important fisheries habitat.

In addition to coral, the United States imports nearly half of the total worldwide-trade in aquarium fishes. Many of the fish imported for the marine aquarium market in the U.S. are captured with the use of cyanide and other poisons, which kills non-target animals and the coral reef itself. This destructive practice is spreading to other countries to meet the growing worldwide demand for ornamental and live food fish.

Presently, hundreds of thousands of kilograms of hard corals and live rock, and 15 to 20 million coral reef fishes are traded each year for use in marine aquaria -- over 1000 different species are in the trade. Localized depletion of certain species due to commercial collection has already occurred. Improper transportation, handling and husbandry of live coral reef species for aquaria may also be leading to high mortality rates and unsustainable trade. Sustainability concerns will only increase with the growing international trade.

Concern about the impact that the trade in marine ornamentals is having on reefs and the viability of the industry has recently brought members of the marine aquarium industry together with environmental organizations to try to address these impacts. Their goal is to promote responsible collection, handling and transportation of coral reef animals within the industry.

The following report examines the nature and extent of threats to reefs related to the international trade in coral reef resources, assesses the role of the United States in the trade, describes current relevant activities of the U. S., and recommends strategies and actions to address these threats.

Recommended Strategic Actions.

As a major consumer and importer of coral reef organisms, a major player in the world trade arena, and a leader in coral reef conservation efforts, the United States has a critical responsibility to address the degradation and loss of coral reef ecosystems that may arise from commerce in coral reefs species and products, and to encourage more responsible trade. The U.S. should discourage the use of destructive or unsustainable collection practices that may jeopardize the future potential of coral reefs to sustain the local communities who depend on them for food and livelihoods, particularly in developing countries, by rewarding and encouraging responsible use of these precious resources. Recommended strategic actions include:

- Actively participate in the international arena to highlight and address trade issues.
- Continue consultations with exporting countries.
- Expand capacity-building efforts in exporting countries.
- Increase consumer awareness.
- Improve domestic law enforcement of illegal coral reef species trade.
- Develop measures to reduce unsustainable collection and take of CITES-listed species, reduce destructive fishing practices, and reduce mortality rates of animals during transportation and handling.

Suggestions for New Authorities. Following are some measures that have been suggested to reduce the adverse impacts of trade and collection in coral and coral reef resources, encourage more responsible trade, and encourage the conservation and sustainable management of coral reef ecosystems both domestically and internationally.

- The United States should prohibit domestic harvest or collection and the import or export of coral reef species and products listed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora that are not sustainably managed or from environmentally-sound mariculture programs. Exceptions might include organisms intended for approved captive breeding programs, scientific research, or public display. Restrictions might be extended to other species of concern under certain circumstances.
- The U.S. should work with members of the marine aquarium industry, environmental organizations and other stakeholders to develop, within a specified time limit, responsible practices and guidelines for collection and transport of coral reef species that reduce mortality rates throughout the trade stream, improve product quality and ensure survival in captivity.
- After working with stakeholders over a specified time period, the U.S. should prohibit the domestic harvest and collection of any coral reef species by defined destructive fishing practices, such as the use of reef-dredging, explosives or poisons.
- After working with stakeholders over a specified time period, the U.S. should prohibit the import or export of any coral reef species unless accompanied by certification that the products were not taken through the use of destructive fishing practices.
- The U. S. should develop a coordinated national strategy for conservation and sustainable management of coral reef species and ecosystems within the U.S., and then work with the international community to share this strategy and develop criteria for the conservation and sustainable management of coral reef ecosystems in other parts of the world.