

8th Coral Reef Task Force Meeting
October 2-3, 2002
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Resolution 8-2: Trade in Coral Reef Species

The U.S. Coral Reef Task Force endorses the Statement of Findings on international trade of coral and coral reef species, and charges the Trade Sub-Group and International Working Group with identifying the best mechanisms for filling the needs identified on the second page of the statement of findings.

The Task Force continues to suggest there is a need 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 Task Force directs as follows:

1. Task Force members participating in the upcoming conference of the parties to CITES should use every opportunity to raise the issue of trade in coral reef species and its impacts on coral reefs:
2. The Trade Sub-Group of the International Working Group of the Task Force should meet shortly after the conclusion of the CITES meeting to consider actions taken at that meeting, the prospects for future CITES actions based on their evaluation of the actions and discussions at this meeting, and the extent to which additional statutory authority to address problems with trade in coral reef species is necessary; and
3. The Trade Sub-Group and the International Working Group report their recommendations to the CRTF at the next meeting.

Key Findings from the Trade Subgroup of the International Working Group

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.

An initial analysis by the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force 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, and that American consumption of coral reef products are inadvertently contributing to the worldwide decline and degradation of reefs.

At the second meeting of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, in March, 1999, a resolution was adopted to support an evaluation of options to address imports of coral and coral reef species and promote sustainable harvesting of traded coral reef resources.

At the fourth meeting of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, in March 2000, a broad strategy was unveiled to address the U.S. role in the international trade of coral and coral reef species; the strategy included recommendations for new trade authorities to ensure responsible and sustainable trade.

There is already strong international concern that some coral reef species are threatened or may become threatened through trade -- 2000 species of hard (stony) corals, black coral, giant clams, Queen conch, and sea turtles are listed under the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The U.S. continues to be a strong supporter of CITES and is supporting proposals to include more species for listing under CITES.

Recent reports and findings indicate that:

- International trade continues to drive over-exploitation and destructive fishing practices and that more reefs and species are threatened by these activities, as reported by recent findings of the World Resources Institute and Reef Check.

- The international aquarium trade continues to increase by 10-30% annually B with the trade in live corals increasing 400% and the trade in live reef rock increasing 1700% since 1988.
- The number of species in trade for marine aquaria continues to increase, with well over 1000 species estimated to be in trade.
- The U.S. continues to import 60 B 80% of the live coral, over 50% of the curio coral, and 95% of the live reef rock and reef substrate in international trade each year.
- Over 400 coral reef species have been identified as inappropriate species for the aquarium trade B such as those that do not survive well in aquaria or are highly poisonous B yet continue to be traded.
- International trade in coral and coral reef animals continues to be largely unregulated, unreported, and illegal.
- International trade in wildlife is associated with money laundering and the drug trade, as reported by the International Marinelife Alliance and the World Wildlife Fund/Traffic.

We have reassessed the situation two years later and found that there are still a number of urgent needs, including personnel needs, financial needs, information needs, and the need for certain authorities to fully address the U.S. role in the international trade of coral and coral reef animals:

- There is a need to strengthen existing implementation of trade responsibilities (i.e. USFWS capacity to implement CITES requirements for exports and imports in the U.S., as well as strengthen the capacity for CITES implementation and coral reef management in developing countries)
- There is a strong need to more fully assess the nature and volume of the curio trade, jewelry trade, and the trade in live invertebrates and fish.
- There is a strong need to more fully assess the U.S. coral reef export trade and its impacts on U.S. coral reefs.
- There is a strong need to assess the nature and magnitude of the illegal trade associated with coral reef animals.
- We applaud the marine aquarium industry's efforts at certification, but we recognize the limitations to industry certification and have identified key authorities that are currently gaps in the ability of the U.S. to effectively address the trade issue. These include authorities to reduce unsustainable collection and take of CITES-listed species, reduce destructive fishing practices, reduce mortality rates of animals during transportation and handling, reduce the number of inappropriate species in trade, establish an advisory council of stakeholders, and develop an ecosystem-based approach for coral reef management.