

Photograph courtesy of Eric Clua/CRISP



A CONTINUING CALL TO ACTION



A CALL BY THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE INTERNATIONAL CORAL REEF INITIATIVE (ICRI) - OCTOBER 2013



"We also recognize the significant economic, social and environmental contributions of coral reefs, in particular to islands and other coastal States, as well as the significant vulnerability of coral reefs and mangroves to impacts including from climate change, ocean acidification, overfishing, destructive fishing practices and pollution. We support international cooperation with a view to conserving coral reef and mangrove ecosystems and realizing their social, economic and environmental benefits as well as facilitating technical collaboration and voluntary information sharing."

- The Future We Want: the outcome statement of the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) as adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations



Photograph courtesy of Jerker Tamelander

THE CONTEXT



Coral reefs are in serious decline globally, especially those near shallow shelves and dense human populations. It has been estimated that 19% of the earth's coral reefs have already been seriously degraded or lost and greater than 60% are under immediate and direct threat. This decline is likely to lead to the loss of most of the world's reef resources during the next century and seriously affect the lives of 500 million people, of which 30 million are largely dependent on reefs for their livelihoods.

The International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) is a partnership among governments, international organisations, and non-government organisations which aims to preserve coral reefs and their related ecosystems in a framework of sustainable use. It was initiated by the governments of Australia, France, Japan, Jamaica, the Philippines, Sweden, the UK and the USA and was announced at the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1994.

First published in 1995, the ICRI Call to Action aims to raise global awareness on the continuing decline in the health of the world's coral reefs and encourages action to address coral reef issues. The Call was 'renewed' at the inaugural International Tropical Marine Ecosystems Management Symposium (ITMEMS) in 1998.



"Often referred to as the "rain forests of the sea", tropical coral reefs rank among the most biologically rich and productive global ecosystems and are representing social, economic and environmental benefits for millions of people."

- Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, August 2011



Photograph courtesy of Sandrine Job/CRISP

PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE



ICRI was founded to raise the profile of the plight of coral reefs on the world stage, bringing the spotlight on their ecological, economic, social and cultural value to a large proportion of the world's population. ICRI members were urged to draw the attention of managers, senior policy makers, funding organisations, scientists and politicians to the issues that faced coral reefs.

The informal nature of ICRI makes it challenging to quantify its influence over time in terms of on-the-ground progress towards sustainable management of coral reefs. However, in this regard it is worthwhile reflecting on:

- the congruence of ICRI's work with the establishment of reef-related international action targets such as:
 - The World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002 Earth Summit MPA networks target;
 - The Convention on Biological Diversity 2002 biodiversity targets relating to eco-region protection, marine protected areas containing coral reefs and sustainable fisheries;
 - The subsequent 2010 Aichi Biodiversity Target 10 dealing specifically with coral reefs leading to the declaration of new marine protected areas, including locally managed areas as well as Large Marine Protected Areas such as the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument or the Phoenix Islands Protected Area; and
- the advent of transformative regional initiatives such as the Coral Triangle Initiative, the Micronesia Challenge and the Caribbean Challenge.

Aside from influence in the above global advancements in coral reef conservation, ICRI can identify tangible achievements clearly of its own making:

- Raising global awareness on all aspects of the goods and services from coral reefs, and the values and challenges facing coral reefs and related ecosystems resulting in the declaration on two occasions of the 'International Year of the Reef' in 1997 and 2008;
- Gaining recognition of the importance of ICRI by its reference in the Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in 2011;
- Creating a forum for regular discussion of coral reef management issues and solutions through meetings of ICRI members and the International Tropical Marine Ecosystems Management Symposia;
- Producing regular global and topic-driven reports on the status of coral reefs through its Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, thereby bringing international attention to their plight and helping to guide policy and actions;
- Helping to raise the global standard of monitoring of the socioeconomic conditions of the world's coral reefs through the Global Socioeconomic Monitoring of World's Tropical Ecosystems (SocMon) Network;



- Instigating a dynamic network of many of the world’s leading coral reef science and conservation organisations through the International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN, 2000-2011);
- Encouraging and supporting collaboration and coordination at national and regional levels through:
 - Regional initiatives (East Asia Regional Activities, CORDIO in the Indian Ocean, CRISP in the Pacific)
 - National initiatives such as the French Coral Reef Initiative (IFRECOR)
 - Technical committees focused on regional issues (e.g. the Ad hoc Committee on Caribbean Regional Response to Lionfish Invasion)
 - A focus on regional days at meetings of ICRI members.
- Facilitating coordinated action and capacity building on key contemporary issues facing coral reef managers including (but not limited to):
 - climate change adaptation;
 - marine protected areas;
 - coral reef associated fisheries (e.g. fish spawning aggregations);
 - trade in coral and coral reef species;
 - coral diseases;
 - enforcement;
 - evaluation of management effectiveness;
 - economic valuation of coral reefs;
 - marine invasive alien species (particularly the lionfish);
 - mangrove forest management.

Despite these achievements, major challenges continue to face coral reef managers. The four cornerstones of ICRI (Integrated management; Capacity building; Science and monitoring; and Review) remain as relevant in the early part of the 21st Century as they did when first conceived in 1995, but they now have to be addressed through the lens of climate change which poses an overarching threat on top of the multiple other stressors on these ecosystems.



“As a partnership among governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations, the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) was launched in 1994 as the only global entity devoted solely to coral reef conservation.”

... BUT THE CHALLENGES CONTINUE



The threats underlined in this Continuing Call to Action remain largely the same as in 1994. Humankind has not changed its fundamental behaviour towards its natural environment: the world's population continues to climb, and the majority of humans live in close proximity to the marine environment, which is heavily utilised for economic, social and cultural purposes.

Further, the consequences of climate change, including many serious and irrevocable impacts, are now better understood than when ICRI was initiated. There is overwhelming scientific consensus that the Earth's climate is changing, driven primarily by greenhouse gas emissions from human activity. Elevated sea surface temperature, along with ocean acidification, are likely to be the most significant global threats to coral reefs. Direct evidence of the widespread negative effects of climate change on coral reefs have already been observed, and immediate action is required to prevent the loss of the world's reef resources during the next few decades.

The threats to reef health are varied, complex, and multiplicative. Increasingly, the capacity of coral reefs and related systems to adapt to the changing climate is being compromised by direct anthropogenic stress. As population levels continue to rise, contributing factors include:

- Unsustainable and destructive resource extraction, catchment run-off; shipping; and coastal development including tourism and recreation;
- Inadequate planning, zoning and management of coastal water and land use.



Photograph courtesy of Rich Carey



Photograph courtesy of Thomas Vignaud/Alofa Tuvalu



“Despite their importance, coral reefs are facing numerous local and global threats caused by human activity and climate change. Unsustainable fishing practices, coastal development, pollution, ocean warming and ocean acidification have already damaged one fifth of the coral reefs beyond repair and predictions are alarming should no change occur.”

- Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, August 2011

THE CONTINUING CALL TO ACTION



The nations and organisations supporting the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) acknowledge that in the nineteen years since its inception, ICRI has been the catalyst for a major improvement in the global awareness of the values of coral reefs and related ecosystems and the threats those systems face. In that time much progress has been made to understand and address those threats. Nevertheless, the plight of coral reefs continues to be a source of great concern. Coral reefs:

- continue to be degraded by a range of pressures; and
- are now affected by a number of anthropogenic and natural processes not clearly understood at the time of ICRI's inception.

Accordingly, ICRI members **CALL** upon all those with influence over the sustainable management of coral reefs and related ecosystems to continue efforts to:

1. manage coral reefs and related ecosystems in a manner that recognises the connectivity of land and sea and the cumulative impacts of anthropogenic pressures, and seeks to build resilience of natural systems to withstand the long term effects of a changing climate (**Integrated Management**);
2. build capacity in all facets of marine conservation and sustainable use, to disseminate and apply best practices and engage communities in the sustainable management of coral reefs and related ecosystems (**Capacity Building**);
3. support research including citizen science approaches to afford the widest possible ability for countries and communities to assess and report on the status, health and threats to their coral reefs in a coordinated, comparable and accessible manner (**Science and Monitoring**); and
4. review impact of actions taken, assess management effectiveness and apply adaptive responses (**Review**).



"... We need to improve, quickly and comprehensively, on existing efforts to protect reefs and the services they provide humanity. It is encouraging that our collective ability to do so has become stronger, with new management tools, increased public understanding, better communications, and more active local engagement."

- Reefs at Risk Revisited
Publication of the World Resources Institute, 2011