



ICRI and cold-water corals

Submitted by the UK

Background

1. At the ICRI CPC meeting held in the Turks and Caicos Island from 17 to 19 November 2003, ICRI agreed to examine further the issue of cold-water coral reefs.
2. It was agreed that an ad hoc committee would be convened by Robert Canning (UK) to assess ICRI's potential role in the international collaboration on cold-water coral reefs, identify ICRI's potential in the protection and sustainable management of cold-water coral reefs, the implications for ICRI's current work and what implementation modalities, if any, might be needed
3. A copy of the convener's report and a draft decision for adoption based on this report is attached.

Action requested

4. ICRI is invited to note the convener's report and to adopt the decision on cold-water coral reefs.

REPORT OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE ON COLD-WATER CORALS

Background

1. At the ICRI CPC meeting held in the Turks and Caicos Island from 17 to 19 November 2003, ICRI agreed to examine further the issue of cold-water coral reefs. It was agreed that an ad hoc committee would be convened by Robert Canning (UK). This would assess ICRI's potential role in the international collaboration on cold-water coral reefs, identify ICRI's potential in the protection and sustainable management of cold-water coral reefs, the implications for ICRI's current work and what implementation modalities, if any, might be needed.

2. A discussion paper was posted on the ICRI Forum by Robert Canning on 2 February 2004. This asked whether there is case for ICRI to extend its remit to include cold-water coral reefs and, if so, whether it is practical to extend its remit. It proposed a possible way forward as the basis for discussion. Views, thoughts and comments from ICRI members were requested by the end of March 2004.

Consideration

3. Only three responses were received by 1 May 2004 to the questions raised and the proposed way forward. All were in favour of the proposal. It is assumed that other ICRI colleagues are content with the proposed way forward based on the carefully thought through proposal on which views were invited. On this basis and in light of comments made, the ad hoc committee concludes that:

- Cold-water coral reefs are rich in biodiversity. They are also impressive in terms of size, structure and intrinsic beauty. Unfortunately they face a range of threats from human activities. These threats, such as climate change and unsustainable fishing are often, but not always, the same as for tropical corals. There is less of a link to food security and poverty eradication than there is with tropical corals.
- Cold-water coral reefs are highly relevant to ICRI's Call to Action. ICRI's mandate is to conserve coral reefs and related ecosystems. Its original focus was on tropical ecosystems with coral reefs as the key drawcard alongside mangrove forests and seagrass beds. Cold-water coral reefs were not considered at the time – not because they were not considered important but because little was known about them when ICRI was established in 1994 and tropical ecosystems were on the global agenda at the time.
- A range of international fora and international agreements have noted the vulnerability of cold-water coral reefs and related ecosystems. These include the OSPAR Commission for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic and the Seventh Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Specifically, the 4th meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea in June 2003 “invited ICRI and other relevant bodies to consider incorporating cold-water coral ecosystems into their programmes of activities.”
- There is currently no global framework under which governments and stakeholders can discuss and co-operate on further international work on cold-water coral reefs. ICRI can therefore play an important role in raising awareness and recognition of cold-water coral reefs and the threats that they face, encourage additional study and monitoring of cold-water coral reefs and identify opportunities for capacity-building.

- In addition, ICRI can play an important role in calling upon competent authorities and other bodies to take appropriate action to conserve, protect and manage cold-water coral reefs and related ecosystems in a sustainable way. This would mirror ICRI's current work on tropical corals. ICRI would be well-placed to become the coordinating forum for exchange and discussion of ideas and measures etc.
- It will be necessary to establish a Working Group and related work programme to deliver these objectives. This will require a convener and the participation of ICRI members. In addition, the Working Group will need to review ICRI's Renewed Call to Action, the Framework for Action and any other relevant ICRI Decisions or documents that might need to be revised and/or complemented.
- The inclusion of cold-water corals in ICRI's remit provides a valuable opportunity to encourage countries with cold-water coral reefs to join ICRI and contribute to delivering its goals and to share wider expertise. This would strengthen the international standing of ICRI, both from the tropical coral reef and cold-water coral reef perspective, and provide an opportunity to secure additional resources.
- It is practical to extend ICRI's remit to include cold-water coral reefs because additional resources to develop and take forward a programme of work will be provided by new ICRI members who join ICRI specifically because ICRI has widened its remit to include cold-water coral reefs. This will ensure that ICRI's work on cold-water corals is not at the expense of its current ongoing work on tropical corals.
- It is noted that there is potential concern that including cold-water coral reefs in ICRI's work could mean that less time was available at CPC meetings for discussion on tropical coral reefs (or that CPC meetings needed to be lengthened). However, those who commented on the proposal did not see this as an obstacle and it is unlikely to be problematic to set aside adequate time at CPC meetings to review progress (for example, there could be an additional session for cold-water corals).
- The ICRI Secretariat would need to consider whether a separate session on cold-water coral reefs – in addition to an update - was required at CPC meetings. Regional meetings on cold-water coral reef issues would also be a further possibility that would need to be explored.
- Whilst there would appear to be clear benefits from extending ICRI's remit to include policy and management issues relating to cold-water coral reefs, the Committee agrees with the views expressed by Clive Wilkinson that including the monitoring of cold-water coral reefs within GCRMN's portfolio is "not an easy option at the moment". This is because the GCRMN runs mostly on in-kind contributions and very small injections of cash. However, the cold-water corals working group could assist GCRMN in coordinating any information required by GCRMN on monitoring cold-water coral reefs.

4. These conclusions and a first draft of the related decision were placed on the ICRI Forum on 17 May for any additional informal comments by the end of May ahead of submitting the proposals to the CPC meeting in Okinawa on 3 and 4 July 2004. No additional comments were received.

Conclusions and recommendation

- ICRI has considerable potential to promote collaboration and action to help to better protect and manage vulnerable cold-water coral reefs and related ecosystems (as it does tropical coral reefs).
- ICRI's work on cold-water corals would be additional work rather than be at the expense of tropical coral work. There is no reason to believe that including cold-water corals within ICRI's remit will lead to less funding or consideration of tropical corals.
- A working group and related work programme will need to be established and progressed. This should cover policy and management issues and not include specific monitoring or assessment issues that are taken forward within the framework of GCRMN.
- That ICRI adopts the attached decision as the basis for including cold-water coral reefs within its remit.

DRAFT ICRI DECISION ON COLD-WATER CORAL REEFS

Recognising the richness in biodiversity of cold-water coral reefs and the threats that they face from, inter alia, unsustainable fishing and use of the sea bed and climate change;

Noting that cold-water coral reefs are highly relevant to ICRI's Call to Action and further noting calls made in international fora to address the threats that vulnerable marine ecosystems face both in territorial seas and in areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction;

Agrees that ICRI's Framework for Action will specifically include cold-water coral reefs and related ecosystems containing coral reefs such as seamounts, and that ICRI's remit should include calling upon competent authorities and other bodies to take appropriate action to conserve, protect and manage cold-water coral reefs and related ecosystems in a sustainable way.

Decides to establish a Working Group to prepare and implement a work programme on cold-water coral reefs and related ecosystems that will, inter alia:

- identify opportunities to raise awareness and recognition of cold-water coral reefs and the threats that they face;
- encourage additional study and monitoring of cold-water coral reefs;
- work with the Secretariat to identify and recruit countries that are known to have cold-water coral reefs but are not currently members of ICRI;
- identify opportunities for capacity-building; and
- review ICRI's Renewed Call to Action, the Framework for Action and any other relevant ICRI Decisions or documents that might need to be revised and/or complemented.

Urges existing ICRI members with cold-water coral reefs to actively participate in this Working Group and to volunteer as lead countries to take forward elements of the work programme;

Agrees that an update of progress made by the Working Group should be provided at CPC meetings and that the Secretariat should consider whether a separate session on cold-water coral reefs is required as an addition to each CPC meeting;

Decides that GCRMN will not include monitoring of cold-water coral reefs in its remit but that the Working Group will assist GCRMN in coordinating any information required by GCRMN on monitoring cold-water coral reefs;

Agrees that ICRI's work on cold-water coral reefs will be additional work that will complement ICRI's ongoing work on tropical coral reefs.

Invites the ICRAN and other associated programmes of work to consider the inclusion of cold-water coral reefs in their programme of work and to report the outcome of these considerations to the next ICRI CPC meeting.