



Information note: Consideration of coral reefs in the CBD post-2020 global biodiversity framework

Disclaimer: The contents of this information note do not constitute a statement of policy, decision or position on behalf of ICRI or any of the ICRI members, nor does it preempt the work of the ad hoc committee with regard to the any consideration of a future target recommendation.

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Ad hoc committee webpage : <https://www.icriforum.org/groups/our-committees/post-2020-coral-reef-target>

1. Background and purpose:

This information note has been drafted by the International Coral Reef Initiative ad hoc committee on developing a recommendation for a post-2020 coral reef target¹. The ad hoc committee was established by the 33rd ICRI General meeting in recognition that there is an urgent and continued need for action to address coral reef issues in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework that is being developed within the context of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

The International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) is an informal partnership between Nations and organizations that strives to preserve coral reefs and related ecosystems around the world by promoting sustainable management practices, building capacity, raising awareness and promoting action to address the continuing decline of coral reefs. ICRI was founded in 1994 and has more than 60 members, including 38 countries. ICRI is currently chaired by Australia, Indonesia and Monaco. ICRI has a unique opportunity to coordinate across member countries and organisations in order to help streamline/ coordinate policy instruments relating to coral reef management and conservation, as called for by UNEA Resolution UNEP/EA.4/L.14 on “Sustainable coral reefs management”² (adopted 15 March 2019).

This information note has been developed as an advisory document to provide ICRI members with information on the status and significance of coral reefs and related ecosystems to our sustainable future and importance of specific action related to coral reefs beyond 2020. ICRI members are invited to share this information with their national CBD focal points or any other relevant colleagues to inform preparatory discussions or responses within the CBD post-2020 framework process.

¹ The ad hoc Committee is co-chaired by Monaco, Vulcan Inc. and the ICRI Secretariat. The membership includes: Australia, France, ICRS, Indonesia, Japan, New Caledonia, Seychelles, SPREP, UN Environment, UNEP-WCMC, UK, US, WCS and WWF International.

² https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/l14_sustainable_coral_reefs_management_1.pdf

2. Value of coral reefs

Coral reefs provide human society with a wide array of goods and services worth at least US\$11.9 trillion per year. Coral reefs support 25% of marine life and through activities such as fisheries and tourism they support at least 500 million people worldwide³ with huge implications for food security and livelihoods. This huge diversity of life also provides potential medicines to treat some of the world's most prevalent and dangerous illnesses and disease. In addition, healthy coral reef ecosystems reduce shoreline erosion by absorbing energy from the waves protecting coastal housing, agricultural land and beaches with a global net benefit of 9 billion USD/ year⁴. The global social and economic dependence on coral reefs is represented in Figure 1.

The benefits derived by human society from functioning coral reefs fit well within the concept of Nature Based Solutions⁵ and it will be engage with this debate so that the role that coral reefs can be articulated in these terms.

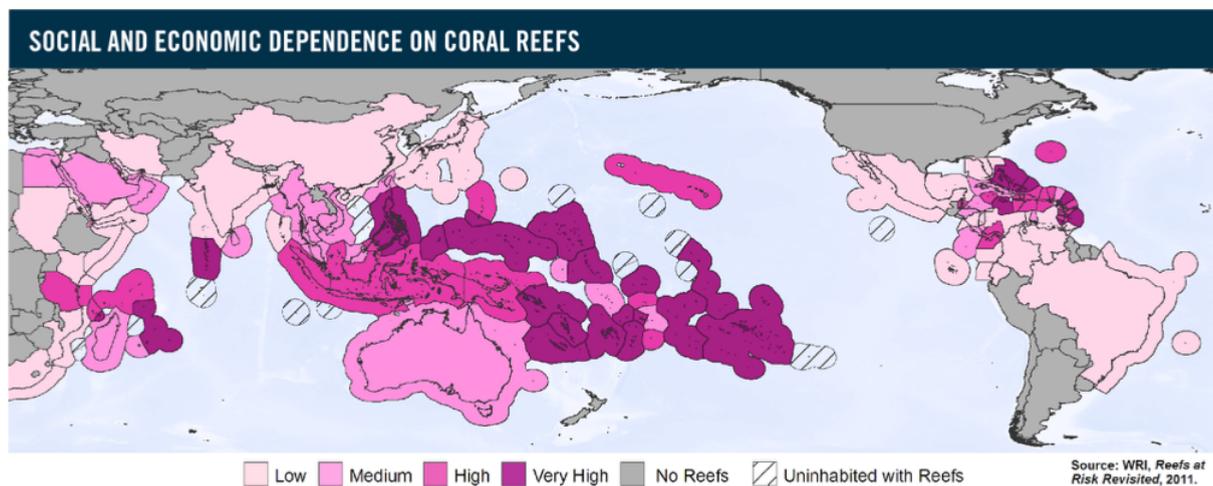


Figure 1: illustration of the social and economic dependence on coral reefs (source: Reefs at Risk revisited, Burke, 2011)

A recent study entitled “The Coral Reef Economy” found that proactive policies to protect and restore the health of the world’s coral reefs could generate a substantial economic gain, provide important societal benefits, including to local communities, and help deliver the UN Sustainable Development Goals⁶. Coral reefs and closely associated ecosystems contribute to 10 of the 17

³ ISRS Consensus Statement on Coral Bleaching Climate Change: https://www.icriforum.org/sites/default/files/2018%20ISRS%20Consensus%20Statement%20on%20Coral%20Bleaching%20Climate%20Change%20final_0.pdf

⁴ Coral Reef Life Declaration <https://www.icriforum.org/sites/default/files/CORAL%20REEF%20LIFE%20Declaration.pdf>

⁵ IUCN define Nature Based Solutions (NBS) as “actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems, which address societal challenges effectively and adaptively”. More information here <https://www.unenvironment.org/engaging-nature-based-solutions-coalition-climate-action-summit>

⁶ UN Environment, ISU, ICRI and Trucost 2018. The Coral Reef Economy: The business case for investment in the protection, preservation and enhancement of coral reef health. 36pp https://www.icriforum.org/sites/default/files/The%20Coral%20Reef%20Economy_0.pdf

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (ICRI, 2017) (figure 2). The key findings of “The Coral Reef Economy” report included:

- Coral reefs underpin significant economic value for the private sector
- The value of future healthy coral reefs is high
- Societal co-benefits of healthy coral reefs could exceed private gains
- Policies to enhance coral reef health generate a financial return on investment
- Climate change poses significant risk and adds uncertainty

Coral reefs and the benefits that human society derives from them must be considered within the broader context of both marine and terrestrial ecosystems. They are influenced by the health and condition of other ecosystems and in turn the health of the coral reef affects other ecosystems.



Figure 2: contribution of the services provided by coral reefs and associated ecosystems to sustainable development.

Key message: Together coral reefs and associated ecosystems play an important role in the broader sustainable development agenda and as Nature Based Solutions for addressing impacts of climate change, protecting the built environment, reducing wave energy, providing novel compounds for breakthrough medicines, marine eco-tourism, fisheries, contributing to GDP, local livelihoods, and food security. Retaining and improving the health of coral reefs is an important key to realising the value of these ecosystems to human society.

3. Status and projected trend for coral reefs:

Shallow, warm water coral reefs occur in the waters of more than 100 countries and 85% of these reefs are under the jurisdiction of just 25 states.

- Over 50% of known living coral has been lost on coral reefs due to a combination of local factors and global climate change^{7, 8}
- Almost 33%: reef forming coral species are threatened with extinction⁹
- Coral reefs continue to be on a catastrophic trajectory if substantial action is not taken within an urgent timeframe.

⁷ UNEP 2017

http://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/22048/Coral_Bleaching_Futures.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

⁸ IPBES Global Assessment 2019 <https://www.ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment>

⁹ IPBES Global Assessment 2019 <https://www.ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment>

- The IPCC 1.5 report, published in 2018 stated that coral reefs would all but disappear in a scenario of up to 2°C warming and up to 90% of coral reefs would be lost even if warming does not exceed 1.5°C¹⁰;
- Annual bleaching events are expected to occur by the 2050s although some countries this may be as soon as 2033¹¹;
- The draft summary for policy makers of the GBO6 report, due to be released in March 2019 has advised governments to prepare for a dramatic decline and possible collapse of coral reef ecosystems and their services of coral reefs, with consequence for reef based industries, shoreline protection and food security (UNEP/EA.4/18 §44).
- Ecosystems that are closely associated with coral reefs are also facing significant declines¹².
 - Mangroves protect coastlines, sequester carbon, and support fish nurseries¹³. 30-50% have been lost over the past 50 years¹⁴;
 - Seagrass beds support fisheries, carbon sequestration, stabilizing sediments and provide nutrient cycling; 29% of the known extent of seagrasses has disappeared since it was first recorded in 1879¹⁵.
- In 2017 approximately 40% of the global population lived within 100km of the coastal zone¹⁶
- The most recent population predictions suggest a global population of 8.6 billion by 2030 and 9.8 billion in 2050. More than half of this growth is expected to come from just 9 countries, including India, Tanzania, USA and Indonesia, all countries with coral reefs (UN, 2017).

Key message: challenges and pressures on coral reef will significantly increase over the next 20 years and therefore the urgency for coral reefs remains and warrants special attention.

4. Reflections on Aichi Biodiversity Target 10

At the end of 2018, ICRI undertook a review of the experiences of selected countries in implementing the Aichi Biodiversity Target 10: “By 2015, the multiple anthropogenic pressures on coral reefs, and other vulnerable ecosystems impacted by climate change or ocean acidification are minimized, so as to maintain their integrity and functioning.” This target sits within Strategic Goal B of the 2011-2020 Strategic Biodiversity Action Plan to “Reduce the direct pressures on biodiversity and promote sustainable use.” It was the first time coral reefs had been singled out in a global biodiversity target.

The 33rd General Meeting of ICRI agreed with the report’s conclusion that AT10 has succeeded in drawing attention to coral reefs as a special ecosystem in crisis and provided an opportunity to have an entry point to focus effort and coordinate policy action in cross boundary pressures. Before the adoption of SDGs, Aichi Target 10 played an important role in being able to stimulate increased activity on marine conservation issues. It has provided leverage for regional and global engagement,

¹⁰ IPCC 2018 -

<https://www.ipcc.ch/2018/10/08/summary-for-policymakers-of-ipcc-special-report-on-global-warming-of-1-5c-approved-by-governments/>

¹¹ UNEP 2017

http://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/22048/Coral_Bleaching_Futures.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

¹² WWF 2018 https://wwf.panda.org/knowledge_hub/all_publications/living_planet_report_2018/

¹³ <https://www.unep-wcmc.org/resources-and-data/the-importance-of-mangroves-to-people--a-call-to-action>

¹⁴ WWF 2018 https://wwf.panda.org/knowledge_hub/all_publications/living_planet_report_2018/

¹⁵ WWF 2018 https://wwf.panda.org/knowledge_hub/all_publications/living_planet_report_2018/

¹⁶ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Ocean-fact-sheet-package.pdf>

and also provided a handle to help demonstrate the wider contribution being made by a range of national and regional initiatives. It has also instigated funding streams to support coral reef conservation work. The mid term evaluation of Aichi Target 10¹⁷ however showed a worsening situation, that there was a move away from the target with increasing pressures on coral reefs and declining state of the ecosystem.

Implementation and progress towards the target has however been low. The 2015 deadline for the target was unrealistic with agreement on indicators only 2 years before the deadline and most of these not ready for use so it was not possible to measure progress against the target. The wording was considered to be vague, ambiguous, complex, difficult to understand and yet requiring transformational change at an institutional level. All of these factors contributing to low implementation.

Key message: it is important that a target learns from the shortcomings of Aichi Target 10: be simple to communicate and clearly articulated; ambitious, but not unrealistic. A target should be accompanied by a clear baseline to allow for effective assessment and review of progress and implementation.

5. Existing International policy commitments that recognise the significant contribution of coral reefs

- The significant contribution of coral reefs is clearly recognised in the text of “The future we want”: 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”
- UNEA Resolutions 2/12 and UNEP/EA.4/L.14 on “Sustainable coral reefs management”¹⁸;
- General Assembly resolution 65/150, “Protection of coral reefs for sustainable livelihoods and development”
- The ICRI Renewed Call to Action (1998)
- The ICRI Continuing Call to Action (2013)¹⁹
- The ICRI Plan of action for 2018-2020 in particular part 1.A Strengthening policies, supporting protection of coral reefs and associated ecosystems through effective policy and legislative frameworks: The desired aim under this theme is demonstrable action to protect and improve the resilience of coral reefs and related ecosystems through policy, management and innovation.
- The Coral Reef Life Declaration²⁰ has been signed by countries who between them are responsible for >55% of all shallow, warm water coral reefs. The Declaration recognises the importance of coral reef ecosystems as key indicators of ocean and planetary health and

¹⁷ Global Biodiversity Outlook 4 (p20) <https://www.cbd.int/gbo/gbo4/publication/gbo4-en.pdf>

¹⁸ https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/114_sustainable_coral_reefs_management_1.pdf

¹⁹ <https://www.icriforum.org/icri-documents/icri-key-documents/continuing-call-action-2013>

²⁰ Coral Reef Life Declaration

<https://www.icriforum.org/news/2017/10/update-coral-reef-life-declaration-hsh-prince-albert-ii-monaco>

their inherent environmental, social, economic and cultural value. As of 31 October 2018 the non-binding declaration has been signed by the following countries (alphabetic order): Australia, Cook Islands, Costa Rica, Ecuador, France, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Grenada, Indonesia, Mexico, Mozambique, Monaco, Niue, Palau, Philippines, Seychelles, United Kingdom, Vanuatu.

In addition to the international and regional policy instruments and commitments many coral reef countries have developed national policies and programmes of actions to conserve coral reefs. For example Indonesia has protection of coral reef in place through laws and regulations, implemented through marine spatial planning and MPA designation to specifically protect coral reefs.

According to a recent study led by UN Environment and pursuant to UNEA Resolution 2/12, there are more than 230 international policy instruments that relate to coral reefs, 73 binding instruments at the global and regional scale, and 591 commitments (UNEP/EA.4/23 and UNEP/EA.4/INF/6 for the full analysis²¹). There are an abundance of agreements that action is needed, policy frameworks in place at different scales and commitments to action and yet the status and function of coral reefs continues to decline. The report has cited challenges with coherence, financing and coordination of these actions in addressing the threats impacting coral reefs. Further to adoption of UNEP/EA.4/L.1, UN Environment are in the process of preparing follow up to this report and recommended courses of action. Further information will be made available in the coming weeks.

*Key message: there are a large number of international commitments to address coral reefs and yet their status continues to decline. How can the post 2020 framework galvanise coordinated, streamlined action and measurable outcomes? An ambition set out in the recently adopted UNEA Resolution UNEP/EA.4/L.14 on “Sustainable coral reefs management”
There should be coherence with existing frameworks and commitments, including Agenda 2030 and the Paris Climate Change Agreement.*

6. Introduction to the work of the ad hoc committee

As per its adopted Terms of Reference²², the ad hoc committee will in the period up to ICRI’s 34th General Meeting in December 2019:

- Coordinate ICRI’s contribution to the CBD post-2020 global biodiversity framework, including preparing a timeline, according to the ICRI Rules of Procedure; (including responding, as appropriate, to CBD consultations);
- Develop a draft recommendation for a coral reef target and an appropriate alternative that aligns with and builds on other relevant processes.

As part of the response to the first objective of the Terms of Reference, the ad hoc committee has developed and shared a response from the ICRI Secretariat to the Secretariat of the CBDS initial discussion document for the post-2020 framework by the deadline of 15 April 2019²³. The ad hoc committee will also see how to make best use of the regional and global consultations to inform the development of a proposed target for coral reefs within the broader marine system. The ad hoc

²¹ Coral policy analysis <https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/k1900316.pdf#overlay-context=pre-session-unea4>

²² <https://www.icriforum.org/groups/our-committees/post-2020-coral-reef-target>

²³ https://www.icriforum.org/sites/default/files/ICRI_SCBD-reply_110419.pdf

committee members will be liaising with relevant national CBD focal points and the broader ICRI membership.

The target that will be proposed should be *quantifiable* and have an *ambitious but realistic* timeframe with a *holistic view of coral reefs* within the broader marine system as well as relate to the *broader sustainable development agenda*, with clear *cross-reference to other global and regional policy instruments and commitments* relevant to coral reefs. The reduction in anthropogenic pressures continues to be a necessary precondition to give coral reefs a chance of surviving by supporting their health and resilience.

It will be important to be able to measure progress towards a target, both in terms of ensuring there are established baselines and being able to measure change over time. Progress in technology and machine learning present new opportunities for regular ecosystem monitoring at scale.

More information relating to the work of the ad hoc committee can be accessed here: <https://www.icriforum.org/groups/our-committees/post-2020-coral-reef-target>

A brief overview of some key dates in the work of this ad hoc committee is show below, for a more general overview of the post-2020 process timeline UNEP-WCMC are maintaining an online overview here <https://post2020.unep-wcmc.org>

Event	Date
Trondheim Biodiversity Conference	2-5 July 2019
Deadline for submissions to the next written consultation on the post-2020 process	15 August 2019
First meeting of the Open Ended Working Group for developing a post-2020 framework - focus on elements of the structure / scope of the framework (Nairobi)	27-30 August 2019
Consultation phase on draft recommendation	September 2019
Global meeting of Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, Berlin	October 2019
Oceans Thematic global consultation, Montreal	4-8 November 2019
Submission of draft motion to the ICRI Secretariat 28 days in advance of the GM; to be circulated for comment at least 14 days in advance of the meeting (18 November)	4 November 2019
34th ICRI General Meeting, Townsville, Australia	2-6 December 2019