

International Coral Reef Initiative

Host Secretariat Advisory on Invasive Lionfish

July 2011

The International Coral Reef Initiative urges immediate action to address the

Lionfish Invasion in the Wider Caribbean

Invasive lionfish (*Pterois miles* and *P. volitans*) pose a serious threat to coral reef ecosystems and associated biodiversity in the western Atlantic Ocean from South America to the northern Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and southeastern United States. Lionfish, native to the Indo-Pacific oceans, have no known native predators in the western Atlantic and Caribbean. Invasive lionfish populations can reach high densities and cause extreme disruption to native fish communities.

A growing body of scientific work has demonstrated that, in some areas where they have become established, invasive lionfish have reduced the biodiversity and resiliency of coral reefs. The expanding invasion may cause declines in ecologically important species and hinder stock-rebuilding efforts for economically important fish species. The invasion has the potential for negative economic impact on local fishing and tourism industries. In addition, lionfish have venomous spines on their fins that can inflict a serious sting to humans; medical attention is recommended following a lionfish sting.

In recognition of the severity of the lionfish invasion and its impact on coral reefs and local communities, ICRI urges that immediate action be taken to control the lionfish invasion in collaboration with relevant international and regional partners and initiatives.

Response to the Invasive Lionfish

This invasion can be most effectively addressed by local action facilitated by a regional strategy encompassing the Wider Caribbean. To this end, in August 2010, ICRI convened a Regional Lionfish Strategy Workshop with managers from 18 Caribbean countries and territories. The workshop resulted in a compilation of best practices to serve as a guide for local managers as they respond to the lionfish invasion. Coral reef managers are encouraged to develop local control plans, partnering with commercial fishing and diving operations where appropriate.

In a recommendation on invasive alien species (IAS) at its 23rd General Meeting, ICRI elevated attention to the threats posed by IAS to marine environments, and many Caribbean governments and institutions are engaged in prevention and control activities. To facilitate development of a regional strategy, ICRI has formed a Regional Lionfish Committee, co-chaired by Mexico, the United States, and the Regional Activity Center of the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA) Protocol to the Cartagena Convention. ICRI urges Caribbean governments to develop appropriate frameworks and actions at the national level



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to limit and control the invasion, and invites interested parties, at all levels, scientific institutions, civil society and the private sector to engage with the Regional Lionfish Committee and to collaborate in a regional response to ensure its wide implementation and success. Information on the Committee and the invasive lionfish best practices manual can be found at www.icriforum.org/lionfish.