



## ICRI Member's Report

### Project AWARE

Reporting period December 2017 – November 2018

1. **Reporting on the ICRI Plan of Action 2016-2018.** *Your responses will help inform the Secretariat about members' contributions toward the previous Plan of Action.*

- a. **Please list any relevant examples from your organisation/country of investment/projects to protect and restore the natural infrastructure of reefs and mangroves.** (See Goal (1) 2 [ICRI Recommendation for supporting investments in the natural infrastructure of reefs and mangroves to increase climate resilience](#)).

**Dive Against Debris® Surveys:** Project AWARE's flagship citizen-science program, Dive Against Debris®, empowers scuba divers to remove marine debris from the ocean and report data on the types, quantities and locations of materials collected. Since the program's launch in 2011, more than 50,000 divers have participated in Dive Against Debris in 114 countries around the world, reporting over 1.2 million pieces of trash. As the only underwater debris data collection program of its kind, Dive Against Debris both improves the health of ocean ecosystems through localized volunteer efforts and provides valuable information about underwater debris to help inform policy change. Earlier this year, Project AWARE has announced its commitment to remove the next million by the end of 2020.

By physically removing debris that currently exists in the ocean, fragile underwater habitats across the globe are being protected. Additionally, the quantitative dataset that Project AWARE is building, provides critical evidence necessary to inform solutions that prevent debris entering the ocean in the first place and thus, protects marine life and fragile underwater habitats from the negative impacts.

**Adopt a Dive Site™:** In order to strengthen the global dataset and encourage volunteers to conduct repeat surveys at the same dive site, in 2016 Project AWARE launched the Adopt A Dive Site™ initiative whereby participants take ownership of their local dive site, committing to surveying the site at least once a month. In 2018, Project AWARE's Adopt a Dive Site initiative reached more than 400 dive sites adopted globally. Acknowledging a diverse global community that spans a variety of demographics, geographic locations and cultures, Project AWARE has created a variety of online and offline tools and resources freely available in multiple languages, in order to maximize engagement and participation of scuba divers in Dive Against Debris. Investing in innovative technology has also seen the development of the interactive Dive Against Debris Map which visualizes the global dataset as well as the freely available Dive Against Debris app - streamlining the data submission process and facilitating in-field data reporting.

**Save Our Marine Life:** Project AWARE is a member of the Save Our Marine Life Alliance - a coalition of environmental groups working to protect and secure the world's largest network of marine reserves around Australia. In 2012 Australia

created the largest network of marine reserves in the world. In December 2013, after 15 years of extensive scientific investigation and the most thorough public consultation process in Australia's History (750,000 submissions showing 95% support), the Government suspended the implementation of the sanctuary management plans. Since then, and with a continually changing political landscape in Australia, Project AWARE has worked with alliance partners advocating for Australia's marine sanctuaries to be reinstated. In July 2018, the Turnbull Government put Australia's marine park network into operation on the water, but in the process slashed these initial plans, reducing the scale of protections by nearly half. Over 80,000 submissions have been made opposing the Government's retrograde plans. In August 2018, Shadow Minister for Environment Tony Burke announced that a future Labor Government would restore marine parks back to the proposed 2012 levels.

**Coral Watch:** Project AWARE in partnership with CoralWatch and PADI instructors has developed a PADI approved *CoralWatch Coral Health Chart Distinctive Specialty* specialty to teach and certify scuba divers and snorkelers in coral monitoring and data collection. This Distinctive Specialty course highlights the impact of coral bleaching and provides students with the knowledge and skills needed to identify coral health and record data. The specialty is aimed at snorkelers and divers who like to get recognition for their gained knowledge and skills, as it is not a requirement to do the surveys.

**Coral Reef Conservation Specialty:** The Coral Reef Conservation Specialty course helps divers appreciate the complexity of these habitats and teaches how they can help conserve these vital systems. Anyone who has an interest in the aquatic world can take this course. There are no prerequisites or age restrictions and no water sessions are required to earn this non-diving certification.

- b. **Has your organisation/country made any progress in the following areas to target anthropogenic pressures?** Please give detail below. Note: If no change since your last ICRI member report, please write 'no change'.

**Encourage ban of plastic microbeads in cosmetic products.** (See Goal (3) 2 & [See ICRI Recommendation to reduce plastic microbeads pollution in marine environment](#)):

**Improve regulation and enforcement to reduce direct anthropogenic damage due to dredging and physical alteration of reef structures.** (See Goal (3) 3 & [ICRI Recommendation to reduce damage due to dredging and dumping on coral reefs](#)):

**Deployment of mooring devices limiting the mechanical destruction of coral reefs and seagrasses.** (See Goal (3) 4).

- c. **Did your organisation/country celebrate International Year of the Reef?** Please give details below. (See Goal (5) 1 & [ICRI Recommendation designating 2018 as the](#)

[third International Year of the Reef](#)):

Through its global network of over 1 million scuba divers and ocean advocates, and its diverse means of communications, Project AWARE disseminates information about key threats facing fragile underwater habitats, including coral reefs, to a wide audience with a focus on distilling complex policy or environmental issues to propel community action on a global scale. With an average audience of over 350K web users, Project AWARE's website exposes a large audience to general information about threats to coral reefs such as marine debris and global warming.

Project AWARE launched its [International Year of the Reef celebrations](#) on Earth Day, April 2018. Through a series of online communications targeting Project AWARE's global audience of more than 500K social followers and web visitors, Project AWARE, throughout 2018, highlighted the impact of plastic pollution on fragile coral reefs ecosystems, raised awareness of the value and threats they are facing and how local actions from Project AWARE community members is making a difference.

As part of the celebrations, Project AWARE relaunched the Project AWARE Specialty course with an emphasis on tips that divers and non-divers can follow to protect underwater life (including coral reefs) and be buoyancy experts among other tips to help protect the ocean and its inhabitants.

During AWARE Week, 15-23 September, Project AWARE and PADI joined forces and partnered for a week packed full of conservation activities around the world, including coral reef conservation activities. The global dive community came together to take action, large and small, to protect fragile underwater habitats. From protecting coral reefs from harmful impact of ghost gear and other forms of marine debris in the Red Sea to Coral Reef Conservation specialty courses in Indonesia and Coral Reef Restoration projects in the Bahamas, divers all around the world organized and joined events and actions, and took courses to equip themselves with the skills needed to help protect coral reefs and the ocean fins on and fins off.

**2. Contribution to the ICRI Plan of Action 2018-2020 and upcoming ICRI general meetings.** *Your responses to the following questions will assist the Secretariat in assessing contributions towards the major themes of the draft ICRI Plan of Action 2018-2020.*

**Theme 1 – Promote effective and adaptable solutions to improve the protection of coral reefs**

- a. **Which of the below topics do you consider to be the three top challenges that your organisation faces in managing coral reefs?** Please select from the options below:

- Climate change impacts
- Inadequate planning, zoning and management
- Unsustainable resource extraction
- Tourism and recreation

- Shipping
- Coastal development
- Dredging
- Illegal and destructive fishing
- Fish and coral trade
- Marine debris
- Other. Please specify:

- b. **Please list any examples of innovative management practices that your organisation/country is involved in, such as use of VMS, drones & ecological mooring devices.** Include their limits, conditions of implementation, financing and an assessment of their results and links for more information if possible.
- c. **Please list any examples of innovative funding for management that your organisation/country is involved in.** Include their limits, conditions of implementation, financing and an assessment of their results and links for more information if possible.
- d. **Please list any examples of leading practices, techniques and strategies for building reef resilience that your organisation/country is involved in.** Include their limits, conditions of implementation, financing and an assessment of their results and links for more information if possible.
- e. **Please list any examples of leading practice reef restoration mechanisms that your organisation/country is involved in.** Include their limits, conditions of implementation, financing and an assessment of their results and links for more information if possible.

### **Theme 3 – Support communities reliant on coral reefs**

- f. **Is sustainable tourism development a significant challenge for your organisation?** If so please include detail below of the kinds of challenges faced and your strategies to deal with them.

Tourism especially, marine and coastal tourism, is one the fastest growing areas within the world's largest industry. Marine tourism and shark and ray tourism in particular are on the rise globally. If current trends continue, the number of shark related tourism operators could more than double over the next twenty years. to help mitigate against the challenges and potential pressures associated with a rapid

industry growth, Project AWARE has partnered with WWF and the Manta Trust to release the world's first "*Responsible Shark & Ray Tourism: A Guide to Best Practice*". The guide is part of a global effort to create well managed shark and ray tourism operations, conserve species, protect their habitats and benefit local communities. Developed in collaboration with science and industry, the guide was created to ensure that sites are established and managed in a manner that benefits sharks and rays, as well as local communities, whilst also inspiring respect and a greater appreciation of the need to conserve these animals and their habitats amongst tourists. Project AWARE is using the guide to empower dive operators to lead by best practice to help build a better future for sharks and rays as well as support their local community. Responsible shark and ray related ecotourism can be a powerful, complementary conservation strategy. It can also serve as an important supplementary source of income benefiting operators and the local communities alike.

- g. Is your organisation involved in activities to raise awareness and encourage action to support communities reliant on coral reefs?** Please include details below.

**Theme 4 – Help to reduce anthropogenic threats to coral reefs, particularly those that occur at a global or regional scale**

- h. What activities is your organisation involved in to elevate awareness of the global nature of the threat of climate change to coral reefs?** Please include details below
- i. Has your organisation made any progress in dealing with destructive fishing and trade?** Please include details below.

International trade in wild plants and animals is estimated to be worth billions of dollars a year and, in too many cases, it threatens species survival. Project AWARE uses the power of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to help protect threatened, commercially valuable shark and ray species - sought for fins, wings, gill plates, meat, oil, teeth and cartilage – from the devastating effects of unregulated, international trade.

International protections for the most vulnerable shark and ray species is a long term goal of Project AWARE. CITES has been identified as an essential vehicle to help protect sharks and rays from unsustainable international trade. CITES CoP17 in 2016 presented opportunities for Project AWARE to collaborate closely with partner NGOs, governments and engage other stakeholders to support and encourage adoption of the CITES Appendix II listing proposals - resulting in status reviews and trade controls - for nine species of devil rays, three species of thresher sharks and the silky shark.

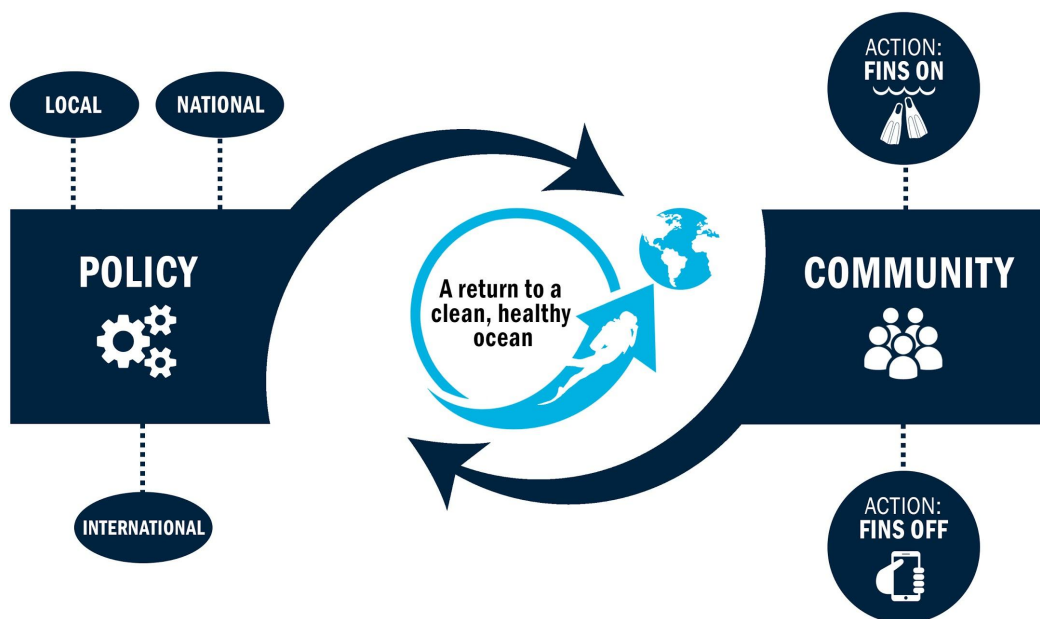
Following the release of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 2015 report "State of the Global Market for Shark Products" by Felix Dent and Shelley Clarke, Project AWARE developed an interactive infographic which illustrates the full story of current, trade-related threats to shark and ray populations. With technical assistance from Dr. Clarke, as well as Sonja Fordham, Shark Advocates International founder and President, Project AWARE created a

visual representation of the report that debunks myths about the global shark trade and points the way to key improvements. In addition to mapping out the top shark trading countries and routes, the infographic offers a close look at the challenges researchers face when studying these global markets, and highlights the measures necessary to increase trade traceability and sustainability. The infographic reveals the significant growth in markets for shark and ray meat, as well as the countries and inadequately restricted fisheries associated with this largely under-the-radar trade. The Infographic is a critical resource that helps to educate the wider public and raise awareness about a very complex issue affecting shark and ray populations globally.

- j. **Has your organisation made any progress in dealing with marine debris?**  
Please include details below.

Through Project AWARE's Clean Ocean strategy, marine debris has been identified as one of the primary sources of pollution threatening the health of our ocean planet including coral reefs.

In order to address marine debris and work towards solutions to prevent debris entering the ocean in the first place, Project AWARE takes a two-pronged approach: bottom-up and top-down - connecting community action locally to high level policy changes at the national, regional and international level.



Recognising that marine debris is a complex global problem that requires collaboration amongst stakeholders in order to achieve global solutions, Project AWARE forges strategic partnerships working with businesses, NGOs and governments to advocate for long-term solutions and influence waste management policies at local, national and international levels.

In 2018, Project AWARE achieved a milestone - removing and reporting one million items from the seafloor through Dive Against Debris (global marine debris survey). To date, Project AWARE has:

- removed 1,234,272 debris items
- engaged over 50,000 participants globally in Dive Against Debris
- 1,683 Instructors and Instructor Trainers have become certified to teach the Dive Against Debris Specialty
- trained 2,958 students through the Dive Against Debris Specialty
- adopted over 450 dive sites across the globe through the Adopt A Dive Site Initiative

By the end of 2020, Project AWARE is will:

- remove the next million debris items from the seafloor
- collaborate with governments and other governing authorities to develop or strengthen National Plans of Action on Marine Debris for prioritised countries (Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia)
- assist nations in tracking their progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030
- streamline and innovate technology infrastructure to facilitate better and more accurate marine debris data reporting through Dive Against Debris
- collaborate with CSIRO and other research institutes in order to use the global Dive Against Debris data set to advance our knowledge and understanding regarding the extent and impacts of seafloor debris as well as informing policy to prevent debris entering the ocean in the first place

**3. Would you like to report on your activities during the ICRI GM?** Please give details below.

Y / **N**

**4. International events.** Please list any upcoming international events relevant to ICRI which someone from your organisation plans to attend in 2018-2019.

ICRI GM, Monaco, 5-7 Dec 2018

Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 3-14 Dec 2018

Reef Futures 2018: A Coral Restoration and Intervention-Science Symposium, Florida, 10-14 Dec 2018

Global World Heritage Marine Managers meeting, Alaska, US, 26-31 May 2019

Other:

**5. Publications.** Please list relevant publications and reports you have released during this reporting period.

6. **ICRI Member Feedback.** What do you find most valuable about the ICRI member reports? If you have any ideas for improvement please list below:

7. **General Information.** (Note that this information will be posted on the ICRI website on your member page: <http://www.icriforum.org/about-icri/members-networks>.)

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