



## Report of the ICRI Ad-Hoc Committee on Cold-water Coral Reefs

Presented by the Chairman of the Ad-Hoc Committee

### Background

1. The ICRI General Meeting in the Seychelles (25-27 April 2005) endorsed the establishment of the cold-water coral reef ad-hoc committee and agreed on:

- the Terms of Reference for the Ad Hoc Committee on Cold-water Coral Reefs, and
- the List of Activities on Cold-water Coral Reefs

as presented to the meeting (cf. Annex 1), subject to comments over 14 days on the ICRI forum. Both products were posted on the ICRI forum on 26 May 2005, and no comments were received.

2. In accordance with the ToR, and with reference to the List of Activities on Cold-water Coral Reefs, the Ad Hoc Committee has compiled information on action undertaken, both under the framework of the Ad Hoc Committee and in other fora (cf. Annex 2).

3. Furthermore, additional information on (i) the UNEP Activities on Cold-water Coral Reefs and (ii) the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> International Symposium on Deep-Sea Corals has been submitted by UNEP as separate information documents (cf. *ICRI GM Japan/Palau (1)2005/4.2/Inf.1* and *ICRI GM Japan/Palau (1)2005/4.2/Inf.2*).

### Conclusion and recommendations

4. The establishment of the ICRI ad-hoc cold-water coral committee has contributed to increased focus and activity on the sustainable management of cold-water corals and related ecosystems. New activities have been initiated according to the committee's terms of reference and the list of recommended activities.

5. It is recommended that the committee continues its co-operation and reports to the next ICRI GM. The committee is open for all interested ICRI members to participate, and the committee's members are encouraged to participate actively to relevant activities as appropriate. It is furthermore recommended that the discussions in the committee are conducted through the ICRI forum as far as possible and appropriate.

### **Terms of Reference for the Ad Hoc Committee on Cold-water Coral Reefs**

1. The ICRI Ad Hoc Committee on Cold-water Coral Reefs shall facilitate ICRI's work on cold-water coral reefs and related ecosystems<sup>1\*</sup> by :
  - a. advising ICRI on issues concerning the ecology, conservation and sustainable use of cold-water coral reefs;
  - b. identifying countries known to have cold-water coral reefs, relevant international organizations and other relevant stakeholders and working with the Secretariat to invite those that are not currently members of ICRI, to participate;
  - c. identifying opportunities to raise awareness and recognition of cold-water coral reefs and the threats that they face;
  - d. encouraging additional study and monitoring of cold-water coral reefs;
  - e. identifying opportunities for capacity-building;
  - f. identifying, as appropriate, actions for consideration by ICRI ; and
  - g. presenting reports on the committee's work to the ICRI General Meetings.

### **List of Activities on Cold-water Coral Reefs**

Below is the list of activities on cold-water coral reefs and related ecosystems that ICRI agreed to recommend as guidance for voluntary action. ICRI members are recommended to consider the list of activities and conduct the activities they find suitable in co-operation with other partners as suitable.

1. Identify opportunities to raise awareness and recognition of cold-water coral reefs and the threats that they face
  - 1.1 Include when appropriate, a chapter on cold-water coral reefs in the GCRMN report "Status of Coral Reefs of the world"
  - 1.2 Produce television documentary (ies) on cold-water coral reefs
  - 1.3 Include information on cold-water coral reef related events (meetings, symposia etc.) on the ICRI Forum list of upcoming events
  - 1.4 Share information on cold-water coral reefs at appropriate meetings
  - 1.5 Encourage inclusion of cold-water coral reef information in relevant reports, educational material etc.
  - 1.6 Encourage industry stakeholder involvement, including for information exchange
2. Encourage additional study and monitoring of cold-water coral reefs
  - 2.1 Encourage the development of a cold-water coral reef database including GIS and information on protected areas
  - 2.2 Encourage the development of a desktop study and predictive modelling for mapping the potential distribution of cold-water coral reefs
  - 2.3 Encourage development of guidance ('code of conduct') for cold-water coral reef research and monitoring
  - 2.4 Encourage development of guidelines/handbooks etc. for monitoring of cold-water coral reefs
  - 2.5 Encourage inclusion of cold-water coral reefs and related ecosystems in relevant scientific programmes and activities

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<sup>1</sup> for the purpose of this document, the term 'cold-water coral reefs' is hereafter used as short for 'cold-water coral reefs and related ecosystems'

- 2.6 Encourage identification of gaps in knowledge concerning cold-water coral reefs, the threats they face and their sustainable management.
3. Identification and invitation of countries that are known to have cold-water coral reefs but are not currently members of ICRI
  - 3.1 Develop and regularly review of list of countries with cold-water coral reefs
  - 3.2 Identify and invite cold-water coral reef countries, scientists, and other cold-water coral reef stakeholders to participate in ICRI
4. Identify opportunities for capacity-building
  - 4.1 Encourage cooperation between relevant partners by including cold-water coral reefs on ICRI's agenda and inviting participation
  - 4.2 Specific cooperation projects through aid programmes
  - 4.3 Encourage compilation of a summary of existing practice and regulations, e.g. by updating the cold-water coral reef report regularly
  - 4.4 Encourage study on existing practice and lessons learned on relevant environmental impact assessments related to cold-water coral reefs
  - 4.5 Encouraging industry stakeholder involvement

## Annex 2

### Action undertaken by ICRI members

The following contains information on the some of actions undertaken by members of the ICRI Ad-Hoc Cold-Water Coral Committee (and other ICRI members) in relation to the list of recommended activities on cold-water coral reefs and related ecosystems agreed by ICRI (cf. Annex 1).

All activities: UNEP, UK and Norway presented documents on cold-water coral reefs, including the outcome of ICRI's deliberations on this issue, to the meeting of the Working Group on Marine Protected Areas, Species and Habitats (MASH), held on 3-7 October 2005 in Bristol, UK, under the auspices of the intergovernmental OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic<sup>2</sup>. MASH reviewed these documents to determine whether, if any, further work on cold-water coral reefs should be carried out under OSPAR in the light of the recommendations made in the report *Cold-water coral reefs: Out of sight – no longer out of mind*. In the light of the discussions held at the meeting, MASH agreed on a procedure for the further development of the documents with the view to preparing one consolidated paper for presentation at the meeting of OSPAR's Biodiversity Committee<sup>3</sup> to be held on 13-17 March 2006 in Norway.

Activity 1.1: A chapter on "*The status of the Cold-water Coral Reefs of the World*" was included in the report "Status of the Coral Reefs of the World: 2004". Whether it is appropriate to do so again in the next global coral reef status report, will have to be considered by ICRI.

Activity 1.2: UNEP has initiated the production of a television documentary on cold-water coral reef; see separate UNEP information document (*ICRI GM Japan/Palau (1)2005/4.2/Inf.1.*)

Activity 1.3: Information on upcoming cold-water coral reef related events (meetings, symposia etc.) and other cold-water coral reef information is being posted on the ICRI forum as and when appropriate. Furthermore, the information submitted by UNEP to ICRI General Meetings on UN activities, processes and products related to ICRI also contain relevant information.

Activity 1.4: Norway, the UK and UNEP presented documents on cold-water coral reefs to the OSPAR MASH meeting (cf. 'All activities' above).

Activity 1.5: The CBD Secretariat commissioned a study on "*Scientific Information on Biodiversity in Marine Areas Beyond the Limits of National Jurisdiction*", which was presented to the CBD Ad Hoc Open-Ended Working Group on Protected Areas (Montecatini, Italy, 13-17 June 2005). This study, which is available on-line at <http://www.biodiv.org/doc/meeting.aspx?mtg=PAWG-01&tab=1> provides the results of a GIS-based analysis of biodiversity in marine areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction. The study contains a section on cold-water coral reefs, based primarily on data submitted by UNEP-WCMC. The results of the analysis indicate that, in areas outside national jurisdiction, cold water coral reefs tend to generally be associated with seamounts. In areas within national jurisdiction, they tend to be associated with continental slopes.

A short section on cold water coral reefs and sponge ecosystems can also be found in a document for the 11th meeting of the CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) titled "*UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/11/11: Status and*

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<sup>2</sup> OSPAR is the intergovernmental Regional Sea Convention for the North-East Atlantic, one of the few RS Conventions which is not facilitated by (or operating under) UNEP.

<sup>3</sup> MASH's superior body

*trends of, and threats to, deep seabed genetic resources beyond national jurisdiction, and identification of technical options for their conservation and sustainable use". This document is available on-line at <http://intranet.biodiv.org/doc/meeting.aspx?mtg=sbstta-11>.*

Activity 1.6: The UNEP Coral Reef Unit has established contact with the International Cable Protection Committee (ICPC), which represents approximately 90% of the world's submarine cable industry. A first ICPC/UNEP telephone conference was held on 6 July 2005. A first pilot project is under way to evaluate whether and to what extent the surveys carried out by industry can provide scientists with valuable data on the distribution of cold-water coral reefs. Depending on the outcome of the pilot project, UNEP is planning to approach the industry for survey data from cables placed in less well known sea areas, such as in the deeper water off the coasts of developing countries and SIDS.

Activity 2.1: UNEP has initiated the establishment of a global cold-water coral reef database and GIS, see separate UNEP information document (*ICRI GM Japan/Palau (1)2005/4.2/Inf.1.*).

Activity 2.3: UNEP proposed at the MASH meeting (cf. activity 1.4 above) that the OSPAR Commission should consider the development of OSPAR Guidelines for In-Situ Research and Bioprospecting on Cold-water Coral Reefs. This proposal will be included in the development of a consolidated paper to be presented to the meeting of OSPAR's Biodiversity Committee (cf. activity 1.4 above).

Activity 2.4: UNEP proposed at the MASH meeting (cf. activity 1.4 above) that the OSPAR Commission should consider the establishment of OSPAR Methods for Monitoring of Cold-water Coral Reefs. This proposal will be included in the development of a consolidated paper to be presented to the meeting of OSPAR's Biodiversity Committee (cf. activity 1.4 above).

Activity 2.5 and 2.6:

EU: See information on the EU/HERMES project below. Norway: A marine sea floor mapping and research programme called MAREANO, was started in 2005. In the years 2005-2010, the main focus will be on mapping of the sea floor (including coral reefs) in Norway's northern sea areas and related research. See also information on Nordic projects below.

Activity 3.1: The list was last updated in 2004.

Activity 3.2: Initial contacts with several government representatives concerning their participation in ICRI will have to be followed up. At the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Symposium on Deep-Sea Corals (cf. above), UNEP will inform the cold-water coral reef community about ICRI's role in the protection of cold-water coral reefs. This might lead in an increased interest of cold-water coral reef countries, scientists, and other cold-water coral reef stakeholders to participate in ICRI.

**Information on action undertaken in various other fora at the national, regional and global level or by non-ICRI members**

**EU / HERMES:**

The HERMES project (Hotspot Ecosystems Research on the Margins of European Seas) was launched in early 2005 through EU's 6th Framework Research Programme to study particular benthic ecosystems on Europe's continental margins in depths from 200 – 4,000 m. The project studies "hotspot" ecosystems: discontinuous environments that are constrained by chemical, physical,

topographic and geological factors and which contain a wealth of unknown species that thrive in insular habitats. Determining the distribution as well as the resilience of these ecosystems, including cold-water coral reefs, is fundamental to producing plans for their sustainable management.

The HERMES consortium comprises 45 partners including 9 small companies, from 15 European countries. The EC contribution amounts to 15 million euros. The partners include small and large institutions and both universities and government laboratories. HERMES will therefore be one of the largest marine science projects in Europe, and as such it is expected to have a high profile with a high impact on education of young scientists throughout Europe.

Over the last 6 months, 33 cruises have taken place in the 6 study areas of the project that stretch along European coasts from margins located off Norway to areas of the north of the Black Sea. Very promising results came out of the cruises, for example discovery of new deep sea species and sites, intensive education and outreach activities and seafloor mapping.

More information, including the September issue of the HERMES Newsletter, is available on [www.eu-hermes.net](http://www.eu-hermes.net).

**Iceland:** has reported in Nordic Council of Ministers to have protected some cold-water coral areas off their coast against bottom trawling.

### **International Symposium on Deep-Sea Corals**

Information on:

1. the upcoming 3<sup>rd</sup> International Symposium on Deep-Sea Corals (ISDSC), which will be held in Miami, Florida, USA on 28 November – 2 December 2005;
2. the Proceedings "*Cold-water Corals and Ecosystems*" (1,247 pages, 361 illustrations) of the 2nd ISDSC held on 9-12 September 2003 in Erlangen, Germany

is contained in a separate information document submitted by UNEP (*ICRI GM Japan/Palau (1)2005/4.2/Inf.2*)

### **Nordic Council of Ministers:**

Some relevant projects financed under Nordic Council of Ministers:

Norway, Sweden and Iceland co-operates on a project on the possible restoration of damaged cold-water corals, including field monitoring on a reef near the border between Norway and Sweden and aquarium studies. The project was started in 2005 and will be continued as part of the EU HERMES programme (see above). A smaller project on photographic studies of marine deep-water habitats (including cold-water coral reefs) in western Nordic area (Iceland, The Faeroes, Greenland and Norway) will be started in 2006 under the lead of the University of Iceland.

### **OSPAR:**

The OSPAR Commission included in 2003 *Lophelia pertusa* reefs in the Initial List of Threatened and/or Declining Species and Habitats. Since then, work under OSPAR on this ecosystem has been facilitated by the lead countries Norway and the UK, including the mapping of *Lophelia* reefs within the OSPAR maritime area, i.e. the North East Atlantic. The preliminary GIS distribution maps are available on <http://www.searchnbn.net/habitat/map.jsp?HABITAT=NBNSYS0000019597>.

In March 2006, the OSPAR Biodiversity Committee will review *inter alia* the work on cold-water coral reefs carried out by its subsidiary Working Group MASH (cf. activities above), and will make recommendations for further work on cold-water coral reefs to be undertaken by OSPAR, or by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) upon request of OSPAR, for consideration at the next meeting of the OSPAR Commission (26-30 June 2006, Stockholm, Sweden).