

Resolution on Coral Disease

Presented by UNEP-WCMC

*Adopted during the ICRI General Meeting (GM)
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Noting with concern the increased frequency and severity of coral diseases across the globe during the last three decades, and the resultant impacts on coral cover and species diversity and reef ecosystem structure and function;

Noting further the effects of pervasive threats to coral reef ecosystems, including, *inter alia*, land based pollution, overfishing, global climate change, and caged fish culture in facilitating infectious disease;

The General Meeting of the International Coral Reef Initiative:

Recognizes the significant threat posed by disease to the health and productivity of coral reefs worldwide and the potential impacts for the 100s of millions of people that rely on reefs for subsistence and livelihoods;

Recognizes the need to better understand the incidence, causal agents, distribution, impact and global patterns of diseases for informed management and research of this emerging issue, as urged by the International Coral Reef Scientific Community 11th ICRS, 2008;

Recognizes the role of research programmes such as the Coral Disease Working Group of the World Bank/Global Environment Facility Coral Reef Targeted Research program in addressing knowledge gaps and linking scientific knowledge with management strategies;

Recognizes the need to collate and exchange information on the global prevalence of coral diseases and support coral reef science, management and decision making communities to collate, interpret and liberate their coral disease data;

Recognizes the established collaboration of NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and UNEP-WCMC since 2000 to compile and organise published data on the occurrence of coral disease through the Global Coral Disease Database (GCDD) and the potential of this facility in supporting managers, scientists and other stakeholders (Annex 1).

Calls on its members to:

1/ Support research to improve the understanding of coral disease prevalence, the vectors by which they are transmitted and impact on coral reefs worldwide, based on global best practices and guidance;

2/ Support actions to improve the exchange of coral disease monitoring data and information with the Global Coral Disease Database, especially from under represented

areas, to facilitate comprehensive analysis of global trends and patterns, and to inform responsive management;

3/ Establish and participate in an *ad hoc* ICRI Committee to guide and inform collaborative action among members on issues relating to marine disease relevant to coral reef ecosystems.

Annex 1

Information on the Global Coral Disease Database

Diseases affecting coral reef organisms are now considered to be a major threat to coral reef health and productivity worldwide. Information on the causal agents of disease and their origins, distribution, and abundance are critical in predicting disease impacts on reef communities, managing or preventing disease outbreaks, and in understanding how current reef management practices and human impacts affect the spread and severity of diseases.

NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and UNEP-WCMC have worked in partnership since 2000 to compile and organise published data on the occurrence of coral disease for the benefit of managers, scientists and other stakeholders. The **Global Coral Disease Database (GCDD)** is the only compilation on the worldwide occurrence of coral diseases, holding over 7000 referenced data entry points with records dating back to 1970. Significant effort has been focused in recent years to standardise and cross check the data holdings, and further work is underway to address the challenges of quality, accessibility, and completeness of the data, to ensure that this unique GIS tool meets its full potential as a critical global facility for the liberation of coral reef disease information.

Through generous support from NOAA, UNEP-WCMC is leading activities in 2009 to advance the visibility and functionality of the GCDD to ensure its increased relevance and value for users, and to build an active user base. A comprehensive survey of current and potential users of the GCDD has been conducted, through both face to face consultations, and an online survey providing insight into the priority needs of target user groups. Global experts, including representatives of the GEF Coral Reef Targeted Research Working Group on Coral Disease and data collection programmes are also providing guidance and direction to the redevelopment process to facilitate appropriate analytical tools and complementarity with coral disease data collection programmes.

The GCDD can play a significant role in supporting the coral reef science, management and decision making communities to collate, store and liberate their coral disease data. Stakeholders from a diverse range of sectors have demonstrated interest in the redevelopment of the GCDD and shown willingness to contribute and exchange data, suggesting that an active user base could be supported following successful redevelopment.

The survey highlighted a critical need to raise awareness of the GCDD among the coral reef community, to encourage data sharing from all regions (especially Indo/Pacific) in order to make the GCDD a truly global resource and to improve the potential of analyses and outputs for all users.

A full report of the user needs survey and planned database upgrade is available from coral.disease@unep-wcmc.org