

Renewed Call to Action

'Coral reefs are in serious decline globally, especially those near shallow shelves and dense populations.'

ICRI Call To Action, June 2, 1995

The contents and message of this document were endorsed by over 300 delegates from 49 nations at the International Tropical Marine Ecosystems Management Symposium in November 1998. This document represents a renewed global call for action on the continuing decline in the health of the world's coral reefs.

The Global Problem Continues

Coral reefs and associated seagrass and mangrove ecosystems are amongst the most biologically productive and diverse on Earth. In addition to the economic benefits of coral reefs, these ecosystems sustain the social fabric and cultural values of many coastal communities around the world. The threats to coral reefs and related ecosystems place in jeopardy the sustainable development of many communities, global biodiversity and the health of the oceans. Global concern for the coastal and marine environment is reflected in Agenda 21 of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and more recent initiatives, including the Jakarta Mandate of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA).

The deteriorating condition of coral reefs around the world continues to be a source of grave concern. Improved monitoring data and detailed predictive studies presented at the International Tropical Marine Ecosystems Management Symposium indicate that, in the four years since the publication of the first International Coral Reef Initiative Call to Action, the state of coral reefs and associated marine ecosystems has worsened significantly.

Human activities threaten the majority of coral reefs in all regions of the world. The 1998 'Reefs at Risk' study found that '58% of the world's reefs are potentially threatened by human activity – ranging from coastal development and destructive, over-fishing practices to over-exploitation of resources, marine pollution and run-off from inland deforestation and farming'. Reef Check surveys conducted in 1997 and 1998 found that most reefs are severely over-fished with most high-value organisms missing.

In addition, the recent impacts of 'natural' events on coral reef ecosystems, such as widespread coral bleaching (documented through the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network), catastrophic storms, and crown-of-thorns starfish, provide an alarming overlay to the increasing human impacts. Over the last 14 months to November 1998, 40–50% of the world's reefs have been hit by severe to catastrophic bleaching. Infestations of crown-of thorns starfish have been reported in 26 countries in 1996–1998.

The International Coral Reef Initiative

The International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) is a partnership among nations and organisations seeking to implement Chapter 17 of Agenda 21, and other international Conventions and agreements for the benefit of coral reefs and related ecosystems. The Initiative was established in order to stop and reverse the global degradation of coral reefs and related ecosystems. The ICRI partnership and approach thus far has been to mobilise governments and a wide range of other stakeholders in an effort to improve management practices, increase capacity and political support, and share information on the health of these ecosystems.

The first International Coral Reef Initiative Workshop was held in the Philippines in June 1995. Its aim was to enable countries, donors, and development and funding agencies to work with coral reef managers, private sector representatives, non-governmental organisations and scientists to develop a Call to Action and a Framework for Action for achieving sustainable management of coral reefs and related ecosystems.

The Call to Action highlighted the significance of coral reef ecosystems to sustainable development. 'Coral reef ecosystems offer benefits to humankind beyond those realised for food production, tourism, recreation, aesthetics, and shoreline protection. Capable of sustaining innumerable coastal communities worldwide, these ecosystems also have great economic, social, and cultural importance to nations, and to entire regions. As competition among multiple uses of reef resources increases, so too will their significance to the human populations that depend on them.' Continuing degradation of coral reefs and related ecosystems and their resources may increase the conflict amongst users and threaten environmental and food security. Coral reefs are the life support system for the existence of small island developing states and many coastal communities of developing tropical countries.

The purpose of the Call to Action was, and remains, to mobilise governments and the wide range of other stakeholders whose coordinated vigorous and effective actions are required to address the threats to reefs. The Framework for Action calls for action in four major areas:

- **integrated management;**
- **capacity building;**
- **research and monitoring; and**
- **review.**

The Dumaguete City workshop (Philippines, May–June 1995) set in place a strategy for subsequent action under ICRI, including endorsement of the need for periodic review of the extent and success of ICRI implementation as an essential element of the ICRI strategy.

ICRI Achievements 1995–1998

Since the first ICRI Workshop significant progress has been made in implementing the elements of the ICRI Call to Action and Framework for Action. This resulted from the action of many involved stakeholders and through many large and small efforts from the local to the global level.

Governments of ICRI partners and non-government organisations (NGOs) raised the profile of coral reefs in the major international fora. The Initiative was endorsed by the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) – which emphasised the importance of the Regional Seas Program to ICRI, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, and the scientific community at the Eighth International Coral Reef Symposium in Panama. Agreement was reached on The Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities which bears directly on reducing a major source of threat to reefs.

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Regional action plans have been developed in all regions of the world: Tropical Americas; the Pacific; the East Asian Seas; South Asia; Eastern Africa and the Western Indian Ocean; and the Middle East. Regional, and also national and local coral reef initiatives were created based on the elements of the Framework for Action and ICRI regional strategies. The regional reports presented at the meeting and contained in the workshop report evaluated the state of implementation of numerous coral reef activities in each region. However, the lack of national level commitments to coral reef programs in some countries hindered implementation of global and regional achievements. While UNEP and several of its Regional Seas Programmes have been productive ICRI partners, the ongoing role of UNEP and the function of regional coordination needs strengthening and identified resources.

Growing partnerships with the scientific and NGO communities were particularly effective in advancing ICRI goals. Borne of their strong commitment, the 1997 International Year of the Reef, followed by the 1998 International Year of the Ocean, broadened awareness and commitment around the world and created a new sense of urgency for conservation and sustainable use of coral reef ecosystems. The Pacific Year of the Reef and the launch of the Reef Check voluntary monitoring network are just two of the many innovative activities of the International Year of the Reef. Each continues to generate action and the information and awareness needed to support that action.

The international science community continues its leading role in the development of new initiatives to better assess the state of coral reef ecosystems and to engage the public in these efforts. Reef Check has involved recreational divers in over 40 countries to obtain a scientifically valid picture of the impacts of humans on reefs, while also raising public awareness. The ICRI Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN) was established under the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and UNEP, and made significant progress in implementing coral reef monitoring around the Indian Ocean and South Asia, and in parts of Southeast Asia, the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean where the Caribbean Coastal Marine Productivity network is already monitoring reefs in 18 countries. The GCRMN and Reef Check have now combined forces to form a comprehensive monitoring program. The lack of sustainable funding sources continues to jeopardise the viability of these efforts.

The Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, Reef Check, ReefBase, the Representative Assessment of Management Parameters and other efforts have increased our understanding of the state of reefs. This meeting has reviewed the results of monitoring efforts in all regions of the world produced by Reef Check and the GCRMN and heard reports on significant efforts to use rapid assessment techniques to survey coral reef ecosystems.

It is also clear that many local communities around the world continued or initiated efforts to find sustainable means to use the marine resources upon which they depend. Many more require the education, capacity building, training and finances necessary to begin to realise this possibility.

Since 1995 bilateral and international development resources have continued to be directed at projects related to coastal management, sustainable coastal development, biodiversity conservation and other relevant activities. These activities have not been systematically enumerated but it is clear that some funding priorities have been shaped by ICRI goals. Furthermore the World Bank has shown its strong commitment to building the ICRI partnership by hosting a major coral reef symposium and other efforts. A study conducted by the World Bank in Indonesia has increased our understanding of the economic value of reefs to local, regional and national economies.

We must continue and strengthen this progress in the face of clear evidence of increasing threats to coral reefs and related ecosystems. Fortunately, evidence suggests that reefs have a high capacity for recovery; if pressures are reduced there is hope that the health of many reefs will rebound.

The International Tropical Marine Ecosystems Management Symposium – Building the Foundation of New ICRI Action

The International Tropical Marine Ecosystems Management Symposium (ITMEMS) was held in Australia in November 1998. The Symposium provided a forum for the review and evaluation of ICRI implementation. The review was conducted within a framework of the four ICRI cornerstones: integrated management, capacity building, research and monitoring, and review. The Symposium also provided an opportunity to identify shortcomings in the global ICRI strategy and for delegates to give guidance to the Secretariat and ICRI partners on the future direction of the Initiative.

ITMEMS 1998 Proceedings

Participants at ITMEMS reaffirmed the importance of reefs to their cultures, communities and economies, and the strong relationship between healthy reefs and the sustainable livelihoods of many sectors of society.

Initially, participants used case study examples from around the world to address a series of issues related to the management of tropical marine ecosystems.

- Coastal Development
- Pollution Control
- Fisheries and Protected Areas
- Protected Areas and the Private Sector
- Tourism and Protected Areas
- Destructive Fishing Practices and Collecting Methods
- Coral Reef Assessment and Monitoring

They analysed both the successes and failures of these case studies to identify lessons learned for each of the above issues.

The detailed case studies and lessons learned are contained in the proceedings of ITMEMS.

As a second step, participants focused on four cross-cutting needs that underlie all management efforts in an effort to expand the scope of the Framework for Action. These important needs were reiterated in all regional strategies developed through ICRI.

- Successful integrated management requires coordination and linkages to other programs, initiatives and legal instruments.
- Stakeholder partnerships and community participation are essential elements for effective management and require the development of culturally sensitive processes of empowerment.
- Public awareness and education, including capacity building, are required to highlight the problem and to support effective management.
- Data and information, in accessible and understandable forms, and from a wide range of sources, are fundamental to successful management.

As a major outcome of ITMEMS participants examined these needs, identified lessons learned and gaps in our understanding, and developed priority actions which are set out in the Working Group Reports.

Origin of International Tropical Marine Ecosystems Management Symposium Delegates

American Samoa	Marshall Islands
Australia	Mauritius
Bangladesh	Mexico
Barbados	Mozambique
Brazil	Netherlands
Cambodia	New Caledonia
China	New Zealand
Colombia	Palau
Cook Islands	Papua New Guinea
Cuba	Philippines
Dutch Antilles	Poland
Egypt	Puerto Rico
Fiji	Samoa
France	Seychelles
French Polynesia	Singapore
Germany	Solomon Islands
India	Sri Lanka
Indonesia	Sweden
Jamaica	Switzerland
Japan	Tanzania
Kenya	Thailand
Kiribati	United Kingdom
Madagascar	United States of America
Malaysia	Vietnam
Maldives	Yemen

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International Tropical Marine Ecosystems Management Symposium Delegates

GOVERNMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID)	Environment Australia
Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS)	Fisheries Department of Malaysia
Caribbean Coastal Area Management Foundation	Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA)
Caribbean Fishery Management Council	Indonesian Directorate General of Tourism
Convention on Biological Diversity	International Center for Living Aquatic Resource Management (ICLARM)
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Vietnam	Kenya Wildlife Service
Department of Agriculture, Forests, Fisheries and Meteorology, Western Samoa	Marine Parks Centre of Japan
Department of Environment, Fiji	Mexico Ministry of Environment
Department of Environment and Conservation, Papua New Guinea	Ministere De L'Amenagement, France
Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Philippines	Ministry of Environment, Cambodia
Department of Ocean Development, India	Ministry of Environment and Forest, Bangladesh
Environment and Conservation Division, Solomon Islands	Ministry of Fisheries and Agriculture, Maldives
Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency	National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency, Sri Lanka
Environment Agency of Japan	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
	New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Office of Environmental Policy and Planning, Thailand
Regional Environment Programme of the Indian Ocean Commission
Republic of the Marshall Islands Environmental Protection Authority
Royal Forest Department, Thailand
Service De L'Environnement, New Caledonia
Seychelles Fishing Authority
South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP)
South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)

State Ministry of the Environment, Indonesia
United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
United States Department of Land and Natural Resources
United States Department of the Interior
United States Department of State
The World Bank

NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS

Association Parc Marin De La Reunion
The Australian Conservation Foundation
Australian Marine Conservation Society
Caribbean Action for Sustainable Tourism
Conservation International
Coral Cay Conservation Limited, United Kingdom
The Coral Reef Alliance (CORAL)
The Cousteau Society
Fundacao Natureza em Perigo, Mozambique
Indonesian Biodiversity Foundation Kehati
International Marinelife Alliance
Koutu-Nui of the Cook Islands

Marine and Coastal Community Network, Australia
The Nature Conservancy
North Queensland Conservation Council
O Le Siosiomaga Society Inc., Samoa
Palau Conservation Society
Queensland Conservation Council
World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC)
World Conservation Union (IUCN)
World Resources Institute (WRI)
Worldwide Fund For Nature (WWF)