

Final Decisions
U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting
November 5-7, 2005
Republic of Palau

The following is a summary of decisions by the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force at its meeting November 5-7, 2005 in the Republic of Palau.

Full text of each decision is listed after the summary.

A summary of the meeting and meeting materials (agendas, presentations etc) will be posted on the Task Force web site (www.coralreef.gov). For information please contact Beth Dieveney (beth.dieveney@noaa.gov) or Roger Griffis (roger.b.griffis@noaa.gov; 301-713-2989x115).

Summary of Decisions
U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting
November 5-7, 2005 (Palau)

1. Continue Implementation of 3 year Local Action Strategies (LAS)

The Task Force affirmed support for continued implementation of the 3 year Local Action Strategies to address priority threats to coral reefs, and tasked the Steering Committee with producing a progress report on LAS implementation by the next Task Force meeting.

2. Call For Action to Respond to Caribbean/Atlantic Bleaching Event

The Task Force expressed serious concern about the scope, scale and impacts of the recent large scale coral bleaching event in the Caribbean/Atlantic region, and called for mobilizing efforts across the region (in collaboration with the International Coral Reef Initiative) to monitor and assess short and long term impacts to learn from the event.

3. Call for Workshop on Tools for Responding to Events Causing Major Injury to Coral Reefs

In response to panel on this topic at the Palau Task Force meeting, the Task Force charged the Steering Committee with developing a workshop in 2006 on tools and needs for responding to major injury events in coral reef areas.

4. Call for Building Enforcement Capacity

The Task Force called on its members to increase efforts to build enforcement capacity, and charged the Steering Committee to continue training and other efforts including the development of an “enforcement toolbox” in cooperation with the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) to help coral reef management communities build enforcement capacity.

5. Respond to Recommendations from Sustainable Financing Workshop

In response to workshop on sustainable financing for coral reef conservation at the Palau Task Force meeting cosponsored with the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Task Force charged the Steering Committee with

reviewing workshop recommendations and developing options for Task Force action including a “sustainable financing toolbox”.

6. Conduct Workshop on Federal Grants and Assistance Opportunities for coral reef conservation efforts in the Pacific

Following report on successful federal grants workshop for the U.S. Caribbean in 2005, the Task Force charged the Steering Committee with holding a workshop in the Pacific in 2006 to provide information on federal grants and other opportunities to support conservation of coral reef ecosystems.

7. Call for Increased Use of Coral Reef Protected Areas

Following panel presentations on use of protected areas and protected area networks for coral reef conservation, the Task Force affirmed the goals and objectives for coral reef protected areas in the National Action Plan and Strategy, and tasked the Steering Committee with completing the draft inventory of existing U.S. coral reef protected areas by the next Task Force meeting.

8. Proposal on 2007 Year of the Reef

The Task Force charged the Education and Outreach Working Group with developing options and recommendations (in collaboration with the International Coral Reef Initiative) on a possible 2007 Year of the Reef.

9. Approval of 2006 Task Force meeting schedule

The Task Force approved meeting dates for 2006 and tasked the Steering Committee with planning 2006 Task Force meetings for first week of May (Washington DC), and late October (USVI).

10. Approval of report from Steering Committee on past resolutions

The Task Force accepted and approved the report and recommendations from the Steering Committee concerning past resolutions.

1. Continue Implementation of 3-year Local Action Strategies

Summary: The Task Force affirmed support for continued implementation of the 3 year Local Action Strategies to address priority threats to coral reefs, and tasked the Steering Committee with producing a progress report on LAS implementation by the next Task Force meeting.

Decision Statement: The CRTF supports continued implementation of Local Action Strategies and tasks the Steering Committee with coordinating a progress report on LAS implementation efforts to be provided to the CRTF prior to the 2006 meeting for presentation and discussion by the CRTF. This report may include an update on progress towards developing and tracking a set of LAS performance metrics, a description of the funds (or other resources) which have been dedicated to support project implementation to date and a presentation of financial and capacity needs and recommendations towards the successful implementation of all LAS projects. CRTF members will ensure adequate support and participation in this effort from member organizations.

2. Call For Action to Respond to Caribbean/Atlantic Bleaching Event

Summary: The Task Force expressed serious concern about the scope, scale and impacts of the recent large scale coral bleaching event in the Caribbean/Atlantic region, and called for mobilizing efforts across the region (in collaboration with the International Coral Reef Initiative) to monitor and assess short and long term impacts to learn from the event.

Statement: At this time, scientists and managers throughout the wider Caribbean region have observed massive, regional-scale bleaching of coral reefs. This is related to extreme ocean temperatures around eastern Caribbean coral reefs, shown by satellite data to be at record levels of thermal stress (10-15 degree heating weeks over much of the region). As seen in previous massive bleaching events, such as the Indo-Pacific bleaching of 1997-98, such high temperature stress is known to promote the bleaching, and often death, of reef corals.

Members of the US Coral Reef Task Force meeting in Palau on 5-7 November 2005 expressed great concern over the magnitude of the bleaching event now taking place in the Caribbean. We call for immediate action to:

1. Establish an ad hoc interagency group to coordinate national and CRTF partner efforts on this event (DOI, NOAA volunteer to lead group);
2. Assist with mobilization of monitoring efforts to assess the scale and impact of the bleaching event including:
 - a. Document the extent of bleaching, mortality, and recovery including ecological and socioeconomic impacts as part of national and CRTF member monitoring efforts;
 - b. Target coral reefs for protection, especially those in resilient

- areas (those that demonstrate high survival and/or recovery), through additions of protected area sites to existing networks of marine protected areas and other management measures including ensuring enforcement in these areas;
- c. Play a leadership role in developing a comprehensive response to this bleaching event in the wider Caribbean region;
 - d. Improve US capabilities to forecast thermal stress and its ecosystem impacts in order to enhance management and conservation of coral reef ecosystems;
 - e. Take steps to better understand and address the underlying causes of massive bleaching events; and
 - f. By December 1, 2005, each member identify to the Steering Committee technical, financial, or additional resources they can provide to assist in the phase I documentation and assessment of this event.
 - g. Ad hoc group to report back to the CRTF at 2006 CRTF meetings on actions, lessons learned.

3. Call for Workshop on Tools for Responding to Events Causing Major Injury to Coral Reefs

Summary: In response to panel on this topic at the Palau Task Force meeting, the Task Force charged the Steering Committee with developing a workshop in 2006 on tools and needs for responding to major injury events in coral reef areas.

Responsible Party: CRTF Steering Committee Mitigation Working Group (WG)

Purpose/Background: Given the recent number of high visibility, major events injuring coral reef ecosystems, purpose of this statement is to highlight the CRTF support for increasing capacity to more effectively prevent and respond to these events.

Decision Statement: The Task Force reaffirms the charge to the Mitigation Working Groups; it encourages the Western Atlantic WG to be active; and supports efforts of members to better understand and apply mitigation tools to address coral reef ecosystem functions and services. CRTF calls on interested members of the Steering Committee to organize and conduct a workshop in 2006 to increase capacity through training and sharing of tools and lessons learned to help prevent, respond to, assess and mitigate major injury events in coral reef ecosystems.

4. Call for Building Enforcement Capacity

Summary: The Task Force called on its members to increase efforts to build enforcement capacity, and charged the Steering Committee to continue training and other efforts including the development of an “enforcement toolbox” in cooperation with the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) to help coral reef management communities build enforcement capacity.

Responsible Party: CRTF Steering Committee

Purpose: Encourage ongoing CRTF capacity building efforts in the area of environmental and marine resources enforcement and support and join in international efforts proposed by the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI).

Background Statement:

- The members of the CRTF have recognized that a key component of any successful coral reef protection program is strong enforcement. Enforcement is an important tool in effective management that complements community involvement and stewardship building.
- To increase the capacity of Task Force member jurisdictions to build effective enforcement programs an interagency group of Federal partners – including the Department of Justice, NOAA, Fish and Wildlife Service, EPA and the U.S. Coast Guard – have to date conducted enforcement training workshops in four jurisdictions.
- The goals of these workshops have been to increase understanding of Federal legal tools to address environmental and marine resource problems, increase cooperation and coordination among Federal and local jurisdictions, and present instruction on techniques and methods for conducting inspection and preparing cases.
- In its meeting this week here in Palau, the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) also identified the importance of strong enforcement and the need for increased capacity building internationally in the areas of marine and natural resource enforcement.
- To address this need, ICRI has proposed the establishment of an *Ad Hoc* committee to focus on coral reef ecosystem enforcement and natural resource investigations, including both statutory and traditional law enforcement practices.
- ICRI’s proposed focus is broad-based, looking at issues ranging from the need for public education, the development of effective legislation, training on crime scene investigation, to hands-on training for prosecutors and judges.
- ICRI proposes the development of training materials that could be used by a global audience. Several Federal agency members of the Task Force are active in ICRI and currently working with ICRI on the establishment of the *Ad Hoc* committee on enforcement.
- In recent years the international coral community has worked collaboratively to develop a series of “toolkits” or guidebooks to assist resource managers in monitoring, establishing and measuring effectiveness of MPAs, and the like, but no such tool kit exists to assist in enforcement.

Decision Statement: The Task Force supports and recommends the continuation of ongoing efforts and development of new efforts by Task Force member agencies to conduct workshops and related activities to build capacity and effectiveness in the area of environmental, marine and natural resource enforcement.

Specifically, the Steering Committee is directed to work on development of written training guidance and other tools that can be used by all jurisdictions. The Steering Committee is also directed to investigate the feasibility of developing judicial training programs and report on these efforts to the CRTF at future meetings

The Task Force supports the efforts of the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) to increase enforcement capacity internationally to protect coral reefs and related marine resources. It requests that those agencies currently involved in ICRI's efforts share developments by the *Ad Hoc* committee with the Steering Committee on a periodic basis so that the Task Force may collaborate in ICRI's efforts. It also encourages other Task Force member agencies and jurisdictions to join the ICRI *Ad Hoc* committee.

5. Respond to Recommendations from Sustainable Financing Workshop

Summary: In response to workshop on sustainable financing for coral reef conservation at the Palau Task Force meeting cosponsored with the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Task Force charged the Steering Committee with reviewing workshop recommendations and developing options for Task Force action including a "sustainable financing toolbox".

Decision Statement: Task Force charges the Steering Committee with reviewing the recommendations from the sustainable financing workshop and developing options and recommendations on how to proceed including workplan for development of a "sustainable financing toolkit".

6. Conduct Workshop on Federal Grants and Assistance Opportunities for coral reef conservation efforts in the Pacific

Summary: Following report on successful federal grants workshop for the U.S. Caribbean in 2005, the Task Force charged the Steering Committee with holding a workshop in the Pacific in 2006 to provide information on federal grants and other opportunities to support conservation of coral reef ecosystems.

Decision Statement: The Task Force commended efforts by member organizations to implement very successful workshops on federal grants opportunities related to coral reef activities in the Caribbean, and charged the Steering Committee with holding a workshop in the Pacific in 2006 to provide information on federal grants and other opportunities to support conservation of coral reef ecosystems. Department of the Interior volunteered to lead interagency team to design and implement the Pacific workshop. All members are encouraged to participate in the planning and implementation of this workshop.

7. Call for Increased Use of Coral Reef Protected Areas

Summary: Following panel presentations on use of protected areas and protected area networks for coral reef conservation, the Task Force affirmed the goals and objectives for coral reef protected areas in the National Action Plan and Strategy, and tasked the Steering Committee with completing the draft inventory of existing U.S. coral reef protected areas by the next Task Force meeting.

Decision Statement: The Task Force reaffirms the goals and objectives for building effective coral reef protected areas and protected area networks in coral reef ecosystems adopted by the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (CRTF) as part of the U.S. National Action Plan for Coral Reef Conservation and the U.S. National Coral Reef Action Strategy. The CRTF encourages local, state/territory, national and international entities to assist in fulfilling these goals.

To help achieve these goals/objectives, the CRTF calls on member agencies to

1. Support and help build collaborative partnerships to strengthen the effectiveness of existing sites and further the development and implementation of coral reef protected area networks. Specifically, CRTF member agencies can assist by providing technical assistance to help build local capacity and support for the design, designation and management of sites.
2. Coordinate and integrate their protected area efforts as appropriate with the ongoing initiative to develop the National System of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), as called for by Presidential Executive Order 13158 on MPAs.
3. Complete the draft inventory and assessment of U.S. coral reef protected areas prior to the next CRTF meeting.

8. Proposal on 2007 Year of the Reef

Summary: The Task Force charged the Education and Outreach Working Group with developing options and recommendations (in collaboration with the International Coral Reef Initiative) on a possible 2007 Year of the Reef.

Decision Statement: The Task Force charges the Education and Outreach Working Group and International Working Group with working with the International Coral Reef Initiative to assess options and provide recommendations to the Task Force by the next meeting concerning a possible Year of the Reef in 2007.

9. Approval of 2006 Task Force meeting schedule

Summary: The Task Force approved meeting dates for 2006 and tasked the Steering Committee with planning 2006 Task Force meetings for first week of May (Washington DC), and late October (USVI).

Decision Statement: Proposed 2006 dates/locations for US Coral Reef Task Force meetings are

1st week of May (1-6), 2006 (Washington DC)

Late October, 2006 (U.S. Virgin Islands)

The Steering Committee is charged with assessing other factors and recommending final dates and agenda (including consideration of dates for ITMEMS and other potential conflicts).

10. Approval of report from Steering Committee on past resolutions

Summary: The Task Force accepted and approved the report and recommendations from the Steering Committee concerning past resolutions.

Decision Statement: The Task Force accepts and approves the report and recommendations from the Steering Committee on past resolutions of the Task Force. The Steering Committee is tasked with distributing copy of the final report to the Task Force.