

Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans
Committee on Natural Resources
United States House of Representatives
September 16, 2008

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Tiffany & Co.

Since our company's founding in 1837, Tiffany has grown and prospered based upon one simple idea – the belief that “good design is good business.” Over the past 10 years, we have come to recognize that there is a vitally important 21st corollary, and that an unequivocal commitment to sustainability and protecting the natural world is also, undeniably, good business. There is today an enormous and fast growing concern among consumers about the impact their consumption decisions have upon the environment. And just as good design has been at the heart of the consumer appeal of Tiffany jewelry, so too does our commitment to sustainability today reflect the evolving desires of those very same consumers.

I am here today speaking of course as a representative of Tiffany & Co. But more fundamentally, I am here speaking for our customers: customers who care deeply about the preservation of the natural world; customers who instinctively recognize that nature has been Tiffany's greatest designer and understand the imperative to protect the source of that inspiration; customers who trust us to make certain that in creating Tiffany jewelry we do everything possible to leave behind a world every bit as beautiful and complete as the one we inherited.

So I testify here today not as an executive who cares about the environment, but rather as an executive who is simply responding to our customers' expectations. We have no doubt that consumers want jewelry that is sourced responsibly. Jewelry that contains precious metals that are mined responsibly; from mines that do not threaten wilderness or recreational values. Diamonds that do not fuel armed conflict. Rubies that do not support governments that abuse human rights. And jewelry that is inspired by the ocean's beauty, not jewelry that destroys the very beauty it seeks to celebrate.

For the past eight years, the Tiffany Foundation has supported research focused on coral reef systems. And since 2003, Tiffany & Co. has helped protect coral in the most simple and direct way we could, by prohibiting its sale in our stores. To be frank, back then we acted more on faith than on fact, choosing to err on the side of caution rather than commerce when the survival of something as precious as coral was at stake. And today, while we remain committed, most retail jewelers, and certainly most consumers, are still sadly unaware of the global destruction of coral, and their complicity in that destruction.

Congress can, as today's hearing demonstrates, play a vital role in drawing attention to the unsustainable trade in coral. We are confident that when given the opportunity to make a responsible choice, the majority of consumers will do precisely that. But government must do much more to better define the threats to our marine ecosystems, and coral in particular, and in so doing inform two key decision making constituencies that can make an immediate impact: consumers and retailers.

Before Tiffany stopped the sale of coral, I can say with near certainty that few if any of our customers understood the ramifications of their purchase decisions. However, I can also say with near certainty that once aware, few if any customers would knowingly contribute to the problem.

Similarly, the majority of retailers remain unaware of the destructive role they play by continuing to sell coral. Many of these retailers naïvely believe that somewhere, out there, are farms where coral is grown and harvested. Or that it can be simply and benignly gathered in the wild. Here research that drives understanding and informed decision making is critical. Eradicating ignorance and skepticism – both genuine and willful – is essential if retailers are to be persuaded to take a stand.

More specifically, we are hopeful that Red Coral (*Corallium*), the most widely traded and valuable species, will be listed under CITES Appendix II. We urge adoption of the Coral Reef Conservation Amendments Act to provide for a study of the full impact of the trade in coral products – economic, social and environmental – as well as improved monitoring and enforcement. More information is desperately needed, and with that information the effort to inform retailers and consumers about this destructive trade can be greatly strengthened. We also urge funding of the Deep Sea Coral Research and Technology Program, and the effort to locate coral populations and develop approaches to their conservation.

In conclusion, I hope the light this hearing can shed on the many threats to coral will cause both consumers to demand, and retailers to wholeheartedly support, a stop to this trade. As a jeweler, it strikes me that perhaps the greatest tragedy here is the insignificance of coral for the jewelry industry as a whole. And unlike gemstones, pearls, or precious metals, which are vitally important to the industry but can be produced responsibly, there is no such benign possibility for coral jewelry. To destroy our vital coral resources for something as insignificant as coral jewelry defies both scientific and economic logic, and simple common sense. Some things are indeed “too precious to wear.”