

Public Comment for the US Coral Reef Task Force Meeting March 1, 2007

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Good morning and thank-you for the opportunity to provide public comment during the 17<sup>th</sup> **U.S. Coral Reef Task Force** Meeting.

Climate change is fast becoming the greatest challenge to long-term coral reef conservation. Its many manifestations, including increasing water temperatures, increasing storm events or intensity, and the linkage with disease, are directly threatening our coral reef resources. In 2006, two species of coral, *Acropora palmata* and *A. cervicornis*, were both listed as threatened for their entire Caribbean range, due in large part to the three factors listed above.

Despite this pressing threat, none of the US Coral Reef Task Force required local action plans include management planning for how to respond to climate change, and only two even recognize climate change as a threat (American Samoa and Guam). The US Coral Reef Task Force and affiliated agencies need to start taking climate change adaptation planning quite seriously. We have fallen well behind the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) despite that fact that we have had dramatic bleaching in US reefs for over two decades. Local managers need guidance and direction from above to allocate limited resources toward addressing climate change and adopting adaptation strategies. If this was a requirement for US Coral Reef Task Force local action plans there would be the motivation and the mandate to move this forward. Our coral reefs are running out of time and our managers will run out of options if they do not start this process soon.

A parallel way to make this happen is to include climate change adaptation planning and action in upcoming federal legislation or legislation renewals, e.g. Sea Grant legislation and Coral Reef Act renewal, and NOAA 'Organic act' creation. The US Coral Reef Task Force could help by formally supporting such requests. WWF has been leading adaptation thinking in the conservation community. Additionally we have field projects around the world, including Florida, American Samoa, Fiji, Tanzania, Madagascar, Mesoamerican Reef, and the Sulu-Sulawesi Seas, working to develop reef conservation approaches in response to climate change. Given our experience to date, we would be happy to help facilitate the process of broadening the US Coral Reef Task Force's engagement on this issue.

Thank you for your consideration.