

*8<sup>th</sup> Coral Reef Task Force Meeting*  
*October 2-3, 2002*  
*San Juan, Puerto Rico*

## **Resolution 8-1: Improving Procedures of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force**

### **I. Background:**

At its December 2001 meeting, the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force identified a need to revise some of its procedures in order to move from planning to implementation of the National Action Plan to Conserve Coral Reefs (NAP). Based on recommendations from the All Islands Committee, constituent input, assessment of similar initiatives, expert consultation, and its experience over the past two years, the Task Force, through its Steering Committee, has identified the need to:

- 1) Improve NAP implementation by identifying threats-based priorities and key actions developed from the 13 goal areas;
- 2) Increase coordination to implement the NAP among government agencies, and across local, regional, and national levels;
- 3) Develop a system to track progress toward achievement of the NAP's goals and objectives; and
- 4) Increase human resources supporting the Task Force, All Islands Committee, State, Territory, and Commonwealth coral reef conservation efforts to implement the proposed process.

Part II outlines procedural changes needed to improve implementation of the NAP. Part III provides an overview of how these revisions integrate into the existing Task Force process and structure. Table 1 provides a quick summary of needs, procedural revisions, and resource requirements. Representatives to the Task Force from the Freely Associated States (Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands) are invited to participate in the procedures outlined below.

### **II. Procedural Revisions:**

1. **Improve Prioritization of Needs.** The Steering Committee found that there is not currently a clear prioritization of needs among the 13 goal areas outlined in the National Action Plan. Recognizing that resource constraints may preclude implementing all 13 areas concurrently, there is an urgent need to proceed strategically by focusing on the most urgent and pressing threats to coral reefs. Thus, it is recommended that the Task Force should identify and endorse 5 threats-based Focus Areas for priority implementation.

The identification of 5 areas will provide better focus for implementation, while allowing locally appropriate management actions to be developed at the jurisdictional (state, territory, and commonwealth governments) and regional levels. This prioritization does not constrain the need for Task Force members to support actions to address other significant threats. Focus Area selection should consider the severity and scale of key threats to reefs as well as the extent to which collaborative efforts can make tangible progress toward identified goals (see procedure #2 regarding 3-year action strategies).

The Steering Committee further found that some of the 13 goal areas outlined in the National Action Plan do not have specific targets clarifying how the goal should be achieved. Thus, it is recommended that, if they do not already exist within the National Action Plan, specific targets, which include timelines and performance indicators, should be established for the Focus Areas endorsed by the Task Force and other areas as appropriate.

In developing the National Action Strategy for Coral Reef Conservation and through more recent assessments by the All Islands Committee, the Steering Committee finds that the preliminary information needed to identify Focus Areas is currently available. Analysis of this information suggests the following areas should be endorsed by the Task Force as Focus Areas for 2003 - 2006:

- a. Land-based Sources of Pollution
  - b. Overfishing
  - c. Lack of Public Awareness (focus on user groups)
  - d. Recreational Overuse and Misuse
  - e-1. Climate Change and Coral Bleaching, and e-2. Disease
2. **Improve Coordination.** The Steering Committee found that improved coordination would help fulfill the Task Force mission, implement the National Action Plan, and increase support for coral reef conservation efforts at state, territory, and local levels. Several areas for improvement were identified: (1) improve coordination between state/territory and federal priorities and implementation activities, (2) better engage important federal partners locally and regionally, (3) increase coordination and collaboration among and between agencies at local and regional levels, and (4) increase coordination with stakeholders. Thus, it is recommended that the Task Force should establish Regional Subcommittees of the Steering Committee in the Caribbean and the Pacific with membership to include, at a minimum, representation from each U.S. Coral Reef Task Force member.

The Steering Committee further found that there is a need to improve inter-agency coordination to implement actions to achieve the goals identified in the National Action Plan, including recommended Focus Areas. Thus, it is recommended that each state/territory and its federal partners work cooperatively to develop, locally focused, 3-year action strategies for applicable Focus Areas giving due consideration to local priorities, federal agency mandates and contribution toward the goals of the NAP. Based on the development of local action strategies, the All Islands Committee, in coordination with the State of Florida, will review and coordinate between the regions, and make recommendations to the regional subcommittees to ensure linkages between the regions.

Regional Subcommittees will:

- Coordinate jurisdictional and federally-managed area action strategies into regional action strategies,
- Identify common issues for regional actions,
- Explore opportunities for the sharing of institutional, financial and human resources among federal and local agencies and partners,
- Seek funding and resources for development of local action strategies and their implementation,
- Report to the Task Force on development and implementation,
- Develop mechanisms for engaging stakeholders, and
- Provide linkages to international efforts.

Each Task Force member will identify appropriate representatives to Regional Subcommittees within one month from adoption of the resolution. The Regional Subcommittees will be established and provide an initial update on key gaps and opportunities for implementation in Focus Areas by the next Task Force meeting. The Regional Subcommittees will provide 3-year pilot action strategies within one year based on the local input available at that time. Nothing in this paragraph will prejudice the functioning of the All Islands Committee.

3. **Improve Mechanisms for Tracking Progress.** The Steering Committee found that there is not currently a systematic tracking system to articulate progress toward implementation of the NAP. Past efforts to report accomplishments have been inefficient and taxed available human resources. Furthermore, unclear goals and indicators have made reporting and implementation difficult. Thus, it is recommended that the Task Force develop a web based system to facilitate reporting accomplishments and actions toward meeting the goals and objectives of the NAP, using performance indicators identified by the local and regional action strategies. Task Force members will populate and maintain this database as a current record of accomplishments and future plans and activities. The Steering Committee will report back to the Task Force with details of the reporting system.

Using this tool, the Regional Subcommittees, the Steering Committee, and, as needed, Working Groups will develop an annual report documenting progress toward the goals and objectives of the

NAP. Recognizing that the Focus Areas are not the only areas requiring reporting, the new tracking mechanisms will be also available to support the development of annual work plans and other accomplishment reports by all Task Force members.

4. **Address Human Resource Limitations.** The Steering Committee found that limitations in available human resources and current funding mechanisms, at both the local and national levels, are significant impediments to fulfilling the mission of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force. In order to implement these revised procedures, the Steering Committee will work with the All Islands Committee to assess human resources needs required. Furthermore, the Steering Committee should recommend strategies for increasing human resource capacity and funding to support Task Force, All Islands Committee, State, Territory, and Commonwealth coral reef conservation efforts to implement the proposed process. This shall include both the establishment of a US Coral Reef Task Force Secretariat and adequate support for the All Islands Committee Secretariat. Task Force members should evaluate their ability to contribute to these efforts. The Steering Committee will report back to the Task Force with further details for a proposed Secretariat.
5. **Amend the Oversight Policy and Charter.** In light of the revisions to the Task Force process proposed here, it is recommended that the Oversight Policy and Charter be amended, as necessary, to reflect this new process.
6. **Charge to Working Groups and Steering Committee.** Working Groups are tasked to assist the Steering Committee with implementing the changes put forth in this document. The Steering Committee will evaluate the role and function of the Working Groups and report recommendations to the next US Coral Reef Task Force meeting.

**III. Overview of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Process** The recommendations outlined here are intended as revisions to the existing structure of the Task Force. The following is a brief summary of some of the key components of the existing and revised structure:

- **The National Action Plan to Conserve Coral Reefs and the National Action Strategy.** The NAP and NAS remain relevant and comprehensive blueprints for coral reef conservation in the U.S. The recommendations here are intended to strategically implement the NAP.
- **Steering Committee.** The steering committee will continue to serve as the primary working body of the US Coral Reef Task Force, providing assistance and coordination for Task Force activities.
- **State/Territory Planning and Implementation.** Ultimately, coral reef management must be implemented in local reef areas, which relies on effective planning and implementation by states and territories with support from federal partners.
- **Federal Agency Planning and Implementation.** Working within its mandates, each federal member of the task force has relevant responsibilities for reef conservation, ranging from prevention of harm to active stewardship to address key threats.
- **All Islands Committee.** The All Islands Committee has provided essential policy guidance to the Task Force since its inception and is critical to bringing local reef issues into the national dialogue at the Task Force, and increasing coordination among federal, state, territory and commonwealth efforts.
- **International Policy Work and Support for Management.** The International Working Group has made notable achievements in international policy arenas, notably regarding coral trade and no-anchoring zones. While contributing to national Focus Areas, the International Working Group will continue its existing policy work.
- **USCRTF Working Groups.** The Steering Committee will work with the Working Group chairs to develop a working group structure compatible with the new Regional Committee structure.
- **Regional Subcommittees.** The role of the regional subcommittees includes 1) to support coordination and implementation of projects of local and regional significance; 2) to explore opportunities for the sharing of institutional, financial and human resources among federal and local agencies and partners; 3) to engage regional program directors to participate in joint activities directed at coral reef management and protection; 4) to assist in the preparation of materials that meet the reporting requirements of the individual jurisdictions. The Regional Sub-committee will include representatives of US Coral Reef Task Force Members.

<b>Table 1. Mechanisms for improving USCRTF prioritization, coordination, reporting, and human resources.</b>				
<b>Area to Improve</b>	<b>Current Status</b>	<b>Proposed Mechanism</b>	<b>Resources Required (Estimates)</b>	<b>Expected Outcome</b>

<b>Prioritize Needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no prioritization across the 13 goal areas</li> <li>• Some goal areas lack specific targets</li> </ul>	USCRTF to endorse 5 threat-based, Focus Areas from the National Action Plan		Specific, threats-based goals based on local priorities
<b>Improve Coordination</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to better synchronize state/territory and federal priorities, implementation</li> <li>• Need to better engage the regional level to support local implementation</li> <li>• Need for inter-agency coordination to address key threats</li> <li>• Need to develop specific actions to implement NAP</li> <li>• Need to coordinate among and between regions</li> </ul>	Regional Subcommittees and All Islands Committee to support local and regional development and implementation of action strategies;	[estimates] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for staff to the two regional subcommittees and All Islands Committee</li> <li>• Lead/sponsor workshops to develop action strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3-year, action strategies for Focus Areas</li> <li>• Increased federal agency support for local implementation</li> </ul>
<b>Report Progress</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reporting is inefficient and taxes available human resources</li> <li>• Unclear goals and indicators make reporting difficult</li> <li>• There is no current tracking system</li> </ul>	Web-Based Database	Funding to establish system; staff time to input and synthesize data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual Task Force Report</li> <li>• Database available for other reporting</li> </ul>
<b>Human Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to establish a Task Force Secretariat</li> <li>• Need to significantly strengthen the All Islands Committee Secretariat</li> <li>• Need to strengthen capacity, and funding at all levels</li> </ul>	Increase dedicated support for staff (e.g. details, funding, internships, fellowships, etc)	[estimates] Support for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 staff for Task Force Secretariat</li> <li>• 1-2 staff for All Islands Secretariat</li> <li>• Other needs TBD</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced capacity to implement the National Action Plan</li> <li>• Active Task Force Secretariat</li> <li>• Strengthened All Islands Secretariat</li> </ul>