

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Coral reefs are some of the most biologically rich and economically valuable ecosystems on Earth. They are also in serious jeopardy, threatened by an increasing array of impacts from over-exploitation, pollution, habitat loss, invasive species, diseases, and climate change. The rapid decline and loss of these valuable marine ecosystems has significant social, economic, and environmental consequences in the U.S. and around the world. Action is needed on a wide variety of fronts to address the coral reef crisis, especially on issues of global proportions such as the impacts of climate change, increasing coastal development and persistent over-fishing of reef systems.

This document, *A National Coral Reef Action Strategy*, was produced by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), in cooperation with the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (Task Force), to fulfill the requirements of the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000 (CRCA) (P.L. 106-562; 16 U.S.C. 6401 *et seq.*) and help track implementation of *The National Action Plan to Conserve Coral Reefs* (U.S. Coral Reef Task Force 2000). The Task Force National Action Plan was the first national blueprint for U.S. action to address the loss and degradation of U.S. and international coral reef ecosystems. Based on extensive input from government and non-government organizations, scientists, resource managers, stakeholders and the public, the National Action Plan: (1) identified key threats and issues driving the loss and degradation of coral reefs, (2) established thirteen major goals to address these threats, and (3) outlined objectives and priority actions needed to achieve each goal.

The CRCA requires the NOAA Administrator to prepare, periodically review, and revise a national coral reef action strategy to achieve the purposes of the CRCA. To fulfill these requirements, NOAA worked closely with the Task Force, Task Force Working Groups and the All Islands Coral Reef Initiative to build on the existing goals, objectives, implementation plans, and other information associated with the National Action Plan. That information was used as the foundation for this strategy.

The strategy is divided into two fundamental themes and 13 goals essential to addressing and reducing threats to coral reefs worldwide:

- **THEME 1: Understand Coral Reef Ecosystems** – Better understanding of complex coral reef ecosystems will improve management and conservation of these valuable resources. The strategy outlines the following major goals to increase understanding of coral reef ecosystems:

Goal 1: Create comprehensive maps of all U.S. coral reef habitats;

Goal 2: Conduct long-term monitoring and assessments of reef ecosystem condition;

Goal 3: Support strategic research to address the major threats to reef ecosystems; and

Goal 4: Increase understanding of the social and economic factors of conserving coral reefs.

- **THEME 2: Reduce The Adverse Impacts Of Human Activities** – Reducing the impacts of human activities is essential to conserving coral reef ecosystems. The strategy outlines the following major goals to reduce the adverse impacts of human activities:

Goal 5: Improve the use of marine protected area to reduce threats;

Goal 6: Reduce adverse impacts of fishing and other extractive uses;

Goal 7: Reduce impacts of coastal uses;

Goal 8: Reduce pollution;

Goal 9: Restore damaged reefs;

Goal 10: Improve education and outreach;

Goal 11: Reduce international threats to coral reef ecosystems;

Goal 12: Reduce impacts from international trade in coral reef species; and

Goal 13: Improve coordination and accountability.

This initial version of the strategy is designed to help track progress to implement the CRCA and National Action Plan in 2002 – 2003. The document provides an assessment of the major threats and needs in each region to help identify and prioritize key areas for management action. For each of the 13 goal areas outlined in the National Action Plan, the document provides partial summaries of accomplishments in 2001, and partial lists of key actions needed in 2002-2003 to help achieve the goals and objectives of the CRCA and National Action Plan.

This document is not intended to be a comprehensive list of accomplishments or future needs. Where possible, the Strategy indicates how to access more comprehensive information from the Task Force (see <http://coralreef.gov/> or Appendix B for list of contacts) or other sources involved in coral reef conservation activities.

As required by the CRCA, this document also provides estimates of federal funding available to directly support coral reef conservation activities.

The National Action Strategy is designed to be revisited biennially (or as need) to track progress and help identify future needs and actions in cooperation with the Task Force, the All Islands Coral Reef Initiative, other organizations, constituents and the public. A comprehensive process for future updates is being developed in cooperation with the Task Force. Input is encouraged on all aspects of the National Action Strategy (please see contact information listed in the front of the document).