

Meeting Highlights
U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting
Washington D.C.
February 2008

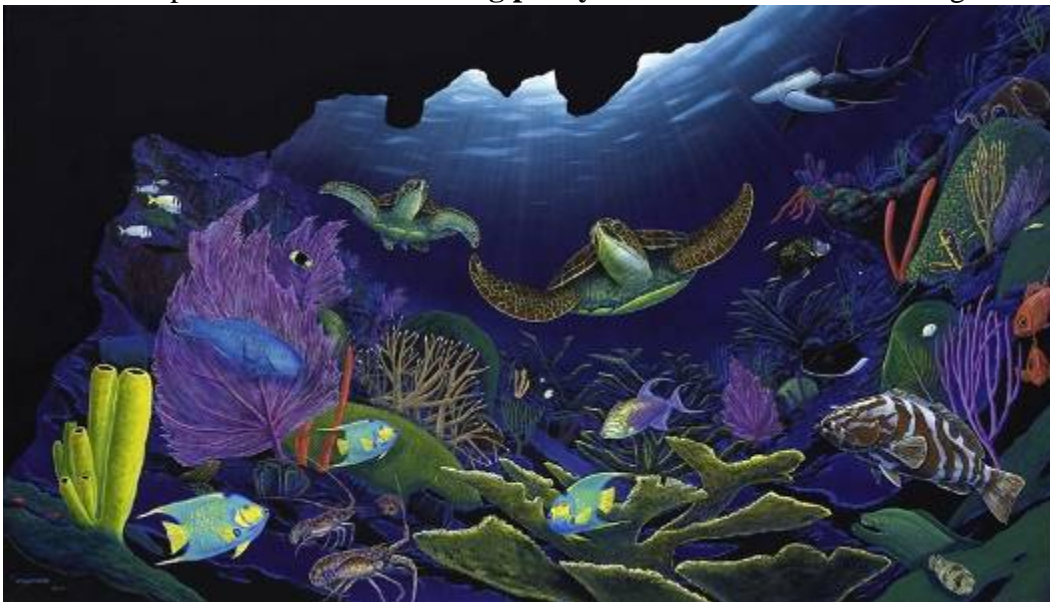
Additional meeting materials (agendas, presentations, etc.) are available on the Task Force web site (www.coralreef.gov). For more information contact Beth Dieveney beth.dieveney@noaa.gov.

General Summary

The U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) held a public meeting in Washington D.C. at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History on February 27, 2008. The USCRTF celebrated the International Year of the Reef 2008 as well as the ten-year anniversary of the formation of the Task Force. As the USCRTF marks ten years of collaborative research, management, and conservation of coral reef ecosystems, a focus of this meeting was to review the collective efforts and accomplishments, highlight remaining needs and challenges, and begin to develop a foundation for a renewed commitment to action.

Highlights of the meeting include:

- The **President of the Republic of Palau** presented his leadership vision for coral reef conservation in the Micronesian and Pacific region.
- Marine artist Wyland unveiled an **official International Year of the Reef 2008** painting: "Year of the Reef."
- A **panel of experts engaged** the USCRTF in a dialogue on *Coral Reef Ecosystem Management – The Next Ten Years: Challenges, Key Priorities, and Innovative Solutions*.
- A keynote address by renowned coral reef researcher **Dr. Nancy Knowlton**, with the Smithsonian Institution Sant Chair for Marine Science.
- Summary of the many **International Year of the Reef** activities by U.S. jurisdictions Task Force members and global environmental organizations.
- USCRTF Jurisdictions shared their seminal, ten-year accomplishments and remaining needs and challenges for effective coral reef management and conservation.
- **Public comment** was given by individuals and organizations.
- The USCRTF presented an **outstanding policy coordination award** to Roger Griffis.



"Year of the Reef" By Wyland

USCRTF – Ten Years of Action, Remaining Challenges, Needs & Plans for the Future

The USCRTF Steering Committee presented a ten-year retrospective look at the successes and challenges of the USCRTF and a vision for the next ten years.

Future USCRTF activities need to be effectively coordinated, supported by the best available science, and should focus on ways to promote and enhance coral reef ecosystem resiliency. The success of these efforts depends on the personal energy and commitment of the USCRTF and partners, coordinated planning and budget process, and reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act by Congress, which would give additional authorities to the USCRTF underscoring our role as an international leader in coral reef management.



Address by President of the Republic of Palau

The President of Palau, *H.E. Tommy E. Remengesau Jr.*, gave an inspiring speech and a challenge to action. He stated the difficult reality for coral reefs and their admittedly difficult prospects. He highlighted the need to form strong partnerships at every level – local, national, regional and global – to achieve resilient reefs. He noted that the partnership between the U.S. and Palau through the USCRTF can serve as a model for marine environmental initiatives in other parts of the world.

The president mentioned some of the many achievements of the Republic of Palau to help promote coral reef resiliency. One example is recent legislative work to increase funding for management and enforcement of Marine Protected Areas. Palau is taking a holistic approach with a broad variety of programs to protect the environment such as preventing shark finning, sponsoring initiatives against deep-sea bottom trawling and supporting the Kyoto protocol and the Convention on Climate Change. The Micronesian Challenge, a call for the region to effectively preserve 20% of terrestrial and 30% of marine areas that has engaged 20 countries in this regional conservation effort, is due in large part to his leadership.



President Remengesau talked about the need to take compatible actions, and how partnerships should be enhanced by political boundaries and not limited by them.

Keynote Address: Dr. Nancy Knowlton

Dr. Nancy Knowlton presented a sobering assessment of coral reefs worldwide. She acknowledged that some colleagues believe that we have already passed the point where reefs can be saved as functioning ecosystems. While she does not adhere to this belief herself, she takes note to the fact that we are seeing coral reefs turn into algal-dominated ecosystems at a global scale. We are only slowly coming to terms with all the threats faced by coral reefs – we have been focused on fishing and water quality much longer than global warming, and focused on climate change much longer than ocean acidification.



Dr. Knowlton mentioned that warming of the oceans has been the leading stressor resulting in bleaching of coral reefs, and offered the summer of 1998 as an example of its devastating consequences. That summer brought a heating episode that caused bleaching in 80% in portions of the Indian Ocean, out of which 20% of the reefs did not recover and subsequently perished. The summer of 2005 was even more devastating for the Caribbean corals, when sustained heating over the period of several weeks brought mortality rates of about 40 to 50% to coral reefs. The Caribbean corals, with their more limited genetic diversity, seem to be particularly vulnerable to future increases in ocean temperature that could very well eliminate the majority of them. Dr. Knowlton cited a recent paper published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science arguing how synergistic events are a bigger problem than first realized – as the number of stresses increase, it is more likely that they move from having an additive effect to producing a multiplicative effect. Ocean acidification is the latest recognized threat making it even more difficult for coral growth to occur.

The future of coral reefs depends on two strategies – short-term local actions to control fishing and water quality, which provide a foundation and time for long-term global scale action to address impacts from climate change.

Coral Reef Ecosystem Management – The Next Ten Years: Challenges, Key Priorities, and Innovative Solutions

Panelists Billy Causey (NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program), Noah Idechong (Republic of Palau House of Delegates) and Marea Hatzios (World Bank) were invited to share their vision for the future of coral reef management and conservation. They were asked to share their unique perspective regarding the priority issues relating to coral reef conservation and innovative tools, solutions, and partnerships.

The panelists identified climate change, land-based pollution, habitat degradation, and overfishing as the main threats to coral reef ecosystems. Three of which can be dealt with directly, but climate change requires global work and leadership. There is a recognized need to raise community awareness and build strong support for political action.

Several tools and solutions were identified that the USCRTF and partners could consider and explore. Among them were these five possible approaches: 1) Explore the principle of subsidiarity – working at the local level to affect change and engaging stakeholders as the resource users, empowering them to take the most immediate action. 2) Employ an ecosystem approach – link upstream and downstream maximizing the net benefits to society, and understand community’s relation to the ecosystem. 3) Address issues of overcapacity in fishing. 4) Offer people engaged in resource extraction opportunities for alternative livelihoods. 5) Scale up marine protected areas.



International Coral Reef Initiative Secretariat Update

The United States and Mexico are serving as co-Secretariats to the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) for 2007 – 2009. The first general meeting of the Mexico-United States ICRI Secretariat and the official international launch of the International Year of the Reef (IYOR 2008) took place from 22 - 25 January 2008 in Washington, DC, with two break-out sessions on Economic Valuation and Sustainable Tourism in the Caribbean. During the meeting, the ICRI Mexico-U.S. Action Plan 2007-09 was adopted. One element of this action plan is to move toward a regional focus with a series of issue-specific workshops hosted in various regions. In association with this meeting, ICRI hosted an IYOR symposium to showcase IYOR activities from around the world. The next ICRI general meeting will be held following the International Coral Reef Symposium (ICRS) on July 12-13 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

International Year of the Reef Celebration

Wyland unveiled his original painting “Year of the Reef” in honor and celebration of the International Year of the Reef (IYOR) 2008. Wyland has long been an effective ambassador for marine conservation, not only through his well known and well-loved art, but also by an active commitment to engage the public through his Wyland Foundation, which focuses on watershed and water quality issues. Wyland announced that he accepted the United Nations Environment Programme’s invitation to serve as the official artist for *Children’s Art*, and he has chosen coral reef ecosystems as the emphasis for this project to further raise our collective awareness about the value of and threats to our coral reefs.

State, Territory, & Commonwealth Highlights from the last Ten Years

U.S. Virgin Islands recently established the East End Marine Park. The point of contact for the USVI expressed support for the exemplary partnership with NOAA and DOI.

Puerto Rico completed an economic valuation of its coral reefs.

Florida established its own Florida Coral Reef Conservation Program and the Florida Reef Resiliency Program.

American Samoa, represented by Governor Tulafono, emphasized the need to continue to build capacity in the jurisdictions and strengthen inter-jurisdictional partnerships. American Samoa is improving energy use through a new Commission established by Governor Tulafono as a response to the USCRTF Climate Change Resolution. The Samoa Archipelago Initiative has been launched as a mechanism to investigate and collaborate on common environmental issues.



Guam, represented by Governor Camacho, stated that “our reefs are not merely pretty places or scientific curiosities; they are the foundation of our way of life.” The Governor emphasized the value of coral reefs to Guam’s livelihood, including provision of food, educational opportunities, recreational opportunities, and protection from storms. The upcoming increase in population growth due to transfer of military personnel to Guam will present significant challenges for coral reef and natural resource management.

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands created seven marine protected areas, which have been established with enabling legislation, three of which have completed management plans. The jurisdiction has completed an economic valuation study for its coral reefs.

Hawaii shared the accomplishment of designating and co-managing with NOAA and DOI one of the largest marine reserves in the world, the Marine National Monument in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

Republic of Palau highlighted the value of the Palau International Coral Reef Center to promoting and enhancing scientific research of Palau’s coral reefs. Palau also recognized the key role they played, with Japan, as International Coral Reef Initiative co-Secretariat for 2005-2007. A final highlight noted was the launch of the Micronesian Challenge.