

## **Actions Taken by the United States CRTF at Its Third Meeting, November 2-3, 1999 St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands**

1. The United States Coral Reef Task Force (CRTF) endorses the Draft National Action Plan to Conserve Coral Reefs ("Draft Action Plan") for the purpose of securing public comment on the Draft Action Plan and then revising the Draft Action Plan as necessary before adoption. Public notice will be given through the *Federal Register* and the Internet (at <http://www.coralreef.gov>), and a sixty (60) day comment period will be provided.

The CRTF agrees further to appoint a working group on the Draft Action Plan to be convened by the CRTF Co-Chairs. The CRTF requests that each CRTF member provide comments on the Draft Action Plan to the working group, and to identify specifically, with budget information where possible, the action items in which that CRTF member plans to participate and the extent of participation. The working group will consider the comments received from CRTF members and from the public, revise the plan to reflect the President's budget for Fiscal Year 2001, and prepare a final Draft National Action Plan for consideration and action by the CRTF at its next meeting.

2. The CRTF adopts the document entitled "Coral Reef Protected Areas: A Guide for Management," subject to technical amendments. Public notice will be provided through the *Federal Register* and the Internet (at <http://www.coralreef.gov>), and a thirty (30) day comment period will be provided. In addition, the CRTF adopts the following resolution concerning this document:

- Resolved, that the United States Coral Reef Task Force requests that, following the public comment period and any technical revision of the document, every organization represented on the Task Force that manages coral reefs distribute to that organization's managers "Coral Reef Protected Areas: A Guide for Management," with whatever changes or explanations are necessary to ensure consistency with that organization's laws and regulations.

3. The CRTF adopts the document entitled "Oversight of Agency Actions Affecting Coral Reef Protection," and invites public comment for 30 days. Public notice will be provided through the *Federal Register* and the Internet (at <http://www.coralreef.gov>), and a thirty (30) day comment period will be provided. The CRTF will consider revisions to the Oversight Procedures in light of public comment.

4. The CRTF will establish a formal Education and Outreach Working Group, building upon the existing *ad hoc* group and its draft plan. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has volunteered to help coordinate the initial meeting.

5. A special session of the CRTF will be convened in Washington, D.C. in February 2000, following release of the President's budget for Fiscal Year 2001. The agenda for the meeting will include possible adoption of the National Action Plan, as well as education and outreach efforts.

6. The CRTF accepts the offer from the Governor of American Samoa to host a meeting of the CRTF.

7. The CRTF agreed to refer the matter of Vieques raised by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to the Department of the Navy in accordance with the procedures set forth in the document entitled "Oversight of Agency Actions Affecting Coral Reef Protection."

8. The CRTF asked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to expand the educational outreach of its regulatory permit program under the Clean Water Act to include the islands and territories of the United States.

9. The CRTF adopted the following resolution concerning sewage:

- Inadequately treated sewage has been raised as a serious threat to coral reefs. Right up the road here in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, there is great concern about sewage outflow. Several serious statements were made about the water quality off the shores of Puerto Rico. The Task Force asks that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency review this situation and report on actions and recommendations by the next task force meeting.

10. The CRTF adopted the following resolution concerning fishery management councils:

- Historically fishery management councils operating under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) have focused on conservation and management on a species by species basis. With this Task Force and Executive Order, the councils and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) have an opportunity to go further. Some councils have begun to address corals on an ecosystem basis--which we applaud--but are finding it difficult to succeed while working within the boundaries of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The Task Force requests that the Council on Environmental Quality convene a group to assist in this effort by providing guidance to the councils and NMFS on how best to protect corals through its NEPA responsibilities and on an ecosystem basis.

11. The CRTF agreed to explore and develop guidelines for mariculture as it relates to coral reef ecosystems, and to coordinate its efforts with the work of other relevant interagency groups (e.g., the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force, the Invasive Species Council, the Ocean Task Force).

12. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers brought to the attention of the CRTF a Joint Memorandum for the Field, to be signed today (November 3, 1999), from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army (Civil Works), concerning 'Special Emphasis Given to Coral Reef Protection under the Clean Water Act, Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act, Rivers and Harbors Act, and Federal Project Authorities'. Its conclusion reads as follows:

- Coral reefs are widely recognized as highly productive, ecologically valuable, and economically important ecosystems that, because of their particular sensitivity to environmental changes, are experiencing a world-wide decline. The CWA, MPRSA, RHA, and Federal Projects conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, by statute and implementing regulations, give particular attention to protecting coral reefs as special aquatic sites from adverse chemical, biological,

and physical impacts associated with discharges into the Nation's waters, including marine waters. Projects that may directly or indirectly adversely affect coral reefs will be given the highest level of protection. This guidance reemphasizes the protections intended for coral reefs under the laws our agencies implement and should ensure that agency field staff are applying these regulations to ensure effective protection for these critical marine ecosystems.