

SCIENTISTS' STATEMENT ON THE REAUTHORIZATION OF THE UNITED STATES' CORAL REEF CONSERVATION ACT

July 23, 2007

As natural and social scientists who study coral reef ecosystems and the coastal and island communities which depend on them, we are profoundly concerned about the threats these ecologically, economically and culturally valuable ecosystems face in the United States and around the world.

Although tropical coral reefs occupy less than 0.1% of the planet's surface area, they are home to an estimated quarter of the world's marine species. This extraordinary biological diversity, combined with the role reefs play in the protection of coastlines from violent storms, the natural storehouse of pharmaceutical compounds they provide, the traditional cultural practices they support, and the economic value they generate through tourism and fisheries, make these ecosystems exceptionally valuable targets for marine conservation.

However, due to the impacts of primarily anthropogenic stressors and threats, coral reefs in the United States and worldwide are declining at an alarming rate. The major threats to coral reefs are well documented and include coastal runoff, overfishing and overharvesting, vessel impacts, invasive species, emergent diseases, and coral bleaching induced by climate change. Last year, two species of stony coral that were once dominant builders of reefs throughout the Caribbean, *Acropora palmata* and *A. cervicornis*, were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Moreover, a worldwide assessment published in 2004 by the Australian Institute of Marine Science indicates that 20% of reefs are already lost, 24% are in critical condition (in risk of being lost in 10-20 years), and 26% are threatened (20-40 year risk of loss).

It is not too late to save these valuable marine ecosystems, and indeed there is much more that we can do to address the major threats. We commend the excellent work accomplished by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Coral Reef Conservation Program and the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force and the proactive steps taken in the reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act by Congress and the Administration.

We further urge Congress and the Administration to adopt the strongest possible language for the protection and conservation of coral reef ecosystems in the reauthorization of this important legislation. Such measures could include the following:

- The increased protection of coral reef ecosystems in all U.S. waters;
- Increased funding for coral reef conservation, science, and management through NOAA and the Department of the Interior to address the threats U.S. coral reefs face;
- Increased coordination between federal agencies, States, Territories and Commonwealths to address coral reef threats on a national and regional basis; and
- Increased emphasis on "active" adaptive management for all U.S. coral reef areas to ensure that all that can be done to enhance reef health and resilience is being done. This action should include rigorous and continuous monitoring, assessment, and reporting of

the effects and effectiveness of federally granted activities and management regimes, including marine protected areas, and vigorous efforts to make watershed activities maximally compatible with coral reef survival. These efforts should encompass both the ecological and sociological effects of management actions and include support for community-based approaches to coral reef stewardship.

Please support a strong reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act. Thank You.

The 180 coral reef scientists from 33 states and territories are listed below.

- Affiliations are for identification only, and do not imply endorsement by the signers' institutions.
- Signatures were collected from June through July 2007.
- Signatures are sorted alphabetically by state or territory and then by last name.

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