

Decision to create a Virtual Working Group to develop Guidance on IMO No-anchoring Areas

*Adopted during the ICRI Coordination and Planning Committee (CPC) Meeting
5-6 April 2001, Cebu City (Philippines)*

Background:

Anchoring by large ships on coral reefs can destroy and degrade a significant portion of these fragile and valuable habitats. The dragging and swinging of large anchor cables and chains destroys coral heads and creates gouges and scars that destabilize the reef structure, which can take thousands of years to build. The regeneration of coral reefs from such damage may never occur. In December 2000, the International Maritime Organization (IMO), a Specialized Agency of the United Nations that addresses international shipping issues, adopted a new rule under international law that allows countries to establish no-anchoring areas for large ships. Such areas may, after submission to IMO, be established in areas where anchoring is unsafe, unstable, or particularly hazardous or where anchoring could result in unacceptable damage to the marine environment. Coral reefs do not provide for stable anchoring, and anchors and anchor cables and chains of large ships also cause devastating harm to coral reefs. The IMO also adopted a US proposal to establish three mandatory no-anchoring areas for all ships for the unique reefs of Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. These areas will go into effect on June 1, 2001.

The adoption of no-anchoring areas by IMO will assist ships steer clear of these areas by requiring that all countries producing charts for international navigation mark such areas on their charts. The no-anchoring measure focuses on prevention of damage, instead of enforcement and liability for damages.

Decision:

The ICRI CPC agrees to establish a working group to design guidance for coral reef managers on the substantive and procedural aspects required to submit a proposal to IMO for the establishment of no-anchoring areas. The Working Group will conduct its work via e-mail, and, when necessary, the internet services of the ICRI Forum or the World Commission on Protected Areas. This project will last not more than one year, with a progress report in the November 2001 CPC meeting and a final product (not more than 10 pages plus samples of proposals) presented in April 2002. The report will be available as a web-based product on the ICRI Forum. Lindy Johnson, who led the US process to create the no-anchoring site documentation submitted to the IMO and serves as NOAA's representative to the IMO, has agreed to chair the Working Group.