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PRESS RELEASE

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75% of World's Coral Reefs Currently Under Threat, New Analysis Finds

"Reefs at Risk Revisited" report presents comprehensive analysis threats to coral reefs

Editor's note: Online resources, including maps, data, regional fact sheets, videos, and more, available at: www.wri.org/reefs

WASHINGTON D.C./LONDON (February 23, 2011)— A new comprehensive analysis finds that 75 percent of the world's coral reefs are currently threatened by local and global pressures. For the first time, the analysis includes threats from climate change, including warming seas and rising ocean acidification. The report shows that local pressures— such as overfishing, coastal development, and pollution— pose the most immediate and direct risks, threatening more than 60 percent of coral reefs today.

"[Reefs at Risk Revisited](#)," the most detailed assessment of threats to coral reefs ever undertaken, is being released by the World Resources Institute, along with the Nature Conservancy, the WorldFish Center, the International Coral Reef Action Network, Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, and the UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Center, along with a network of more than 25 organizations. Launch activities are taking place in Washington, D.C., London, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Caribbean, Australia, and other locations around the world.

"This report serves as a wake-up call for policy-makers, business leaders, ocean managers, and others about the urgent need for greater protection for coral reefs," said Dr. Jane Lubchenco, under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "As the report makes clear, local and global threats, including climate change, are already having significant impacts on coral reefs, putting the future of these beautiful and valuable ecosystems at risk."

Local pressures – especially overfishing and destructive fishing – are causing many reefs to be degraded. Global pressures are leading to coral bleaching from rising sea temperatures and increasing ocean acidification from carbon dioxide pollution. According to the new analysis, if left unchecked, more than 90 percent of reefs will be threatened by 2030 and *nearly all* reefs will be at risk by 2050.

"Coral reefs are valuable resources for millions of people worldwide. Despite the dire situation for many reefs, there is reason for hope," said Loretta Burke, senior associate at WRI and a lead author of the report. "Reefs are resilient, and by reducing the local pressures we can buy time as we find global solutions to preserve reefs for future generations."

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The report includes multiple recommendations to better protect and manage reefs, including through marine protected areas. The analysis shows that more than one-quarter of reefs are already encompassed in a range of parks and reserves, more than any other marine habitat. However, only six percent of reefs are in protected areas that are effectively managed.

“Well managed marine protected areas are one of the best tools to safeguard reefs,” said Mark Spalding, senior marine scientist at the Nature Conservancy and a lead author of the report. “At their core, reefs are about people as well as nature: ensuring stable food supplies, promoting recovery from coral bleaching, and acting as a magnet for tourist dollars. We need apply the knowledge we have to shore up existing protected areas, as well as to designate new sites where threats are highest, such as the populous hearts of the Caribbean, Southeast Asia, East Africa and the Middle East.”

Reefs offer multiple benefits to people and the economy – providing food, sustaining livelihoods, supporting tourism, protecting coasts, and even helping to prevent disease. According the report, more than 275 million people live in the direct vicinity (30 km/18 miles) of coral reefs. In more than 100 countries and territories, coral reefs protect 150,000 km (over 93,000 miles) of shorelines, helping defend coastal communities and infrastructure against storms and erosion.

For the first time, the report identifies the 27 nations most socially and economically vulnerable to coral reef degradation and loss. Among these, the nine most vulnerable countries are: Haiti, Grenada, Philippines, Comoros, Vanuatu, Tanzania, Kiribati, Fiji, and Indonesia.

“The people at greatest risk are those who depend heavily on threatened reefs, and who have limited capacity to adapt to the loss of the valuable resources and services reefs provide,” said Allison Perry, project scientist at the WorldFish Center and a lead author. “For highly vulnerable nations – including many island nations – there is a pressing need for development efforts to reduce dependence on reefs and build adaptive capacity, in addition to protecting reefs from threats.”

The report is an update of “Reefs at Risk,” released by WRI in 1998, which served as an important resource for policymakers to understand and address the threats of reefs. The new report uses the latest data and satellite information to map coral reefs— including a reef map with a resolution 64 times higher than the original report.

“Through new technology and improved data, this study provides valuable tools and information for decision makers from national leaders to local marine managers,” said Katie Reytar, research associate at WRI and a lead author. “In order to maximize the benefits of these tools, we need policymakers to commit to greater action to address the growing threats to coral reefs.”

Find out more at: www.wri.org/reefs

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REEFS – ADD TWO

The World Resources Institute (WRI) is a global environmental think tank that goes beyond research to put ideas into action. We work with governments, companies, and civil society to build solutions to urgent environmental challenges. (www.wri.org)

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. The Conservancy and its more than one million members have protected more than 480,000 sq km of land and engage in more than 100 marine conservation projects. The Conservancy is actively working on coral reef conservation in 24 countries, including the Caribbean and the Coral Triangle. (www.nature.org)

WorldFish Center is an international, nonprofit, nongovernmental organization dedicated to reducing poverty and hunger by improving fisheries and aquaculture. Working in partnership with a wide range of agencies and research institutions, WorldFish carries out research to improve small-scale fisheries and aquaculture. Its work on coral reefs includes ReefBase, the global information system on coral reefs. (www.worldfishcenter.org)

International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN) is a global network of coral reef science and conservation organizations working together and with local stakeholders to improve the management of coral reef ecosystems. ICRAN facilitates the exchange and replication of good practices in coral reef management throughout the world's major coral reef regions. (www.icran.org)

United Nations Environment Programme-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) is an internationally recognized center for the synthesis, analysis, and dissemination of global biodiversity knowledge. UNEP-WCMC provides authoritative, strategic, and timely information on critical marine and coastal habitats for conventions, countries, organizations, and companies to use in the development and implementation of their policies and decisions. (www.unep-wcmc.org)

Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN) is an operational unit of the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) charged with coordinating research and monitoring of coral reefs. The network, with many partners, reports on ecological and socioeconomic monitoring and produces Status of Coral Reefs of the World reports covering more than 80 countries and states. (www.gcrmn.org)