



# SETTING SHARED GOALS AND TARGETS FOR CORAL REEFS

## WCS Recommendation on the CBD Global Biodiversity Framework

### OUR CONSERVATION CHALLENGE, AND POLICY OPPORTUNITY

As detailed by the [Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Global Assessment](#), the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on the Oceans and Cryosphere](#), and the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#), coral reef ecosystems are uniquely threatened as a result of climate change and other anthropogenic impacts.

At [CBD CoP15](#) in 2021, the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) will adopt a post-2020 global biodiversity framework, and set shared goals and action-oriented targets to provide the momentum for conservation action at multiple scales. This is a critical policy moment to **improve global goals and targets related to coral reefs, including their clarity and the indicators we use to measure progress**, to drive conservation action that effectively conserves coral reef biodiversity and their socio-economic benefits at relevant scales.

READ MORE:

[CoralPost2020.org](#)  
[WCS.org](#)



### GOVERNMENTS, EXPERTS AGREE THROUGH ICRI WHAT IS NEEDED

The [current draft of the CBD post-2020 framework](#) sets outcome-oriented goals, including on the state of natural ecosystems, and measurable “action targets” for 2030 on tools like spatial planning and area-based conservation measures. Many of these goals and targets will apply to coral reefs, and have explicit placeholders for coral reef-relevant indicators.

Following the publication of the draft framework, **WCS and other members of the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), including 40 countries whose territories contain most of the world’s coral reef ecosystems, agreed by consensus to critical recommendations to CBD Parties on this draft.** High-level recommendations include:

- the **“explicit and prominent recognition of coral reef ecosystems,”** including potentially through explicit references in the goals and targets;
- the **“retention of language concerning the integrity and resilience of ecosystems”** in goals and targets, to conserve all biodiversity values and benefits from functioning coral reefs; and
- the **“explicit inclusion of relevant coral reef indicators”** for post-2020 goals and targets, including the indicators included in the recommendation (see next page).



## WCS, ICRI MEMBERS AGREE ON CRITICAL CORAL REEF INDICATORS

CBD Parties will adopt a monitoring framework with indicators for the goals and targets adopted at CoP15. WCS works on coral reef conservation in many countries, and stands ready to support Parties to scale up monitoring and reporting including through online tools like [MERMAID](#). ICRI Members recommended a suite of indicators, including (but not limited to):



### Live coral cover

Live coral cover is already a global indicator for Aichi Target 10. WCS and our partners monitor live coral cover, and our science shows that reefs need a precautionary threshold of ~30% live coral cover to secure growth.



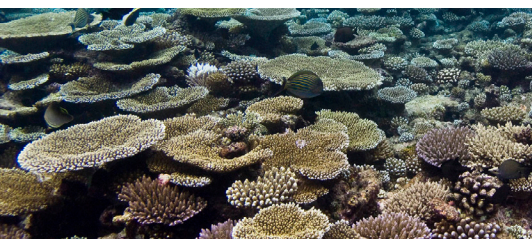
### Fleshy algae cover & Cover of key benthic groups

Collecting data on the percent cover of fleshy algae and other key benthic groups (e.g. cyanobacteria, seagrass), collected alongside live coral cover, improves understanding of ecosystem composition and function.



### Reef fish abundance and biomass

Fish biomass assessments capture ecological and fisheries status of coral reefs. WCS science shows that at least 500-600 kg/ha is needed to maintain fisheries productivity, ecosystem function, and biodiversity.



### Structural complexity of coral reefs

Structural complexity is positively associated with traits like reef fish abundance and biodiversity. WCS is working to refine data collection efforts and define a globally relevant threshold for adoption by CBD.

These are only some of the indicators endorsed by ICRI. Work is underway to bring still more indicators online, including proxy indicators for coral reefs that can be analyzed using global datasets, like access to coral reefs and their proximity to markets, or chronic thermal stress. Read more about the science behind these indicators here:

- Darling et al. "[Social-environmental drivers inform strategic management of coral reefs in the Anthropocene.](#)" *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, 2019.
- McClanahan et al. "[Critical thresholds and tangible targets for ecosystem-based management of coral reef fisheries.](#)" *PNAS*, 2011.
- Darling et al. "[Relationships between structural complexity, coral traits, and reef fish assemblages.](#)" *Coral Reefs*, 2017.
- McClanahan et al. "[Global baselines and benchmarks for fish biomass: comparing remote reefs and fisheries closures.](#)" *MEPS*, 2019

**A note on coral reef restoration:** *We have not proven that we can restore complex ecosystems like coral reefs at spatial or temporal scales that allow us to achieve shared biodiversity goals. Indicators for this are also underdeveloped. We therefore urge Parties to focus on the retention of existing coral reefs, and the mitigation of immediate threats.*

## NEGOTIATIONS ARE UNDERWAY, AND CORAL REEFS NEED CHAMPIONS

Join WCS and our ICRI partners in advocating for the adoption of ICRI's recommendations at: the 24th meeting of CBD's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice ([SBSTTA-24](#))-- currently scheduled for November 2020 in Quebec City, Canada. Document on indicators for the post-2020 framework are already available for peer review [here](#). ■

For more information, please contact:  
**Susan Lieberman, PhD**  
Vice President, International Policy  
[slieberman@wcs.org](mailto:slieberman@wcs.org)

