



Coral Research
& Development
Accelerator
Platform

Open Letter Calling for Urgent Coral Reef Action Addressed to Leaders and Policy-Makers at COP27, Ocean20 and COP15

Dear Leaders and Policy-Makers,

The recent UN Ocean Conference ignited a new wave of ocean action and science clearly concluding it is now or never to safeguard the very existence of coral reefs. **We have before us crucial opportunities to implement the policy, finance and science-based solutions needed to safeguard coral reefs.**

The mandates and priorities of the 27th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27); the Ocean 20 (O20) agenda, an initiative under Indonesia's G20 Presidency; and the second part of the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15) are inextricably linked to the health of coral reefs. **Leaders and policymakers at these fora must take dramatic and immediate action to ensure the continued existence of coral reefs.**

For more than one billion people, healthy coral reefs deliver sustainable food sources, livelihoods and income generation, protection from storm surge, medicinal properties, and significant cultural value. **Coral reefs are essential to the security and climate resilience of many nations, including the most vulnerable nations on Earth.**

The interlinked crises of climate change and biodiversity loss have brought to centre stage the need for greater collaboration and action at the international level to conserve, manage, and restore coral reefs. Coral reefs exist in more than 100 countries and territories and, whilst they cover only 0.2% of the seafloor, they support at least 25% of marine species and provide **ecosystem services valued up to \$9.9 trillion annually.**

The climate crisis and other local anthropogenic stressors, such as land and marine pollution, unsustainable tourism and development, overfishing and other harmful extractive activities, pose existential threats to coral reef survival. This threat combination has already resulted in the loss of more than half of the world's coral reefs. The world lost 14 percent of the coral on its coral reefs between 2009 and 2018, and **90 percent of the world's remaining coral reefs are threatened and may disappear completely by 2050. The window for protecting these ecosystems is closing rapidly.**

However, there is still hope.

Recognising this decade is the last chance for a turning point in favour of coral reef survival, as representatives of the coral reef community, we urgently emphasise the need to take immediate action at scale. On the occasion of the G20 O20 Ocean Days, COP27 and the second part of COP15, world leaders and policy-makers must place coral reefs in the centre of the climate-biodiversity-ocean nexus; highlighting their value, the need to address their threats, and to invest in future solutions to prevent their extinction – instigating and driving change.

Given the significance of the world’s 20 largest economies and the G20’s role as a leading platform to accelerate achievement of the 2030 Agenda, G20 leaders are crucial in progressing action to prevent the catastrophic loss of coral reefs. With the services of coral reefs underpinning all six priority O20 themes, the G20 offers a connecting force between COP27 and COP15.

We call on the G20, parties of COP27 and COP15, and private sector leaders to urgently implement the policy change, increase the level of investment and leadership needed to ensure coral reef conservation, protection, and restoration commensurate with their value to people and the world economy.

To fast-track implementation efforts for coral reefs, the global alliance of the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), the Global Fund for Coral Reefs (GFCR) and the G20 Coral Research & Development Accelerator Platform (CORDAP) stand ready to build resilience, address local, regional and global loss drivers, rapidly increase protection, unlock further finance, and expand restoration.

We look forward to your leadership in safeguarding coral reef ecosystems and ensuring a sustainable, blue future.

Coral Reef Solutions Overview

Commit to Marine Conservation

Countries, national agencies, communities, and actors must prepare for the future. With increased frequency of bleaching, devastating storm activity and increasing acidity, there must be a powerful drive to promote resilient coral reefs. Supporting the resilience of reefs and related ecosystems in national, regional, and international policies will support the sustainable management of reefs, and increase their ability to recover from severe perturbations, whilst building capacity to support nature and people. Resilience-based Management (RBM) is forward-looking and cost-effective in the long run. It empowers reef managers and communities to address current and future threats.

There is an urgent need to accelerate actions to support the resilience and restoration of coral reefs and coral reef-dependent communities globally, whilst mitigating and remediating local and global threats. Here, RBM is key as it requires the consideration of the entire system (community, governance, ecosystem) and anticipation of future impacts in the context of climate change. RBM builds on conventional management approaches – for example, establishing marine protected areas, integrating watershed and coastal zone management, and ensuring fisheries and other extractive uses are sustainable. This, therefore, emphasises the need for countries to agree on strong and ambitious actions within the international context: UNFCCC COP27 to limit climate change; the Ocean 20 to expand cooperation and spur investment in sustainable blue economy while protecting, restoring and regenerating it; and CBD COP15, focused on accountable actions for protection and restoration of marine biodiversity, including commitments to actions for 30x30 and marine protected area investment. Acting now will help secure a future for our valuable coral reefs.

Accelerate Coral Reef Restoration

Coral reef restoration can be used as part of a broader management strategy to combat declines in coral health globally and help countries deliver on commitments under various multilateral environmental agreements. However, coral reef restoration is not a stand-alone ‘fix’ for reef declines and the potential to restore should never be used as an excuse to continue activities that degrade reefs. Rather, restoration must be paired with efforts to mitigate and address threats prior to or alongside restoration efforts.

Importantly, coral reef restoration is not designed to reduce climate impacts, rather it is intended as a complementary tool to support natural recovery following disturbance in high-value areas. Thus, climate change mitigation should not preclude investment in local conservation strategies designed to build the resilience and adaptation of the socio-ecological coral reef systems. Scientists agree, it is not an ‘either or’ situation; actions need to be implemented concurrently to provide coral reefs with the greatest hope for future existence.

As coral reefs have experienced catastrophic losses in cover during recent years, the need for coral reef restoration efforts is escalating. Whilst it is not designed to reduce climate impacts, coral reef restoration can be a useful tool to support resilience, especially at local scales where coral recruitment is limited, and disturbances can be mitigated.

Policy, plans, and funding specific to coral reef restoration are needed to accelerate implementation at global, regional, and local scales. Funding and support for research and development, harnessing science, technology and innovation, and leveraging technologies towards implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework is critical.

Strengthen Sustainable Blue Food

Coral reefs help feed communities. They are home to one quarter of all marine species, which provide protein to an estimated one billion people. Reef ecosystems are considered “nurseries of the seas,” offering spawning grounds for sought-after fish, crabs, clams and other species. The health of reef ecosystems is critical to the food security of more than 500 million coastal community members who depend on reef fish for food and livelihoods.

With declining fish stocks globally, the role of coral reefs and sustainable aquatic foods in supporting human health and security has become increasingly important. To ensure the continued existence of biologically productive ecosystems like coral reefs, we must ensure they are protected, resilient and restored. Further, we must ensure practices relating to overfishing, wasteful fishing practices and overconsumption are addressed to improve the viability of coral reefs as natural food suppliers.

Address Marine Pollution

Coral reefs need clean water to survive. When sediment and other pollutants enter the water, they smother coral reefs, speed the growth of damaging algae, and lower water quality. Pollution can also make corals more susceptible to disease, impede coral growth and reproduction, and cause changes in food structures on the reef.

Sedimentation from coastal development, urban stormwater runoff, deforestation, and agriculture has been identified as a primary stressor for the existence and recovery of coral species as it can smother corals and interfere with their ability to feed, grow, and reproduce. Marine plastic is also of particular peril; the likelihood of disease increases from 4 percent to 89 percent once coral comes into contact with plastic. Nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorous) from agricultural and residential fertiliser use, sewage discharges (including wastewater treatment plants and septic systems), and animal waste can lead to the growth of algae that outcompetes coral colonisation and growth, as well as also supporting growth of microorganisms, like bacteria and fungi, that can be pathogenic to corals.

As many coral reefs occur in shallow water near shore, they are particularly vulnerable to pollution that originates on land but finds its way into coastal waters. In particular, blue

economy and blended finance offer promising pathways to support the solutions needed to address marine pollution.

Support Sustainable Blue Economy and Blended Finance

Despite the urgent need for action to avoid coral extinction and reverse degradation, a small amount, less than 0.01%, of climate finance from development banks between 2010 and 2015 went to coral reefs. In 2018, a jointly published report by the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre, *Analysis of International Funding for the Sustainable Management of Coral Reefs and Associated Ecosystems*, issued key findings including:

- funding for coral reef ecosystems remains significantly less than required;
- diversification of investment portfolios is critical to bridge the financing gap, including innovative approaches such as development of investment funds for coral reefs and enhancement of public-private partnerships; and
- The need for donor funding to facilitate the transition of reef ecosystems to be considered as blue economy assets.

These findings were followed by an assessment conducted by the Conservation for Biodiversity High-Level Panel that estimated that the global investment required for coral reefs is at least five times greater than current levels.

Widespread support was issued by leading coral reef donors, financial experts and institutions for the use of blended finance, the use of catalytic grant capital to attract private impact investment, as a promising avenue to close the coral reef funding gap.

Expansion, strategic design and support of sustainable blue economy further offers an immensely powerful pathway to address local drivers of coral reef loss, while offering entry points for private investment aligned to conservation aims. Blue economy coral reef-positive solutions include waste treatment and recycling facilities, coral reef insurance, sustainable aquaculture and agriculture, ecotourism, blue carbon credits, and sustainably financed marine protected areas.

About the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI)

The International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) is a global partnership between Nations and organisations that strives to preserve coral reefs and related ecosystems around the world. ICRI's actions continue to be pivotal in continuing to highlight the global importance of coral reefs and related ecosystems to environmental sustainability, food security and social and cultural wellbeing. The work of ICRI is regularly recognised for its important cooperation, collaboration, and advocacy role within the international arena.

The Initiative was founded in 1994 by Australia, France, Japan, Jamaica, the Philippines, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, and has since has grown to a network of over 90 members, including 45 countries who are custodians of over 75% of the world's coral reefs. ICRI continues to advocate for the protection, effective management, restoration and sustainable use of coral reefs and associated ecosystems, promoting effective and adaptable real-world solutions to the coral reef crisis. ICRI's actions are driven through its members, Ad Hoc Committees, and its operational network: the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN).

ICRI is currently chaired by the United States of America Secretariat implementing its Plan of Action, Turning the tide for Coral Reefs, 2021 – 2024. ICRI works to incorporate science into action, strengthen leadership and emerging technologies, and promote collaboration and communication among stakeholders. Activities will reach to Indigenous Peoples and local communities, ensuring their knowledge and intrinsic values of coral reefs are appropriately reflected alongside augmenting new technologies to support coral reef monitoring. The capacity of managers to response to climate change impacts will be built with opportunities taken to raise the plight of coral reefs amongst the international community; securing their protection and recover. Read more about ICRI at icriforum.org.

About the Global Fund for Coral Reefs (GFCR)

The Global Fund for Coral Reefs (GFCR) is the largest global blended finance vehicle dedicated to the Sustainable Development Goal 14, Life Below Water. The GFCR is designed to scale financial solutions and blue economic growth that bolsters the resilience of coral reefs and the communities that depend on them. GFCR blended finance programmes incubate and scale interventions that address local drivers of coral reef degradation, unlock conservation funding flows, and increase communities' adaptive capacities. Supported solutions include waste treatment and recycling facilities, coral reef insurance, sustainable aquaculture and agriculture, ecotourism enterprises, blue carbon credits, and sustainably financed marine protected areas. The GFCR Coalition partnership is driven by a coalition of Member States, UN Agencies, financial institutions, philanthropies, impact investors and organisations. Read more about the GFCR at GlobalFundCoralReefs.org.

About the Coral Research & Development Accelerator Platform (CORDAP)

The G20 Coral Research & Development Accelerator Platform (CORDAP) was launched in 2020 by the G20 to fast-track research and development (R&D) solutions to save the world's corals. It is the only international organisation fully dedicated to funding global R&D for

coral restoration and conservation, and the only G20 initiative dedicated to the ocean. A primary objective of **CORDAP** is to significantly increase the funding available globally for coral R&D and deploy that funding into a range of programs and projects that build on, connect, and complement existing national and international activities. It is governed by G20 member states and international coral organisations, is open for any country to join and is guided by an international scientific advisory committee. **CORDAP** is committed to delivering solutions that are scalable, transferable and affordable to those who most in need, focus areas include new innovative ideas for coral restoration, methods to protect existing corals, increasing the survival of early life corals, reef monitoring and building R&D capacity in developing nations. Read more about **CORDAP** at cordap.org.