IMPACT REPORT 2023

FOREWORD

Having been part of ICRI for over 20 years, it is with great pleasure and a sense of accomplishment that I present to you the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) 2023 Impact Report. This report is a testament to our collective efforts in the preservation and sustainable management of coral reefs worldwide. Over the past year, ICRI has undertaken significant initiatives to address the challenges facing coral reefs globally most notably hosting ICRI's first face-to-face General Meeting since 2019 in Kona, Hawaii, under the chairmanship of the United States of America, building strong alliances in 2023. In 2023, ICRI's membership grew to 101, including 45 countries who host over 75% of the World's coral reefs.

This year also saw the launch of the Coral Reef Breakthrough, a global vision grounded in science-based, measurable, and achievable goals for state and non-state actors to collectively conserve, protect, and restore coral reefs at the scale that is needed to secure the future of these vital ecosystems and the high-valuable contributions they provide to people.

ICRI continues to work closely with partners such as the Global Coral Research & Development Accelerator Platform (CORDAP), the Global Environment Programme (UNEP) to mobilise action and resources to protect and restore coral reef ecosystems.

This Impact Report serves as an overview of the main accomplishments of ICRI's collaborative efforts. The commitment and dedication of ICRI members, partners, and supporters have been instrumental in achieving positive outcomes and safeguarding coral reefs and their associated ecosystems.

Whilst ICRI continues to be steadfast in its efforts to conserve, protect and restore coral reefs, it is without doubt that coral reefs face an existential threat and a coupling of immediate and long-term management strategies, alongside sustainable financing, are needed.

I look forward to the continued successes in the collective effort to safeguard coral reefs worldwide and the many opportunities to continue partnership activities and enhance the visibility of ICRI's work.

Francis Staub
ICRI Global Coordinator

ICRI – USA TURNING THE TIDE FOR CORAL REEFS

The twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss have brought into stark relief the need for greater collaboration and action at the international level to conserve, manage, and restore coral reefs.

It is in this context that the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) Secretariat launched its Plan of Action for 2021-2024, Turning the Tide for Coral Reefs, from its current Chair, the United States of America. The ICRI Secretariat maintains progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 13 (take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts) and Goal 14 (conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources) and as a platform to support coral reef countries in the implementation of their national plans, strategies, and regional agreements, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Throughout 2023, ICRI’s members, its Chairs and the Secretariat have worked to better incorporate science into action, strengthen leadership and emerging technologies, whilst promoting collaboration and communication among stakeholders. Efforts have been taken to incorporate the traditional and intrinsic values of Indigenous Peoples and local communities regarding coral reefs and their associated ecosystems into ICRI’s actions, evidenced through the hosting of ICRI’s first ever Indigenous Local Knowledge (ILK) listening sessions and Youth Delegation at the occasion of the 37th ICRI general meeting.

Every opportunity has been taken, and will continue to be taken, to raise the profile of coral reefs with the broader international community and the actions that can be taken at local, regional, and global levels to secure their protection and recovery. Through 2023, this included the representation of the Initiative at 24 international events, including the organisation of side events at international meetings. In early 2023, at our Ocean conference in Vanuatu, ICRI held a side event in partnership with the Global Fund for Coral Reefs, UN OCEAN, Bloomberg Philanthropies, United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, Race to Resilience and United Nations Environment Programme, entitled ‘Future of Reefs: Innovative Solutions and Commitments to Increase the Resilience of Coral Reefs and their Guardian Communities’. Moreover, at the Twenty-third Global Meeting of Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, ICRI held a side event that emphasised the strong collaboration between ICRI and the UNEP Regional Seas Programme. This highlighted the pivotal role the regions hold for the preservation of coral reefs on a global scale, from supporting monitoring activities at the national scale, to shaping policies and influencing decision makers within international processes. In addition, ICRI partnered with the MIRPURU Foundation to launch the 2023 Ocean Award, focusing on raising awareness and finding solutions for coral reefs across the globe.

The ICRI Secretariat serves as a vital platform to support coral reef countries in the implementation of their national plans, strategies, and regional agreements, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and Beyond. This included the representation of the Initiative at 24 international events, including the organisation of side events at international meetings. In early 2023, at our Ocean conference in Vanuatu, ICRI held a side event in partnership with the Global Fund for Coral Reefs, UN OCEAN, Bloomberg Philanthropies, United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, Race to Resilience and United Nations Environment Programme, entitled ‘Future of Reefs: Innovative Solutions and Commitments to Increase the Resilience of Coral Reefs and their Guardian Communities’. Moreover, at the Twenty-third Global Meeting of Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, ICRI held a side event that emphasised the strong collaboration between ICRI and the UNEP Regional Seas Programme. This highlighted the pivotal role the regions hold for the preservation of coral reefs on a global scale, from supporting monitoring activities at the national scale, to shaping policies and influencing decision makers within international processes. In addition, ICRI partnered with the MIRPURU Foundation to launch the 2023 Ocean Award, focusing on raising awareness and finding solutions for coral reefs across the globe.

PLAN OF ACTION 2021-2023

ICRI – USA TURNING THE TIDE FOR CORAL REEFS

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Theme 1: Preparing for the Future: Promoting Resilient Coral Reefs

The increased awareness of the vulnerability of coral reefs, their role in supporting nature and people, and there is an urgent need to build coral reef resilience in marine conservation efforts globally, including in global policy frameworks.

Building on ICRI’s work in the build-up and adoption of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the Global Biodiversity Framework’s (GBF) 4 goals and 23 targets, an ad hoc committee on integrating coral reefs into National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) was created. ICRI assembled a guidance document to support the development of NBSAPs that align with, and build upon, the GBF’s 4 goals and 23 targets under the Coral Reef Breakthrough.

In June 2023, with the theme ‘Coral reef science and management in a rapidly changing world’, the 5th Asia Pacific Coral Reef Symposium (APCRS - 5) was attended by ICRI and the GCRMN to expand its network and other existing initiatives, (such as SocMon), or to provide technical support to members of the network. In May 2023, the GCRMN also established its Data Task Force to operational productivity, and robustness of future GCRMN reports.

Theme 2: Coral Reef Science and oceanography: advancing and utilising the latest science and technology

Over 30 internal meetings were held throughout 2023, with 14 additional meetings undertaken, either to improve the collaboration between the GCRMN network and other existing initiatives, (such as SocMon), or to provide technical support to members of the network. In May 2023, the GCRMN also established its Data Task Force to operational productivity, and robustness of future GCRMN reports.

Other activities included the release of the Coral Reef Breakthrough and a collaboration with CORAL to create awareness for coral bleaching, in which over 150 organisations joined the campaign.

The Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN), an operation under the network of ICRI, was established in 1999 to monitor the condition of the world’s coral reefs. GCRMN is hosted by the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) and operates through 10 regional nodes. In September 2023, the 31 participants to discuss the next global report and to strengthen the collaborative framework to drive the production of the “Status and Trends of Coral Reefs in the Pacific” regional report. The workshop enabled participants to strengthen their regional connectivity and the Pacific node to further expand its network, providing opportunities for collaboration between participants as well exchange of knowledge, and lessons learnt.

The Caribbean node convened 17 participants representing nine different countries, and territories and economies from the Caribbean region, at the occasion of the 7th annual meeting of the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI 76), for the development of a roadmap to produce the next regional GCRMN report.

Other regional coordinators were highly active throughout the year with additional workshops conducted in the Western Indian Ocean, Regional Organisation for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME), East Asian and Eastern Gulf and Caribbean region. To strengthen the collaboration with SocMon, an initiative aimed at helping coastal managers better understand and incorporate the socioeconomic context into coastal management programs ICRI funded the participation of 4 SocMon coordinators to attend the GM. In addition, funding was provided to produce visual infographics to effectively disseminate crucial information and foster a greater global awareness of SocMon’s goals and accomplishments.
At the ICRI 37th General Meeting, a series of presentations were delivered addressing existing response plans, including Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD), Lionfish Management, El Niño forecasting and Coral Bleaching Toolkits. These were then followed by a panel session to discuss resilient, comprehensive, and collaborative coral reef response plans that address the multifaceted threats facing coral reef ecosystems including lessons learned from different strategies adopted by various countries and organisations. Two of the main outcomes of the discussions included a proposal of a series of webinars to be produced on response planning and how to communicate the data already available into an accessible manner to be used across countries, regions and globally.

**Theme 3 Local threat reduction: integrating response planning frameworks**

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**Plan of Action Themes 3 & 4**

**Theme 3**

Local threat reduction: integrating response planning frameworks

**Theme 4**

Diversity and inclusion: expanding the coral reef community

The ICRI 37th General Meeting strongly focused on Theme 4 and aimed to broaden the coral reef community to include underrepresented voices, including the Indigenous, local, and youth communities. The meeting hosted a cultural exchange at the Kaloko-Honokohau National Historical Park, which preserves, interprets, and perpetuates Hawaiian cultural heritage providing the Hawaiian people and visitors to Hawai‘i Island a chance to connect with the mana (magic or spirit) of traditional Native Hawaiian culture.

ICRI recognises that indigenous and local knowledge (ILK) practices hold the key to effective reef management. Integrating these perspectives with scientific research results in a holistic approach that can better protect these fragile ecosystems. Therefore prior to the commencement of the Reef Management meeting, a ‘Listening Session’ was organised to involve Indigenous Local Knowledge participants and learn from their wisdom, where there was interest and consent to be involved. The session was chaired by ‘Aulani Wilhelm, Senior Vice President for Oceans at Conservation International and Kyle Whyte, Science Envoy for Indigenous and Local Knowledge, U.S. Department of State and George Willis Pack Professor, School for Environment and Sustainability, University of Michigan with speakers from Australia, Hawai‘i, New Zealand, Federated States of Micronesia and Panama. Participants shared their unique perspectives, values, and traditions to ensure the integration of ILK voices into ICRI discussions from the start. This was a powerful session which offered a platform for voices that are often marginalised, and provide unique perspectives and wisdom, contributing to a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of diverse coral reef issues.

A reflection document was produced and presented to ICRI members for the inclusion of Indigenous and Local Knowledge into coral reef conservation, and this was then replicated for a Youth panel. The involvement of youth is crucial due to their unique perspectives, fresh ideas, and potential to drive innovative solutions. For the first time in ICRI’s history, a youth delegation formed an informal working group, led by Diwigdi Valiente (Gunu peoples of Panama) and Esther Maina (Kenyan Youth Biodiversity Network), throughout the duration of the general meeting to develop reflections for the inclusion of Youth in future ICRI actions and global efforts.

By engaging these communities, ICRI aims to create a collaborative network that fosters the exchange of knowledge and encourages the active participation of underrepresented voices in decision-making processes related to reef management. ICRI will continue to incorporate diverse voices into its actions and welcome youth and ILK holders at the next general meeting.

**We are representing intergenerational knowledge and whatever we take back to the people that we represent is a proactive movement. We know what hasn’t worked in the past so we can do things better.**

- Troy Johnson, Wulgurukaba Traditional Owner from the Townsville and Yunbenun (Magnetic Island) region.
ICRI fosters partnerships and collaboration among governments, non-governmental organisations, international governmental organisations, research institutions, and other stakeholders to enhance knowledge generation and bridge existing knowledge gaps surrounding coral reef conservation and sustainable management practices. Safeguarding coral reefs can only be achieved through collective action.

ICRI members 2023

- 45 Countries
- +6 New members
- 75% Coral reefs represented

New partnerships

- Coral Risk and Resilience Action Alliance (ORRAA)
- Ocean & Climate Platform
- Technical Partner with the NBSAP Forums

Regional GCRMN workshops

- 14 Awareness videos
- 10,662 Followers

International events attended and/or supported

- 24 News articles
- 11 Newsletters
- 55 Newletters

Map of ICRI’s 45 country members including ICRI’s 8 founding countries

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The 37th General Meeting, the second of the United States of America’s third tenure chairing ICRI, brought together members from around the world face-to-face for the first time since the 34th General Meeting in Townsville (Australia) in 2019 to discuss the achievements of ICRI and its members, share knowledge and experiences, and drive the implementation of the 2021 – 2024 Plan of Action. Over 80 participants from 40 ICRI members gathered to take part in the rich discussions.

The meeting also set a precedence for future meetings, hosting the first ICRI Listening Session with Indigenous peoples and Local Community representatives and ICRI’s first Youth Delegation were welcomed.

“We are all connected by the problem, but hopefully connected by the solution”
– Ana Paula Prates, Director, Brazilian Ministry of the Environment

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OVER 80 PARTICIPANTS FROM 40 ICRI MEMBERS

LAUNCH OF THE CORAL REEF BREAKTHROUGH

6 NEW MEMBERS
• Arizona State University
• The Coral Research & Development Accelerator Platform (CORDAP)
• Coral Restoration Foundation (CRF)
• MSC Foundation
• SECORE International
• Suganthi Devadason Marine Research Institute (SDMRI)

2 AD HOC COMMITTEES (AHC)
• New AHC on integrating coral reefs into National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs)
• Extension of the Reef Restoration AHC

1 YOUTH PANEL TO INTEGRATE YOUTH PERSPECTIVES INTO ICRI ACTIONS

1 LISTENING SESSION TO BROADEN THE CORAL REEF COMMUNITY AND THE INCLUSION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND TRADITIONAL OWNERS

© Beth Watson

37TH GENERAL MEETING

ICRI 37th General Meeting
THE CORAL REEF BREAKTHROUGH

The world has lost 14 percent of the coral on its coral reefs since 2009 (Status of Coral Reefs of the World: 2020) and with ever-increasing pressures from climate change, the window for protecting these ecosystems is closing rapidly. Recognising the lack of coral reef-specific global targets, ICRI convened and chaired a working group to develop the Breakthrough of over 30 lead coral reef experts, in partnership with the GFCR and the High-Level Climate Champions (HLCC). This ensured the targets were grounded in science, actionable and measurable.

The Coral Reef Breakthrough aims to secure the future of at least 125,000 km² of shallow-water tropical coral reefs with investments of at least USD 12 billion by 2030 from public and private sources to conserve and restore these crucial ecosystems.

None of ICRI’s achievements would have been possible without the support of its members, collaborators and partners. The unwavering commitment to the ICRI mission is what drives us forward, whose contributions make a significant impact on safeguarding coral reefs and their associated ecosystems.

As a supporting partner of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, ICRI is taking part in the regular all partner online event, in addition to contribution to the 3 task forces.

ICRI would like to acknowledge the support from the Principality of Monaco, Government of Sweden, United Nations Environment Programme, NOAA and The United States of America for their support. With special thanks to the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation and the Reef World Foundation.

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Support for Coral Reef Breakthrough is support for the well-being of generations to come. – Ambassador Peter Thomson, UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Ocean.

At COP28, representatives of the GFCR Coalition announced the mobilisation of more than $200 million USD as an initial direct investment toward the Coral Reef Breakthrough targets to scale conservation solutions. In addition, the United Kingdom was the first country to officially endorse the Breakthrough.

Moving forward, ICRI will continue to build on the existing momentum of the Breakthrough, generating global endorsements and positive coral reef action whilst effectively raising awareness on the plight of coral reefs, showcasing the actions currently being implemented, and the solutions to prevent their functional extinction.

Stay updated on the Coral Reef Breakthrough www.coralbreakthrough.org

Download the Coral Reef Breakthrough

PARTNERSHIPS

ICRI strengthened its current partnership with several organisations including the global Coral Reef Assessment and Restoration Accelerator Platform (CORAAXP), by welcoming them as a new ICRI member and maintaining its active role as a member of the Initiative Governing Committee.

ICRI also worked closely with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), including the Regional Seas Programme.

ICRI continued to co-chair the UN Community of Ocean Action (COA) on Coral Reefs. The Community of Ocean Action aims to support its members in implementing their coral reef-related voluntary commitments by exchanging progress reports, experiences, lessons learned and good practices. ICRI represented the Community at the 2023 workshop, From Lisbon to Nice: Implementing SDG 14 with the Communities of Ocean Action.

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Purpose
ICRI emerged out of the recognition that coral reefs and related ecosystems found in tropical and sub-tropical regions are facing serious degradation, primarily due to acute and chronic anthropogenic stresses. Many nations face similar threats to natural resources and ecosystem services as well as similar management problems. Recognising this, ICRI’s objectives are to:
• Encourage the adoption of best practice in sustainable management of coral reefs and associated ecosystems,
• Build capacity amongst stakeholders, managers, and governments,
• and raise awareness at all levels on the plight of coral reefs around the world.

Mission
The International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) is a partnership between Nations and organisations which strives to preserve coral reefs and related ecosystems around the world. Although the Initiative’s decisions are not binding on its members, its actions have been pivotal in continuing to highlight the importance of coral reefs and related ecosystems to environmental sustainability, food security and social and cultural wellbeing. The work of ICRI is regularly acknowledged in United Nations documents, highlighting the Initiative’s important cooperation, collaboration, and advocacy role within the international arena.

The Initiative was founded in 1994 by eight governments: Australia, France, Japan, Jamaica, the Philippines, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. It was announced at the First Conference of the Parties (COP) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in December 1994.

ICRI is celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2024, which marks a significant milestone in global conservation efforts, highlighting sustained dedication to protecting coral reefs, one of Earth’s most biodiverse and economically valuable ecosystems.
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