



International Coral Reef Initiative

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INTERNATIONAL CORAL REEF INITIATIVE

ONLINE MEETING SUMMARY

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Hosted under the United States of America Secretariat



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1 Key information

The ICRI Online Meeting recording and PowerPoint presentations (.pdf) are available to download on the dedicated event page: <https://icriforum.org/events/icri-online-meeting-2024/>

2 Opening Remarks

The meeting was opened by Jennifer Koss, NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program and ICRI Co-chair, delivering remarks to over 60 participants. This was an informal online ICRI meeting, with a series of informative presentations summarised below.

3 Resilience Based Management Case Studies Update

Teena Browning, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

This presentation detailed the five case studies that have been produced under the recently closed ICRI ad hoc committee on Resilience Based Management. The five case studies produced are:

1. Kahekili Herbivore Fisheries Management, West Maui Hawai'i
2. Climate Change Resilience and Adaptation Planning Tool, NOAA, USA
3. Co-management of Caribbean Fisheries, Tela Bay, Honduras
4. Master Reef Guides, Great Barrier Reef, Australia
5. Crown-of-thorns Starfish Control Programme, Great Barrier Reef Australia

A call for a sixth and final case study was also announced, with respect to community, governance, and ecosystem approaches with a focus across, one or all of the below specific action points:

1. Partnering with Indigenous people in coral reef planning, monitoring and adaptive;
2. Implementing ridge 2 reef strategies for water pollution management and coastal erosion;
3. Mixed economy finance mechanisms; and
4. Strengthen legal and policy frameworks to promote the sustainable use of coral reefs and their connected ecosystems.

ICRI members who are interested in this opportunity are kindly asked to reach out to the ICRI Secretariat at their earliest convenience **but no later than April 15th, 2024**.

4 Updates from the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN)

Britta Schaffelke, GCRMN Global Coordinator, Australian Institute of Marine Sciences

Britta provided a detailed update on the progress of actions since the last GCRMN Steering Committee Meeting which took place in September 2023, at the occasion of the 37th ICRI General Meeting in Hawai'i. This included further information on the status of the next global report, as well as a detailed timeline (Fig. 1) and the steps to follow. To deliver the next global report, Britta highlighted the proposed three groups for the production of the next report:

1. A production team;
2. a data integration and analysis team; and
3. communications team.

In addition, a regional node survey is underway in which an opportunity to provide suggestions for possible case studies to be included in the next report, was also highlighted. To streamline the production of GCRMN reports, a Data Task Force (DTF) was established in May 2023. The objectives include: i) To improve data integration and analyses to facilitate production of future

GCRMN regional and global reports in a more efficient manner and ii) To promote good data management practices based on FAIR data principles¹ for the coral reef scientific community. The Data Taskforce is currently active and implementing its objectives, namely in the development of the methodological approaches to be used in the next global report.

Britta noted the need to source funding to support this process and ICRI members are requested to contact the ICRI Secretariat if they are aware of any opportunities.

Lastly, the next steps for the GCRMN Global report were highlighted and include the following:

- Analyse feedback from survey of regional nodes
- GCRMN Steering Committee 26 March- seek in principle endorsement of scope and plan
- Data Taskforce background work and engaging with nominated regional reps- next 2-3 months to agree on statistical analysis method
- Starting data collation ~ mid-year 2024, open to ~ mid-year 2025
- Regular consultation of regional nodes and Steering Committee throughout the process

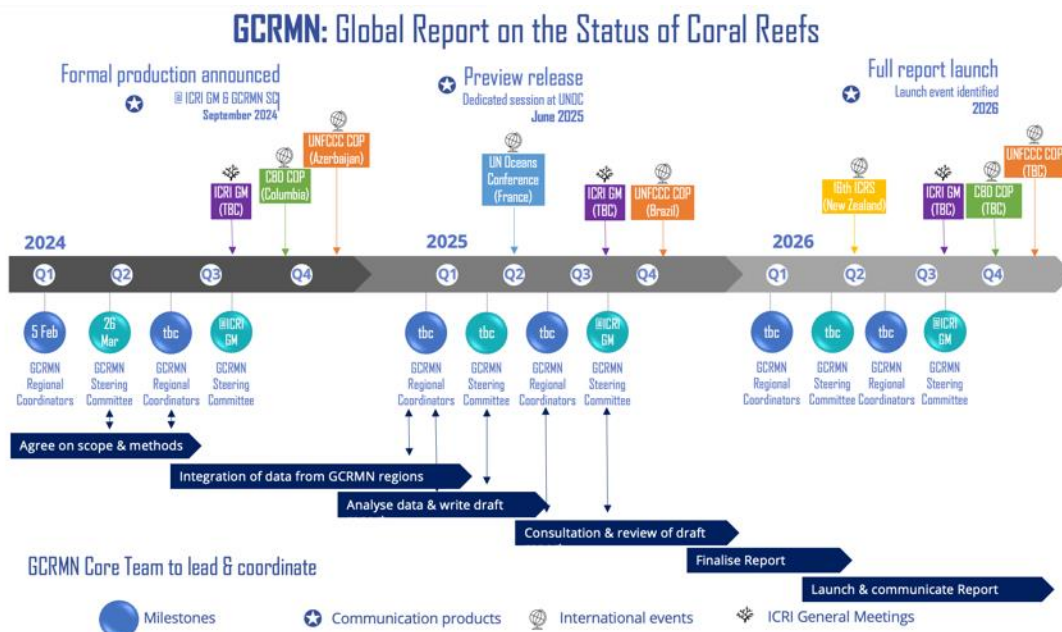


Figure 1: GCRMN Global Report on the Status of Coral Reefs Timeline

5 Record-Setting Heat Stress on Coral Reefs in 2023-2024: Current Patterns of Heat Stress and Future Outlook

Derek Manzello, NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program

Given the record-setting heat stress for the North-western Atlantic and Eastern Pacific in 2023, and multiple locations in the Southern Hemisphere currently experiencing record heat stress, it is imperative to understand the current patterns and future outlook for coral reefs. Derek presented updates on the new coral bleaching alert system, including the current projections of patterns of coral bleaching. This included information on a **near-global** mass bleaching event, with at least **42** countries/territories in **five** various oceans/seas being reported (Fig. 2). The Southern Hemisphere locations currently experiencing record heat stress include Tuvualu, Samoa and some parts of the Southwestern Indian Ocean to name a few. It is important to highlight, that there is also positive

¹ The 'FAIR Guiding Principles for scientific data management and stewardship' provide guidelines to improve the Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability, and Reuse of digital assets.

news in which, “A transition from El Niño to ENSO-neutral is likely by April-June 2024 (79% chance), with increasing odds of La Niña developing in June-August (55% chance).”

Lastly, Derek noted the importance of collecting long-term post-bleaching monitoring data for up to 2 years after heat stress subsides. This not only allows the identification of resilient reefs, species, and genotypes, but provides blueprints for how to save coral reefs during the next, inevitable coral bleaching event. The presentation served as a reminder that bleached coral is not dead coral and can recover if temperatures return to normal. However, the stress induced by the bleaching can lead to many corals later dying due to increased susceptibility to disease or predation.

To announce a global coral bleaching event the following criteria must be recognised:

The first, referred to as the Global Bleaching Index (GBI), utilises the 1998 event as a benchmark to delineate a global event which can be extended to evaluate the relative extent of heat stress conditions in subsequent global events (Skirving *et al.*, 2019)². This criterion is based on the accumulation of reef pixels in each ocean basin that have surpassed bleaching-level heat stress over the past year. Specifically, if > 12% of the reef pixels in each ocean basin have exceeded 4-degree heating weeks (DHWs) within the past 12 months, then this is indicative of a global event.

The second criteria used is in-water confirmation that mass bleaching is indeed happening in each ocean basin. There are confirmed reports from the Atlantic and Pacific but are standing by for conclusive evidence that widespread bleaching is indeed happening in the Indian Ocean. Reports of 'medium bleaching' are being received by CORDIO, but as of yet, it's not totally clear that severe, widespread bleaching is happening there. Once we get multiple reports that are more indicative of a severe, widespread event, then we will be ready to make the official declaration. We are right on the cusp of having all the info to make this official.

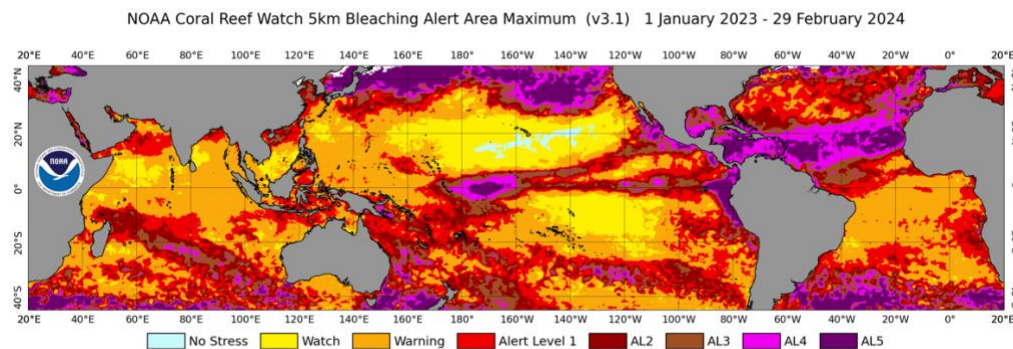


Figure 2: NOAA National Environment Satellite Data and information Service

6 Discussion on coral bleaching, key messaging, and next steps

Jennifer Koss, NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program and ICRI Co-chair

Coral reefs are currently facing a near-global mass bleaching event, with the ocean running a serious ‘fever’. However, it is important to note the extensive work currently being carried out to

² Skirving, W.J., Heron, S.F., Marsh, B.L. *et al.* The relentless march of mass coral bleaching: a global perspective of changing heat stress. *Coral Reefs* **38**, 547–557 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00338-019-01799-4>

ensure coral reef ecosystems are not lost. A discussion was led by Jennifer Koss, to coordinate an ICRI response either via press-release and media event as well as roadmap to accurately report what is happening at a regional and global level to highlight the many international efforts to promote innovative coral interventions and coral resilience. The ICRI and coral reef community stands united #ForCoral. To support, share knowledge, and build capacity of managers, policy makers, nations, and stakeholders, ICRI has created a [Coral Bleaching Hub](#), to share key messages and resources, its impacts, causes and solutions currently being implemented and developed. AIMS noted, “this is a global event, with a global stressor that requires a global response”.

Additional support and request to join the message construction team was provided by:

- Australian institute of Marine Sciences (AIMS)
- UNEP Cartagena Convention Secretariat
- Coral Reef Alliance
- Coral Research & Development Accelerator Platform (CORDAP)
- Coastal Oceans Research and Development in the Indian Ocean (CORDIO)
- The Reef Authority / Great Barrier Reef Marine park Authority (GBRMPA)
- Great Barrier Reef Foundation
- International Coral Reef Society (ICRS)
- The Reef World Foundation
- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Marine Programme
- The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

As a key next step, ICRI will aim to convene an online meeting to develop the roadmap, messaging, and next steps.

ICRI members were requested to contact the ICRI Secretariat if they wished to be included in the discussions in formulating messaging with respect to the announcement and response by ICRI.

In addition, WWF is producing a series of videos called untangled, which explain complex topics. This will include a segment on coral bleaching and how it influences coastal communities and sustainable development.

7 Coral Reef Red list of Ecosystems (RLE)

David Obura, Coastal Oceans, Research and Development in the Indian Ocean (CORDIO)

The Red List of Ecosystems (RLE) is a global standard for how to assess the conservation status of ecosystems, applicable at local, national, regional, and global levels. David’s presentation highlighted the role of the RLE in the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) in relation to concepts, indicators, and interpretation, as well as highlighting research articles on the detailed methodology on how to apply the RLE in coral reef contexts, providing a template for regional adaptation/specification. Moreover, the presentation highlighted the five criteria for assessing the different ecosystem characteristics. A regional Western Indian Ocean (WIO) analysis has been completed, with National Coral Reef Assessments (NCRA) currently underway in Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Madagascar, and the Comoros. The next steps of the RLE for coral reefs is to engage with the GCRMN, for a global coral reef assessment, meeting the needs in global policies for biodiversity and sustainability.

8 Report of the ad hoc committee (ahc) on Reef Restoration

Hannah Grice, UNEP-WCMC

Reef restoration continues to be an important aspect for coral reef conservation. Hannah highlighted the past achievements of the *ad hoc* committee as well as the proposed activities to take place in 2024:

- Development of regulatory and permitting guidelines
- Webinars
- Coral Bleaching Communications
- Reef Futures 2024

In addition, Hannah noted that any ICRI members that were not already a member of the Committee, and would like to join, to contact the ICRI Secretariat. A call was particularly made for ICRI country representatives to elucidate the knowledge on the global landscape for coral reef restoration and adequately disseminate guidelines.

9 ICRI Secretariat Progress Report

Margaux Monfared, ICRI Secretariat

As 2023 was a year full of achievements, ICRI released its 2023 ICRI Impact Report, on 12th March 2024. This Impact Report serves as an overview of the main accomplishments of ICRI's collaborative efforts in 2023 as well as the commitment and dedication of its members, partners, and supporters, all of whom have been instrumental in achieving positive outcomes and safeguarding coral reefs and their associated ecosystems.

Margaux also highlighted the [#ForCoral Webinar series](#), which kicked off earlier this month in collaboration with ICRI co-chair NOAA, on [Recent coral response events and the need for integrated response planning](#). Registration is also now open for the next webinar which will take place on 4th April in collaboration with ICRI member the World Heritage Marine Programme, on [The impacts of land based source of pollution on coral reefs](#). Additional webinars in the pipeline include the Coral Reef Red list of Ecosystems in collaboration with ICRI members IUCN and CORDIO, and one on the Resilience Based Management (RBM) Case Studies.

Should ICRI members wish to see certain topics please do not hesitate to contact the ICRI Secretariat.

ICRI was also pleased to announce a save the date for the ICRI 38th General Meeting, **9th – 13th September 2024**. The location and further details will be shared with ICRI members shortly.

10 Upcoming events

Tom Dallison, ICRI Secretariat

ICRI remains committed to ensuring coral reefs remain at the forefront of the international agenda, and therefore will be attending and hosting several upcoming events around the world:

- **Monaco Ocean Week**
 - Implementing the Coral Reef Breakthrough: Solutions #ForCoral
 - **Location:** Monaco, (18th – 22nd March 2024)
 - **Side Event Date:** 19th March (12:30 – 14:00)
 - **Website:** <https://icriforum.org/events/mow2024/>
- **Ocean Decade Conference**
 - The Coral Reef Breakthrough
 - **Location:** CCIB Barcelona, Spain (10th – 12nd April 2024)

- **Side Event Date:** 11th April (08:30 – 09:45 am)
- **Website:** <https://oceandecade-conference.com/on-site-satellite-events.php>

- **Twenty-sixth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA-26)**
 - ICRI has submitted a side event on coral reefs
 - **Location:** Nairobi, Kenya, (13th – 18th May 2024)
 - **Website:** <https://www.cbd.int/meetings/SBSTTA-26>

- **4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS-4)**
 - ICRI submitted a side event titled: Ocean Health, Human Wealth: The importance of coral reefs
 - **Location:** Antigua and Barbuda (27th – 30th May 2024)
 - **Website:** <https://sdgs.un.org/conferences/sids2024>

- **16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**
 - ICRI is planning to organise a high-level event to celebrate its 30th Anniversary
 - **Location:** Cali, Colombia (21st October – 1st November 2024)
 - **Website:** <https://www.cbd.int/meetings/COP-16>

11 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) – COP16

Ximena Rojas Giraldo and Maria Teresa Becerra Ramirez, Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, Colombia

ICRI was pleased to welcome remarks from the Government of Colombia regarding the upcoming COP 16, to be held in Cali, Colombia (21st October – 1st November 2024), with further information and comments provided by Joseph Appiott, from the Secretariat of the Convention of Biological Diversity. COP 16 will be the first Biodiversity COP since the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework at COP 15 in December 2022 in Montreal, Canada.

At COP 16, governments will be tasked with reviewing the state of implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Parties to the Convention are expected to show the alignment of their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) with the Framework. COP 16 will further develop the monitoring framework and advance resource mobilisation for the Global Biodiversity Framework. In addition, revisions of two programmes of the Convention will take place including:

- The Marine and Coastal Biodiversity programme
- The biodiversity and climate change item

12 Brazil's G20 Presidency

Mariana Vitali, Ministério do Meio Ambiente e Mudança do Clima

Debuting at the G20 under the Brazilian presidency, the Oceans 20 (O20) Engagement Group focuses on an often-neglected issue: the vital role of the oceans in driving sustainable economic growth and global development. The novelty marks a turning point, recognising the ocean as a central and limited resource that requires immediate attention and international cooperation to ensure its protection and sustainable use. The Environment and Climate Sustainability Working

Group deals with current issues on the environmental and climate sustainability agenda, with a view to encouraging cooperation between G20 members and guests on concrete and innovative solutions. It will discuss preventive and emergency adaptation to extreme events, payments for ecosystem services, **oceans**, as well as waste and the circular economy.

In addition, Mariana shared information on a series of meetings that are being prepared:

- 12th - 13th April 2024: the 2nd Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group will convene to discuss two themes including the Ocean and Adaptation issues in Brasilia,
- 19th – 21st June 2024: Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group - Payments for ecosystem services and Circular Economy in Manaus,
- 1st – 2nd October 2024: Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group with the 4 themes in Rio de Janeiro,
- 3rd October 2024: The Environment and Climate Sustainability Ministerial Meeting in Rio de Janeiro,
- 18th - 19th November 2024: The G20 Summit will be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

The first Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group with the 4 themes (arresting land degradation, accelerating ecosystem restoration, and enriching biodiversity; promoting a sustainable and climate-resilient blue economy; and encouraging resource efficiency and circular economy), took place in February 2024, with an [Inception Meeting of Oceans 20](#) in Rio de Janeiro on Monday March 18th 2024.

13 Guidance document of the integration of coral reefs into National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs)

Simon Harding, International Coral Reef Society (ICRS)

As part of the ICRI ad hoc committee on integrating coral reefs and associated ecosystems into NBSAPs, a document was created to provide guidance to coral reef countries on how to integrate coral reefs and associated ecosystems into their revised NBSAPs to support the alignment of plans and actions, at the national level, with respect to the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). The guidance presents a range of resources and example actions that could be undertaken by countries in relation to the goals and targets of the GBF. Countries and readers are encouraged to consider the international context of the guidance in this document and utilise the information to support their respective national-level context and processes for developing and preparing NBSAPs concerning coral reefs and associated ecosystems.

Download the [Guide for Integrating Coral Reefs and Associated Ecosystems in to National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans \(NBSAPs\) \(.pdf\)](#).

Three case studies and a short summary document are available on the above ICRI Document page.

14 Closing Remarks

Christine Dawson, US Department of State and ICRI Co-chair

The meeting was concluded by Christine Dawson, recognising the long-standing global efforts of ICRI, and the need for ICRI in these testing times for coral reef ecosystems. Just like a pearl, ICRI is perseverant and resilient - a fitting analogy as ICRI celebrates its 30th Anniversary.