

# Red Sea Coral Day - Synopsis

- **Global Importance:** The loss of coral reefs globally threatens the well-being of millions, but biodiversity hotspots like the Red Sea remain critical for marine life and human livelihoods.
- **Red Sea Significance:** Home to some of the most biologically diverse coral reef communities outside Southeast Asia, the Red Sea boasts 6% endemic coral species and is one of the longest continuous reef systems in the world.
- **Economic Value:** The Red Sea's coral reefs support 28 million coastal inhabitants, generating over US \$230 million annually from fisheries and US \$12 billion from tourism, underscoring their socio-economic significance.
- **Climate Refuge Potential:** The Red Sea, particularly the Gulf of Aqaba, shows high thermal resilience, offering hope as a major global marine refuge in the face of climate change.
- **SHAMS Leadership & Forum Goals:** SHAMS leads efforts to protect and restore the Red Sea's coral reefs through expert collaboration. The Red Sea Coral Day will strengthen global partnerships, advance science-based conservation solutions, and position the Red Sea as a model for climate-adaptive marine ecosystems, setting new standards for coral reef protection and restoration.

# # 1 Setting the scene – welcome and opening remarks

- Best practice is needed to succeed conservation
- Nationally aligned with Vision 2030, RSSS, NES
- Ensure holistic system and collaborative model to learn, share successes and challenges
- National, regional and international collaboration are critical
- 1<sup>st</sup> Red Sea Outlook report
- Insights from NEOM: Protect, rewild, recover
- Data sharing and trustful partnerships

## #2 SHAMS – A leading organization to oversee the regulation, protection, development, and sustainability of coral reefs in the Red Sea

- Red Sea is a climate refuge for corals and all biodiversity
- Prioritization of reefs and management actions is important for efficiency, resilience and restoration
- Vision: Communities, citizens, stakeholders: Engagement and awareness to strengthen pride and understanding of coral reefs as national icon and assets to the people, the economy and the world.
- Adaptive and community-engaging Resilience-Based Management
- Shift perceptions: Changing minds, changing behaviors, building communities, changing structures
- Restoration can help safeguard ecosystem services and support livelihoods.
- Science-based conservation strategies and management

# # 3 Monitoring efforts in the Red Sea in response to Climate Change

- PERSEGA has established legal frameworks and regional action plans for international conservation
- SHAMS to engage with stakeholders and experts around the world: act quickly and adaptively
- First bleaching forum got partners together, shared best practices and lessons, and standardized methods
- Northern Red sea corals on average live below their thermal limits, and the Gulf of Aqaba is a Beacon of hope for the future
- Continuum from carrying capacity towards resilience-based management and reef stewardship

## # 4 Safeguarding Red Sea coral reefs: conservation strategies and the importance for regional collaboration

- Red Sea underrepresented on UNESCO list but unique in history and resilience
- World Heritage Sites: Global recognition, prestige and attention, may require international collaboration
- Atlas of connectivity: Modeling ocean currents and source & sink reefs
- Small scale fishery most directly interact with coral reefs but historical data are a challenge in KSA
- Large concern about overfishing
- Knowledge on fish aggregation sites is very limited

## #5 Sustainable tourism, and blue natural capital: Elevating and investing in the Red Sea as a coral refugia and national treasure

- Tourism has great potential but also great risk - we need solutions
- Green Fins is an example of global standard for sustainable snorkeling and diving
- Saudi Red Sea Authority: Preserve Red Sea with coastal tourism in the right way
  - Goal: 19 million leisure tourists until 2030. Create 210k jobs.
- Natural capital value depends on ecological integrity
- Reefs have direct use values (market and non-market based), indirect values, iconic value. Protecting and enhancing this capital is key
- We need defined destinations and standards – what does full sustainability look like.
- Use innovative finance tools (e.g., coral reef insurance) to safeguard ecosystems



# Ways forward for KSA coral reef management

-  Best practices for conservation
-  National, regional and international collaboration
-  Data sharing and trustful partnerships
-  Prioritization and resilience
-  Communities, citizens, stakeholders
-  National icon asset to the people, the economy and the world
-  Act quickly and adaptively
-  Regionally relevant models
-  Carrying capacity and sustainable tourism

*“There is huge potential of the development sector, communities and tourism to move from compliance to becoming active drivers of conservation.”*

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