

Key Policy Asks for Coral Reefs - 2025: Accelerating the decade of action #ForCoral

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As the world stands at the precipice of critical oceanic milestones, 2025 is a defining year for the future of the ocean. With several major ocean events on the horizon, such as the [10th Our Ocean Conference](#) and the [Third United Nations Ocean Conference \(UNOC-3\)](#), this year stands as a crucial turning point in the global effort to protect the health of the ocean. It also marks the halfway point in our journey toward achieving the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), and the [Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework \(GBF\)](#), presenting a critical opportunity to accelerate action for ocean sustainability.

Recognising that [16 out of 23 GBF Targets](#) are considered highly relevant to coral reefs¹, it is imperative that the global community prioritise coral reefs in ocean policy discussions and decision-making under aligned and consistent messaging. To achieve [SDG 14: Life below water](#), urgent and decisive action is required to address the primary drivers of coral reef decline, alongside effective conservation, and sustainable management strategies. These efforts must not only halt further degradation but also build the foundation for long-term ecological health and socio-economic resilience.

All activities outlined in the key policy asks for coral reefs will take in to consideration [Target 22](#) of the Kunming-Montreal Global biodiversity Framework (GBF), to ensure the full, equitable, inclusive, effective and gender-responsive representation and participation in decision-making, and access to justice and information related to biodiversity by indigenous peoples and local communities, respecting their cultures and their rights over lands, territories, resources, and traditional knowledge, as well as by women and girls, children and youth, and persons with disabilities and ensure the full protection of environmental human rights defenders.

● Address Localised Anthropogenic Threats

Increase resilience of coral reefs, and the communities that depend on them by enacting, implementing, and enforcing policies to address, manage and reduce threats from human activity.

- Maintain, improve, and manage water quality, reducing land-based pollution risk, especially from agriculture, plastics, and other sources, by establishing meaningful water quality targets, implementing strong regulations, and effectively managing watersheds.
- Support sustainable fisheries, by reducing destructive practices, ending overfishing, stopping illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and promoting effective fisheries management practices through policies guided by the best available science, and local knowledge, and that support customary sustainable use, build resilience and long-term efficiency.
- Ensure land-use planning, pollution control, sediment management, and implement strong regulations to minimise damage to reef ecosystems from construction activities and run-off.
- Embed coral reef impact mitigation, and continued risk management, in business and reef-use activities to limit, and halt, direct impacts and unsustainable exploitative use of coral reefs.

● Increase and Strengthen Protection and Conservation

¹ International Coral Reef Initiative. (2024). Guidance Document on Integrating Coral Reefs and Associated Ecosystems into National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans. London, United Kingdom: International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) Secretariat.

Expand and strengthen coral reef protection and resilience through effective management and conservation efforts, working at both the national and regional scales, to support global coral reef recovery.

- Increase the area of coral reefs under effective management, protection, and conservation through Area-based Management Tools (ABMT), highly and fully protected areas, Marine Protected Areas (MPA), Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECM), and Indigenous and traditional territories and local community stewardship.
- Build resilience and promote and support recovery by taking urgent action to safeguard and conserve coral reefs, with special attention to identifying and acting to protect regions most vulnerable to climate change and to those regions or reefs that are particularly resilient to the impacts of climate change (climate refugia).
- Leverage existing regional conservation and governance frameworks, including Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, Regional Fisheries Bodies, and other Regional or Subregional Intergovernmental Organisations, to strengthen coordinated efforts, policy integration, and resource mobilization to promote coral reef conservation.

- **Restoration**

Design policies that support effective coral reef restoration through integrated strategies that address local threats and build long-term resilience.

- Ensure restoration projects are paired with local threat reduction policies, such as water quality improvement and sustainable fishing, and management efforts to build coral reef resilience to climate-induced disturbances.
- Employ best-practice, climate-smart guidelines for intervention and engage in targeted, strategic efforts to address coral bleaching, and repair degraded coral reef ecosystems, supporting natural recovery with innovative new techniques where appropriate.
- Ensure ownership and community buy-in to address local pressure and mobilise traditional knowledge and practices, supported by national frameworks and policies, for effective and sustainable restoration efforts.
- Advance standardized monitoring of restoration efforts and guidelines for measuring ecosystem-level impacts of restoration activities.

- **Developing Capacity**

Enhance capacity through partnerships, knowledge exchange, and community initiatives to strengthen coral reef management and governance.

- Foster capacity-building and development partnerships, and knowledge exchange, between all nations to enable the implementation of effective practices in coral reef management, and support responsiveness to disturbances, policy, and regulations.
- Better-equip communities through capacity-building and development initiatives that guide local authorities, community groups, and actors, to effectively implement equitable governance, integrated and participatory management practices.
- Build and enhance capacity to embed coral reefs into government and sectoral policies, planning, and regulations at local, national, and international levels.

- **Strengthening Scientific Monitoring**

Strengthen coral reef monitoring to provide actionable data that better informs decision-makers and policy, supporting effective management and global collaboration.

- Establish and strengthen national coral reef monitoring programmes to collate high-quality actionable data, information, and knowledge, making results freely available, to inform management and policy decisions, and commitments, at both national and international levels
- Encourage the adoption and monitoring of critical healthy coral reef indicators including [ICRI's Healthy Coral Reef Indicators](#) that assess the biological, physical, social, cultural, and economic variables of coral reefs (including hard coral and macroalgae cover, the abundance and biomass of herbivorous fishes, and prevalence of disease) over space and time to track the implementation, and impact, of international coral reef targets.
- Support coral reef monitoring networks, including the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN), and promote standardised monitoring and data handling practices, to enable timely responses to dynamic conditions and threats of coral reefs. Further support and equip participatory and citizen science monitoring networks to strengthen local and national capacities and foster culturally-sound, rights-based and cost-efficient approaches.

- **Addressing the Climate-Biodiversity Nexus and Triple-Planetary Crisis**

Climate and biodiversity policies are often developed and implemented by separate institutions and frameworks, which can lead to missed opportunities for coordinated action. Collaborative efforts should be emphasised in negotiations, with the aim of creating shared goals and strategies that serve both climate mitigation and biodiversity conservation.

- Encourage governments to promote the consideration of natural infrastructure alternatives such as mangrove forest and reef conservation and restoration in assessments of the cost effectiveness of risk reduction measures.
- Incorporate coral reefs into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) as natural infrastructure and nature-based solutions for climate mitigation and adaptation.
- Include strong science-based protection and restoration targets for coral reefs and their associated ecosystems in National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), complemented by regularly updated management plans and monitoring programs, ensuring a dynamic approach that tracks progress and adapts to evolving conditions.

- **Equitable and Collaborative Governance**

Foster inclusive governance by ensuring equitable access to resources and empowering stakeholders in coral reef conservation efforts.

- Establish transboundary governance systems for coordinated action on interconnected or shared coral reef ecosystems, including leveraging existing frameworks, such as Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans or other regional organisations that already have a mandate in this regard.
- Ensure that all stakeholders, including local communities, women and youth, Indigenous groups, and small-scale fishers, have equitable access to essential resources (such as knowledge, funding, and technology) and are actively involved in decision-making processes to promote reef conservation and support sustainable livelihoods.

- **Scaling Finance**

Unlock sustainable funding for coral reef conservation by promoting long-term investments, redirecting harmful subsidies, and leveraging innovative financial mechanisms to support coral reef resilience and the blue economy.

- Increase dedicated funding in an effective, timely and easily accessible manner, through the allocation of specific, long-term funding to support coral reef conservation, restoration, and resilience actions that align with global climate and biodiversity commitments, ensuring equitable access for all.
- Ensure that sufficient and durable financing for coral reef protection and conservation is included by all donor countries, multilateral institutions, and other financial partners when fulfilling the target of the Coral Reef Breakthrough to secure investments of at least USD 12 billion by 2030.
- Implement regulations and incentives to ensure that private industries make reef-safe investments, requiring them to be at a minimum reef-neutral, and encourage the allocation of capital towards reef-positive enterprises, promote sustainable blue economy initiatives, and establish financial mechanisms that enhance the resilience of coral reefs.
- Redirect and phase out harmful subsidies from governments and financial institutions that support overfishing, destructive coastal development, and fossil fuel use, and promote a shift toward reef-positive investments that enhance marine protection and sustainable ocean economies.
- Leverage innovative financing mechanisms, like the Global Fund for Coral Reefs (GFCR), that expand the use of blended finance, blue bonds, debt-for-nature swaps, and reef insurance to mobilise diverse funding sources and de-risk private sector engagement.