

CHAPTER 12:

Reducing Impacts from

International Trade





Goal:

Reduce the adverse impacts of the collection of and trade in coral reef animals, encourage more responsible trade, and encourage the conservation and management of coral reef ecosystems, both domestically and internationally.

Coral reefs face increasing pressure from commercial harvesting for export to supply the world's growing demand for food, aquarium organisms, live reef fish food, curios, jewelry, pharmaceuticals, and traditional medicines. In many cases, collection occurs at unsustainable levels, leading to a reduction in the abundance and biomass of targeted species, a shift in species composition, potential large-scale ecosystem degradation, and diminished long-term benefits to local communities. In addition to overfishing and over-exploitation, destructive fishing practices and unsafe diving methods are becoming more widespread as fishermen must access more remote and deeper locations to collect target species. Many of the coral reef animals and products imported into the United States may be captured using methods damaging to reefs and may be collected at unsustainable levels. Eliminating destructive collection practices and overfishing can help local communities and the marine aquarium industry sustain jobs and income and help ensure access for



Live rock mining in Fiji

U.S. consumers to quality products without impacting the health and sustainability of coral reefs. The USCRTF has strengthened human and institutional capacity to develop and implement sustainable management plans, enforce relevant laws and regulations, develop environmentally sound collection practices and alternatives, and implement other measures to protect and conserve coral reef ecosystems.

Accomplishments by Objective

Objective 1: *Assess the nature and extent of trade in coral reef species and both positive and negative impacts associated with the trade.*

Trade-driven damage to coral reef ecosystems is an issue of great importance to the United States, one of the world's largest consumers of marine ornamental products for aquaria, curios, and jewelry. The USCRTF supports projects to improve coral reef management

and environmental law enforcement to reduce illegal fishing and negative impacts associated with international trade. For example, in the Philippines, the Coastal Resources Management Program helped establish three coastal law enforcement councils in the province of Bohol. Training, which included building general capacities and basic investigative techniques, increased the confidence and effectiveness of officers from councils and other local maritime and fishery enforcement groups. The enforcement councils reported a 95 percent success rate in prosecuting cases filed in court against illegal fishing methods. The councils have also helped municipal governments standardize laws and fines related to coastal resource management and launched information campaigns in popular illegal fishing hot spots.

The international trade in coral reef animals and products not only causes physical harm to the reef, but also undermines the rule of



Humphead Wrasse

law and efforts to promote sustainable and equitable management. An assessment in the Philippines of the marine aquarium trade found 80 percent of the animals were collected by illegal, roving collectors (i.e., collectors operating outside of their own jurisdiction). Many of these roving collectors were using cyanide, a collection practice illegal in the Philippines and destructive to reefs.

Objective 2: *Evaluate and implement approaches to mitigate negative impacts associated with trade.*

One approach used by the USCRTF to reduce the trade in rare, ecologically important species and unsuitable species unable to survive in captivity is to work through CITES. CITES is an international agreement between governments and aims to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. In 2004, the United States

developed and submitted a CITES Appendix II listing proposal for the humphead wrasse (*Cheilinus undulates*), a vulnerable, long-lived fish targeted for the live reef food fish trade. Through unanimous vote, the Parties at the 13th Conference of Parties of CITES adopted this proposal. The United States worked with CITES Parties to adopt a minimum export size of ten-centimeters for wild-caught seahorse specimens as a voluntary interim measure for making non-detriment findings as required for export of CITES-listed species. Participants at a workshop in Mazatlan, Mexico, developed guidelines for sustainable management of seahorse fisheries, methods to improve capability of law enforcement to identify and verify CITES shipments of seahorses, and criteria for non-detrimental aquaculture operations. The United States successfully defended the retention of live rock (coral rock) used in home aquaria as part of the CITES Appendix II listing for stony corals, thereby retaining restrictions on international trade,



Corallium, pink coral necklaces.

and did not support consideration of these specimens as “fossil coral,” which is exempt from CITES controls.

One aspect of improving the effectiveness of CITES to reduce the trade in rare or endangered coral reef species is to increase the capacity of enforcement throughout the CITES Parties. To help improve enforcement, the United States supported and participated in capacity-building trainings and workshops including the following:

In each year covered by this report, the USFWS provided wildlife crime investigative training at the International Law Enforcement Academy in Botswana to officers from sub-Saharan African nations, including the coral reef countries of South Africa, Tanzania, and Kenya. The two-week program covered CITES and other endangered species laws, intelligence gathering, undercover

operations, and preparation of cases for court.

Working with partners, the USFWS conducted a two-week criminal investigators program for 30 officers from Thai agencies charged with protecting the nation’s wildlife and marine resources and two observers from the Philippine National Bureau of Investigations. The program covered CITES and other endangered species laws, intelligence gathering, undercover operations, raid planning and execution, and preparation of cases for court.

The USFWS and DOJ participated in a three-day Wildlife Enforcement Network Workshop conducted by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in Thailand. The U.S. representatives provided overview presentations on legislative, investigative, and prosecutorial

strategies for combating trafficking in protected species. USAID supported the establishment of the Wildlife Enforcement Network in Southeast Asia, in a coordinated effort to address the illegal trade in wildlife.

Intercepted Illegal Trade of Coral Reef Species

The USFWS has a 30-year history of implementing the CITES, the only international treaty designed specifically to control, monitor, and regulate international trade in certain animal and plant species now or potentially threatened with extinction. CITES is one of the most effective forces in the world today for conserving threatened fauna and flora; it is effective both in halting the trade in species and in fostering sustainable use of other vulnerable species. A number of coral species and species associated with coral reefs, such as the humphead wrasse are among the approximately 35,000 species protected by CITES, of which roughly 224 are species associated with coral reef ecosystems.

The USFWS monitors wildlife trade at 38 U.S. ports, five of which were first staffed by inspectors since 2004. Following are highlighted cases of interdictions of coral-related species:

In Charleston, South Carolina, inspectors seized 4,791 coral pieces and shells imported without the required declaration or CITES permits. Seven undeclared giant clam shells (each weighing 50+ pounds) hidden in a commercial shipment of antiques were also discovered. The seized coral pieces and shells are on loan to the Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta for use in an education display about safeguards for coral reefs and reef species.

In Atlanta, Georgia, inspectors report an increased number of violations involving the importation of CITES live and dead corals as well as other reef species. One seizure consisted of 163 pieces of coral and queen conch shells; another involved 25 pounds of whole, freshly killed sea turtle meat from El Salvador.

In Miami, Florida, inspectors seized commercial shipments of queen conch meat from Haiti, Turks and Caicos and intercepted multiple shipments of black coral and queen conch. They also foiled a smuggling attempt of sea horses in which an individual arrived from Peru with 320 specimens hidden in his baggage.

*In Los Angeles, California, a cooperative investigation documented the smuggling of live Clarion angelfish, *Holocanthus clarionensis* (a rare coral reef species). The defendant had concealed 160 of the rare fish in a shipment of other tropical fish; Clarion angelfish sell for as much as \$2,600 each.*