

## U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Resolution 34.1

1. Title: USCRTF Framework for Fiscal Year (FY) 2016-FY 2020 Priority Action
2. Responsible Party: Implementation of this resolution will take full U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) Steering Committee staff engagement. The USCRTF Secretariat will serve as lead for coordination. Individual USCRTF member contributions are noted in the specific action items listed below.
3. Issue Statement: The survival of coral reefs is at risk. Healthy coral reefs are among the most biologically diverse and economically valuable ecosystems on Earth however, coral reef ecosystems are facing significant threats to their integrity and survival. The USCRTF recognizes the urgent need for action to improve coral reef management and science and to reduce threats to coral reef ecosystems. The USCRTF has fostered efforts to address stressors to make reef ecosystems more resilient in the face of climate change, ocean acidification, and impacts from natural disasters and unmanaged human activity.

Science has demonstrated that reef communities protected from local stressors are healthier, provide more services (fisheries, storm protection), and are more likely to recover. Climate change and ocean acidification are already damaging coral reefs around the world, and many coral reefs may not survive to the end of this century at projected levels of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions. As atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> increases, protection, adaptation, and restoration options for coral reefs and related ecosystems become fewer and less effective. This reinforces the need to act to secure precious time for coral reef ecosystems to adapt to changing conditions, which can be done, in part, through increased protection from land and marine pollution, unsustainable fishing practices, coastal development, and other stressors known to reduce the health and sustainability of coral reef ecosystems. However, these local actions alone will be insufficient if both jurisdictional and federal governments do not continue to act within their authorities to limit levels of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere.

It is clear that the USCRTF, with partners, must significantly increase our collective efforts to address these threats to coral reefs. The USCRTF recommits to its call for immediate action to respond to these threats and meet the challenges confronting our coral reef ecosystems and the communities that depend upon them. The USCRTF will act as a leading intergovernmental body continuing to facilitate the implementation of both national scale efforts, such as the National Ocean Policy (as it pertains to coral reef ecosystems) and local, on-the-ground efforts in the Pacific and Atlantic/Caribbean regions. To enhance our effectiveness within the context of national and local actions, the USCRTF will identify strategic and targeted priorities for FY16-FY20 and commits to conducting more results-oriented actions.

It is essential that the USCRTF members provide strong leadership and actively engage a vision and a voice for coral reef conservation and protection. The USCRTF must continue to maintain a comprehensive and collaborative framework to carryout America's stewardship responsibilities for coral reefs. This framework will provide strong leadership, a common vision, and a unified voice for coral reef stewardship.

4. Background: The USCRTF, since its establishment in 1998, has worked as an effective intergovernmental body promoting a holistic, ecosystem-based approach to coral reef conservation and facilitating coordination and integration across the federal government to support federal, state, territorial, commonwealth, tribal, local, and regional management of coral reef ecosystems.

Statement Decision: To fulfill the intent of this resolution, the USCRTF decides to:

***Strategic and Targeted USCRTF Priorities FY16-FY20***

1. Contribute to the National Ocean Policy:
  - a. Continue to implement interagency and intergovernmental priority actions and projects related to conserving and protecting coral reef ecosystems in the Pacific and Atlantic/Caribbean regions listed in the National Ocean Policy Implementation Plan. These actions will be listed as complete under the National Ocean Council's action tracking system as projects have been put in place or documents have been developed. However, these actions are ongoing and will need continued support by member agencies and jurisdictions to be implemented, adapted, and updated as needed:
    - i. Implement coordinated projects in targeted locations to reduce land-based pollutants impacting coral reef ecosystems. Provide information and tools necessary for managers and decision-makers to identify and implement the most effective and efficient management practices in upstream environments.
    - ii. Complete state/territory-specific coral bleaching response plans and/or resilience/adaptation strategies to better coordinate action to address the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification on coral reef ecosystems.
    - iii. Complete and disseminate a reference handbook to include a review of existing policies, agency and state/territory roles and responsibilities, a compendium of best practices, science-based methodologies for quantifying ecosystem services, and protocols for use when responding, assessing, mitigating, and restoring coral reef ecosystems.
  - b. Continue to support regional marine planning efforts by supporting Regional Planning Body (RPB) meetings, in conjunction with USCRTF meetings as appropriate and requested; contributing knowledge and staff expertise to RPBs as appropriate and requested; and providing a communication forum for any additional means of potential support.
2. Take action on priority issues through place-based partnerships
  - a. Watershed Partnership Initiative
    - i. Continue to engage USCRTF Watershed Working Group through monthly calls and workshops at jurisdictional meetings.
    - ii. Continue to support priority watersheds, including but not limited to Guanica, Puerto Rico; West Maui, Hawaii; and Faga'alu, American

- Samoa, where local and federal partners promote restoration, pollution controls, and monitoring to improve coral reef condition.
- iii. Assess success of interventions implemented at priority watersheds using indicators developed by the metrics subcommittee. Support work of the metrics subcommittee to completion of programmatic, social, and ecological watershed indicators.
  - iv. Build capacity at other jurisdictional watershed sites through sharing of lessons learned, metrics, workshops and webinars.
  - v. Develop a strategy for the Initiative that defines common terminology, provides background on the Initiative and targeted objectives, describes the USCRTF Watershed Working Group's goals and actions, and maps a new strategy for including new priority watersheds and sharing information and lessons learned and building capacity at other jurisdictional watersheds.
3. Serve to advance information sharing and promote joint action on topics that involve trans-jurisdictional issues.
- a. Develop working groups around trans-jurisdictional issues and/or increase states/territories focus on trans-jurisdictional issues via existing working groups.
  - b. Focus discussions at state and territory-hosted meetings on one or two key issues within that host jurisdiction, and include lessons learned from other jurisdictions in these discussions.
  - c. Increase effective communication and information sharing between federal and jurisdictional members of the USCRTF.
  - d. Support state and territory leadership engagement to ensure efforts implemented are complementary and well-integrated with existing state and territory laws, regulations, and policies.
  - e. Specific actions for FY16-FY20:
    - i. Injury and Mitigation
      - Complete the development of the Coral Reef Mitigation Handbook (Handbook), a reference document for coral reef managers, project applicants, proponents, permittees, and/or consultants to utilize for damage response, impact mitigation, and/or habitat restoration of coral reef ecosystems.
      - Distribute the Handbook to USCRTF members and interested partners and stakeholders
      - Continue to update and revise the Handbook as additional information regarding the mitigation of coral reef ecosystems becomes available.
    - ii. Education and Outreach
      - Develop a communication strategy to engage and educate reef users, local communities, school children and the general public in coral reef conservation efforts.
      - Continue to host seminars and/or outreach events for the local community and USCRTF meeting participants during the USCRTF's biannual meetings.

- iii. Climate Change
  - Continue work associated with the Corals & Climate Adaptation Planning (CCAP) Project activities.
  - Engage USCRTF staff, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), and other outside partners through regular webinar presentations.
  - Build on the *Reef Manager's Guide to Coral Bleaching* and support coral reef managers in using the guide.
  - Develop the next Climate Change Resolution to guide the activities of the CCWG in 2017 and beyond.
- iv. Ocean Acidification (OA)
  - Use the voice of the USCRTF to advance robust outreach on OA by welcoming scientific and policy discussions on OA at USCRTF meetings.
  - Support efforts by USCRTF members, such as EPA, State Department, and local jurisdictions, to reduce atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations
  - Enhance partnerships by coordinating USCRTF efforts on ocean acidification with the National Ocean Council; OA Interagency Working Group; federal agencies; states, territories, and commonwealths; and other key partners and support the national strategic plan on OA research.
  - Promote opportunities to reduce additional coastal acidification by working through USCRTF initiatives and partnerships to provide tools to reduce nutrient inputs to coastal waters which can lead to eutrophication and increase acidity. For example, by limiting entry into the ocean of high phosphate detergents and cleaning products, fertilizers, and inadequately treated sewage effluent.
  - Promote opportunities to increase coral reef ecosystems resiliency as much as possible in the face of ocean acidification by working through USCRTF initiatives and partnerships to provide tools to reduce other stressors such as land-based sources of pollution, sedimentation, and over-fishing.
  - Help define and pursue adaptation strategies for coral impacted by OA.
- v. Enforcement
  - Develop a small task team will determine if there are actionable steps that can be taken by the USCRTF to address issues related to enforcement. Utilize the recently compiled jurisdictional Capacity Assessments, which in several instances provide a potential stepping off point to more clearly identify impediments to achieving compliance in the jurisdictions.
  - Determine if additional analyses and threats assessments could yield a clearer statement of needs and allow agencies and organizations to better align support to address those needs.

- Develop a working group to address and implement these actions if it is determined that there are actionable steps for which the USCRTF is best suited to undertake.
    - vi. Jurisdiction and All Islands Coral Reef Committee (AIC) Coral Reef Management Priorities and Emerging Issues:
      - Continue to help address jurisdictional coral reef management and AIC priorities, including strengthened federal-jurisdiction partnerships integration and communication, and a concentration on place-based and resource-focused outcomes.
      - Continue to help address coral reef-related emerging issues (e.g., crown-of-thorns starfish outbreak).
4. Build the capacity of members and partners to implement adaptive decision-making that better targets and utilizes science to address key threats and support priority management decision-making, actions and resource-focused outcomes. The USCRTF will also address this imperative through the priority actions listed in items 1 through 3 above.
- a. Continue to actively encourage sharing of methods, findings, and information to help align coral reef research activities with management needs and priorities, improve resource-focused outcomes, enhance coordination, avoid duplication, identify gaps, and promote joint research activities related to coral reef ecosystems; and identify effective and available leaders for specific action items that will deliver measurable results and outcomes.
  - b. Increase effective communication among USCRTF members to better share information, particularly as related to coral reef ecosystem research and management needs and priorities.
  - c. FY16-FY20 activities include:
    - i. Continue to host scientific discussions on targeted science-to-management needs and gaps.
    - ii. Ensure that activities undertaken related to place-based partnerships and trans-jurisdictional issues are informed by science.
    - iii. Develop a specific plan for the coordination of scientific activities with coral reef management needs and priorities across respective USCRTF agencies and jurisdictions.
    - iv. Develop a method to increase effective communications, particularly information sharing, across USCRTF member agencies and jurisdictions.
    - v. Audit data.gov for completeness and accessibility of data, and investigate feasibility of coral theme or data bin.
5. Enhance the understanding and consideration of the issues facing coral reef ecosystems, including through new and existing partnerships such as the International Coral Reef Initiative and through conferences, social media, meetings, community outreach, and other forums.
6. Support reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act (CRCA) with appropriate modifications to reflect USCRTF members recommendations.. Identify agreed upon priorities for a reauthorized CRCA and develop common messages to be used in

communications materials. Determine the role of USCRTF members in reauthorization of the CRCA.

### ***Internal Business***

1. Organizational Structure:
  - a. The Steering Committee (SC) will, on a bi-annual basis, review the status of SC working groups to ensure adequate representation, update the work plan that implements strategies and approaches, as needed, and ensure that the work plan, including outputs and outcomes, is aligned with the goal of the USCRTF
  - b. Provide working groups a clear purpose and objective(s). Outputs and outcomes should be shared with other SC and USCRTF members as appropriate. When objectives have been successfully completed, USCRTF members will vote to give the working group new objective(s) or to dissolve the working group.
2. Results-oriented Focus: Actions and efforts of the USCRTF, its committees and working groups, are results-focused and help achieve the goals of the USCRTF.
  - a. Develop results-focused and decision-oriented meeting agendas that encourage healthy discussions on important issues and priorities.
  - b. As appropriate, ensure effective engagement of key partners and stakeholders as important components to a results-oriented meeting.
  - c. As needed, hold Executive Sessions with USCRTF members to discuss and come to consensus on specific actions/decisions related to important issues and priorities.
  - d. Host decision-making results-focused working sessions at the SC and working group level to accomplish work plan action items.
  - e. Ensure any actions of the USCRTF, SC, working groups, and committees are aligned with the overall goals of the USCRTF.
  - f. Require working groups and committees to report out to the SC on work conducted since the last meeting, and to provide an update on pending work products.
  - g. Identify and agree upon topics for discussion at USCRTF meetings at least one meeting in advance to enhance USCRTF member engagement and potential action towards results.
3. Appropriate Member Engagement:
  - a. Create and maintain a standard on-boarding process and “welcome package” for new USCRTF members and Points of Contact (POCs).
  - b. Ensure USCRTF members (or representatives) at Business Meetings and Executive Sessions have the appropriate decision-making authority.
  - c. Ensure USCRTF members are briefed and kept apprised of main issue areas, priorities, and progress towards goals.
4. Strategic Planning: Engage in strategic planning to set the course for attainment of USCRTF tasks and goals articulated in Executive Order 13089 and tailored to the FY16-FY20 performance period by this resolution, to effectively preserve and protect coral reef

ecosystems for future generations. Based on the outcome of this strategic planning process, the USCRTF will reevaluate Resolution 34.1 to determine if an amendment or separate superseding resolution is necessary.

5. Reporting:

- a. Track resolutions requiring ongoing action and formally acknowledge no additional action to be taken on all others.
- b. Track and report out on Work Plan action items.