

U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting
May 4, 2006
Washington, DC

Resolution 15-1: Form a Working Group on Enforcement and Utilize Task Force Expertise to Address the Illegal Use of Cyanide and Other Poisons in International Trade

Responsible Party: USCRTF Steering Committee, International Working Group and Enforcement Representatives. Contacts:

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Issue Statement: There is an urgent need for fast, reliable and convenient detection tests for determining whether cyanide and other poisons have been used in the collection of live coral reef fish entering into international trade. Many Task Force member agencies have expertise in toxicology, biomarkers and forensics that could be applied to this issue. Field-based cyanide detection tests would be extremely useful for local management and enforcement authorities in source countries. Tests that could be reliably used several weeks after exposure would also allow the U.S. to apply the Lacey Act to suspected illegal imports.

Although illegal in most countries, the use of cyanide to capture reef fish alive is widespread, and is driven by the lucrative, growing and largely unregulated international trade in live reef food fish and marine aquarium industry. The U.S. is the number one consumer of live coral, live rock and coral reef fish for the aquarium trade and of coral skeletons and precious corals for curios and jewelry. Previous studies have estimated that most live reef fish entering into international trade and imported into the U.S. are collected with the use of cyanide, and thus are illegal.

Background: Provide a brief history of relevant documents pertaining to the proposal being presented to the SC. Include relevance of EO 13089, Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000, Coral Reef National Action Plan, Coral Reef Action Strategy, Local Action Strategies, Federal regulations or other pertinent guidance as necessary.

Executive Order #13089 for the Protection of Coral Reefs mandates that the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force "...assess the U.S. role in international trade and protection of coral reef species and implement appropriate strategies and actions to promote conservation and sustainable use of coral reef resources worldwide."

The Coral Reef Action Plan calls for efforts to reduce global threats to coral reefs and to reduce the impacts of international trade in coral reef resources, through exercising global leadership in the international arena, strengthening international conventions, providing assistance and strengthening international research and management.

Assessment of U.S. Role in Trade: Under the leadership of the Department of the Interior (USFWS) and the Department of Justice, the Coral Trade Subgroup of the International Working Group conducted an initial assessment of the role of the U.S. in the international trade of coral and coral reef species in 2000. The analysis found that the U.S. is the number one consumer of live coral, "live rock" and marine reef fish for the aquarium trade and of coral skeletons and precious corals for curios and jewelry. Results of that assessment, along with a recommended strategy for action, were compiled in a report to the Task Force entitled, **International Trade in Coral and Coral Reef Species: The Role of the United States**. (The report is available at www.coralreef.gov)

While it is known that the US is the largest importer of coral reef fish for the marine aquarium trade, the magnitude of the trade is based upon estimates as almost all reef fish are not listed on CITES. The NMFS is analyzing the USFWS import data – recently modified to identify and separate out freshwater and marine fish – to assess the quantity of fish entering the U.S. The initial analysis indicates that more than twice as many coral reef fish are entering the U.S. for the marine aquarium hobby than was originally estimated, up to 16 million fish a year.

USCRTF Resolution 14_4 Call for Building Enforcement Capacity: At the 14th Meeting of the USCRTF in Palau, the Task Force called on its members to increase efforts to build enforcement capacity. The Steering Committee was charged with continuing training and other efforts, including the development of an enforcement “toolbox” in cooperation with the international Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), to help coral reef management communities build enforcement capacity.

Statement Decision(s):

The USCRTF decides to:

- Form a working group on enforcement to assist in fulfilling Resolution 14_4.
- Identify and recommend specific experts in law enforcement, field forensics, and toxicology/biomarkers to serve on the working group from Task Force agencies.
- Utilize expertise from Task Force agencies to identify existing or potential cyanide detection methods or tests which could be used to determine if fish had been exposed to cyanide or other poisons.
- Explore the usefulness and need to convene a broader expert panel to resolve the issues associated with cyanide and other poison detection tests, and if needed, assist in convening such a panel.
- Encourage all coral reef jurisdictions to identify and promote alternative, sustainable, non-destructive practices in regard to aquarium fisheries.

Experts and relevant representatives from Task Force Agencies will be identified and the Working Group on Enforcement formed within two months. Progress on assessing cyanide and other poison detection tests and building enforcement capacity will be presented at the next USCRTF Meeting.