

Participation in Free Trade Agreements

Charge to the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force

Section 5(d) of Executive Order 13089 (Protection of Coral Reefs) concerns the duties of the Task Force to protect international coral reef resources. The charge of the Executive Order to the Task Force states: The Secretary of State and the Administrator of the Agency for International Development, in cooperation with other members of the Coral Reef Task Force and drawing upon their expertise, shall 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. Such actions shall include expanded collaboration with other International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) partners, especially governments, to implement the ICRI through its Framework for Action and the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network at regional, national, and local levels.

Recommendation of the International Trade Subgroup

- Task Force agencies participating in the environmental reviews of free trade negotiations and environmental projects under such free trade agreements should raise, where appropriate, concerns about the protection of coral reef resources.

Background

- At the 8th meeting of the Coral Reef Task Force, it was agreed that the Trade Subgroup of the International Working Group should continue its work. This includes providing input through their respective agencies on coral reef trade issues during environmental reviews for appropriate free trade agreements.
- Currently, the U.S. is developing a free trade agreement with five countries in Central America, including Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. The Western Caribbean Sea off Central America contains the Meso-American Barrier Reef and many offshore islands. These reef resources are connected oceanographically and biologically to coral reef ecosystems of the United States. There are limited coral reefs off western Central America, and coral reef resources on both sides of Central America are under stress. Protecting these valuable coral reef resources will benefit the biodiversity and economies of Central American countries, other countries in the Wider Caribbean, and the United States.
- There are plans to develop free trade agreements with Australia, with the largest barrier reef ecosystem in the world, and the South African Customs Union, which includes the Republic of South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland. The first meeting with Australia is scheduled for March 2003 and meetings with the South African Customs Union are planned for Spring 2003.
- In light of the upcoming free trade agreement negotiations and the significance of coral reef issues for the countries involved, the Trade Subgroup finds that greater participation on the part of Task Force agencies is necessary in order to implement appropriate strategies and actions to promote conservation and sustainable use of coral reef resources worldwide.