

INDIVIDUAL ACTION: WHAT YOU CAN DO

Many of the recommendations outlined in this chapter involve collaboration among multiple sectors and require political will, which can take time and coordinated efforts to achieve. However, immediate results are also attainable from individual actions.

If you live near a coral reef:

- **Follow the rules.** Learn about local laws and regulations designed to protect reefs and marine species, and obey them. Setting a good example can encourage a broader sense of environmental stewardship in your community.
- **Fish sustainably.** If you fish, for food or recreation, try to minimize your impact. Never take rare species, juveniles, or undersized species, or those that are breeding or bearing eggs. Do not fish in spawning aggregations and do not take more than you need. Never abandon fishing gear.
- **Avoid physical damage.** Boat anchors, trampling, and even handling corals can damage the structure of the reef environment. Try not to touch.
- **Minimize your indirect impacts on reefs.** Pay attention to where your seafood comes from, and how it is fished; know which fish are caught sustainably and which are best avoided. Find out whether your household waste and sewage are properly disposed of, away from the marine environment, and if not, press for change. Reduce your use of chemicals and fertilizers, to prevent these pollutants from entering inshore waters.
- **Help improve reef protection.** If there are insufficient conservation measures around your area, work with others to establish more. Be aware of planned development projects in coastal or watershed areas, and participate in public consultation processes. Support local organizations and community groups that take care of the reefs. Organize or help with reef, beach, and watershed cleanups, reef monitoring, restoration, and public awareness activities.



Getting involved in local activities, such as replanting mangroves, can be enjoyable and can also benefit the local environment.

- **Campaign for the reefs.** Let your local political representative or government know that the reefs are important to you and your community. Political will is important for establishing policies to better manage and protect reefs, to support the people and businesses that rely upon them, and to address the serious threats posed by climate change. Creating such policies begins with making reef issues a priority among political decisionmakers.

If you visit coral reefs:

- **Ask before you go.** Find out which hotels and tourism operators at your destination are sustainably managed and eco-conscious (that is, treat their wastewater; support local communities; honor coastal setbacks) and patronize them.
- **Dive and snorkel carefully.** Touching corals with your hands, body, or fins can damage delicate reef structures, potentially harming both you and the reef. Keep a short distance away. As the saying goes: take only pictures and leave only bubbles.
- **Tell people if they are doing something wrong.** If you see someone littering on a beach or in the sea, or stepping on corals... say something! Showing that you care and informing others can propagate good environmental stewardship.

- **Visit MPAs and make a contribution.** Many MPAs acquire funding for management through fees and donations from tourists. If you are vacationing near an MPA, support its reef management by visiting, diving, or snorkeling there.
- **Avoid buying coral souvenirs.** Purchasing products made from corals or other marine organisms encourages excessive (and in some cases, illegal) harvesting of such resources. As an informed tourist, refrain from purchasing souvenirs made from marine species.

Wherever you are:

- **Eat sustainably.** Choose to eat sustainably caught seafood and avoid overfished species like groupers, snappers, and sharks. Many seafood products that are sustainably sourced bear an eco-certification label, from organizations including the Marine Stewardship Council (www.msc.org) and Friend of the Sea (www.friendofthesea.org). Wallet-sized guides and mobile phone applications for making informed seafood choices are available from organizations such as the Australian Marine Conservation Society (www.marineconservation.org.au), Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch (www.seafoodwatch.org), Sea Choice (www.seachoice.org), Southern African Sustainable Seafood Initiative (www.wwf-sassi.co.za), and WWF (www.panda.org).
- **Avoid buying marine species that are threatened, or that may have been caught or farmed unsustainably.** Purchasing wildlife that is already under threat encourages continued overexploitation, putting these species at greater risk. Be an educated consumer—purchase items from reputable vendors, and ensure that animals purchased live for aquariums are certified, such as through the Marine Aquarium Council (MAC) (www.aquarium-council.org).
- **Vote for conservation.** Be an informed voter and know the priorities of your government representatives. If the environment, conservation, and climate change are not major issues for them, call or write to them to voice your opinion and make these issues a priority.

- **Support NGOs that conserve reefs and encourage sustainable development in reef regions.** Many NGOs around the world support reef conservation on local, regional, or global scales. Contributing time or money to these organizations can help them in their efforts to conserve reef resources, encourage sustainable development in reef regions, and support reef-dependent communities.
- **Educate through example.** People are most influenced by their friends, family, and peers. Showing people that you care about reefs, and helping them to appreciate why reefs are important to you—by sharing books, articles, or videos—are important steps in propagating a conservation message.
- **Reduce your CO₂ emissions.** Changes to climate and to ocean chemistry may soon become the greatest threats of all to coral reefs. Individual actions will never be enough, but reducing our individual carbon footprints sends a powerful message to those we know, and to those we vote for.



Whichever of these you do, encourage others to do the same.

CONCLUSION

Coral reefs are vital to coastal communities and nations around the world. They are a source of inspiration to many more. The threats to the world's coral reefs, however, are serious and growing. This report has portrayed the precarious state of coral reefs globally, encroached upon from all sides by numerous threats. In the face of such pressures it is critical that we focus on practical, immediate responses, such as those highlighted above, to reduce and to reverse these threats. We are at a critical juncture. We know what is needed. Action now could ensure that coral reefs remain, and that they continue to provide food, livelihoods, and inspiration to hundreds of millions of people now, and for generations into the future.