

8.037 Fourth global coral bleaching event: urgent action to reduce the risk of catastrophic loss of the world's coral reefs

RECOGNISING the critical role that coral reefs play in supporting biodiversity, notably 25% of all known marine species, and sustaining a billion people globally who depend on these ecosystems for livelihoods, coastal protection, food security and cultural identity;

UNDERLINING that coral reefs contribute up to USD 9.9 trillion per year in goods and services, including USD 109 billion in Gross Domestic Product worldwide;

RECOGNISING ALSO that coral reefs protect coastlines, vulnerable coastal populations and economies, as they reduce up to 97% of wave energy that would otherwise hit coastlines, averting tens to hundreds of millions of dollars in flood damage every year for many nations;

RECOGNISING FURTHER that healthy adjacent terrestrial ecosystems, notably seabird colonies, can directly contribute to coral reef productivity;

RECOGNISING MOREOVER that geodiversity plays a crucial role in coral reef ecosystems; it influences habitat structure, water chemistry, and mineral availability – factors essential for coral growth and resilience; diverse geological features provide shelter and reduce physical stress, while local geological conditions help regulate temperature and water quality; and this interplay is vital in mitigating coral bleaching by enhancing the ability of corals to withstand environmental stressors and maintain ecosystem health;

NOTING with concern the 2024 global assessment of coral species led by the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Coral Specialist Group;

DEEPLY CONCERNED about the intensifying frequency, extent and severity of marine heatwaves, which can lead to bleaching events and the catastrophic loss of coral reefs;

ALARMED by the declaration made in April 2024 by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), confirming the fourth global coral bleaching event, which, in May 2024, exceeded the spatial extent of the third global coral bleaching event (2014–2017), previously the most severe on record;

STRESSING that the fourth global coral bleaching event represents a critical warning and demands immediate action to mitigate climate impacts, enhance coral resilience and prevent catastrophic ecosystem collapse;

APPRECIATING the efforts of ICRI and various regional and national initiatives dedicated to the preservation and sustainable management of coral reef ecosystems; and

NOTING ALSO the need for a substantial and progressive increase of financial resources from all sources, including domestic, international, public, private and blended finance resources, toward coral reef action;

The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025, at its session in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates:

1. CALLS ON IUCN Members, governments, non-governmental organisations, Indigenous Peoples' Organisations, and international and regional intergovernmental organisations, to:

a. strengthen cooperation in research, conservation and integrated management of coral reefs and associated ecosystems, particularly their overall integrity and resilience in response to the fourth global coral bleaching event;

b. prioritise coral reefs in national biodiversity, geoheritage and climate mitigation plans, and enhance financial support for coral reef monitoring, protection, adaptation and restoration;

c. recognise regional differences in thermal baselines and ecological thresholds of coral reef systems (e.g. Arabian Gulf's heat-adapted corals) to ensure that restoration and adaptation responses are tailored to local contexts;

d. invest in long-term monitoring and sharing of data for regular assessments of the status of coral reefs, using the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network and recommended data platforms;

e. invest in, and promote, best practices to conserve and restore the ecological integrity of coral reef systems to promote post-bleaching recovery, including identifying resilient coral reef systems, minimising cumulative pressures, implementing rapid-response actions and monitoring in affected areas, and the use of innovative approaches and technologies;

f. support the use of locally led, science-informed coral reef restoration and resilience strategies, including genomic and ecosystem-based approaches, to address site-specific vulnerabilities; and

g. enhance cooperation and develop capacity for integrated management, monitoring and resilience planning among stakeholders and rightsholders, including through engagement, training and knowledge exchange;

2. CALLS ON the IUCN Director General, Commissions and the Council to promote the elements of paragraph 1, in its programmatic work, advocacy positions, fundraising and advice to Members during the period 2026–2030; and

3. CALLS ON Member States to integrate coral reef resilience and adaptation measures into national climate strategies, nationally determined contributions and biodiversity action plans, where relevant.