



JEFF KUWABARA / UH MANOA



U.S. ALL ISLANDS CORAL REEF COMMITTEE

CHAIR'S REPORT

TO THE U.S. CORAL REEF TASK FORCE

MAY 2026

U.S. ALL ISLANDS CORAL REEF COMMITTEE (AIC) CHAIR'S REPORT TO THE U.S. CORAL REEF TASK FORCE

May 22, 2026

AIC vision: Thriving coral reef ecosystems, effectively managed to protect their ecological, social, and economic value for present and future generations.

AIC mission: To be a unified voice for the effective management of coral reef ecosystems in the U.S. and Freely Associated States.

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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Hafa Adai, Tirow, Talofa, Aloha, Hola, Iakwe, Kaselehlle, Alii, and Hello,

On behalf of the U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee (AIC), I'm pleased to present this report outlining the AIC's priorities, accomplishments, and emerging issues from May 2025 to April 2026. This report is submitted to the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) following the 51st USCRTF Meeting in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

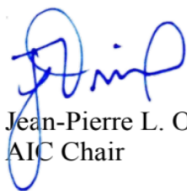
The theme of the 51st USCRTF Meeting is: *Restoring Reefs, Sustainable Resources: Protecting U.S. Ocean Wealth*. Coral reefs continue to face growing threats from localized stressors, such as land-based pollution, overfishing, and the spread of coral diseases and invasive species, compounded by unprecedented global coral bleaching. Recent events—including devastating typhoon impacts in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, severe flooding in Hawai'i, and emerging threats such as invasive soft corals—underscore both the urgency of this work and the importance of strong federal-jurisdiction partnerships. Despite the scale of these challenges, this meeting is a powerful reminder of the strength of the Task Force and the importance of continued collective action to protect coral reefs and the communities that rely on them.

Across both ocean basins, the U.S. coral reef jurisdictions and Freely Associated States (FAS) continue advancing practical, place-based solutions through broader partnerships, innovative research, and strengthened management capacity. From reducing local stressors and scaling restoration efforts to improving fisheries management and disturbance response, the AIC remains focused on actions that increase coral reef resilience while sustaining the communities, economies, and cultural traditions supported by healthy reefs.

The AIC also welcomes continued progress under implementation of the reauthorized Coral Reef Conservation Act (CRCA) of 2022. We remain deeply grateful to the many partners who helped advance this critical legislation and are now working to realize its promise. The reauthorized CRCA is strengthening federal-jurisdiction collaboration, expanding opportunities for more flexible and diversified support, and helping catalyze innovative, management-driven science through the Coral Reef Research Coordination Institutes and other emerging partnerships.

In this report, we highlight coral reef management accomplishments and novel issues from the U.S. and FAS jurisdictions between May 2025 and April 2026, while outlining the AIC's priorities for advancing conservation, restoration, and management priorities in partnership with our federal family and other allies. In a time of increasing uncertainty and intensifying pressures on reefs and reef-dependent communities, continued collaboration, innovation, and shared commitment across the AIC and USCRTF will be essential to protecting and restoring coral reefs for current and future generations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'JP Oriol', is positioned above the printed name and title.

Jean-Pierre L. Oriol
AIC Chair

ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

AIC: U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee
CNMI: Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
COTS: Crown of thorns sea stars
CR4: Coral Reef Restoration for Risk Reduction
CRAG: American Samoa Coral Reef Advisory Group
CRCA: Coral Reef Conservation Act
CRCP: NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program
DAR: Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources
DARPA: Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency
DCRM: CNMI Division of Coastal Resources Management
DEP: Florida Department of Environmental Protection
DMWR: American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources
DNER: Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources
DOAG: Guam Department of Agriculture
DOI: U.S. Department of the Interior
DPNR: USVI Department of Planning and Natural Resources
EPA: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
FAS: Freely Associated States
FSM: Federated States of Micronesia
GCRI: Guam Coral Reef Initiative
GI: Green infrastructure
LBSP: Land-based sources of pollution
MIMRA: Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority
MPA: Marine Protected Area
NASA: National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NFWF: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
NMSAS: National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa
NOAA: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
OIA: DOI Office of Insular Affairs
PacIOOS: Pacific Islands Ocean Observing System
PAN: Protected Areas Network
PI-CASC: Pacific Islands Climate Adaptation Science Center
PICRC: Palau International Coral Reef Center
PIFSC: NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center
PIMPAC: Pacific Islands Marine Protected Areas Community
PIRO: NOAA Pacific Islands Regional Office
POC: Point of contact
RBM: Resilience-based management
RMI: Republic of the Marshall Islands
RRN: The Nature Conservancy's Reef Resilience Network
SCTLD: Stony coral tissue loss disease
SPC: Pacific Community
TNC: The Nature Conservancy
USCRTF: U.S. Coral Reef Task Force
USFWS: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS: U.S. Geological Survey
USVI: U.S. Virgin Islands

AIC PRIORITIES

The overarching priorities of the U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee are to:

1. Strengthen AIC-federal partnerships and increase responsiveness to jurisdictional needs under the reauthorized U.S. Coral Reef Conservation Act
2. Improve integration of jurisdictional priorities into efforts of the USCRTF Working Groups
3. Secure dedicated long-term funding for the Susan L. Williams National Coral Reef Management Fellowship
4. Continue to support establishment and enforcement of water quality standards that address impacts to coral reef health
5. Advance resilience-based management practices in the U.S. and Freely Associated States
6. Facilitate implementation of jurisdictional reef restoration plans, foster innovation in restoration efforts, and streamline permitting processes
7. Enhance efficiency and effectiveness of disturbance response activities related to coral diseases (e.g., SCTLD), invasive species, bleaching events, vessel groundings, and hurricanes/typhoons
8. Build capacity for effective and sustainable management of coral reef fisheries



AIC and USCRTF Principals, Points of Contact, support staff, and Secretariat members at the 50th U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting in Washington, D.C. in May 2025 (Photo: NOAA CRCP)

1) Strengthen AIC-federal partnerships and increase responsiveness to jurisdictional needs under the reauthorized U.S. Coral Reef Conservation Act

The reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act (CRCA) was the first major update to U.S. coral reef legislation in over two decades and a vital step forward in effective management of coral reef ecosystems. The reauthorization is a critical opportunity to build the capacity of coral reef jurisdictions, improve alignment between local and federal efforts, and ensure that decision-making and funding reflect on-the-ground realities.

To fully realize the potential of the reauthorized CRCA, the AIC calls for robust collaboration across the federal family, with planning, implementation, and funding efforts explicitly guided by jurisdictional

priorities. Coral reefs support billions in coastal economies, protect shorelines from storm damage, and sustain culturally and economically important fisheries. Federal investment in these ecosystems not only improves local resilience but advances national priorities, such as building economic independence, reducing impacts from natural disasters, and enhancing food security.

Key priorities under the CRCA include:

- Increasing direct funding for state and territorial coral reef programs
- Improving federal-local coordination and reducing administrative and grant management burdens
- Supporting local disturbance response through the Coral Reef Emergency Fund and ensuring that jurisdictions have prompt access to funds to respond to urgent needs
- Ensuring the Coral Reef Research Coordination Institutes conduct management-focused science that is guided by jurisdictional input and based on local needs and priorities, to include formalization of a governance structure for the Institutes that supports local management efforts in the
- Building public-private partnerships through the Coral Reef Stewardship Partnerships and Fund
- Incorporating jurisdictional needs and priorities into the National Coral Reef Resilience Strategy and Coral Reef Action Plans

MAIN POINT: *The reauthorized Coral Reef Conservation Act should be implemented based on jurisdictional needs and priorities to ensure efficient use of federal funding, local capacity building, and alignment with national priorities such as risk reduction, food security, and economic independence.*



Flower corals on a reef in the Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary, American Samoa (Photo: Tilali Scanlan, CRAG)

2) Improve integration of jurisdictional priorities into efforts of the USCRTF Working Groups

The AIC deeply values the contributions of the USCRTF Working Groups and recognizes their essential role in driving coordinated action across agencies and jurisdictions. Working group products – such as the permitting guidance document prepared by the Restoration Working Group, fisheries management plans developed by the Fisheries Sustainability and Ecosystem Management Working Group, and social media toolkits produced by the Communications Working Group – are most impactful when developed to accomplish jurisdictional needs and priorities.

The AIC remains committed to active participation and leadership across working groups and encourages greater collaboration between groups addressing overlapping challenges (e.g., water quality, disease, warming). A cross-cutting, coordinated approach will ensure efficient use of federal resources, avoid redundancy, maximize the impact of USCRTF initiatives, and support more consistent agency alignment with real-world needs in the jurisdictions.

MAIN POINT: *Activities and products of the USCRTF Working Groups must be driven by jurisdictional needs and based on meaningful input from the AIC.*



Yellow tang on a reef in Kealakekua, Hawaii Island (Photo: Bert Weeks)

3) Secure dedicated long-term funding for the Susan L. Williams National Coral Reef Management Fellowship

The AIC thanks the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP), the U.S. Department of the Interior's Office of Insular Affairs (DOI OIA), Nova Southeastern University, and our own jurisdictional leadership for their continued financial, technical, and programmatic support of the Susan L. Williams National Coral Reef Management Fellowship, which is a critical avenue for building capacity in the jurisdictions. Since 2003, the program has trained dozens of early-career professionals, many of whom now serve in marine management and conservation positions in local and federal agencies, NGOs, and universities. Nova Southeastern University has administered the program since 2016, supporting 36 Fellows in four cohorts.

The 2024-2026 Fellowship cohort began their work in the jurisdictions in January 2024. Current Coral Fellows are working on some of the most pressing coral reef management concerns across the jurisdictions; they are implementing coral reef restoration plans, integrating water quality data into management approaches, and enhancing community outreach and education efforts. The Fellowship provides essential training to young managers and provides them with broad skills to tackle the most significant threats facing coral reef ecosystems and reef-associated ecosystem services.

Now institutionalized under the reauthorized CRCA, the Coral Fellowship is a proven workforce development pipeline that creates jobs, strengthens local governance, and enhances scientific and technical capacity in the jurisdictions. Increased investment will ensure the Fellowship remains competitive and continues to attract qualified candidates, particularly as cost-of-living pressures grow.

MAIN POINT: *Sustained, dedicated funding for the National Coral Reef Management Fellowship advances creates jobs in the jurisdictions, advances workforce development, and builds long-term local capacity to manage U.S. coral reef ecosystems.*



The 2024-2026 National Coral Reef Management Fellows during orientation at Nova Southeastern University in January 2024 (Photo: Wendy Wood/NSU)

4) Continue to support establishment and enforcement of water quality standards that address impacts to coral reef health

Improving nearshore water quality is one of the most immediate and cost-effective strategies to safeguard coral reefs, coastal economies, and food security. Coral reefs require clean, minimally-impacted waters to thrive; excess nutrients and pollutants degrade habitat quality, suppress coral reproduction, and increase vulnerability to disease and bleaching.

While codifying water quality standards is the responsibility of each jurisdiction, the AIC requests continued support from U.S. EPA and other federal agencies to assist in developing and implementing water and bottom quality standards that facilitate the conditions essential for sustaining coral reef habitats. Applied research is critically needed to establish biological benchmarks for nutrients and pollutants that are protective of coral health and reproduction. Standards based solely on levels that cause coral mortality are insufficient; by the time such thresholds are exceeded, reef ecosystems may already be destabilized. Instead, research should inform the development of national guidance that empowers jurisdictions to adopt locally appropriate, reef-protective standards. Local and Federal Regulatory Agencies are also encouraged to develop cost-effective best practices framework for coastal development projects that will improve stormwater management, advance efforts to reduce the volume and velocity of freshwater drainage, incorporate filtration mechanisms for removing particulates and toxicants through a regulatory agency partnership effort.

The AIC urges EPA, NOAA, and other federal agencies to ensure that implementation translates into meaningful improvements in reef health by providing dedicated funding and technical support for long-term jurisdictional monitoring programs, which will be essential for evaluating progress and informing future restoration investments. This work supports not only ecosystem health, but also local economies dependent on fisheries, tourism, and coastal protection.

The AIC seeks:

- Technical support from federal agencies in identifying key water and bottom quality characteristics and threshold values at which coral health and/or reproduction are impacted.

- Funding and technical guidance for long-term jurisdictional water quality monitoring programs.
- Technical support to develop and implement research and modeling related to genetic connectivity and suitable habitat for coral settlement.
- Commitment from the federal family that when distributing funds, when applicable, recipients will be required to implement surface water management that will restore natural volume and velocity of discharges and meet water quality thresholds needed for the health of associated coastal ecosystem while meeting drinking water needs and achieving flood protection targets. The federal family is also requested to consider other improvements to restore water quality when distributing funds.

We ask that the USCRTF take an interagency approach to support critical efforts in each jurisdiction, enhance funding for scientific inquiry in this area, and build capacity to ensure that jurisdictional water quality standards are adequate to sustain coral reefs in the face both local and global stressors.

MAIN POINT: *U.S. EPA, in partnership with other agencies, should provide technical support to the AIC by developing a list of key water and bottom quality metrics with minimum numerical thresholds that impact coral health and reproduction. AIC jurisdictions will use these threshold values to establish state and territorial water quality standards that protect coral reef health and inform restoration programs.*

5) Advance resilience-based management practices in the U.S. and Freely Associated States

As changing ocean conditions – including warming seas, ocean acidification, and more frequent disturbances – continue to impact coral reefs, resilience-based management (RBM) is essential to help these ecosystems withstand and recover from threats. RBM enables local managers to reduce stressors, prioritize conservation actions, and strategically direct resources toward habitats and taxa most likely to endure and recover from changing ocean conditions. This science-driven approach complements national priorities, such as reducing future disaster impacts on coastal infrastructure and increasing food security through nature-based solutions, while empowering local entities to take meaningful steps despite global change. With support from federal partners, the U.S. jurisdictions and FAS can expand capacity for RBM, aligning with the broader goals of coastal protection, disaster resilience, and economic independence.

MAIN POINT: *The AIC calls for support to integrate resilience-based management (RBM) strategies into all USCRTF efforts, and to build local capacity to effectively apply RBM approaches in the jurisdictions.*



The STX Coral Strike Team conducts SCTLD surveys in St. Croix, USVI (Photo: Joe Snyder)

6) Facilitate implementation of jurisdictional reef restoration plans, foster innovation in restoration efforts, and streamline permitting

As reef degradation accelerates, restoration is no longer optional – it is essential. With steep declines in coral reef health due to a variety of threats, adaptive coral restoration is now being planned and implemented in every jurisdiction at varying scales. The AIC states, territories, and FAS are advancing restoration science, planning at ecosystem levels, and seeking innovative techniques to increase success rates. However, time- and resource-intensive permitting processes, vulnerability of restoration projects to coastal stressors, and limited funding hinder timely and effective implementation.

The AIC requests streamlined permitting, enhanced technical partnerships, and sustained federal investment to implement jurisdictional coral reef restoration plans and bring restoration projects to scale, especially in priority areas that are critical for shoreline defense, tourism, and economic activity. Research and funding from the Department of Defense (DOD) Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) have been a great asset for upscaling restoration. The AIC seeks additional federal funding and enhanced partnerships to support restoration at ecosystem levels, apply innovations to increase the resilience of restoration projects to local and global stressors, and ensure that restoration efforts foster economic growth, create jobs, and restore ecosystem services essential to coastal defense and food security.

***MAIN POINT:** The jurisdictions seek streamlined permitting processes, access to innovations through technical partnerships, and increased funding to enhance local capacity scale up restoration efforts that strengthen coastal protection, support local economies, and safeguard food security.*



Dr. Denise Perez, former Scientific and Technical Advisor for DCRM, cleans coral trees in the CNMI coral nursery (Photo: Kylie Hasegawa, DCRM)

7) Enhance efficiency and effectiveness of disturbance response activities related to coral diseases (e.g., SCTLD), invasive species, bleaching events, vessel groundings, and hurricanes/typhoons

As extreme events increase in frequency and intensity, coral reef resilience hinges on our ability to respond quickly and effectively. These events threaten not only reef ecosystems but also local economies, food security, and coastal infrastructure. AIC jurisdictions must be able to effectively respond to both localized and regional disturbances, such as stony coral tissue loss disease (SCTLD), invasive and nuisance species (including outbreaks of crown of thorns sea stars (COTS) on Pacific reefs), bleaching events, vessel groundings and oil/chemical spills, and physical damage to coral reefs caused by severe storms and other

events. The reauthorized CRCA presents new opportunities to build capacity in these areas, such as the Coral Reef Emergency Fund through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

The AIC requests federal support to improve surveillance, develop response protocols, and secure fast-acting emergency funds. Of particular concern is preventing transmission of SCTLD to the Pacific – a risk with significant implications for maritime security and regional stability. Given that ballast water and/or biofouling appear to be the most likely vectors of SCTLD, the AIC calls upon all relevant federal agencies involved in maritime shipping, defense, etc. to prevent the spread of SCTLD to the Pacific.

Addressing emerging threats, such as outbreaks of invasive pulse corals in Hawai'i and Puerto Rico, is another critical component of disturbance response and preparedness. These exigent impacts require partnerships to build detection and surveillance capacity, development of best practices for removal and/or eradication, and conduct research into vectors that spread these species. Furthermore, coral reefs are now facing the fourth global coral bleaching event, making coral bleaching response a paramount concern. This includes coral rescue for rare and/or ecologically important coral species, in addition to testing and implementation of novel techniques.

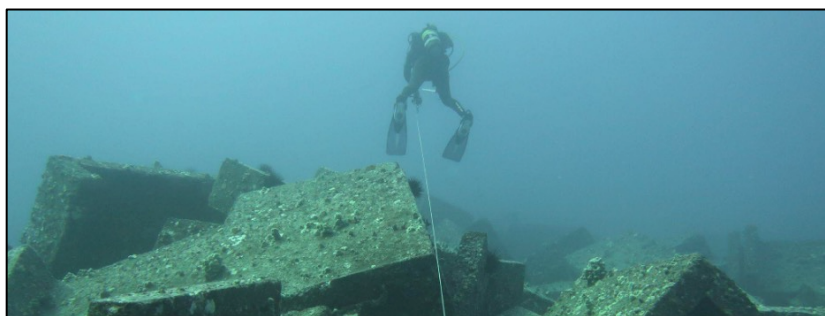
***MAIN POINT:** The AIC calls for federal support to enhance surveillance, establish response protocols, and secure fast-acting emergency funds for disturbance response. Well-funded and highly coordinated interagency action is critical to prevent high-risk threats, such as the spread of SCTLD to the Pacific basin.*

8) Build capacity for effective and sustainable management of coral reef fisheries

Coral reef fisheries are vital to local food systems, economies, and cultural traditions. Managing these complex systems requires strong enforcement, science-informed policies, and sustainable harvest strategies that reflect local context.

The AIC appreciates the work of the Fisheries and Ecosystem Management Working Group and urges expanded support from USCRTF agencies to implement jurisdiction-led Fisheries Management Action Plans. Strengthening coral reef fisheries aligns with national goals of economic independence, job creation, and food security in coastal communities. We encourage federal USCRTF members to support the technical, fiscal, and capacity elements in these plans to improve sustainable coral reef fisheries management in the jurisdictions. The AIC encourages agencies, especially NOAA, to ensure that their programs and funding prioritize management and research to work with jurisdiction to manage for sustainable fisheries on coral reefs.

***MAIN POINT:** To better manage coral reef fisheries, the AIC needs USCRTF support to implement jurisdiction-led Fisheries Management Action Plans that strengthen food security, support cultural heritage, and reduce dependency on imported protein.*



A DAR diver monitors an artificial reef in Maunalua Bay on O'ahu in 2024 (Photo: Jake Reichard/DAR)

AIC MEMBER PRIORITIES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

This section provides jurisdictional updates from May 2025 through April 2026, highlighting coral reef management accomplishments, ongoing activities, and key challenges. Where applicable, updates are tagged with the corresponding AIC priority number(s):

1 Jurisdictional needs met under CRCA	5 Advancement of RBM practices
2 Jurisdictional priorities included in WG efforts	6 Scaled-up coral reef restoration efforts
3 National Coral Reef Management Fellowship	7 Efficient and effective disturbance response
4 Water quality standards for coral health	8 Sustainable coral reef fisheries management

ATLANTIC/CARIBBEAN JURISDICTIONS

Florida

Accomplishments:

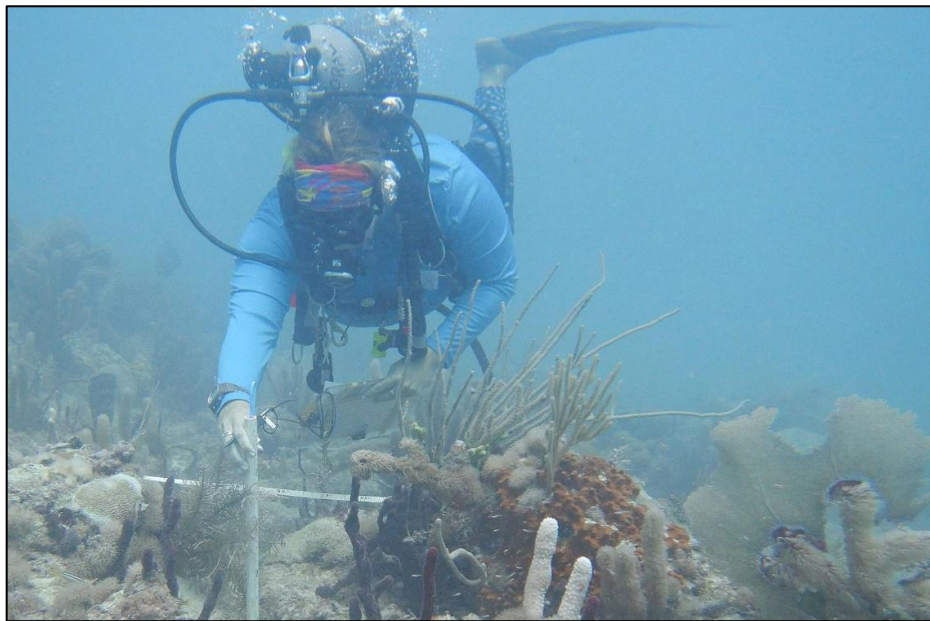
- 1. RESTORATION PLANNING:** Florida is working with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), NOAA, and local agencies to develop tiered coral reef restoration strategies. The Tier 1 state-wide strategy combines coral connectivity modeling and in-water coral population data to narrow down focal areas for restoration; Tier 2 strategies further refine focal areas using data on tourism value, fisheries aggregations, and coastal shoreline protection at jurisdictional levels; and Tier 3 strategies are site-specific restoration plans at priority locations. The Tier 1 strategy has been completed and a Tier 2 plan for the Kristin Jacobs Coral Aquatic Preserve was recently finalized. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is conducting ground-truthing to narrow the selection of Tier 3 priority sites and begin restoration implementation. (6)
- 2. RESTORATION AND RECOVERY INITIATIVE ISSUES THIRD ROUND OF GRANT AWARDS:** As part of Florida's Coral Reef Restoration and Recovery (FCR3) Initiative, a third year of grant funding totaling \$9.5 million was awarded to 11 Florida-based institutions. This funding will continue to scale up land-based and in-water coral propagation and capacity, develop a coral husbandry training curriculum and workforce development workshops, and incorporate innovative technology and large-scale nurseries into Florida's Coral Restoration Economy. Over the past three fiscal years, \$28.5 million has been awarded under the FCR3 Initiative, spread between 14 partners over 9 counties. (6)
- 3. UPDATED PROTOCOLS FOR THE CORAL MANAGEMENT:** Following consultation with Florida managers and restoration practitioners, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) completed "Protocols for the Management of In-Water Coral Nurseries, Coral Transport, and Coral Outplanting in Florida." The document includes updated protocols for in-water coral nursery management, outplanting, and the transportation of corals between in-water locations and from land-based locations to in-water sites. The expected benefits of these protocols, implemented since March 2026, includes minimizing the spread of coral diseases and other perturbations (e.g., predators, competitors, overcrowding), decreased mortality of corals in nurseries, increased survival of outplanted corals, fewer impacts to wild corals and reef-associated organisms, and overall improvement of reef condition at outplant sites. (5, 6, 7)

Ongoing activities:

- 1. KRISTIN JACOB CORAL AQUATIC PRESERVE MANAGEMENT PLAN:** The northernmost section of Florida's Coral Reef was designated as the Kristin Jacobs Coral Aquatic Preserve in July 2024. DEP's Coral Reef Conservation Program oversees this new aquatic preserve and has completed

the public review process of working with stakeholders and local agencies to draft a new management plan for the area. A formal management plan will help ensure holistic management of the area by improving coordination of coral reef restoration and shoreline stabilization projects, streamlining water quality monitoring efforts, and solidifying Florida's commitment to protecting its coral reef habitat and resources. The draft plan has been completed and is awaiting final approval from Florida's Acquisition and Restoration Council in June 2026. (1)

2. **TIRE REMOVAL AND RESTORATION:** Tire removal efforts are on-going at Osborne Reef and now include larger removal areas. A second tire removal contractor has been hired to focus on removal of tires from coral reef and hardbottom habitat, complementing ongoing efforts to remove tires from sand habitat. Florida is also coordinating coral removal from the tires in advance of tire removal to streamline the process and lessen potential impacts. (6, 7)
3. **FLORIDA SEAFLOOR MAPPING INITIATIVE:** The [Florida Seafloor Mapping Initiative](#) is progressing with the collection of high-resolution bathymetric lidar and sonar data along Florida's continental shelf out to 200-meter depths, which will be used to develop a seamless, statewide digital elevation model of the seafloor, including Florida's Coral Reef. This data will be critical for modeling analysis and site plan development for reef restoration efforts. (5, 7)
4. **DEVELOPING REQUIREMENTS FOR CORAL AND REEF-ASSOCIATED SPECIES CARE:** State and federal managers are continuing to develop additional protocols for the care and genetic management of corals and keystone species prior to outplanting. (5, 6, 7)



Summer Disturbance Response Monitoring surveys (Photo: Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute)

Challenges and needs:

1. **EMERGENCY FUNDS:** Access to appropriately scaled and readily available emergency response funding is imperative. Managers need assistance to better evaluate and pilot both proactive and reactive actions that can be taken when severe bleaching and disease events occur. Interventions, such as those in the [NAS Interventions to Increase the Resilience of Coral Reefs](#), should be further developed and regulatory processes streamlined. (1, 7)
2. **RESTORATION AT SCALE:** Scaling up propagation and restoration of more resilient coral populations is essential, or we risk losing the significant environmental economic and cultural benefits this critical ecosystem provides communities in southeast Florida including hundreds of millions of dollars in flood risk reduction each year. (1, 6)

3. **WATER QUALITY STANDARDS:** Effective water quality management is impacted by lack of research and standards that are based on coral reef health and reproductive success; a national approach must be taken to provide jurisdictional guidance for appropriate water quality standards. (1, 4)
4. **INVASIVE AND NUISANCE SPECIES:** Threats, like invasive species and algal blooms, are becoming more prevalent. Research needs to be done to determine the cause, extent of potential impacts on coral reefs, and best practices for removal or eradication under regulatory standards. (2, 5, 7)

Puerto Rico

Accomplishments:

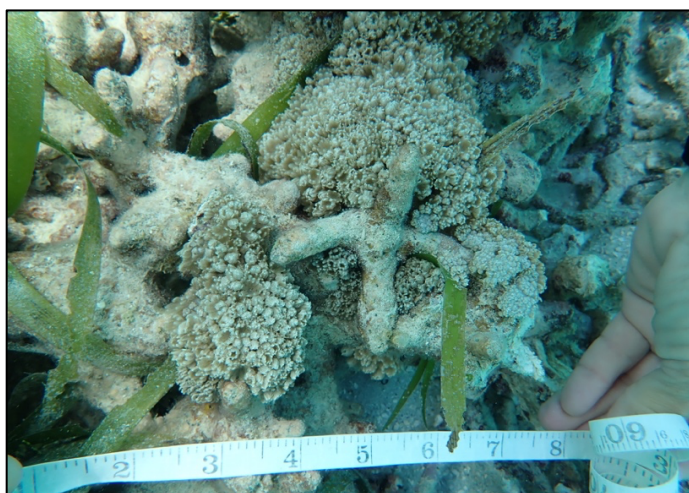
1. **CORAL FELLOWSHIP:** Puerto Rico's 2026-2028 Susan L. Williams National Coral Reef Management Fellow, Leysa Lopez, was onboarded in March 2026. (3)
2. **WATER QUALITY MONITORING:** Phase 1 of Puerto Rico's Long-Term Coral Reef Water Quality Framework is nearing completion, with a story map soon to be published. (1, 2, 4)

Ongoing activities:

1. **GENETICS RESEARCH:** DNER is moving toward integrating molecular techniques for updating Puerto Rico's coral gene bank, as well as identifying and confirming invasive populations of *Xeniid* soft coral. (6, 7)
2. **RESPONSE TRAINING:** As a result of systematic capacity building training for emergency and disturbance response, Puerto Rico currently has over 60 advanced scientific divers trained and an integrated emergency response framework is in development. (2, 7)
3. **CORAL RESTORATION:** Phase 1 of the FEMA-funded coral restoration project in the San Juan Metro area is nearing completion, and at least four community engagement activities have been held. This project was made possible by Puerto Rico's 2020 declaration of reefs as natural infrastructure. (6)

Challenges and needs:

1. **INVASIVE SOFT CORALS:** Mitigation of the spread of the invasive soft pulse corals in Puerto Rico is a paramount concern. We've identified two *Xeniid* species originally from the Red Sea and Australia. Research, support, and capacity are needed for mitigation and removal. (7)



Invasive pulse corals, *Xeniid* sp., detected at a reef site in southern Puerto Rico
(Photo: Sandra Schleier/PR Coral Reef Conservation & Management Program)

U.S. Virgin Islands

Accomplishments:

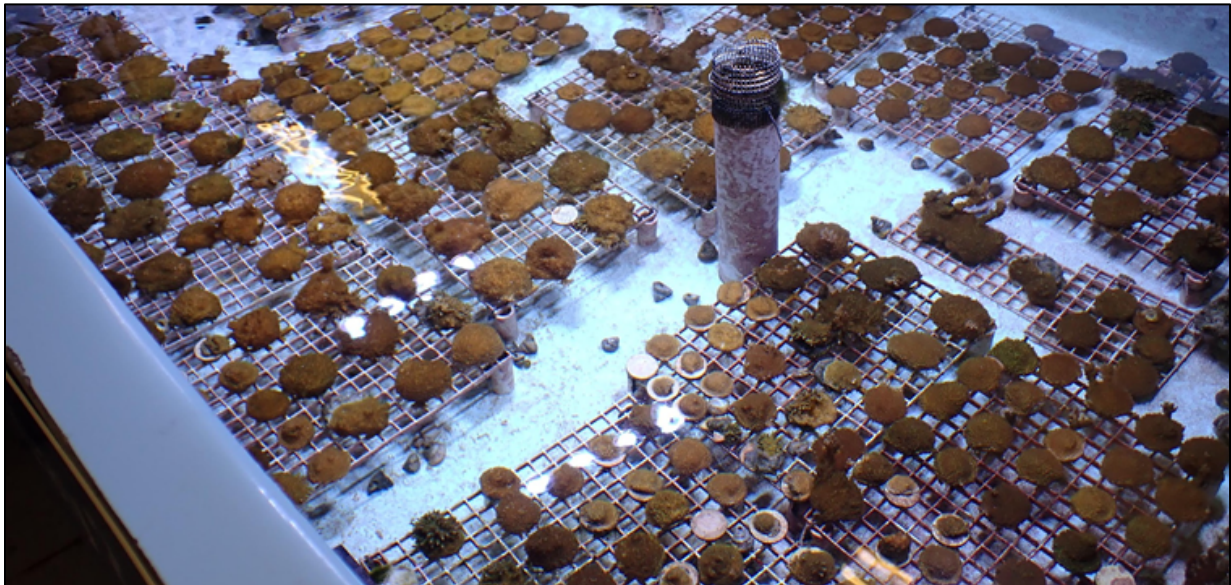
1. **CORAL RESCUE CAPACITY:** USVI hosted, coordinated, and presented at the first Regional Coral Network Meeting in September 2025. (5, 7)

Ongoing activities:

1. **WATER QUALITY PLAN:** USVI DPNR has developed its first comprehensive territorial Water Quality Monitoring Plan based on impacts of water quality on coral reef health, in collaboration with NOAA and key stakeholders. (7)
2. **GENETIC DIVERSITY:** USVI has created an agreement and protocol document with partner organizations to allow Assisted Gene Flow *Acropora* corals into the territory for research and eventual restoration. (5, 6)
3. **CORAL FELLOWSHIP:** DPNR has selected and onboarded its new NOAA Coral Reef Management Fellow, Ajani Saldana, who was born and raised in St. Croix, USVI. (3, 6)

Challenges and needs:

1. **PEIS DELAYS:** Expiration of NOAA Programmatic Environmental Impact Statements in December 2025 has caused significant delays in environmental compliance approvals and severely limited ability to engage in hands on coral reef operations in recently awarded and upcoming grants. (7)



Assisted Gene Flow *Acropora palmata* corals in holding at Mote's International Coral Gene Bank, awaiting transport to the USVI. (Photo: Mote Marine Laboratory)

PACIFIC JURISDICTIONS

American Samoa

Accomplishments:

1. **CORAL RESTORATION:** The Coral Reef Advisory Group (CRAG), American Samoa Community College, and Old Dominion University secured \$4.5 million from NOAA CZM to advance coral restoration and expand staffing and graduate student support. (6)
2. **REEF FLAT MONITORING:** ASEPA, CRAG, and DMWR completed annual reef flat surveys at 50 established sites around Tutuila and Aunu'u. Benthic and invertebrate data now being analyzed. (5)
3. **QUEST TRAINING:** The QUEST course in March 2026 in Nu'uuli trained ASCC students, DMWR Fisheries staff, and partners in quantitative underwater ecological survey techniques. (5, 8)

Ongoing activities:

1. **CORAL RESTORATION:** CRAG and partners are piloting coral-of-opportunity and MARRS STARS restoration approaches in backreef and degraded sites, while obtaining permits and conducting community outreach to prepare for future upscaling. (5, 6, 8)
2. **BLEACHING MONITORING:** CRAG and DMWR continue reef flat, reef slope, and HOBO logger monitoring across priority sites in Tutuila, Aunu'u, and Manu'a to assess bleaching impacts and improve regional datasets. (5, 7)
3. **DISTURBANCE PREPAREDNESS:** NMSAS continues resource protection surveys and co-leads the Pacific Preparedness Team under the USCRTF Coral Disease and Disturbance Working Group while supporting regional invasive species and biosecurity readiness. (2, 5, 7)



Participants in the QUEST training course learning quantitative underwater ecological survey techniques in March 2026 in Tutuila. (Photo: Jeff Kuwabara)

Challenges and needs:

1. **COMPLIANCE AND PERMITTING:** Time-intensive permitting, EFH/ESA consultations, and NEPA-related restrictions continue to delay restoration activities, outreach, and travel for site assessments, especially in Manua. (1, 6)
2. **STAFFING AND ADMIN CAPACITY:** DMWR and CRAG have lost key staff, several positions remain vacant, and limited administrative support continues to slow procurement, payments, vessel servicing, and timely project implementation (1, 5, 6, 7, 8)
3. **SCIENTIFIC DIVING AND BOAT TRAINING:** CRAG member agencies need additional scientific diving and small boat operations training to safely implement monitoring, disturbance response, and restoration projects. (5, 6, 7)

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI)*Accomplishments:*

1. **REPORT TO CONGRESS:** CNMI submitted the annual Jurisdictional Report to Congress on jurisdictional coral reef management activities in December 2025. (1, 3)
2. **OIA SITE VISIT:** CNMI Coral Reef Initiative and Fisheries staff hosted OIA PDAS William Hague on his visit to Saipan in June 2025. During this visit, PDAS learned how OIA's CRNR funding supports CNMI's coral reef and natural resource management activities while snorkeling at Obyan Beach and Tanapag Lagoon. (1, 2)
3. **CORAL NURSERY EXPANSION:** The CNMI Government Nursery has expanded their coral nursery with the addition of two additional larger-capacity trees, bringing the total capacity of corals in the nursery to 1,050 coral fragments. (6)
4. **CAPACITY BUILDING:** CNMI CRI completed professional trainings, including Open Water Scuba certifications and renewed Red Cross CPR/AED/First Aid training, for staff in March 2026. (7, 8)



CNMI CRI and Fisheries Staff pose with OIA Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary William Hague at Obyan Beach, Saipan, in June 2025 during his visit to the CNMI. (Photo: Harry Blanco, CNMI Office of Insular Affairs)

Ongoing activities:

1. **INCREASED CAPACITY:** With assistance from DLNR, the CNMI CRI successfully onboarded a new Communications and Outreach Coordinator and Lead Biologist in June 2025. (6, 7, 8)
2. **ROTA MARINE MONITORING:** Despite a shortage of divers, the Marine Monitoring Team resumed bi-annual reef surveys around Rota, collecting fish, coral, and benthic data at seven long term sites in June 2025. The last time Rota had been surveyed was in 2022. (7, 8)
3. **COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** CNMI's Eyes of the Reef training was updated and trainings have been held on Saipan and Rota, with a training planned on Saipan for this year. The CRCI Restoration Coordinator educated students on the linkages between coral reefs and healthy fisheries during the CNMI's first ever Fishers' Week in June 2025. (7, 8)
4. **LEGISLATIVE REFORM:** CNMI is drafting amendments and local policy language for the Coral Reef Protection Act to improve enforcement capabilities. (1)

Challenges and needs:

1. **TYPHOON RECOVERY:** In light of the recent devastating impacts caused by Typhoon Sinlaku, there will be significant emerging needs related to post-storm assessment, recovery, and restoration for both communities and coral reef resources in the CNMI. As impacts continue to be evaluated, federal interagency coordination and support will be important to help address near- and longer-term recovery challenges. (7)
2. **CRI PROGRAM TRANSITION:** As of October 1, the CNMI Coral Reef Initiative is now situated under the Department of Lands and Natural Resources (DLNR), after moving from the Division of Coastal Resources Management (DCRM), retaining all previous staff with two new positions. This move will help leverage DLNR's jurisdiction over natural resources and capacity to build momentum towards more effective and efficient management of coral reef and related resources. (1, 5, 8)
3. **GRANTS MANAGEMENT TRAINING:** Delays and administrative bottlenecks at DCRM resulted in a loss of momentum for proposed activities and deliverables, lack of training for technical staff, and diminished morale for the CRI Program in FY2025. This challenge emphasizes the need for ongoing federal grants management training for both management and administrative staff, which will advance the progress made through the relocation of CRI to DLNR. (1, 5)
4. **NUISANCE SPECIES OUTBREAKS:** Two reported outbreaks of *Terpios hoshinata*, a coral killing sponge, in Tinian, and Crown-of-Thorns sea stars (COTS) at Obyan Beach in Saipan were reported in September. However, due to a lack of permits and a need for environmental compliance to be completed before mitigation activities can proceed, as well as end of the year administration hurdles, the Marine Monitoring and Response Team has had to pause response activities. Assistance with simplifying environmental compliance activities and streamlining permitting on both the local and federal side would be helpful moving forward. (1, 5)

Guam*Accomplishments:*

1. **WATER QUALITY INTERVENTIONS:** GCRI, in partnership with Guam EPA, responded to poor water quality in the Taguag river—which led to coral die-offs in the Piti Bomb Holes Marine Preserve—by cleaning up the river, removing over 50 bags of trash, and citing the landowner. GCRI and GEPA also responded to a landslide in East Hagatna Bay by conducting visual surveys, water sampling, and sonde-based water quality monitoring, revealing no major marine impacts nearby. (4, 5, 7)

2. **RESTORATION CAPACITY:** GCRI expanded coral reef restoration capacity by installing 5 new nursery structures, 1900+ coral fragments, 3 new species, and 37 new genotypes. GCRI's reef restoration team hosted a half-day volunteer event for 15 members of the community to help with constructing nursery materials, preparing outreach materials, and learn about GCRI's coral restoration methods. (5, 6)
3. **OUTREACH AND EDUCATION:** DOAG Division of Aquatic and Wildlife resources developed and constructed an exhibit at the Guam Museum titled "Gineftao," highlighting CHamoru interpretations of ocean stewardship. Additionally, over 200 high school students participated in the long-standing Guardians of the Reef program, presenting to more than 2500 third grade students in Guam's public schools. (5)

Ongoing activities:

1. **RESPONSE PLANNING:** GCRI is collaborating with The Nature Conservancy and ERG to develop a framework for coral reef disturbance response plans. (5, 7)
2. **RESTORATION RESEARCH:** GCRI is collaborating with CORDAP-funded researchers at the University of Delaware to identify the relationship between coral color and heat stress tolerance, using GCRI's nursery-grown corals as test subjects. (5, 6)
3. **SEAGRASS DISEASE:** GCRI's Seagrass and Mangrove Conservation Soordinator authored a paper reporting the first known instance of a slime mold causing disease in seagrasses on Guam. (5)

Challenges and needs:

1. **STAFF CAPACITY:** GCRI has struggled to fill staff positions due to recruitment and hiring delays, and several funded positions have been vacant for more than a year. (5)
2. **PROCUREMENT DELAYS:** Procurement challenges continue to cause difficulties in completing projects and fulfilling grant objectives, although new agreements with partners may help to meet project-based procurement needs. (5)
3. **DEEP SEA MINING CONCERNS:** GCRI continues to conduct outreach and education to deep sea mining via social media posts. (5)



Fifteen community members joined GCRI's restoration team to help construct coral nursery materials and prepare outreach materials. (Photo: GCRI)

Hawai'i

Accomplishments:

1. **WATER QUALITY STRATEGY:** DAR's Coral Fellow led completion of the He Wai e Ola Water Quality Strategy in 2025 in partnership with the Mauka to Makai Water Quality Working Group and the Department of Health, providing a coordinated framework for integrating water quality considerations into nearshore management. DAR convened watershed working groups four times for West Maui and three times for South Maui to collaborate on land-based pollution challenges. Local non-profit Hui O Ka Wai Ola completed an additional year of coastal water quality monitoring in leeward Maui, contributing over 600 sampling results for 11 key parameters, and DAR initiated a review of 2016-2025 leeward Maui coastal water quality data. (7)
2. **CORAL RESTORATION & PERMITTING:** DAR significantly expanded coral restoration capacity statewide. Kaua'i's first coral nursery was established at Nōmilu Fishpond in partnership with Ho'omalū Ke Kai, with pilot restoration underway. The Hawai'i Coral Restoration Nursery (HCRN) expanded its Rare Coral Ark to maintain nearly 50 rare, uncommon, and endemic coral species, and outplanted endemic nursery-grown corals to south shore O'ahu, including the first restoration outplanting in the Waikīkī Marine Life Conservation District. To strengthen resilience, DAR screened 60 genotypes of *Porites meandrina* for thermal tolerance and produced over 1,000 corals across 36 genotypes in partnership with Arizona State University 'Āko'ako'a. Coral restoration pilots were also established at Kealakekua Bay and Kahalu'u Bay, and 313 corals were reattached in West Hawai'i following winter swell damage in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy. The Special Activity Permit Coral Restoration Framework has been active over the past year with minor adjustments and the concept shared with AIC members during an in-person visit. The Permitting Team convened the external Coral Restoration Scientific Advisory Board twice to guide more complex coral restoration permitting decisions. (6)
3. **MAUI HOLOMUA PROCESS:** The Holomua Marine Initiative Maui Navigation Team, representing ten island moku with generations of knowledge and stewardship, completed three rounds of scoping meetings and led fishers and community members in developing a draft island-wide nearshore management proposal. DAR conducted four Information Exchanges reaching 80 fishermen in Paia, Upcountry, and Kīhei. The draft Maui Management Plan has been completed with revisions and finalization ongoing in 2026. (5, 8)

Ongoing activities:

1. **INVASIVE SPECIES:** DAR trained 65+ staff on identification, detection, and response protocols for invasive octocorals, including in-water heat treatment and photogrammetry-based quantification. The *Unomia stolonifera* response in Pearl Harbor represents a well-coordinated, multi-agency effort. DAR surveyed 169 acres of Pearl Harbor outside the known infestation zone and developed a collaborative database for the Hawai'i Invasive Octocorals Working Group. Containment remains successful, but long-term vigilance, expanded surveys, and sustained funding will be critical to prevent the spread of these invasive octocorals beyond Navy waters. DAR is anticipating federal funding (earmark) to continue this work. DAR also rapidly responded to a new population of invasive soft coral *Capnella spicata* from Kāne'ohe Bay using heat treatment within 19 days of detection. DAR is currently responding to an *Anemonia manjano* infestation in Kāne'ohe Bay. In March 2026, the Governor issued an official environmental emergency, enabling faster, less constrained action to protect coral reef ecosystems, but there are still multiple hurdles to face as eradication treatment using chlorine and tarps is deployed. DAR is also working with the University of Hawai'i, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and non-profit Papahānaumokuākea Marine Debris Program to prevent the spread of *Chondria tumulosa* to the main Hawaiian Islands. (7)

2. **SUSTAINABLE FUNDING:** The DAR-led Aloha i ke Kai program has spent, encumbered, or committed over \$2.8M by the end of 2025. This program is supporting a diverse, statewide portfolio of projects spanning invasive species response, coral restoration, water quality, and community-based stewardship—making it a key financing and coordination mechanism for Hawai‘i’s marine conservation priorities. The State of Hawai‘i-led Act 96 (Green Fee) provides a scalable, visitor-funded revenue stream potentially delivering \$180M to \$330M annually, making it a durable, long-term funding source for reef management, invasive species response, and marine conservation in Hawai‘i. (5, 6)
3. **MAKAI RESTORATION ACTION PLAN – GOAL 3:** DAR advanced scoping for the Reef Habitat Plan under the Makai Restoration Action Plan, engaging over 300 fishers at 17 in-person events and 1,000 fishers online statewide. DAR established a network of 50 hui members through six island-specific meetings to serve as ongoing consultants for the Reef Habitat Plan. These engagements, combined with approximately 1,000 fisher surveys completed in 2025 and continued conversations with fishers in 2026, will inform plan development as DAR advances the fish habitat enhancement goal under the Makai Restoration Action Plan. (6)

Challenges and needs:

1. **PERMITTING:** Programmatic federal and state permitting must be established for rapid response to environmental damage and aquatic invasive species disturbances. Conflicting information across agencies and long timelines hinder response. (7)
2. **WATER QUALITY:** Significant gaps remain in understanding the cumulative impacts of water quality parameters on coral reef ecosystems. DAR developed a plan, but continued inter-agency coordination and collaboration is necessary to implement it. (4)
3. **STORM RESPONSE:** Given recent events in Hawai‘i and elsewhere, DAR is interested in working with AIC and USCRTF to establish protocols related to data collection when storm events occur. (1, 7)



DAR’s Hawai‘i Coral Restoration Nursery (HCRN) has completed the first coral restoration outplanting in the Waikīkī Marine Life Conservation District, placing nursery-grown corals onto the reef flat between the Waikīkī Aquarium and the Waikīkī Natatorium. The site was selected with strong community input and support, highlighting its accessibility and importance as a historically and culturally significant area. (Photo: DLNR)

AIC AFFILIATE MEMBER PRIORITIES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Republic of Palau

Accomplishments:

1. **ASEXUAL CORAL PROPAGATION:** 160 reef stars were deployed at two sites and attached using locally available fragments of opportunity. Twenty local stakeholders were trained in deployment and maintenance. (6)
2. **CLIMATE-SMART RESTORATION FRAMEWORK:** Final draft of a framework on climate-smart coral restoration has been completed and circulated. This will guide practitioners and policymakers on evaluating proposed restoration projects. (5, 6)
3. **REEF RESILIENCE INITIATIVE:** PICRC and Koror State rangers reported results of sea cucumber and sea urchin stock assessments as well as fisheries stock assessments and fish catch data to Koror State Government to assist in development of their fisheries management plan. (5, 8)



During a coral restoration training for local stakeholders, coral fragments are attached to reef stars under the supervision of Mars Sustainable Solutions (MSS). (Photo: Hiromi Ito, PICRC)

Ongoing activities:

1. **CORALADAPT:** In collaboration with Newcastle University, University of Queensland, and University of Philippines, research is underway to collect observational data on coral spawning timings, to contribute to the Indo-Pacific coral spawning database. (5, 6)
2. **RESTORATION MONITORING:** Outplanted coral recruits are currently being monitored using a combination of sub-samples, in-situ data collection, and 3D photogrammetry. AI tools to streamline photo analysis are being explored. (6)

3. **PAN MPA ASSESSMENTS:** Assessments of all sixteen Protected Area Network (PAN) MPAs began in August 2025, expected completion in September 2026. Results from the assessments assist state governments to make informed management decisions. (5, 8)

Challenges and needs:

1. **UNDERSTANDING RESILIENCE:** During a current project related to changing ocean conditions, a key challenge identified was navigating and accessing relevant data and technical information. While substantial information exists, it is often difficult to obtain or apply without clear points of contact, guidance on available resources, and support in identifying the right questions to inform management decisions. Another challenge is limited understanding of the underlying drivers of reef degradation at restoration sites. Enhanced water quality assessments and related diagnostic tools are needed to help identify causes of decline and inform more effective restoration planning and site selection. (4, 5, 6, 7)
2. **POWER OUTAGES IMPACT RESTORATION:** Frequent power outages in Palau pose an ongoing risk to ex situ coral rearing and related restoration activities. Additional system redundancies and backup infrastructure are needed to reduce vulnerability, minimize disruptions, and improve project resilience. (5, 6)

Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)

We look forward to including updates from the Federated States of Micronesia in the next biannual AIC Chair's Report to the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force.

Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI)

We look forward to including updates from the Republic of the Marshall Islands in the next biannual AIC Chair's Report to the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force.

AIC CORAL REEF POINTS OF CONTACT & SECRETARIAT

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U.S. Virgin Islands: Jean-Pierre Oriol (*AIC Chair*), Department of Planning and Natural Resources

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AIC Points of Contact, jurisdictional support staff, and Secretariat members at the 49th U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting in Saipan, CNMI in November 2024 (Photo: DCRM)