

International Year of the Reef 2008



By Francis Staub

The International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), a global partnership of governments and organisations dedicated to halting and reversing the degradation of coral reefs and related ecosystems worldwide, has designated 2008 as the International Year of the Reef (IYOR 2008).



ICRI seeks to implement the recommendations of the Rio Earth Summit (Agenda 21, Chapter 17) and other international conventions and agreements for the benefit of coral reefs and associated ecosystems, such as mangroves and sea grasses. ICRI was established to halt and reverse the global degradation of coral reefs and related ecosystems. The ICRI partnership has mobilised governments and a wide range of stakeholders in efforts to improve management practices, increase capacity and political support, and share information on the health of these ecosystems.

A decade ago, 1997 was designated the first International Year of the Reef. IYOR 1997 was a global effort to raise awareness about coral reefs and generate support for coral reef conservation, research and management efforts. Despite IYOR 97's success in raising global awareness of coral reefs and associated ecosystems, ten years later, there remains an urgent need to increase awareness, to take action, further conserve and manage coral reefs and associated ecosystems, and to appreciate their value to humanity. A good example of the need of awareness is highlighted in a recent opinion paper published in the *Bulletin of Marine Science*¹ on scientist's perceptions of threats to coral reef.

1. Kleypas, J and Eakin M (2007). Scientists' perceptions of threats to coral reefs: Results of a survey of coral reef researchers. Opinion Paper. *Bulletin of Marine Science* **80(2)**, 419–436.

To the question, "For reefs worldwide, which three actions do you think would most effectively improve the overall state of coral reefs?", the top-ranked answer was: "Improve education/communication about coral reefs."

We now have a much clearer understanding of how reefs are being affected (including by "emerging" threats such as climate change and ocean acidification). However, the status of coral reefs is not improving. The latest estimates of the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN) states that 20% of coral reefs are considered as effectively lost (which means damaged beyond repair). Another 24% of the remaining reefs are at critical status (high to very high threat of destruction, if we do nothing), and only 50% are currently classified as low risk.² We also have a better understanding of services that healthy coral reefs provide: for example, billions of dollars and millions of jobs in over 90 countries around the world; food for people living near coral reefs, especially on small islands; a natural

2. Status of Coral Reefs of the World (2004). Edited by Clive Wilkinson.

barrier protecting coastal cities, communities and beaches.

According to a United Nations estimate, the total economic value of coral reefs range from \$100,000 to \$600,000 per square kilometre per year.³

With that in mind, education at all levels in helping to make people more aware, enthusiastic and supportive of coral reef issues, including understanding “why are coral reefs important to all people in many different ways,” has a critical role in coral reefs conservation.

The 2008 Year will be a worldwide, year-long campaign of events and initiatives hosted by governments, individuals, corporations and schools around the world, to raise awareness about the value and importance of coral reefs and threats to their sustainability and to motivate people to take action to protect them. All individuals, corporations, schools, governments and organisations are welcome and actively encouraged to participate in IYOR 2008.

3. UNEP-WCMC (2006). *In the front line: shoreline protection and other ecosystem services from mangroves and coral reefs.* UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge, UK, 33pp. This is available online at http://www.unepwcmc.org/resources/publications/UNEP_WCMC_bio_series/24.cfm.



For further information

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OBITUARY

John Gray (1941-2007)

Professor John S. Gray PhD DSc passed away on Sunday, 21st of October, at the age of 66. John was a leading benthic ecologist and was instrumental in moving benthic ecology and studies of pollution from observation to hypothesis testing. John received his PhD in 1965 from the University of Wales, Marine Science Laboratories, and after several positions in England came to Norway in 1976 as professor and head of the Department of Marine Biology and Zoology, University of Oslo. He was the recipient of numerous awards, including the Zoological Society of London's T.H. Huxley Prize and the Fridtjof Nansen Prize for Research from the Norwegian Academy of Arts and Science. The author of over 120 publications, John was an ISI highly cited scientist and co-author of the influential John Martin Award-winning paper that introduced the concept of the ‘microbial loop.’ His research papers also provided evidence that was instrumental to the ban on discharges of oil-based

drilling muds on the Norwegian Continental Shelf. He wrote a popular textbook on marine benthic ecology, first published in 1981 and updated shortly before his death. John's recent research focused on elucidating patterns of marine benthic diversity, marine pollution and bio-magnification and interdisciplinary studies on recently-discovered seabed ‘pockmarks’ in the Oslofjord and North Sea. John made many collaborations over the years and collected friends and colleagues around the world in diverse places such as South Africa, Hong Kong, North America, Europe and Australasia. John was engaged in public debates on protecting the marine environment where he always emphasised the importance of science. He has been an important educator of undergraduate and post-graduate students who will carry his intellectual contributions forward to shape future marine benthic ecology. He was a wonderful friend, colleague, mentor and teacher and he will be greatly missed.



The late Professor John S. Gray.