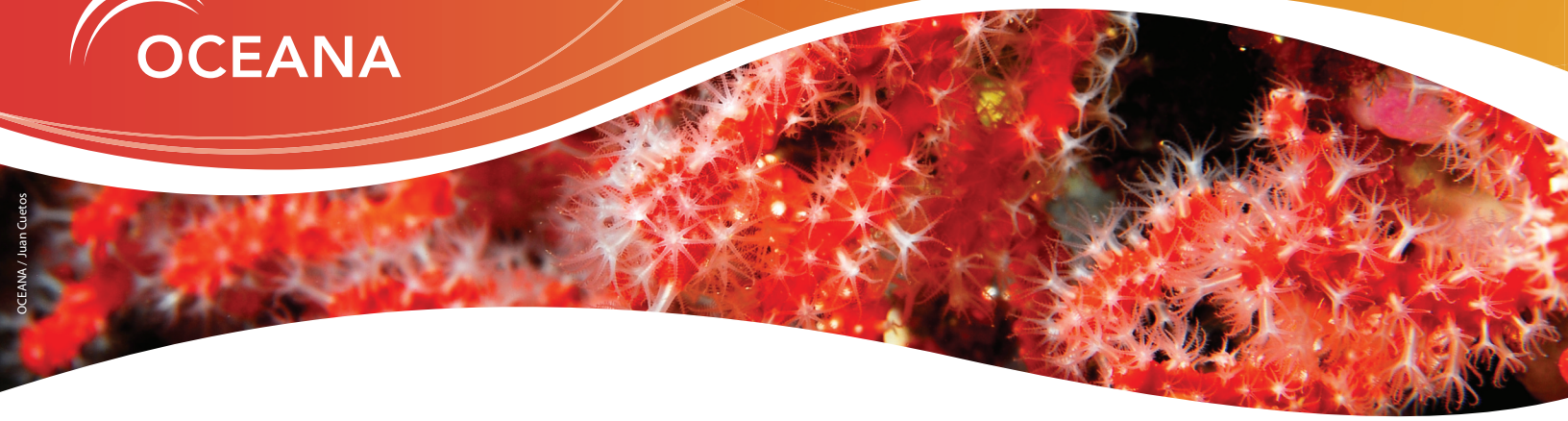

OCEANA / Juan Cuetos

Precious Corals and CITES

"Precious corals" refers to roughly thirty species that belong to the Corallium and Paracorallium genera. These octocorals occur in a wide geographic and bathymetric range. They are found in tropical, subtropical and temperate waters in all oceans and at the depths of 10 to 5,000 meters.

Many precious coral species are long-lived, reaching more than 100 years of age, and grow slowly, usually less than one millimetre in thickness per year.[1] These colonies are fragile and extremely vulnerable to exploitation and destruction, and their biological characteristics also severely limit their subsequent recovery.

Precious corals have been highly exploited around the world by the jewellery and souvenir industries, as well as for certain homeopathic products. Although trade has mainly focused on species that are in highest demand by the jewellery sector, such as *Corallium rubrum* from the Mediterranean and North East Atlantic, and *C. Secundum, C. konojoi, C. elatius, C. regale and Paracorallium japonicum* from the Pacific, all coral species have been impacted by these activities. Overexploitation has caused a decline in production in the past few decades of almost 70 percent in some species.[2]

Other factors, including fishing activities in coral habitat, higher sea temperatures and increased ocean acidification resulting from global climate change, are also causing the destruction of corals.

The catch of precious coral significantly increased after the second half of the 1970s, reached roughly 450 tons in the 1980s and, due to overexploitation, has declined to roughly 50 tons today.[3] Coral catch registers fail to identify commercialized species due to their similarities. This has led to incorrect estimates for the exploitation of many different precious coral species. In addition, the removal of these species has affected all the species in the genus Corallidae.

The thirty-one species of the famillae Corallidae (*Corallium* spp. and *Paracorallium* spp.) are proposed for inclusion in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Appendix II by the United States and the European Union. The inclusion of the Corallidae family in CITES Appendix II is needed to ensure the future of these species and the marine habitats they support. Oceana strongly recommends the adoption of this proposal.

The Species at a Glance

Corals Proposed for Inclusion in CITES Appendix II

CITES has already included other coral species in its appendices, such as stone corals (Scleractinia) and black corals (Antipatharia), without distinguishing between species, given their ecological importance, similarities and common threats. Furthermore, CITES already includes *Corallium elatius, C. konojoi, C. secundum and Paracorallium japonicum* specifically for China in Appendix III.

Currently, only red coral (*Corallium rubrum*) is included in an international convention (annex III of the Bern Convention) and in multi-governmental legislation (annex V of the EU Habitats Directive), apart from the extraction limits imposed by certain countries. However, these measures are not enough to conserve these species and control their international trade.

The United States proposal[4] to include the genera Corallium and Paracorallium in CITES Appendix II during the 14th Conference of the Parties included a total of 26 species. This list has been subsequently expanded to include the 31 species currently identified around the world, and is the list included in the proposal co-sponsored by the United States and European Union for CoP1.[5] Of these, seven are included for their high commercial value (underlined below) and the remaining 24 are considered "look-alike" species, due to their similarity to the species proposed for protection. As such, the species included after taxonomic revisions[A] are the following:

Corallium abyssale
Corallium borneense
Corallium boshuense
Corallium ducale
Corallium elatius
Corallium halmaheirense
Corallium imperiale
Corallium johnsoni
Corallium konojoi
Corallium maderense
Corallium medea
Corallium niobe
Corallium niveum
Corallium porcellanum
Corallium pusillum
Corallium regale
Corallium reginae
Corallium rubrum
Corallium secundum
Corallium sulcatum
Corallium tricolor
Corallium vanderbilti
Corallium variabile
Corallium sp. nov
Paracorallium inutile
Paracorallium japonicum
Paracorallium nix
Paracorallium salomonense
Paracorallium stylasteroides
Paracorallium thrinax
Paracorallium tortuosum


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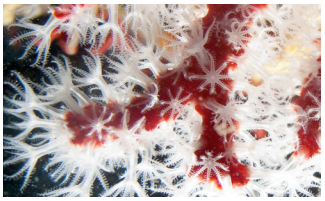
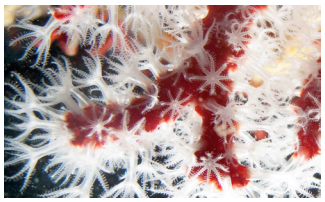
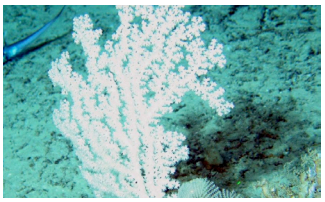
OCEANA / Houssine Kaddachi


Lorenzo Bramanti-Marine Photobank


Lindsey Robinett-Marine Photobank


Lindsey Robinett-Marine Photobank


Brooke et al, NOAA OE 2005-Marine Photobank

[A] From the original COP14 proposal, *Corallium kishinouyei* is no longer included in currently accepted taxonomic classifications and *C. lauuense* is considered a synonym for *C. regale*. On the other hand, the following new species are included: *Corallium boshuense, C. niveum, C. porcellanum, C. pusillum, C. vanderbilti and C. variabile*. In any case, all species are included in the current proposal as it includes, in general, the entire genera Corallium and Paracorallium

Case Studies

Mediterranean red coral *{Corallium rubrum}*
Corallium rubrum is endemic to the Mediterranean and adjacent Atlantic waters off Western Africa. This species has been harvested since ancient times and is quite possibly the most threatened. Up to 2,000 vessels were dedicated to harvesting this coral[6] using destructive techniques such as crowbars (*barra italiana*) or double cross (*cruz de San Andrés*). In Italy, the main exploiter of this resource, 66 percent of the colonies are no longer reproductive.[7] In extensive areas of Spain, 86 percent of the colonies do not reach the legal exploitable size and 91 percent barely reach five centimetres in height.[8] Although certain countries show a sharper decline than others, red coral catches have fallen 60 percent from their historic highs.[9]

Red corals *{Corallium regale and Paracorallium japonicum}* **and pink corals** *{Corallium secundum}* **from the Pacific**
Asian fleets began exploiting precious corals from the Pacific Ocean in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Japanese and Taiwanese catches have dropped drastically, to only four percent and one percent, respectively, of their maximum highs in the 1970s and 80s,[10] when catches often exceeded 200 tonnes.[11]

The United States, especially around the Hawaiian Islands and some seamounts, has also maintained an active industry for coral exploitation and commercialisation.

Most *Corallium sp.* reefs in the west Pacific have been quickly depleted, in some cases in only a five-year time period.[12]

What is CITES?

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) is an international agreement entered into force in 1975 to prevent species from becoming extinct as a result of international trade. Regulated through export and import permits, CITES applies to species whose populations may be threatened by international trade. There are approximately 5,000 species of animals and 28,000 species of plants included in the CITES three appendices. Proposals to include species in Appendices I and II are considered by the 175 CITES countries at a Conference of the Parties every two to three years. Within the last 30 years, no species that has been included in CITES has gone extinct, thus illustrating its ability to be successful.[13]

Appendix I is the most stringent inclusion, banning commercial international trade for species who are most threatened with extinction.

Appendix II is for species that may become threatened with extinction if trade of the species is not strictly regulated. In addition, species that look similar in appearance to other species included in Appendix II may also be included. International commercial trade of included species requires an export permit.

Appendix III includes species that an individual Party has asked other parties to assist in the regulation of trade. Trade of the included species requires an export permit and a certificate of origin.

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[3] CITES (2007). Inclusion of all species in the genus Corallium in Appendix II of CITES. This taxon comprises 26 closely related species. Consideration of proposals for Amendment of Appendices I and II. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties The Hague (Netherlands), 3-15 June 2007.

[4] Ibidem.

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About Oceana

Oceana campaigns to protect and restore the world's oceans. Our teams of marine scientists, economists, lawyers and advocates win specific and concrete policy changes to reduce pollution and to prevent the irreversible collapse of fish populations, marine mammals and other sea life. Global in scope and dedicated to conservation, Oceana has campaigners based in North America, Europe and South and Central America. More than 300,000 members and e-activists in over 150 countries have already joined Oceana. For more information, please visit http://www.oceana.org.

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