

## A review of ICRI

*This review was approved by the ICRI members at the ICRI General Meeting held in Tokyo, Japan (April 23<sup>rd</sup> - 24<sup>th</sup>, 2007).*

The Call to Action was made by the International Coral Reef Initiative in 1995, resulting in a decade of international collaboration, striving to reverse the degradation of coral reefs and associated ecosystems

In recognition of the 10 year anniversary of ICRI, a decision made during the ICRI General Meeting, Palau, October 2005 (ICRI GM Japan/Palau (1) 2005/8.0/1) to undertake and evaluation of the Initiative which states:

*"ICRI members requested that the ICRI Secretariat initiate a review of the successes and failures of the past 10 years, so that future direction may benefit from past experience. As a result of this request the incoming ICRI Secretariat have proposed a ten-year review as the 3<sup>rd</sup> outcome of the Action Plan for consideration by the ICRI members at this meeting."*

The methodology for this review consisted of information collection through:

*Research of ICRI Forum archives (desk based research)*

The ICRIForum website holds an extensive amount of information on all ICRI related activities. Desk-based research was undertaken to find relevant information needed for the review. The ICRIForum was a first point of call when researching before broader research was undertaken.

### *Questionnaire*

Email questionnaires were developed for four groups:

- (i) Current ICRI focal points;
- (ii) Past secretariat staff;
- (iii) Lapsed ICRI members;
- (iv) Those who have been targeted as suitable ICRI members, but who have not attended.

The questionnaires were intended to gather information and views resulting from people who had been involved in ICRI, or

who had decided not to be involved. Responses were received, collated, and quantitative analysis undertaken to provide the baseline information for the charts that appear in this report.

The questionnaire raised a number of key issues but the small sample size of the responses received were inadequate for substantial statistical analysis. These were discussed by a small working group at the Cozumel meeting and formed important background for this report.

### **The First 12 Years of ICRI**

The mission of ICRI is still important. The informal nature of ICRI as a small public-private partnership involving government and non-government members provides an appropriate forum for awareness raising and agenda development for the management of coral reefs and related ecosystems.

A distinctive characteristic of ICRI as a public-private partnership is the rotating chairmanship. Chairs hold office for a two year term and the rotation provides new energy and perspectives but this has provided problems of programme continuity.

In 2001 the practice of co-Chairing by a partnership of a developing and a developed country was adopted and has further added to the energy and breadth of focus of ICRI.

ICRI has evolved, and continues to evolve, from a small partnership to a body with an increasing and diverse membership. This has occurred in parallel with events and challenges such as coral bleaching that have increased the urgency of management action to conserve and maintain coral reefs and associated ecosystems. ICRI's profile and membership have grown. As a result the requirements for meeting format have changed with a need for increasingly focused agenda. This is the sign of a mature organisation.

The ICRI Call to Action identified four main areas for action:

1. Integrated Coastal Management;
2. Capacity Building;
3. Research and Monitoring;
4. Review and Performance Evaluation.

The Call to Action and subsequent ICRI documents refer to coral reefs and associated ecosystems such as mangroves, seagrasses and sandy seabed communities. ICRI has had limited success in broadening the reach of its programme to encompass mangroves and other linked ecosystems.

ICRI has been more successful in activities related to research and monitoring and some areas of capacity building than in ICM. This probably reflects the roles and capacities of the current membership that consists largely of environment agencies, NGOs and researchers. There have been attempts to reach out more broadly to the fishing industry, tourism and other community and private sector groups, but these have had limited success.

The 1995 ICRI meeting at Dumaguete City, Philippines, agreed that it was important that ICRI should be driven by its regions because they are the points at which action priorities and programmes are most clearly linked to local needs, opportunities and capacities. Most ICRI secretariats have held regional meetings and have had limited success in empowerment and the need to regionalise is still urgent.

A common pattern in ICRI meetings has been the development of recommendations or proposals for action, which, while important were made with no provision or allocation of responsibility for implementation or report back. This has been addressed through a more focused process in management of recent meetings.

### **Achievements of ICRI**

ICRI has been successful in engaging with international processes and major events, achieving insertion of text relating to coral reefs and associated ecosystems in a number of international documents (e.g. UN General Assembly) and in capacity building through workshops and publications. These achievements are summarised in Table 1.

ICRI has created the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network and the International Coral Reef Action Network that have been successful in raising awareness. implementing programs of monitoring, coordinating programs of action and conducting capacity building and workshops.

For twelve years, ICRI, through its Coordination Planning Committee, and through a broad range of engagement by its

partners, has provided an ongoing formal and informal forum at the global and regional levels, for sharing information, discussing issues and building knowledge, coordinating on initiatives and projects, and helping to foster partnerships and connect needs to resources in support of the initial ICRI Call to Action.

ICRI has had substantial success through the establishment by members of national programmes and committees that maintain focus, awareness and program activity for coral reefs and associated ecosystems.

### **Future management of ICRI**

Recent meetings have been more formally organised, reflecting the needs of the growing organisation. They have included time for workshop discussion and substantive consideration of issues. This has been welcomed by members.

ICRI had had significant successes in international engagement such as the focus on coral reefs and associated ecosystems in the programs of the Ramsar Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity. In the light of these is important to recognise that the task of raising the profile of ICRI in other international fora (e.g. FAO and IMO) should be seen as a major responsibility of hosting governments and ICRI members.

An issue which requires attention is to develop the modalities for closer engagement and empowerment of regions in the work of ICRI. This has been started through regional caucuses within ITMEMS. There is clear potential to take this further through regional meetings of ICRI.

In the interest of increasing the engagement of all members in the work of ICRI future meetings should build on the start made in identifying action priorities with report-back commitments by members, for specific activities.

A recurrent issue is the matter of funding. While the initiative has been extremely cost-effective and its budgets small, the funding base of the programs of ICRI and its networks is narrow and currently depends on a very small number of funding bodies. It is important that this be addressed to achieve a more sustainable funding base and so maintain and develop the programs to meet growing needs and to provide for participation, particularly from developing countries. This may in part be addressed by a greater use of

regional meetings, perhaps mid-sessional, between ICRI general meetings. A further issue to pursue would be for ICRI partners to engage with programme designers, and funders to establish the understanding that the peer-to-peer networking about management experience. This is a critical element of capacity building and performance review and should be seen as a core activity and funded within management programmes.

### **Conclusions**

ICRI has had significant successes in its first 12 years of operation. It has maintained and gained stature with both governments and non-governmental institutions. As a result of this success, and the continued broadening of the partnership, the necessary modalities for management have changed, even as ICRI maintains its relatively informal nature. Given its strong position, it is highly recommended and important that ICRI continue to perform its role of awareness raising and promotion of programmes to address the needs of coral reefs and related ecosystems.

There are several issues that need more substantial consideration by members in relation to developing modalities for future operation. These include ongoing attention to agendas that actively engage the participation of existing and new members and the logistics of the rotation of the hosting government(s).