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SEAWEB APPLAUDS U.S. DECISION TO SUPPORT BLUEFIN TUNA TRADE PROTECTION

Organization Urges Worldwide Support for Similar Effort to Protect Red and Pink Coral

LONDON—SeaWeb applauded the announcement by the United States that it will support a proposed international trade ban for endangered bluefin tuna, and the ocean conservation organization called for international support for 32 species of red and pink coral as well as for eight shark species proposed for similar protection. These unique and valued marine species will be the focus of the upcoming Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Conference of Parties (CoP15), in Doha, Qatar, March 13 to 25.

SeaWeb's *Too Precious To Wear* campaign raises awareness of the threats posed to coral by the international trade. Red and pink coral (scientific name: Coralliidae) are widely used in jewelry and home décor but are among the least protected of all coral species.

“SeaWeb applauds the United States for its strong support of trade protection for bluefin tuna, and for its leadership in proposing six species of sharks and red and pink coral for CITES protection,” said Kristian Teleki, who is SeaWeb’s vice president for science initiatives and based in London. “The Doha meeting represents a unique opportunity for meaningful trade measures to be put in place for these valuable marine species.”

Scientists, conservationists, jewelers and designers are urging countries to protect red and pink corals, calling the Qatar meeting the last chance for these long-lived, slow-growing species to receive international trade protection. Red and pink coral are a type of deep-sea precious coral found in the Mediterranean and Pacific. Between 30 and 50 metric tons of these corals are taken from the ocean annually to meet consumer demand for jewelry and decorative items. The United States alone imported 28 million pieces of red and pink coral between 2001 and 2008. A finished red coral necklace can retail for hundreds of thousands of dollars. Jewelry retailer Tiffany & Co., designer Temple St. Clair, ocean conservationist Céline Cousteau and many others are in support of the United States and European Union’s proposal to protect red and pink coral under Appendix II of CITES.

“Overfishing of red and pink coral has put these animals—precious jewels of the sea—at great risk,” said Teleki. “A CITES Appendix II listing for Coralliidae can help safeguard these species as well as the future of the industries and people that depend on them.”

The global wildlife trade is immense, highly valuable and is often a threat to global conservation efforts. Thousands of species are traded every year, with an estimated value of US\$160 billion. Illegal trade in wildlife products is estimated at US\$10 to US\$20 billion. Scientists estimate that because of trade, loss of habitat and other environmental changes, species are becoming extinct 1,000 times faster than a natural rate. The United Nations has declared 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity, and protection for many species under CITES is needed to protect diversity, livelihoods and ecosystems around the world.

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Further information:

SeaWeb staff will be attending the 15th CoP and will be providing real-time updates from the conference as decisions are made. For further information relating to the red and pink coral proposal, visit <http://www.seaweb.org/markets/cites.php>

For interviews with spokespeople, b-roll, and images please contact Julia Roberson (jroberson@seaweb.org, +44.77.04.54.83.92) or Ken Goldman (kgoldman@seaweb.org +1.301.495.9570).

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SeaWeb, founded in 1996 to raise awareness of the growing threats to the ocean and its living resources, is a communications-based nonprofit organization that utilizes social marketing techniques to advance ocean conservation. By increasing public awareness, advancing science-based solutions and mobilizing decision makers around ocean conservation, SeaWeb has brought together multiple, diverse and powerful voices for a healthy ocean. www.seaweb.org

Too Precious to Wear is a SeaWeb campaign to create a demand for coral conservation. The campaign raises awareness of the need for coral protection among the fashion, jewelry and design industries and addresses the threats posed to coral by the often-unregulated and illegal trade in these species. The campaign is seeking an Appendix II listing for red and pink corals (Coralliidae) under CITES. Coralliidae are the most valuable and widely traded of all precious coral species (called precious because of their use in jewelry and home décor), but they are among the least protected. www.tooprecioustowear.org

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) is an international agreement between 175 countries to address the significant trade in wildlife products that is estimated to be worth billions of dollars annually and includes fur, food products, herbs, timber, jewelry and curios. Trade in certain wildlife products has brought some animal populations to the verge of extinction. CITES was created to address this threat, so that trade in wildlife is not detrimental to species' survival. More than 30,000 species of plants (roughly 25,000) and animals (5,000) are listed under the three Appendices of CITES, which afford varying levels of protection. Species are proposed for listing under the Appendices at the Conference of Parties (CoP), held every two to three years. www.cites.org