



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
March 12, 2010

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COUNTRIES URGED TO PROTECT RED AND PINK CORAL AS INTERNATIONAL WILDLIFE TRADE MEETING BEGINS

DOHA, QATAR—SeaWeb’s Vice President for Science Initiatives Kristian Teleki issued the following statement today as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) 15th Conference of Parties convenes for two weeks to decide the level of trade protection for red and pink coral (*Coralliidae*), bluefin tuna and several species of sharks:

“Today marks the beginning of what could be a watershed moment for marine conservation. Countries will consider red and pink corals, bluefin tuna and several species of sharks for international trade protection during the course of the next two weeks in Doha. Red and pink corals, which are long-lived and slow growing, have been used for centuries in jewelry and home décor. After years of ineffective management and overexploitation, these animals are facing their last chance to receive meaningful protection under CITES. An Appendix II listing would ensure that any trade in red and pink coral is sustainable and would require exporting countries to prove that it is so. SeaWeb urges international governments to join with the United States and European Union to give red and pink corals—and the industries and people that depend upon these ocean resources—the protection they need in order to survive.”

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Further information:

Red and pink corals are deep-sea precious corals found in the Mediterranean and Pacific Oceans. Between 30 and 50 metric tons of these corals are taken from the ocean annually to meet consumer demand for jewelry and decorative items. Despite the value and size of the international red and pink coral trade, these species have no international trade protection. The United States alone imported 28 million pieces of red and pink coral between 2001 and 2008, and a finished red coral necklace can retail for hundreds of thousands of U.S. dollars.

In 2007, the United States proposed red and pink corals for an Appendix II listing at the 14th Conference of Parties. Despite an initial successful listing, the proposal was overturned on the final day of the conference after intensive lobbying by industry interests. The United States and the European Union are cosponsoring a proposal at the 15th Conference of Parties in Doha, Qatar, to list *Coralliidae* under Appendix II. Red and pink coral will be considered alongside bluefin tuna and several species of sharks. Jewelry retailer Tiffany & Co., jewelry designer Temple St. Clair, environmental advocate and filmmaker Céline Cousteau and many others are joining SeaWeb in support of the United States and European Union’s proposal to protect red and pink coral under Appendix II of CITES.

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 to be US\$10 billion 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 the 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 (March 13 to 25 in Doha, Qatar) and will be providing real-time updates from the conference as decisions are made at <http://seawebvoicesinaction.blogspot.com/>

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).

Follow us on Twitter: twitter.com/SeaWeb_Coral

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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 brings 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 the CITES. *Coralliidae* are the most valuable and widely traded of all precious coral species (those used 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 three Appendices at the CITES Conference of Parties (CoP), held every two to three years. www.cites.org