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**SCIENTISTS AND FASHION INDUSTRY JOIN FORCES FOR
CORAL CONSERVATION CAMPAIGN**

Scientists say reducing consumer pressure will help threatened marine animals' survival as a recent study warns that 98 percent of corals could disappear by 2050

NEW YORK, NY (January 23, 2008) – Julia Louis-Dreyfus, The Tiffany & Co. Foundation and leading fashion and home designers unveiled their commitment to coral conservation today at the launch of *Too Precious to Wear*, a program of the ocean conservation organization SeaWeb. *Too Precious to Wear* aims to raise awareness of corals and the threats to their survival, and to show how the fashion and design industries, as well as consumers, can safeguard these imperiled marine species.

Despite their appearances, corals are neither rocks nor plants. Corals are living animals that provide marine species with food, fertile grounds for reproduction and safe havens from predators. Reefs provide more than \$15 billion worth of fisheries and tourism services around the world, and one billion people in Asia alone depend on fish caught in coastal waters dominated by coral reefs. Unfortunately, corals are in serious trouble due to destructive fishing methods, climate change, pollution, and removal from the sea for jewelry and decorative home objects.

Too Precious to Wear is launching at the beginning of the 2008 International Year of the Reef, marking the first time that marine scientists and fashion industry elite have joined to raise awareness of the threats facing corals and coral reefs. Scientists say that 20 percent of the world's coral reefs have already been destroyed, and that another 24 percent may be lost within our lifetimes if human impacts on corals are not reduced.

“Corals inspire me and many others with their beauty, and coral reefs support the livelihoods of millions around the world,” said Julia Louis-Dreyfus, founding partner of *Too Precious to Wear*. “These animals are integral to the health of the ocean, and it is up to each of us to make sure corals are protected. If we take good care of the ocean, the ocean will take care of us.”

The United States, as the world's largest documented consumer, has placed significant pressure on these threatened animals, importing more than 26 million pieces from 2001 to 2006. The American market is also responsible for 80 percent of the live coral taken from reefs (more than 400,000 pieces a year).

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Dawn M. Martin, president of SeaWeb, said, “Corals simply are too precious to wear. They belong in their natural ocean habitat, where they contribute to the survival of thousands of other marine species. Consumers and the fashion industry can play an important role in the ocean’s recovery by simply choosing products that do not harm the ocean.”

Recent science has painted an increasingly dire picture of the status of corals and reefs worldwide. In a recent issue of the journal *Science*, the paper *Coral Reefs under Rapid Climate Change and Ocean Acidification*, co-authored by seventeen marine scientists from seven different countries, showed that 98 percent of coral reefs could disappear by 2050 unless governments act immediately to combat the effects of global warming.

Dr. Andrew Baker, scientist and professor at the University of Miami said, “Corals around the world are in jeopardy, and urgent action is needed to stem their decline. With the fashion industry and scientists uniting, we have an opportunity to reduce consumer pressure on corals, and raise awareness of the global threats they face from climate change, overfishing, habitat destruction, pollution and disease.”

The fashion and design worlds have long looked to corals and the ocean as a source of inspiration and imagination. *Too Precious to Wear* fashion leaders include Sylvie Chantecaille, owner and founder of Chantecaille Beauté, designer Lela Rose, Lisa Mayock and Sophie Buhai of Vena Cava, and home and lifestyle designer Michael Aram. Chantecaille has designed a compact with a coral-inspired motif to benefit the Pew Institute of Ocean Science’s Reefs of Hope project. Led by Dr. Andrew Baker, the project seeks to find practical, science-based solutions for corals as they face the pressures of climate change.

Red and pink corals, otherwise known as precious corals, are more often seen adorning the necks of beautiful women than in their natural ocean habitat. Having been fished for more than 5,000 years in the Pacific and the Mediterranean, they have shown serious signs of decline in the past two decades. Entire coral populations have been wiped out by destructive fishing gear such as trawls, which can mow down everything in their path. Recovery is not guaranteed and takes decades if it is able to occur.

Michael J. Kowalski, Chairman and CEO of Tiffany & Co., said, “We are committed to obtaining precious materials in ways that are socially and environmentally responsible. We decided to stop using real coral in our jewelry over six years ago and feel that there are much better alternatives that celebrate the beauty of the ocean.”

In addition to raising consumer and industry awareness of the need to protect corals, SeaWeb and its *Too Precious to Wear* program will seek stronger conservation policy for corals in the United States and abroad, by calling for increased monitoring of the global coral trade through the Coral Reef Conservation Act. The act has been languishing in Congress since 2005.

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For more information or interviews with spokespeople, please contact Julia Roberson (+011.44.44.74.04.54.83.92, jroberson@seaweb.org) or Corinne Knutson (+1.808.497.3360, cknutson@seaweb.org). For further information on *Too Precious to Wear*, visit www.tooprecioustowear.org. SeaWeb (www.seaweb.org) is a communications-based nonprofit organization that uses social marketing techniques to advance ocean conservation. By raising public awareness, advancing science-based solutions and mobilizing decision-makers around ocean conservation, SeaWeb is leading voices for a healthy ocean.

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