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## **LEGISLATION INTRODUCED TO INCREASE PROTECTION OF NATION'S CORALS**

### ***SeaWeb Applauds Senate Bill to Strengthen Coral Reef Conservation Act***

WASHINGTON, D.C.—SeaWeb hailed last night's introduction of legislation by Senator Daniel K. Inouye of Hawaii and several co-sponsors that, when passed into law, will increase protections for corals and coral reefs throughout the United States and its territories as, "a great step forward in protecting these vital species." Upon passage in the U.S. Senate, the *Coral Reef Conservation Amendments Act of 2009* would be reconciled with a version that already passed in the U.S. House of Representatives and next sent to President Obama to be signed into law.

"Senator Inouye and his colleagues clearly recognize the importance of corals, and they have demonstrated their leadership by introducing this valuable piece of legislation," said Dawn M. Martin, president of SeaWeb. "The future for corals—which lately has been bleak at best—just got a little brighter thanks to Senator Inouye and the other co-sponsors of this bill."

The introduction of the legislation comes as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change meets in Copenhagen. "Corals are often seen as the 'canaries in the coalmine' when it comes to the effects of climate change on the ocean. Rising ocean temperatures lead to coral bleaching, and increasing carbon dioxide emissions are making the ocean more acidic, affecting corals' ability to build reefs. This bill is yet another example of the leadership that the United States is exhibiting on these issues," said Martin.

The bill would strengthen the 2000 Coral Reef Conservation Act by expanding the U.S. Coral Reef Conservation Program and by granting greater authority for emergency action in response to damage to coral from vessel impacts, fishing gear, anchors and disaster-related circumstances stemming from human activities. It also includes measures to assess the impact of trade on corals, laying the groundwork for future efforts to enhance coral protection. Coral advocates hope that today's important addition to the original 2000 Act will help pave the way for increased oversight of what has been often unregulated international trade in corals and reef species.

"The value of coral reefs cannot be overstated," said Martin. "Their importance to the healthy balance of the ocean is second to none, and we in the United States need to do all we can to ensure their survival in our waters and around the world."

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Coral reefs provide marine life with places to find food, safe havens from predators and areas for reproduction. In return, coral reef ecosystems provide us with food, commerce, protection from storms and even medicine. The economic value of healthy and thriving coral reef ecosystems throughout the ocean is significant: A recent study by the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity project estimates that, globally, coral reefs are worth \$172 billion annually in benefits that include food, tourism, climate regulation, coastal protection and biodiversity.

However, corals and coral reefs are in crisis, suffering effects from overfishing, climate change, ocean acidification, invasive species, pollution, coastal development and oil and gas exploration. In addition, some species suffer from extraction for use in the jewelry, home décor and aquarium industries. SeaWeb's *Too Precious to Wear* campaign is calling for increased protection of red and pink corals—deep-sea corals that are found in the Mediterranean and the Pacific and are commonly used in jewelry and home décor. An Appendix II listing under the Convention on International Trade (CITES) in Endangered Species would provide much-needed monitoring and oversight to this highly unregulated trade.

“A CITES Appendix II listing for red and pink corals would complement the efforts of Senator Inouye and his colleagues who recognize the importance of strategically managing and preserving corals and coral reefs here in the United States,” said Martin. “We urge the member countries of CITES to support the United States’ proposal. We also ask the Senate to quickly pass this legislation so that enhanced protection for corals can take effect as soon as possible.”

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](http://www.seaweb.org).

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