

Calendar No. 186

105TH CONGRESS }
1st Session

SENATE

{ REPORT
105-94

CORAL REEF ECOSYSTEMS

R E P O R T

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION

ON

H. CON. RES. 8



SEPTEMBER 30, 1997.—Ordered to be printed

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SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

ONE HUNDRED FIFTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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SEPTEMBER 30, 1997.—Ordered to be printed

Mr. MCCAIN, from the Committee on Commerce, Science, and
Transportation, submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany H. Con. Res. 8]

The Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, to which was referred the concurrent resolution (H. Con. Res. 8) “A Concurrent Resolution recognizing the significance of maintaining the health and stability of coral reef ecosystems”, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon with amendments and recommends that the concurrent resolution (as amended) do pass.

PURPOSE OF THE RESOLUTION

The purpose of H. Con. Res. 8 is to express Congressional commitment to improve stewardship, research, and sustainable use of coral reefs. The resolution also acknowledges United States participation in the International Coral Reef Initiative and recognizes that 1997 has been declared the “International Year of the Reef.”

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR LEGISLATION

Coral reefs are recognized as being among the world’s most productive and biologically diverse habitats. Restricted to areas with clean, warm water free of excessive sediments, coral reefs thrive only in limited areas of the oceans. In the United States, only Florida and Hawaii have well developed coral reefs in their coastal waters, although coral reefs are associated with many of the United States territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific Oceans. Coral communities are found at Gray’s Reef off the Georgia coast and The Flower Garden Banks off of Texas.

Despite their limited distribution, coral reefs provide substantial economic and environmental benefits. Annually, the reefs of the Florida Keys attract over 2.5 million visitors and generate over,

\$2.9 billion in revenue from recreational activities like fishing, diving, and boating. This reef-based tourism generates thousands of job opportunities in Florida alone. Healthy coral reefs also support a variety of commercial fisheries. According to figures from the National Marine Fisheries Service, reef-related commercial fisheries landings in the United States Gulf of Mexico were valued at \$79.5 million in 1995. But tourism and fisheries are not the only benefits provided by coral reefs. Organisms associated with reefs are valued by the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries for providing compounds with anti-viral and anti-bacterial properties. Coral reefs can reduce incoming wave energy by up to 97 percent, minimizing the impact of storm surges and protecting shoreline property and infrastructure.

However, there is growing concern over the worldwide degradation of coral reefs. While coral reefs can be thousands of years old, corals grow slowly and are easily damaged. Threats to coral reefs arise from destructive fishing practices (including the use of cyanide, other poisons, surfactants, and explosives), dredging, damage from boat anchors and ship groundings, and coastal pollution. Scientists estimate that 10 percent of the world's reefs have been degraded beyond recovery, a number which is expected to rise to 30 percent within the next 10 to 20 years if present trends continue.

In 1994, representatives from the governments of the United States, Japan, Australia, France, Jamaica, the Philippines, the United Kingdom, and Sweden, along with several non-governmental organizations, multilateral development banks, and U.N. organizations, formed a partnership known as the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI). There are now more than 75 participating governments. This voluntary partnership does not seek to create any new agencies or funding authorities, rather, it is working to build cooperation among existing coral reef research and management programs. Among other initiatives, the ICRI seeks to encourage the development of national, regional, and local coral reef initiatives, establish a Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network through the International Oceanographic Commission, expand international coral reef research by building partnerships among nations conducting such research, and promote coral reef conservation through public education and outreach. The United States is a leader in ICRI activities, which are coordinated by the State Department and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Along with the ongoing efforts under ICRI, a group of scientists and others decided to highlight awareness of the status of coral reefs by declaring 1997 the "International Year of the Reef" (IYOR). This year-long, world-wide campaign has hundreds of participants including, in the United States, the American Zoological Association, American Oceans Campaign, Center for Marine Conservation, Smithsonian Institution, World Wildlife Fund, and many other zoos and aquaria, conservation societies, trade organizations, and academic institutions. H. Con. Res. 8 reflects the Congress's support for the conservation of coral reefs, and is intended to coincide with the IYOR.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

H. Con. Res. 8 was received by the Senate from the House of Representatives on April 24, 1997 and was referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation on May 13, 1997. On June 19, 1997, H. Con. Res. 8 was taken up by the Committee during an open executive session. Senators Inouye, Snowe, Kerry, Akaka, and Breaux offered amendments to the preamble and to the resolving clause, and the resolution as amended was unanimously adopted by voice vote.

ESTIMATED COSTS

U.S. CONGRESS,
CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE,
Washington, DC, June 26, 1997.

Hon. JOHN MCCAIN,
*Chairman, Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation,
U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.*

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: The Congressional Budget Office has reviewed H. Con. Res. 8, as ordered reported by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation on June 19, 1997.

CBO estimates that adopting this resolution would have no effect on the federal budget. The resolution would express Congressional commitment to promoting stewardship of coral reef habitats; discouraging practices that are harmful to coral reefs; encouraging research, monitoring, assessment, and education about reef ecosystems; improving the coordination of coral reef activities among public and private institutions; and promoting preservation and sustainable use of coral reef resources worldwide. Coral reefs serve as habitats for many species of marine life and are located in coastal waters off several states and U.S. territories.

If you wish further details on this estimate, we will be pleased to provide them. The CBO staff contact is Gary Brown. This estimate was approved by Paul N. Van de Water, Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.

Sincerely,

JAMES L. BLUM
(For June E. O'Neill, Director).

REGULATORY IMPACT STATEMENT

H. Con. Res. 8 will have no regulatory impact.

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

PREAMBLE

The preamble addresses the benefits provided by coral reefs, the management actions taken to protect coral reefs, the International Coral Reef Initiative, and the designation of 1997 as the "International Year of the Reef." Language added by the Inouye amendment mentions the destructive impacts of many coral reef fishing practices, including the use of poison and explosives in fishing operations.

RESOLVING CLAUSE

In the resolution, Congress recognizes the significance of coral reefs and agrees to: (1) promote stewardship of coral reef ecosystems; (2) discourage practices harmful to coral reefs; (3) encourage research, monitoring, and education; (4) improve coordination within and among Federal, academic, non-governmental, and industrial institutions; and (5) promote preservation and sustainable use of coral reef resources.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

In compliance with paragraph 12 of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee states that the resolution as reported would make no change to existing law.

