

# Governments fail to protect red and pink coral

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International governments today failed to grant trade protection to the unique and valuable red and pink corals (*Coralliidae*) used in jewelry and home décor, despite sound science showing that regulation is needed for their continued survival. SeaWeb, an ocean conservation organization whose campaign Too Precious to Wear had called for governments to protect *Coralliidae* under Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), called the decision "a major step backward for the long-term survival of red and pink coral and the industries that depend on them." Intensive lobbying by coral industry interests occurred in the days leading up to the vote.

The vote to protect red and pink coral failed to receive the two-thirds majority needed at the 15th Conference of Parties of CITES (64 countries voted in favor, 59 against and 10 abstained), and comes just three days after a proposal to protect bluefin tuna was overwhelmingly defeated by delegates after intensive lobbying by fishing interests. The sought-after Appendix II listing for *Coralliidae* would have required countries wishing to export these species to prove that trade is not harming their continued survival. Trade in red and pink coral will now continue unchecked, with no guarantee as to its sustainability or the industries that depend on this resource. The United States and European Union, who put forward the proposal, have the opportunity to bring the issue back to a plenary vote on Thursday, but it is unclear whether or not this will happen.

"For the second time in three days, governments have put short-term

political and economic interests ahead of sound science - first with bluefin tuna and now with red and pink coral," said Kristian Teleki, vice president of science initiatives for SeaWeb. "*Coralliidae* are in desperate need of a mechanism that controls the immense trade in these species. CITES could have provided that, but today the representatives failed to heed the science showing these populations are in steep decline. It is now up to the jewelry and design industries, and their customers, to act where governments have failed." SeaWeb's Too Precious to Wear campaign is calling on jewelers and designers to refuse to use or purchase red and pink coral until sound management is in place and populations of these long-lived, slow growing species have recovered.

Red and pink coral are among the world's most valuable wildlife commodities but have been intensively fished for centuries to meet consumer demand for jewelry and curios. These long-lived species support some of the slowest-growing fisheries in the world. They grow less than one millimeter a year and can live to more than 100 years old. Research shows that for populations to be sustained indefinitely, red coral should not be fished until it is 98 years old. Current practice is to remove colonies 7 to 10 years of age. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's data, more than 30 to 50 metric tons are taken from the ocean each year, but unlike other coral species in trade, *Coralliidae* receives no international trade protection.

The United States alone imported 28 million pieces of red and pink coral between 2001 and 2008. A finished red coral necklace can sell for hundreds of thousands of dollars. Jewelry retailer Tiffany & Co., jewelry designer Temple St. Clair, ocean conservationist Céline Cousteau and many others supported the United States and European Union's proposal to protect red and pink coral under Appendix II of CITES.

"The irony is that the Italian artisans who work in coral and helped create this resistance to an Appendix II listing feel that it would threaten

their livelihood," said jewelry designer Temple St. Clair, who has lived and worked in Italy for over 25 years. "As we know, the real threat to their livelihood is not protecting these corals. If they stay on their current track, there will be no more coral for them to harvest. It's now up the jewelry and design industry to stop buying and using this coral so populations can recover. If consumer demand is lessened, perhaps governments and the coral industry will get serious about protecting these precious animals for future generations," St. Clair added.

Conservationists have decried the decisions at the Doha CoP, with bluefin tuna and now red and pink corals failing to receive trade protection, despite showing clear populations declines due to overharvesting. Protection for eight species of sharks will be voted on in the coming days.

Provided by SeaWeb

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