

US, Cuban aquariums sign coral protection agreement

August 5 2015



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A Florida aquarium has reached an agreement with one in Cuba to cooperate on coral conservation efforts—the first such arrangement since Washington and Havana normalized relations, the American marine institute said Wednesday.

"Although Cuba's reefs are only 90 miles (145 kilometers) away from Key West, they are in much better condition than our local reefs systems," said Thom Stork, president and CEO of The Florida Aquarium.

The institute signed a memorandum with the National Aquarium of Cuba, marking the first agreement between the Cuban aquarium and any US aquarium.

"There is much we can learn from them, and there is much good we can do together," said Thomas Hall, chairman of The Florida Aquarium Foundation.

"We are very proud to be their partners and look forward to the results from our work as teammates to improve the health of our oceans," he added.

The thaw between Cuba and the United States, which restored full diplomatic relations last month after more than a half century of enmity, has created high expectations among entrepreneurs, researchers and scientists in Florida, the US state physically closest to Cuba.

The Florida Aquarium announced that it will send a delegation to Havana in November to participate in marine science and conservation workshops, alongside scientists from Mexico and Cuba.

Americans can apply for permission to travel to Cuba for only a few specific reasons, among them academic, cultural, sports or religious purposes.

Tourism and most commerce with the island is still banned under the US trade embargo.

Representatives from the Florida [aquarium](#) visited Cuba last October to develop a professional relationship, as both countries "share a lot of water, sea life, and valuable coral reefs," Hall said.

He added that the National Aquarium of Cuba has "developed a formidable bank of coral reef research which complements the [coral](#) work we do."

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Citation: US, Cuban aquariums sign coral protection agreement (2015, August 5) retrieved 8 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-08-cuban-aquariums-coral-agreement.html>

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