



THE OCEAN FOUNDATION

Executive Summary of 2007 Coral Poll Findings

This summary reports key findings from a nationwide survey of 1019 American adults. The survey was conducted December 2007 using a nationally representative sample from 2 million person online research panel. Data were weighted to reflect demographic and geographic distribution of population based on census data. The margin of error is +/- 3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Where appropriate, comparisons are made to the national survey on American Attitudes toward Coral and Coral Reefs conducted in 2002. For exact question wording and question order please refer to the attached questionnaire document.

Marine Biology 101: Americans lack basic scientific knowledge about coral.

- Although 39% of the public can correctly identify coral as an animal; the majority get it wrong with 31% believing corals are plants and 18% saying they are rock formations (another 13% just are not sure what coral is).
- Likewise only a third (34%) of the public is aware that corals are found both in warm shallow waters and in deep cold waters.

Out of Sight: Americans continue to feel they do not hear much about coral, yet they remain convinced of coral's value and importance to the sea and life on earth.

- As we found in 2002, many Americans continue to feel they know little about the state of coral reefs. The percentage who say that have heard "a great deal" about coral reefs declined from 13% in 2002 to 7% in 2007. Overall, 47% say they heard at least "some" about coral while 46% say they have heard "not much" or nothing at all."
- What Americans do hear however appears to be enough to convince them of coral's importance. Eighty percent (80%) say that having healthy coral reefs is important to the overall health of the ocean and 69% say healthy reefs are also important to human well-being.

Seeing is Believing: Those who have seen coral first-hand are most aware of the threats to its survival.

- Most Americans have not directly experienced the coral reef environment. When they do, Americans primarily interact with coral and reefs through vacations to coastal areas and on

cruises. In the past five years, 24% report having visited coastal areas in the United States that have coral reefs, primarily the Florida Keys and Hawaii. Of those that visit, the majority (68%) take boat trips, fish, SCUBA or snorkel around the reefs.

- A smaller (15%) number of Americans have also visited reef areas as part of a cruise ship vacation. Again most but not all (53%) visit the reefs directly to fish, dive or snorkel as part of the trip.
- Those who have visited coral as vacationers, divers or snorkelers are more aware of coral's importance, more aware of threats and more supportive of every type of reef conservation measure by margins of 10 to 20 points compared to the public at-large.

Yet, Americans Understand that Coral Reefs Are in Trouble.

- Most Americans rate the health of reefs worldwide as “only fair” (41%) or poor (13%) for a total of 54% rating reef health in the negative. This is very similar to the 56% who gave world reefs a negative health rating in 2002. Fully 25% do not know how to rate the health of coral reefs, underscoring a general lack of awareness.
- Moreover, they believe that current regulations to protect coral reefs worldwide are not as effective as they should be. Only 24% believe regulations to protect coral are effective compared to 48% who say they are ineffective. This pessimistic view has deepened since 2002 when 34% said that regulation protecting coral were ineffective.
- While many problems facing coral are perceived to be serious, water pollution impacts and damaging fishing practices are considered the top threats:
 - Water pollution affected coastal waters (58% “very serious” threat to coral);
 - Fishing practices that damage coral reefs (57% very serious);
 - Growth and development causing increased sewage (49% very serious);
 - Bilge water from cruise ships (48% very serious);
 - Increased tourism causing increased sewage (46% very serious);
 - Fishing practices that drag nets along the ocean bottom (47% very serious).
- The potential impacts of global warming on coral are just emerging in the public consciousness. Overall, only 4-in-10 says they have heard (a great deal or some) about how coral reefs will be affected by global warming. When asked how serious a concern various global warming impacts are to coral health, they seem serious, but not as much as water pollution and fishing issues:
 - Global warming increasing the temperature of the water (44% very serious);
 - Increased CO2 making the ocean more acidic (42% very serious);
 - Sea level rise limiting access to sunlight (39% very serious).

Majorities Support Every Reef Conservation Measure Tested.

- There is widespread support for all the coral reef conservation measures tested in the poll. The strongest support (78%) is for increased enforcement of existing water pollution laws in

place under the Clean Water Act. Americans are also strongly supportive (69%) of designating coral reefs as marine protected areas with varying levels of protection, including full protection from all potentially damaging activities. Those who have vacationed in coral areas (81%) and those who SCUBA or snorkel as a hobby (89%) are the most supportive of creating coral marine protected areas.

- Americans are also willing to designate coral species currently used in the curio and jewelry trade as endangered species with the protections that are mandated by that status. Fully 63% support adding these coral species to the endangered species list under the US Endangered Species Act as well as listing them under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).
- Finally, nearly three-quarters (73%) believe that the United States should take a leadership role in protecting the world's coral reefs. Fully 72% say we should start by enacting our own regulation to mandate best practices in the collection and trade of coral reef animals and products in order to ensure that commercial activities will not harm the reefs.

Americans Are Willing To Vote with Their Pocketbooks To Help Coral.

- While Americans are quite supportive of additional governmental regulations and legal protections for coral, they are also willing to make personal consumption choices or contributions to reef conservation when visiting these areas. When asked to consider the total cost of a vacation to a coral reef area, Americans are willing to add meaningful sums to support the conservation of the coral reefs in that area, assuming the money would be dedicated to the protection and scientific research of the reef. Sixty-five percent (65%) would be willing to pay at least some more for their vacation in order to support the reef. Fully a third (33%) are willing to pay \$50 to \$100 more per person as a part of vacation fees and expenses.
- The public is also willing to take into account a cruise lines reef pollution record when planning a cruise vacation. When asked how likely they would be to take a cruise vacation with a cruise line had discharged polluted water in coral reef areas, 61% said they would be less likely to take the trip (42% much less likely).
- Finally people are willing to change certain purchasing habits in order to protect and support coral reefs. Although 20% of Americans have purchased coral jewelry and souvenirs in the past, only 10% say they are likely to do so in the future, and only 2% say they are very likely to purchase more wild coral. In fact, 59% are willing to take a pledge not to purchase real coral jewelry or other products. In addition, 65% are also willing to buy and eat only those fish and seafood caught or farmed without impact to coral.

In sum, although Americans feel that they hear fairly little about the status of coral they assume that coral is in trouble and should have greater protections. They are open to a variety of regulatory, legal and market-based approaches to helping coral. Those who have directly experienced coral reef environments are the most aware and supportive segment, underscoring the need for good outreach and education when people are visiting coral reefs.