



TOO PRECIOUS TO WEAR AND WWF URGE EU MEMBER STATES TO TAKE ACTION ON RED AND PINK CORAL PROTECTION

*Decision hinges on outcomes of Mediterranean red coral workshop, held
in Naples this week.*

(Naples, Italy—September 24, 2009) SeaWeb's *Too Precious to Wear* campaign and WWF today urged European Union member states to support a request from the United States on the regulation of trade in red and pink coral, saying it would be “a major step forward in protecting some of the most sought-after species in the ocean.” The push for support comes as a workshop on the species convenes this week in Naples, Italy. The United States is seeking EU support to list red and pink coral under Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) at the next Conference of Parties, taking place in March 2010.

The Mediterranean member states, led by Italy, objected to co-sponsorship of the proposal earlier this week, with other EU member states indicating they will further consider the US request once the Naples workshop concludes. Italy is known as the world capital of the red coral trade, with the Italian town of Torre del Greco reporting USD\$174million in red coral revenue in 1999 alone. The EU had considered co-sponsorship of a proposal to suspend trade in Atlantic bluefin tuna, which would also affect Mediterranean countries.

Red and pink corals, also known as *Corallium*, are among the world's most valuable wildlife commodities. They are widely traded and highly valued in the jewelry and home décor industries, with a finished necklace retailing for up to



tens of thousands of dollars. The species were considered for Appendix II protection in 2007 at the last Conference of Parties, but the proposal was narrowly defeated.

“During the past thirty years, overfishing of red coral has put these animals – precious jewels of the sea – at great risk,” said Dawn Martin, president of SeaWeb. “A CITES Appendix II listing can help safeguard red and pink coral as well as the future of the industries that depend on them. It is essential that the EU and the United States, as the world’s largest consumers of *Corallium*, work together to ensure these species receive the trade protection they need.” The United States alone has imported more than 26 million pieces of red and pink coral from 2001 to 2006.

Scientists, conservationists, industry representatives and policymakers are meeting in Naples this week to discuss red coral science, management and trade. The workshop, co-hosted by the Italian and U.S. governments, will address any implementation issues surrounding a potential CITES listing for red and pink coral.

“It is difficult to see why there is an issue with the red coral proposal, given that more than 2,000 other coral species are currently afforded CITES protection, including black coral, which has been listed since 1981,” said Dr. Colman O’Criodain of WWF International. The global black coral trade is estimated at five metric tonnes, compared to 30 to 50 tonnes for *Corallium*.

An Appendix II listing for red and pink coral would ensure international trade in these long-lived, slow-growing species is carefully monitored to ensure the populations remain healthy for future generations. Countries wishing to export red and pink coral would be required to issue a scientific finding that proves trade is not detrimental to the survival of these species.

“We remain confident that once implementation issues on a CITES listing are addressed at the Naples workshop, the EU member states will do the right thing and decide to co-sponsor the *Corallium* proposal,” said Martin.

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For interviews with spokespeople, images and b-roll, contact Julia Roberson in Naples (jroberson@seaweb.org or +44(0)7704 54832) or Jackie Marks in the US (jmarks@seaweb.org or 1.301.495.9570).



Too Precious to Wear is a SeaWeb campaign to create a demand for coral conservation. *Too Precious to Wear* is made possible with support from The Tiffany & Co. Foundation, Kingfisher Foundation and The Ocean Foundation. www.tooprecioustowear.org.

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

