



Final Report for Science Communication and Media Outreach for the 11th International Coral Reef Symposium

Grant No. NA07NMF4630100

Through its project “Science Communication and Media Outreach for the 11th International Coral Reef Symposium,” SeaWeb aimed to generate sufficient media coverage of coral reef issues to raise public awareness and galvanize action to protect corals. Our efforts have been instrumental in achieving and even surpassing this goal.

ACTIVITIES & OUTPUTS

In coordination with the Local Organizing Committee for the 11th International Coral Reef Symposium (ICRS), SeaWeb conducted a suite of activities to generate news coverage and stimulate public awareness for a multitude of issues relating to coral reef health, threats, and the need for conservation. The significant volume, breadth, depth, and geographic reach of media coverage far exceeded our expectations. Our goal was to assist in establishing and branding the 2008 Symposium as a watershed event for raising coral reef awareness and understanding, and we believe the outcomes demonstrate that we were quite successful in doing so.

By orchestrating a competitive journalist fellowship opportunity, daily media briefings during the Symposium, a fully equipped media room, an online media portal updated daily, and an “in-the-water” field trip for journalists, SeaWeb was able to garner more than 500 (at the time of writing) print, broadcast, radio, and Web-based stories in national and international media. Wire service coverage of the event was unprecedented, with articles by the Associated Press, Reuters, Inter Press Service, United Press International, and Agence France-Presse. Stories also appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *The Independent*, *Nature*, *Science*, *New Scientist*, *Time*, National Public Radio, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, and *NBC Nightly News*, and in many other national and international mainstream and online media outlets.

SeaWeb worked as a science translator for media representatives in attendance and leveraged media

opportunities by working closely with international and domestic journalists throughout the event. Some of the more high profile, mainstream news coverage of the current state of coral reefs included stories on National Public Radio and widely viewed television profiles on ABC's *Good Morning America* and NBC *Nightly News*.

All told, SeaWeb estimates that the combined reach from broadcast, print and online media totaled approximately 800 million people worldwide. This number speaks to SeaWeb's ultimate goal, which was to raise public awareness and generate a demand for coral conservation. In pursuit of that goal, SeaWeb focused on three primary objectives:

- (1) Prepare experts to present compelling, relevant research by honing their communication skills;
- (2) Attract the participation of top-quality U.S. and international journalists by providing support, background information, story leads and networking opportunities;
- (3) Generate international media coverage on the developments in coral reef science and conservation presented at the 11th ICRS.

Detailed below are the project activities in which we engaged and how they enabled us to meet our goals.

ACTIVITY 1: PREPARING EXPERTS

A. Message Identification and Development

SeaWeb prepared experts from the coral reef, climate change, ocean acidification, and coral disease fields to present compelling, relevant research by developing and executing on-site press briefings. In order to select the most newsworthy and cutting-edge science for the briefings, SeaWeb reviewed the 2,400 abstracts that were accepted for presentation at ICRS. To distill this body of knowledge into a small set of briefings, we read the abstracts and then consulted the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) Chair, Richard Dodge, and the Science Committee Chair, Rob van Woesik, as well as the members of the LOC science committee and the 96 chairs of the 25 mini-symposia. Based on the feedback received, SeaWeb then created and/or organized ten hour-long press briefings. Panelists were selected based on the relevance of their research to the conference and its themes, as well as potential newsworthiness.

B. Message Delivery and Training

More than 30 scientists were selected to participate in SeaWeb-organized press briefings based on their abstracts for ICRS or other relevant and recent research. Through one-on-one and group conference calls in advance of ICRS, SeaWeb staff worked closely with the scientists to develop their presentations and to effectively communicate their messages to the media and, in turn, the public. In addition, presenters were exposed to formal communications training and mock interviews to prepare them for the media briefings. SeaWeb engaged some of the world's leading journalists in the trainings to help the researchers' distill their scientific findings into relevant and interesting messages that would be appealing to all audiences. These efforts, combined with SeaWeb's news media outreach materials and the subsequent publicity we were able to generate for the conference, made the 11th ICRS a leading event during the International Year of the Reef.

ACTIVITY 2: ATTRACTING JOURNALISTS

A. Promoting Attendance

Between January and July 2008, SeaWeb built a comprehensive media list that included approximately 400 U.S. and international reporters, editors, and news outlets. Outreach was conducted to all listed media professionals by phone and/or e-mail to discern whether they would be interested in covering ocean issues from the 11th ICRS and if they wished to receive meeting announcements and other information from the Symposium. In addition, we sent two media advisories to our media list and to listservs from esteemed scientific and environmental journalism organizations. One of the media advisories was distributed through PR Newswire to thousands of newspapers, magazines, national wire services, broadcast media, environmental trade publications, Web sites, databases and online services. These efforts were successful in encouraging the most motivated and qualified ocean and environmental reporters to attend the Symposium. All media were required to register as press and SeaWeb worked closely with them throughout the event. The 11th ICRS registered 94 international and domestic journalists and public affairs staff from various government agencies and NGOs. In addition, many journalists worldwide covered the 11th ICRS remotely, using the news releases, daily digests, and video segments that were posted each day to update these reporters on the latest news and findings generated by the Symposium.

B. Media Fellowships

SeaWeb distributed a fellowship announcement to more than 20,000 U.S. and international writers, journalists, and editors. The announcement outlined the scope of the 11th ICRS, the media opportunities available, and travel support provided to selected recipients of the fellowship. We also publicized the program at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) meeting in Boston in February, through our connections with International Year of the Reef participants, and in postings on listservs, blogs, and Web sites. The final roster of 17 fellows was announced in mid-April as follows:

Africa/India

- Rina Mukherji, freelancer, Kolkata, India
- Peter Okumu, *Kenya Times*, Nairobi, Kenya

Asia Pacific

- Masanobu Fujiwara, NHK (Japanese television broadcasting corporation), Tokyo, Japan
- Titi Gabi, PNG FM, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea
- Samisoni Pareti, *Islands Business Magazine*, Suva, Fiji Islands
- Corinne Podger, ABC Radio Australia, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
- Henrylito Tacio, freelancer, Bansalan, Davao del Sur, Philippines,

Caribbean & Latin America

- Susan Soltero, Univision TV and AM Radio, San Juan, Puerto Rico

Europe

- Nick Atkinson, freelancer/blogger, Northumberland, UK
- Steve Connor, *The Independent*, London, UK

- Tim Radford, *The Guardian*, London, UK

United States & Canada

- Jeff Burnside, NBC6 Miami, Miami, Florida
- Stephen Leahy, wire service writer for Latin America/blogger, Brooklin, Ontario, Canada
- Chris Pala, science and popular magazines freelancer, Honolulu, Hawaii
- Christina Reed, science magazine freelancer, Redmond, Washington
- Mark Schrope, science and popular magazines freelancer, Melbourne, Florida
- Kenneth Weiss, *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles, California

C. Providing a Pressroom to Facilitate Coverage

SeaWeb coordinated with conference organizers to provide a fully equipped pressroom to journalists and public information officers attending the Symposium. In late April, a site visit was conducted to verify all arrangements for workspace, computers, Internet, phone, fax machines, printers, a briefing room, and designated space for interviews. Prior to the conference, we worked with the LOC and on-site consultants to ensure that all equipment was fully functional and ready for the media. In addition to the press command station, SeaWeb had nine staff on-site to assist with all media-related queries and to help connect scientists and journalists.

ACTIVITY 3: GENERATING MEDIA INTEREST

A. Media Briefings to Synthesize Science

SeaWeb shaped, organized, moderated and/or provided the venue for the following press briefings:

Time	Topics Monday July 7	Topics Tuesday July 8	Topics Wednesday July 9	Topics Thursday July 10	Topics Friday July 11
9:30 - 10:30 a.m.	Presentation of Federal Funding for Coral Reef Research	Coral Reef Fisheries: What's the Catch?	All-day field trip with briefings from local coral experts.	Untold Stories of Climate Change and Corals	Reef Restoration: Dispatches from the Front Line
11:00 a.m. – 12:00p.m.	NOAA Press Briefing — Launch of ‘The Status of U.S. Coral Reefs’ Report	Coral Reef Fish: Where are they going?	Coral Disease Beyond the Symptoms	Our Reefs, Ourselves: How do we manage?	"Mission Possible:" solutions and next steps
1:00 - 2:00 p.m.				A Global Assessment of The Threats of Extinction for Reef-Building Corals	

Highlights from the briefings include:

- The first report released by NOAA researchers and the National Centers for Coastal Monitoring and Assessment on the conditions of coral reef ecosystems under United States jurisdiction since 2005, showing that half of all U.S. coral reefs are in poor or fair condition. The report was picked up by the Associated Press, was featured in numerous print and Web-based publications, and was the first major news story to come out of the 11th ICRS.
- The announcement that one-third of reef building corals face extinction, according to the comprehensive global assessment by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Conservation International (CI)—resulting in more than 700 coral species listed to the IUCN Red List. The report findings were covered by the *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, and *NBC Nightly News*, among many others.
- “Coral Reef Fisheries: What’s the Catch?” researchers spoke about global fish catches and the current trade-related tracking methods. The session focused on new data sources for tracking largely underreported subsistence fishing and the importance of fostering interaction between fisheries, fish population health, and food security. Reporters covered this briefing from ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) Radio Australia, All Headline News (global news service), the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Honolulu Advertiser*.

B. Media Registration – With the help of the LOC, SeaWeb implemented a complimentary media registration for all working press, enabling working media to attend the conference free of charge and allowing them to register with SeaWeb staff in the pressroom. Ninety-four national and international media (including a handful of public affairs staff from government agencies and NGOs) registered on-site at ICRS.

C. Press Kits and Media Portal – SeaWeb sent out two media advisories in advance of ICRS; the first advisory was distributed one month before the event, the second advisory was sent out the week before the Symposium began. Press kits were created for all media, complete with a background document on ICRS, a Q&A on corals, photo resources, and a press briefings schedule. SeaWeb prepared contact information for scientists taking part in the above briefings, as well as information on their abstracts and available video footage and photographs. SeaWeb worked with the Nova Southeastern University Webmaster to create the online media portal for the ICRS Web site. The portal housed press releases, updates, and photos from the conference, along with “Daily Digests”—synopses written and published by SeaWeb that were also distributed to our media list via e-mail. B-roll footage was shot in April 2008 during the site visit and included interviews with LOC members and Dr. Andrew Baker from the University of Miami. Additionally, SeaWeb worked with a video crew to interview key experts and spokespersons about their findings, as well as to capture footage of daily ICRS proceedings and B-roll of the conference, which was posted to the media portal each day. All of this video footage was instrumental in generating broadcast, print, and Internet coverage of the Symposium. To explore the media portal, please visit:

http://www.nova.edu/ncri/11icrs/media_newsroom.html, and to view the video produced by SeaWeb, please visit: http://www.nova.edu/ncri/11icrs/media_photovideo.html.

D. Connecting Scientists and Journalists – An evening plenary hosted by COMPASS/SeaWeb titled “Can this Relationship be Saved?” set a panel of media fellows opposite a panel of ocean science experts. The two groups went head-to-head on a plethora of issues, giving the audience an idea of the professional challenges they face when working with one another. Both professions provided candid insight into their work while proposing ways in which the efforts of each side could be leveraged for better communication. At the end of the session, audience members were invited to ask the panelists their own questions, of which they took full advantage. Afterwards, COMPASS/SeaWeb hosted a cocktail party to encourage conversation and mingling between the often separate and sometimes misunderstood worlds of science and journalism. In addition, COMPASS/SeaWeb led a closing plenary session on the conference’s final day that focused on the styles and views of scientists and journalists. The session pointed out that, through communication and understanding, both groups have the ability to find common ground, create greater public awareness, and increase their likelihood of attaining individual goals.

E. Field Trip – SeaWeb prepared an all-day, “in-the-water” field trip for registered media and fellows to Biscayne National Park on Wednesday, July 9. Twenty-one journalists attended this snorkeling trip, 14 of whom were SeaWeb media fellows. A variety of freelance, print, online, and broadcast journalists and photographers were able to explore coral reefs in a natural setting. Specific media outlets represented included:

- The Associated Press
- *The Guardian*
- *The Independent*
- *Kenya Times*
- *Los Angeles Times*
- *NBC Nightly News*
- NHK Japanese public broadcast
- *Orlando Sentinel*
- PNG FM
- Univision TV and AM Radio

In addition, SeaWeb arranged for eight ocean experts to attend the field trip and provide background and scientific information to the group. The attending experts were:

- Jerald Ault, professor of Marine Biology and Fisheries at the University of Miami;
- Chris Bergh, Florida Keys program director for The Nature Conservancy;
- Richard Curry, ocean, reef and science program manager for Biscayne National Park;
- John Halas, National Ocean Service biologist at the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary;
- Brian Keller, regional science coordinator with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA);
- Matt Paterson, network coordinator, South Florida/Caribbean Network;
- Gary Davis, a coastal conservation consultant with the U.S. National Park Service; and
- Bernhard Riegl, associate professor at Nova Southeastern University.

The group was taken to three different dive sites: a recovery area for *Acropora* corals, an old shipwreck, and one of the few coral nurseries in Florida cultivating brain coral. At each site ocean experts provided background information to the journalists, with questions and dialogue continuing in the water and on the boat. The journalists interviewed several of the experts and took their contact information for future stories.

The field trip experience inspired several attending journalists to write stories about the threats to coral and provided colorful background and imagery for stories featured on *NBC Nightly News* on July 11 and in the *Orlando Sentinel* on July 12. The underwater footage commissioned by SeaWeb was critical to the NBC national broadcast airing.

Steve Connor, science editor for *The Independent* newspaper of London participated in the field trip and included his personal observation in a story he wrote for the newspaper on July 17, 2008: “[The coral reef’s] plight is bad news for all of us, but will horrify anyone who has put on flippers, mask and snorkel to experience its magnificence first-hand. Snorkelling over a reef for the first time, as I did last week off the coast of Florida, is like floating over a brilliantly coloured Garden of Eden landscaped by some maritime Capability Brown.”

RESULTS & INDICATORS

The results of our outreach and communication efforts were unprecedented. We more than doubled our stated goal of 45 journalists at the Symposium, with 94 reporters in attendance. More importantly, the media events, trainings, and networking opportunities designed and executed by SeaWeb truly resonated with the journalists. Subsequently, what was learned about the state of coral reefs—their health status and the many threats they face—was widely reported to the general public.

As a result of SeaWeb’s media outreach, the 11th ICRS was well publicized. More than 500 print, broadcast, radio, television, and Internet-based stories appeared in the media, including some generated by wire services and widely distributed by these powerful “message multipliers.” For example, Inter Press Service alone has a potential pick-up in more than 500 newspapers and magazines around the world, with approximately 200 million readers. After an exhaustive search, we have counted stories that appeared on more than 107 television programs, 35 radio stations, and in more than 380 print and online media outlets.

This amount of publicity will, we anticipate, influence future ICRS events. Our work has helped to heighten the profile of ICRS on both a national and an international level as the premier scientific gathering of coral scientists where new, cutting edge research is revealed and debated and where it can lead to true conservation-based change. As a result, we anticipate attendance and interest at the next ICRS to be even greater than we experienced this past July.

We believe the coverage generated will result in a more informed and engaged public regarding our ocean planet in general and corals specifically. With an estimated audience of 800 million, the sheer volume of media coverage suggests that substantial awareness was raised by the Symposium. We know that at the very least, we have made remarkable progress by informing media and empowering a cadre of scientists with new and improved communications skills.

According to Maxwell McCombs, an author and expert on mass media, “Through their day-by-day selection and display of the news, editors and news directors focus our attention and influence our perceptions of what are the most important issues of the day. This ability to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda has come to be called the agenda-setting role of the news media. . . .the news media may not be successful in telling people what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling their audiences what to think about” (McCombs, 2004). ICRS and SeaWeb have certainly laid the foundation for coral to be on the public agenda for some time to come.

During ICRS, SeaWeb contributed to a better-informed and empowered marine science community with the training and tools necessary to influence future policy decisions. Experts that attended SeaWeb’s one-on-one trainings and participated in SeaWeb’s press briefings have developed and refined their media skills, which will help them to engage the public during media interviews, press conferences, and other events in which they are able to share their knowledge with the rest of the world.

In addition, the attending media have developed lasting contacts with ocean experts, thus affording them opportunities to achieve quality, in-depth coverage of marine and related issues in the future. These journalists now have a cadre of expert voices and champions ready to speak out on matters related to ocean conservation. As proof, the SeaWeb media team continues to find wire stories and long-lead media that mention this year’s coral Symposium.

Glowing feedback from our media fellows speaks for itself:

“Probably the best fellowship I've been on—and one of the best conferences I've covered. It was a delight.”

“The ICRS seemed to be a model of its kind, lively, rich in character and efficiently organized.”

“It was very useful, and coming away with the book of abstracts and the list of contacts was great—they will be useful for pitching stories for a long time to come.”

“Keep the developing world involved in your programs. You don't know how valuable that is to us!”

“I have attended other international conferences and it was one of the best ever. Thanks for including me as part of the history.”

“The conference was wonderful, as was the way you guys organized us! It was a genuine pleasure.”

SeaWeb shed light on the important differences in the roles played by scientists and journalists in educating the public. Through SeaWeb’s trainings, our provocative evening panel discussion, and the insightful closing plenary, we emphasized the importance—and ability—of the two to find common ground, a concept that was well-received and one that will undoubtedly result in better, clearer, more informative messages delivered to the masses.

Please see the accompanying ICRS clip book that shows the media coverage achieved from the above activities.

SEAWEB EXPENDITURES

	TOTAL NOAA BUDGET	ACTUAL NOAA EXPENDITURES
Personnel	\$14,800	\$14,800
Travel	\$12,200	\$12,200
Equipment	\$0	\$0
Supplies	\$0	\$0
Contract	\$0	\$0
Construction	\$0	\$0
Other	\$0	\$0
Total Direct	\$27,000	\$27,000
Indirect Costs	\$0	\$0
TOTAL	\$27,000	\$27,000