

Coral reef destruction— a global issue

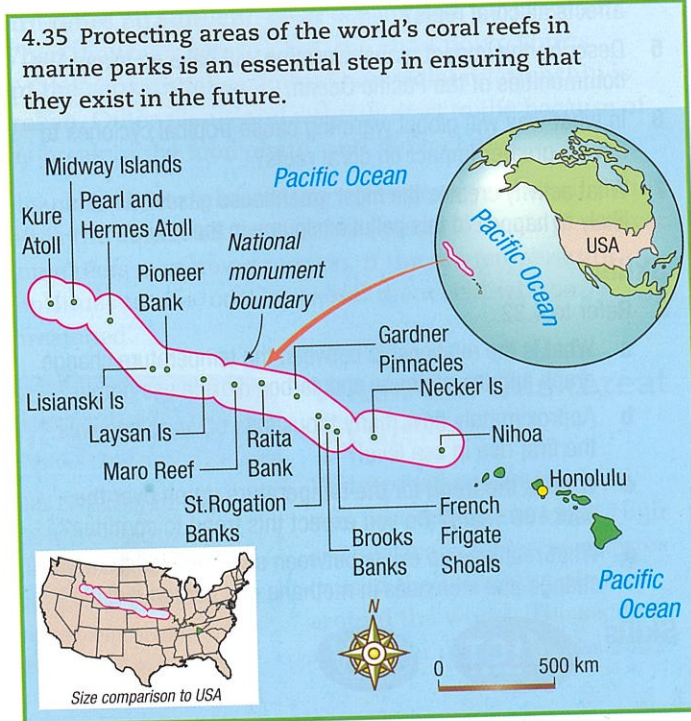


4.34 Protests can be an effective way to raise awareness of the need to protect coral reefs.

The destruction of coral reefs is a worldwide problem that the global community has to address. Responses come from all levels. At the global level the United Nations acts to protect and preserve these environments. There is also action from national governments and from international organisations.

GLOBAL TREATIES AND AGREEMENTS

- Two treaties administered by the United Nations are:
- The World Heritage Convention—Twenty World Heritage sites contain coral reefs. The unique nature of corals is being protected in an attempt to protect all types of coral reef and as much biodiversity as possible.
 - The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)—Member nations watch and monitor the trade in reef species. This is especially important considering the trade in seahorses has led to a 25 per cent decline in seahorse numbers and as the aquarium hobby increases the illegal trade in live coral and reef fish species also increases.



4.35 Protecting areas of the world's coral reefs in marine parks is an essential step in ensuring that they exist in the future.

GOVERNMENT PROTECTION

At the regional level countries cooperate to protect and preserve coral reefs. A part of this is the formation of protected marine parks. They are similar to national parks except that they are in the sea (see Snapshot).

NGOs

Non-government organisations—commonly known as NGOs—also get involved in preserving coral reefs. These organisations rely on people to take action at a variety of levels including the local level. The forms of action vary and can involve email campaigns, letter writing and even protests. If protests are planned wisely, they can attract media attention from around the world with the potential to raise pressure from nations as well as individuals. NGOs can also receive government funding for research activities.

INDIVIDUAL ACTION

Learning about the coral reef environment and the threats to it are the first steps towards exercising your rights as a global citizen. Geographical knowledge used the right way can be a powerful tool that can move countries and their organisations towards using the world's resources sustainably. Taking action in an informed way on environmental issues is one of the important things geographers do.

SNAPSHOT

Regional protection of marine areas

On 15 June 2006 the President of the United States signed a document that created the world's biggest marine reserve. The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument covers an area of 363 000 square kilometres of the Pacific Ocean, stretching from the Islands of Hawaii to Midway and Kure atolls in the Pacific Ocean. It is one of the world's most isolated marine sanctuaries.

The park itself consists of largely uninhabited islands and contains 70 per cent of the United States' shallow water coral reefs that provide a habitat for 7000 marine species and 14 million seabirds.

Part of the protection of the area will involve controlling all human activities—even people wishing to visit parts of the sanctuary to snorkel and take photographs will need to get a permit. While its isolation remains the largest factor that will protect the marine reserve, other regulations have been put in place. All fishing will be banned, as will the removal of animals, especially coral.

The main aim of creating the reserve was to signal that the area needed to remain a totally natural environment.

SKILLS MASTER

Writing an email or letter

Email is rapidly taking over global communications and is an effective way to lobby leaders for global change. NGOs have email campaigns that you can easily be a part of to influence the future of the world, its people and its resources.

Why not have a go at writing your own. Pick an issue, work out who is responsible then get writing! Write to the organisation's leader or a representative of the group. This information can usually be found on a website. Your email or letter does not have to be long but it should follow this four-paragraph outline.

- 1 **Attention**—What are you concerned about? (Put in some facts and figures that highlight the issue.)
- 2 **Interest**—Why are you involved in this action? What is your interest?
- 3 **Desire**—What would you like to see happen? What solutions or actions need to happen to improve the situation?
- 4 **Action**—What do you require the organisation to do?

Make sure you spell all words correctly and that you use formal language.

The rest is up to you. Why not take what you learn in Geography and use it to make the world a better place?

Activities

Knowledge

- 1 At what scale does the United Nations act to protect coral reefs?
- 2 Describe how global conventions help protect coral reefs.
- 3 Describe one way countries can act to help protect coral reefs.
- 4 What are NGOs? List three forms of actions they may organise to protect coral reefs.

Skills

- 5 Read the snapshot:
 - a Describe the location and size of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands National Monument marine park.
 - b What types of marine species will be protected by the creation of the marine park?
 - c What activities have been banned from the park?

Application

- 6 How can a well designed protest attract the attention of people in other countries? How effective do you think this form of action is in raising awareness of global issues?

7 Read the following email a student wrote supporting the creation of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands National Monument marine park. Explain why you think this email would not be effective.

To: President of the United States
 CC:
 Subject: You Beauty m8

Hi Pres
 Just hrd that u made the NWHINM marine park, that's gr8.
 Ppl told me it was > the GBRMP and I LOL
 Jst hrd, its tru
 ;)
 Cul8r

8 Write another email following the 'attention, interest, desire and action' format to the president about his or her decision to create the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands National Monument marine park.

