

# **CORAL REEF ADVISORY GROUP**

## **THREE-YEAR PLAN**

January 2003-January 2006

### **Vision**

To protect and conserve coral reefs for the benefit of the people of American Samoa, the United States, and the world.

### **Mission**

CRAG member agencies will work together by mutual consensus to manage coral reefs in American Samoa by planning achievable programs, identifying and collaborating with other partners, obtaining funding for projects, tracking project compliance, promoting public awareness, and developing local capacity for eventual self-sustainability.

### **History**

The Coral Reef Advisory Group was founded in 1994. Originally it was initiated to address coral reef issues that were elevated to National and International attention by Vice-President Al Gore. In response to these newly prominent issues the American Samoa Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Commerce and the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources convened to develop a plan that would speak to the coral reef issues. The original plan, which was completed in 1995, has been updated annually. In 2000 this group expanded to include the National Park of American Samoa and American Samoa Community College's Marine Science Program. At this time it also adopted the name Coral Reef Advisory Group (CRAG) and formalized its procedures for agency representation and priority setting for funding.

Since its conception it has successfully [accomplishments needed]. The coral reef advisory group manages and participates in projects. It increases effectiveness of member agency collaboration on projects and it creates greater alignment with non-CRAG agencies that have common interests.

### **Analysis**

The Coral Reef Advisory Group completed an internal and external analysis to determine the best way to become more efficient, effective and accountable as an advisory group.

### **Strengths**

The Coral Reef Advisory Group is supported by Governor Tauese P.F. Sunia, the community, and an International framework that supports coral reefs. Coral Reef Advisory Group members represent American Samoa government agencies and federal agencies. They are volunteers committed to the protection and conservation of coral reefs in American Samoa and the world. The multi-agency membership of CRAG provides the group with a variety of local, national and international experience, which is essential to accomplish its mission.

### Weaknesses

The Coral Reef Advisory Group has struggled with managing local projects in an efficient and effective manner. Efficiency and effectiveness of CRAG is affected because members have full-time careers in addition to being CRAG volunteers. Difficulties arise in project management because member agencies staff are fully tasked with existing duties, therefore the current staff cannot absorb additional duties that are created by CRAG projects.

Human resource capacity building is extremely difficult. Hiring new staff for particular projects is typically done off-island, which takes a substantial amount of time. Due to budget constraints contracts are usually of a one to two year duration, which is not enough time to fully complete projects. Furthermore, many people do not renew their contracts and some do not finish their initial contract. Thus, there is no continuity in project management and completion. The deficiency in human resource capacity leads to an inability to complete research studies and projects, which leads to a lack of proper information that speaks to the current state of the coral reefs in American Samoa.

CRAG planning has been piecemeal. There has been little attempt to create a comprehensive plan to build permanent, self-sustaining capacity. There is no programmatic structural plan that outlines procedural techniques for review of project proposals. It seems that current CRAG planning has been representative of the needs of an individual agency rather than the mission and vision of CRAG.

### Opportunities

International and community support in protecting and conserving the coral reefs of American Samoa and around the world is growing. The Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources has a Community Based Fisheries Management Program to educate the community about healthy fishing practices on the reefs. The number of villages that participate in this program is increasing.

There are a variety of resources available to CRAG, which includes funding, and new management technologies (*like what?*). Governor Tauese P.F. Sunia has implemented a unique SCUBA spear fishing ban, which (*elaborate*).

The National Ocean Service developed a *Coral Reef Threat Matrix* (*is this the right name?*) as a process for determining and prioritizing threats to coral reefs. American Samoa adopted this approach in September 2002 (see appendix ). This process has provided CRAG with specific direction to determine priority threat areas to focus upon.

## Threats

There are many threats that endanger the coral reefs of American Samoa. Over-fishing, Population Growth, Development pressure/unmanaged land-use, and climate change are four of the many that could have devastating affects. These four threats were chosen by CRAG from the matrix developed by the National Ocean Service (NOS) as the most devastating for reefs in American Samoa. Traditional Samoan fishing practices and beach mining are also very destructive to the reefs. These threats seem to be the ramifications of a thirty-five percent population increase on island in the last ten years. This growth has caused rapid development, unmanaged land-use, depletion of marine resources, and the proliferation of non-point source (NPS) pollution (i.e. sediments, pesticides, organic nutrients, oil, etc.). Rapid development and the accompanying NPS pollution have negatively affected public health, recreation, and coral reef health. This explosive growth demands more from the island than it has the capacity to sustain.

## Conclusion

CRAG determined that a workshop to develop a three-year strategic plan would be beneficial to help them tend to the variety of issues, both internally and externally that need attention. It was also decided that due to the complexity of what needed to be accomplished an impartial facilitator was a necessity.

Dr. Donna Ching from the University of Hawaii was recommended as an excellent strategic plan facilitator. She was selected as the workshop facilitator based on her expertise in strategic planning. She has worked with all types of organizations providing workshops in the area of group process, leadership and strategic planning.