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Coral reefs can be saved

Measures to control overfishing and pollution and to protect mangroves would counter the destruction of coral reefs by climate change, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) said.

New reports by the organisation on coral bleaching and on mangroves showed that attempts to fight other problem areas improve the health of reefs, which are home to about one quarter of known marine species, and make them more resilient to climate change. "The two reports give a clear positive message: while we cannot stop climate change in the short term, we can help tropical marine ecosystems survive," Carl Gustaf Lundin, head of the IUCN's Global Marine Programme said.

Greater acidity of the oceans, caused by higher levels of dissolved carbon dioxide from emissions, is adding to mass coral bleaching caused by higher sea surface temperatures as well as other forms of pollution, the reports said. Overfishing also undermines the complex balance of marine life that creates and sustains the reefs, said Gabriel Grimsditch, one of the authors.

Coral reefs provide livelihoods for 100 million people and form the basis for industries such as tourism and fishing, worth 30 billion dollars a year, according to the IUCN. AFP