

PRESS RELEASE
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ILLEGAL COLLECTION AND USE OF CORAL

The Department of Fisheries is concerned over the prevalent use of coral as a form of decoration within commercial houses, restaurants and hotels and its continued use in the making of handicrafts, jewellery, and other forms of souvenirs.

Under the Fisheries Regulations, No. 9 of 1994, it is illegal to collect, damage, use, sell, buy or have in one's possession coral of any kind. This includes live and dead coral, and refers to both the typical "hard" forms of coral and also the range of "soft" corals (including sea fans, sea whips, black coral, and brown coral). The prohibition includes the collection and use of coral from the wild (i.e, from sub-marine areas), but many persons do not realize that the law *also* protects all coral rubble which may be found on the beach or in other parts of the coastal area.

Why is the law so strict, when it comes to the protection of all forms of corals? Saint Lucia's total coral reef resource is extremely limited to the extent, yet is vitally important as a basis for the local reef fisheries, for shoreline protection, scuba tourism, and as a biologically diverse critical marine habitat. Even dead coral skeletons are an important component of local beach material and, when broken down over time, they form the basis of our white sandy beaches. Also, complete protection of coral is thought necessary so as to prevent the illegal collection of live coral for subsequent use of the coral skeleton in the craft and souvenir trade. Based on this wide range of critical roles played by coral, strict protection has been instituted at the national level. Persons found violating the Fisheries Regulations can be fined up to \$5,000.00.

In light of the above, the Department is seeking the support of local entrepreneurs and business houses, crafts persons, owners and operators of souvenir shops and souvenir vendors in giving full support to this local restriction on use of coral and coral based items. The Department will be engaging in island-wide inspections, and anyone found to be in possession of coral or coral-based items or engaging in the sale of such items will be liable to a fine under the Fisheries Regulations.

Persons and/or agencies can liaise with the Department of Fisheries (Tel. No. 468-4135 or 468-4143) to obtain further information or to arrange educational activities on this issue.