

# Australia hails 'tremendous' UN barrier reef decision

July 2 2015

---



Australia has hailed a United Nations decision to keep the Great Barrier Reef off its in danger list as "tremendous", but activists warn more must be done to improve the marine park's health

Australia Thursday hailed a United Nations decision to keep the Great Barrier Reef off its in danger list as "tremendous", but activists warned more must be done to improve the marine park's health.

The world's biggest coral [reef ecosystem](#), which has had World Heritage Site status since 1981, has been under increasing threat from climate change, farming run-off, development and the coral-eating crown-of-thorns starfish.

"This is a tremendous decision," Environment Minister Greg Hunt told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation from Germany, where UNESCO made its decision late Wednesday.

"What we have got now is unanimous and overwhelming support for the [reef](#), support for what Australia's doing."

The decision by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization will see the reef—a major tourist attraction off the Queensland coast—remain under surveillance but not listed as endangered.

Australia is required to report back to the UN on its progress on implementing its "Reef 2050" plan by December 1, 2016. The plan outlines the government's vision to improve the health of the reef over successive decades.

Queensland state's Deputy Premier Jackie Trad, who travelled with Hunt to the UNESCO meeting in Bonn, said she was humbled by the international support for the biodiverse site.

"We know that the real work starts now," she said.

"We have a strong suite of plans and commitments and they all need to be implemented to ensure that we can come back to... report positively."

## The Great Barrier Reef



Source : Australian government/Greatbarrierreef.org

AFP

The Great Barrier Reef, the world's biggest coral reef ecosystem, which has had World Heritage Site status since 1981, has been under increasing threat from climate change

Trad praised the efforts of civil society groups and environmental activists in calling attention to the reef's condition, which was described as "poor" in an August 2014 Australian government report.

Conservation group WWF welcomed the UN announcement, calling it a

"powerful decision that places Australia on probation over the health of the Great Barrier Reef".

"The (World Heritage) Committee must continue to play this crucial role holding the Australian and Queensland governments to account and ensuring that promises are translated into real action and improvements in the health of the reef," WWF-Australia chief executive Dermot O'Gorman said.

Greenpeace warned that the reef, which runs along Australia's resources-rich northeast coast, would not be fully protected unless the country drops its expansion plans for coal and port developments in the area.



An aerial view of the Great Barrier Reef near the Whitsunday Islands, along the central coast of Queensland

"Until the plans for the massive coal mine and port expansion are dropped, it's impossible to take Australia's claims that they are protecting the reef seriously," said Greenpeace Australia Pacific's political adviser Jess Panegyres.

"The government's Reef 2050 plan... has effectively carved out a space for massive coal mines and port expansion that will create a highway for coal ships straight through the reef."

Australia last year gave the green light to a Aus\$16.5 billion (US\$12.7 billion) mine development by India's Adani Group near the Great Barrier Reef.

It also approved a major coal port expansion for Adani at Abbot Point on the reef's coast subject to environmental conditions.

© 2015 AFP

Citation: Australia hails 'tremendous' UN barrier reef decision (2015, July 2) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-07-australia-hails-tremendous-barrier-reef.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.