

UNESCO keeps Great Barrier Reef off 'in danger' list

July 6 2017



Under its Reef 2050 Plan, Australia is fighting the effects of an unprecedented two straight years of coral reef bleaching on its iconic Great Barrier Reef

UNESCO said Thursday its World Heritage Committee (WHC) had decided not to place the Great Barrier Reef on its list of sites "in danger" despite concern over coral bleaching.

A WHC spokesperson said the Committee, which is meeting in Poland, had made the decision late Wednesday and expressed "deep concern" over two years of back-to-back mass coral bleaching which aerial surveys found had affected some two-thirds of the World Heritage-listed

site.

The bleaching is the result of warming sea temperatures linked to climate change.

In reaching its decision, the Committee noted Australian attempts to preserve the largest living structure on Earth under its Reef 2050 Plan and did not find it necessary to place the site on its danger list, spokeswoman Anika Paliszewska said, despite fears on whether conservation targets can be met.

Coral predators

WHC lauded "major efforts deployed by all those involved" in the Australian preservation plan but "strongly encourages (Australia) to step up efforts to ensure that medium- and long-term objectives fixed by the Plan are met, which is essential for the global resilience" of the [reef](#).

In a draft report to the WHC last month, UNESCO said [climate change](#) remained the most significant threat to the future of the coral expanse which stretches for some 2,300 kilometres (1,400 miles) and criticised Australia for slow progress towards achieving water quality targets.

The reef is notably threatened by a proliferation of crown-of-thorns starfish, a coral predator which has a devastating impact on [coral reef ecosystems](#).



The bleaching of the world heritage site, worth an estimated \$42 billion and which is bigger than Britain, Switzerland and the Netherlands combined, is the result of rising sea temperatures and also the proliferation of predatory, coral-feeding crown-of-thorns starfish

A Deloitte Access Economics report commissioned by the Great Barrier Reef Foundation last month stated that the site is an asset worth Aus\$56 billion (\$42 billion) supporting 64,000 jobs and as an ecosystem and economic driver is "too big to fail."

That report was the first time the economic and social value of the reef—which is bigger than Britain, Switzerland and the Netherlands combined—had been calculated.

As well as the problem posed by starfish, the site is also under pressure

from farming run-off and development.

The report's lead author, John O'Mahony, said the study made clear the reef was "priceless and irreplaceable" both in terms of its biodiversity and its job-creating potential.

Australia in May hosted a summit of more than 70 of the world's leading marine experts to work on a blueprint on how best to respond to the threats facing the reef.

Options explored included developing coral nurseries, culling of crown-of-thorns starfish, expanding monitoring systems and identifying priority sites for coral restoration.

In April, Australia's independent Climate Council warned further damage to the reef could cut tourism by more than a million a year, costing up to Aus\$1.0 billion and also around 10,000 jobs.

Canberra has committed more than Aus\$2.0 billion to protect the site over the next decade but has been criticised for backing a huge coal project by Indian mining giant Adani near the reef, which environmentalists warn would harm the natural wonder.

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