

Experts: Great Barrier Reef among World Heritage sites where 'In Danger' listing is essential

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A team of climate and environment experts has put the Great Barrier Reef in the spotlight by calling for it to be listed as "In Danger" in a wider argument to increase protection of World Heritage listed sites that are vulnerable to climate change impacts.

The [discussion paper](#), published by Griffith University's Climate Action Beacon, proposes a structured way forward for the 21 World Heritage Committee government signatories to deal with the global threat of [climate change](#).

The key measures outlined include:

- More ambitious climate action by the government of the country in which the World Heritage site is situated;
- More ambitious climate action by other country's governments who are also signatories to the World Heritage Convention;
- Additional measures that would raise the profile of climate impacts on World Heritage sites in the other important international conventions, especially the UN Climate Change and Biodiversity conventions

The GBR has experienced major coral bleaching events in the past seven years with the latest event occurring during the current cooler La Nina cycle, which has prompted renewed calls for Australia to list the GBR as "In Danger" by scientists.

Co-Lead Authors Professor Brendan Mackey and Imogen Zethoven said the GBR faced two main threats: climate change and poor water quality from agricultural runoff.

"The Australian Government has committed substantial funds to address [poor water quality](#) and implement a reef water quality management plan," Professor Mackey said.

"However, while addressing water quality is necessary it does not protect the GBR from climate change. In the last seven years there have been four severe and widespread coral bleaching events and the threat from climate change increases with every increment of global warming.

"Therefore, as the climate change threat remains, there is a strong scientific case to have the GBR, and other at-risk World Heritage coral reef sites, placed on the In Danger list."

The discussion paper argues as the real purpose of the In Danger listing is not to "name and shame" a government but to send a clear signal to the world community for collective action.

Professor Mackey said the listing would present the Australian Government with an opportunity to enhance Australia's role as a leader on climate action by working in partnership with its neighboring countries who also have vulnerable tropical coral reef World Heritage sites.

These include the Lagoons of New Caledonia (France); Phoenix Islands Protected Areas (Kiribati); East Rennell (Solomon Islands); Rock Islands Southern Lagoon (Palau); Papahānaumokuākea (Hawaii, US), Komodo National Park (Indonesia) and Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park (Philippines).

"Australia can work with these governments, and other signatories to the World Heritage Convention, to help increase international climate ambition, capacity build our developing country neighbors and share knowledge and experiences on healthy reef management," Zethoven said.

"This is about a global policy on climate impacts and risk that could apply to any climate-vulnerable World Heritage site, whether it's cultural

or natural.

"Yes, the GBR is a case study, but this applies to every signatory country to the World Heritage Convention and will apply to an increasing number of sites.

"Let's look at this issue with a fresh pair of eyes, let's shift it from a perspective of 'In Danger' as being a negative or a penalty to the country, to this is what the science is telling us is the right thing to do.

"Let's use the 'In Danger' listing as a tool to both increase our ambition in Australia and urge other major emitters that they need to do more to protect World Heritage sites from [climate change impacts](#)."

More information: For more information, visit whc.unesco.org/en/sessions/45COM

Provided by Griffith University

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