

Campaign to save Barrier Reef from industry

April 28 2013



Activists protest in central Sydney over the destruction of the Great Barrier Reef, on February 1, 2013. Conservationists have accused Australia of failing to protect the Great Barrier Reef from massive industrial development as they launched a multi-million dollar campaign to drum up awareness.

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The move follows UNESCO demanding decisive action to protect the world's largest coral reef from a gas and mining boom and increasing [coastal development](#), or risk the embarrassment of seeing it put on its danger list.

The government says it is "absolutely committed" to the reef and in February outlined to UNESCO how it planned to improve management and protection.

UNESCO's World Heritage Committee will consider the response at its annual meeting in Phnom Penh in June.

In the lead-up to the meeting and in an election year, the Australian Marine Conservation Society and WWF-Australia launched an advertising blitz to highlight increased "dredging, dumping and shipping in the marine park".

"The reef is one of the seven natural wonders of the world, but our governments seem to have forgotten that fact," said Bob Irwin, father of late "Crocodile Hunter" Steve Irwin, who is the face of the TV, radio, online and newspaper campaign.

"The reef belongs to all of us, not to big industry to use as a dredge, dumping ground and shipping superhighway. The Australian people are the only ones who can make a difference to protecting the reef."

Australia is riding an unprecedented wave of resources investment due to booming demand from Asia, with hundreds of billions of dollars worth of resource projects in the pipeline.

Last year, UNESCO said the sheer number and scale of proposals, including liquefied natural gas, tourism and mining projects, could threaten the reef's status.

The Australian Marine Conservation Society's Felicity Wishart claimed the Queensland state government was fast-tracking mega ports along the reef and planned to dredge and dump millions of tonnes of mud and rock in its waters.

"In 2012, less than half a million tonnes of dredge spoil was dumped in the [Great Barrier Reef](#) World Heritage Area. In 2015 it's predicted that figure will explode out to 23.5 million tonnes—a massive 50-fold increase," she said.

"The Great Barrier Reef is a major tourist destination generating \$6 billion a year and supporting 60,000 jobs. No one is going to want come half way around the world to see mega industrial ports."

According to WWF-Australia, recent polling it conducted showed 91 percent of Australians think protecting the Great Barrier Reef is the country's most important environmental issue in 2013.

The Queensland government was not immediately available to comment.

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