



**GREAT
BARRIER
REEF
CAMPAIGN**

THE GREAT BARRIER REEF UNDER THREAT

KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Great Barrier Reef Under Threat, authored by independent consulting firm Dalberg Global Development Advisors, was commissioned by conservation organization WWF. The report and its contents are strictly embargoed until 00:01 GMT 9 Feb 2015. Excerpts contained here are indicated with quotation marks and page numbers.

For a copy of the report, images of the reef or to schedule an expert interview, please contact Alona Rivord at arivord@wwfint.org or +41 79 959 1963.

NATURAL AND ECONOMIC VALUE

- The Great Barrier Reef is one of the planet's most biodiverse ocean habitats, and the world's largest barrier reef system. Thousands of different kinds of plants and animals are found there including seagrasses, corals, crustaceans and fish. It is also home to endangered species of sharks, rays, marine turtles and whales.
- The reef's Raine Island has the world's largest nesting population of endangered green turtles. There are only about 200,000 nesting females left worldwide, and as many as 130,000 lay their eggs on this small island's shores each year.
- "The Great Barrier Reef was inscribed as a natural World Heritage Site in 1981 having met all four criteria for *outstanding universal value*" defined by UNESCO. (Page 21)
- "The Great Barrier Reef creates an annual economic value of nearly US\$5.8 billion and provides almost 69,000 full-time equivalent jobs. Its contribution to the Australian economy comes from tourism and recreational activities, scientific and tropical marine ecosystem research, and commercial fishing." (Page 25) Over 2 million tourists from all over the world visit the reef each year, and it is also a popular recreation destination for local residents.
- "Importantly as well, the Great Barrier Reef offers coastal protection, acting as a natural breakwater to protect coastal communities from erosion that could threaten their land and homes." (Page 25)

THREATS

- "Substantial damage has been inflicted upon the Great Barrier Reef in recent years." Over the past three decades, more than half the reef's coral cover has disappeared due to water pollution, tropical cyclones, coral bleaching, and other factors. "Planned port expansions could bring about additional damage and cause the world to lose this place of outstanding universal natural value." (Page 29)
- "The Great Barrier Reef is under threat from a series of port expansions and infrastructure projects along the Queensland coast." (Page 12) There are plans to build numerous new terminals within World Heritage Site, which would be used for purposes including exports of coal, liquefied natural gas and other cargo. "The planned expansions... pose additional threats to the Great Barrier Reef." (Page 8)

- "Up to an estimated 51 million cubic metres of seabed material could be dredged to build and expand ports in the reef." That is enough seabed to fill New York City's Empire State Building 49 times over. (Page 16)
- "There is currently no ban on the dumping of dredge spoil in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Site, and up to an estimated 39 million cubic metres of dredged material could be dumped into World Heritage waters." (Page 16) That would be "in addition to the 28 million cubic metres of dredge spoil that was dumped in the World Heritage waters between 2001 and 2013." (Page 17)
- The Australian government is considering a ban on dumping within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, but "the marine park is slightly smaller than the World Heritage Site, and does not include most of the islands and waters around the ports. It is in these locations that 80 per cent of dumping has occurred since 2010." Therefore, a ban that does not include the full World Heritage Site "will have little impact on current dumping levels, and will provide very little additional protection to the Great Barrier Reef." (Page 16)
- "Dredging and dumping spoil in the Great Barrier Reef has devastating impacts on the marine ecosystem. Dredging and dumping of dredged material destroys corals, seagrass meadows, and ocean floor habitats" and "can have far-reaching consequences for marine life." (Page 17) For example, recent deaths of endangered green turtles have "been attributed to malnutrition, associated with the significant destruction and contamination of seagrass beds due to dredging and sedimentation..." (Page 20)
- "The most severe effects are observed at the site of dredging and dumping, but impacts can be felt some distance from the site... The dumping of dredge spoil in offshore waters can create plumes of fine sediment that can drift up to 80 kilometres from the dumping site." (Page 20)
- Farm chemical runoff has degraded the reef's water quality, and both dredging and dumping worsen the problem, which the "Australian federal and Queensland state governments collectively have spent approximately US\$350 million between 2009 and 2013 to improve." (Page 11) "The government should prohibit all dumping of dredge spoil in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Site," the report concludes. (Page 28)
- "*The Marine Park Authority Outlook Report 2014* projects that the number of commercial vessels passing through the reef each year could increase from approximately 4,000 per year in 2012 to 7,500 ships in 2020, and 10,000 in 2032. More ships passing through the Great Barrier Reef will mean greater chances of accidents and groundings, oil or chemical spills... wildlife ship strikes" and other negative impacts. (Page 13)
- "The combination of existing pressures and new coastal infrastructure could result in the Great Barrier Reef being listed as 'in danger' by UNESCO." (Page 21) The decision will come in June at the UNESCO World Heritage Committee meeting, which will be held in Bonn, Germany.

PORT EXPANSIONS

- "The Australian petroleum industry aims to make Australia the world's largest liquefied natural gas exporter by 2020." One new gas terminal has just been completed within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Site, two are under construction and a fourth is planned. Together, "the four terminals could see a throughput of 54.5 million tonnes of liquefied natural gas each year, which is double the amount that is currently exported by Australia as a whole." (Page 13)
- "Additional port expansions are planned to accommodate cruise ships and increased shipping of other cargo." (Page 13)
- "Many of the new terminals proposed under the port expansion plans would be used to export coal. If realized, the ports would more than double the area's current coal export capacity," (Page 8) increasing it from 267 million tonnes per year to 637 million tonnes annually. "This would make the total capacity of the Great Barrier Reef's coal ports just less than the overall capacity of the current largest port in the world: Shanghai, China." (Page 12)
- The Australian and Queensland governments are providing financial incentives that support the expansion of coal mines and their associated infrastructure such as railways and ports, yet "it is unlikely that all of the proposed coal ports will be needed." (Page 23)
- Current forecasts for Australia as a whole predict exports of no more than 433 million tonnes of coal annually by fiscal year 2018-2019, yet the state of Queensland alone is seeking to build capacity for 637 million tonnes per year. Meanwhile, existing "Queensland coal ports are currently under-utilized; they are operating at an average of just 66 per cent of their overall capacity." (Page 28)

- “In order to contain the most immediate risks to the reef, port expansions should not be considered until existing facilities are at full capacity, thereby reducing the need for new port infrastructure,” the authors say. (Page 28)
- “The structural health of the coal industry as a whole seems to be deteriorating,” according to the report. (Page 23) “The price of coal has fallen by 40 per cent since 2011... With the decline in coal prices, forecasts for coal production and exports have also fallen. Some planned coal mine and coal port expansions have been cancelled as a result.” (Page 8)
- “In view of the environmental risks, many financial institutions have chosen not to fund the Abbot Point port expansion. In recent months, nine international banks (JP Morgan Chase, Morgan Stanley, Citibank, RBS, Barclays, HSBC, Goldman Sachs, Deutsche Bank and Credit Agricole) have stated that they will not be involved in the funding of the Abbot Point port expansion,” which is the most advanced of the proposed Queensland projects. (Page 22)
- “Responsible financial institutions and private sector entities should not invest or participate in any project with the potential to damage a World Heritage Site,” *The Great Barrier Reef Under Threat* concludes. (Page 29)

WWF'S RECOMMENDATIONS

WWF calls on governments and businesses “to take immediate steps to protect the Great Barrier Reef from the impacts of expanding industrialization.” (Page 5)

Australia should ban all dumping of dredge spoil in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Site, minimize dredging, and take other actions to ensure full protection of the reef, such as improving water quality.

The UNESCO World Heritage Committee should hold Australia accountable for its obligations related to the reef, including ensuring that industrial projects alongside the reef do not impact its *outstanding universal value*, and should encourage countries to make World Heritage Sites *no-go* for oil, gas and mining.

Companies should commit not to finance projects that could threaten the Great Barrier Reef or any other World Heritage Site, and examine their portfolios and holdings through the lens of responsible business conduct.

Governments globally should protect all World Heritage Sites, including the reef, and ensure that companies adhere to best practice standards, such as the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises.