

Inquiry into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Great Barrier Reef) Bill 2013

Current management and governance of the Great Barrier Reef is failing to prevent its slow decline. For example, two peer-reviewed scientific studies, published in 2004 (<http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v429/n6994/pdf/nature02691.pdf>) and 2007 (<http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0000711>), have shown that at least 50% of the corals on the Great Barrier Reef have disappeared in recent decades. A more recent report (<http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2012/09/25/1208909109.abstract>), the most comprehensive analysis to date from the Australian Institute of Marine Science, confirms these earlier studies. Other metrics of the status of the Great Barrier Reef such as counts of sharks, dugongs and turtles, also show consistent, long-term downward trajectories. In 2009, the Commonwealth's *Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report* (http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/outlook-for-the-reef/great-barrier-reef-outlook-report/outlook-online?sq_content_src=%2BdXJsPWh0dHAlM0ElMkYlMkZ3d3ctcmMuZ2JybXBhLmdvdi5hdSUyRmNvenBfc2l0ZSUyRmtleV9pc3NlZXMIkZ3YXRlc9xdWFsaXR5JmFsbD0x) concluded that climate change, the continued decline in water quality from catchment runoff, loss of coastal habitats from coastal development and overfishing were the key pressures reducing the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef. It concluded that "the overall outlook for the Great Barrier Reef is poor and catastrophic damage to the ecosystem may not be averted". The well-documented decline in coral cover highlights UNESCO's concerns about the dwindling Universal Heritage Values of the Barrier Reef.

In response, I urge the government to legislate to:

Halt approvals of any new developments that could seriously affect the Great Barrier Reef, including new coal mines and major port dredging and dumping

Initiate a permanent ban on new port development outside of the long-established major port areas along the Queensland coast. In particular, new port developments in Port Alma, Balaclava Island, northern Curtis Island and north of Cairns should not be developed to avoid unnecessary risk to the Great Barrier Reef.

Ban dumping of dredge spoil within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, and the proposed practice of "mitigation" of the resulting damage, because this activity is counter to the Commonwealth's obligations to protect the Reef under the GBRMP Act.

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