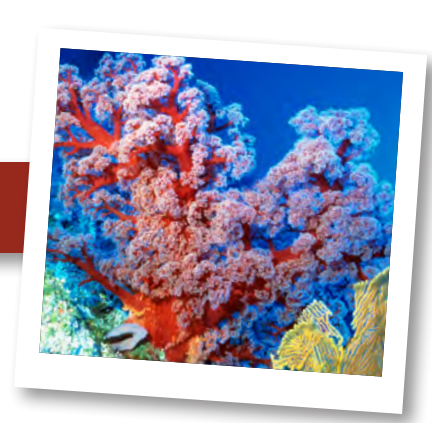


AUSTRALIA'S WORLD HERITAGE PLACES

GREAT BARRIER REEF INFORMATION SHEET



Quick Facts

- The Great Barrier Reef is on the north-east continental shelf Australia.
- The Great Barrier Reef is the largest single collection of coral reefs in the world.
- The reef stretches over 2,000 kilometres and is larger than Italy.
- Each of Australia's 17 World Heritage Places are also on Australia's National Heritage List.

Why is the Great Barrier Reef of World Heritage value?

The Great Barrier Reef was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1981 for its natural values.

- **It helps us understand how the earth was formed**
The Great Barrier Reef is the largest single collection of coral reefs in the world with close to 3,000 coral reefs. The history of its evolution is recorded in the reef structure, and the old corals are a record of climate history, environmental conditions and processes.
- **It helps us understand how living organisms develop**
Biologically, the Great Barrier Reef supports one of the most diverse ecosystems in the world and this is thought to reflect an ecosystem which has evolved over millions of years.
- **It contains amazing natural formations and features**
The Great Barrier Reef provides some of the most spectacular scenery on earth. It contains large areas of seagrass, mangroves, sandy and muddy seabed communities, inter-reefal areas, deep oceanic waters and island communities. The Great Barrier Reef has approximately 1,500 species of fish, 360 species of hard reef-building corals, more than 4,000 mollusc species and over 1,500 species of sponges.
- **It contains important habitats where endangered animals and plants live**
The seagrass beds of the Great Barrier Reef are an important feeding ground for dugongs and the reef is also home to varieties of algae that turtles, fish, sea urchins and molluscs graze on. The endangered loggerhead turtle nests on beaches at the reef, while humpback whales come from Antarctica to give birth in its warm waters.



Australian Government
Department of the Environment,
Water, Heritage and the Arts



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Challenges and Management

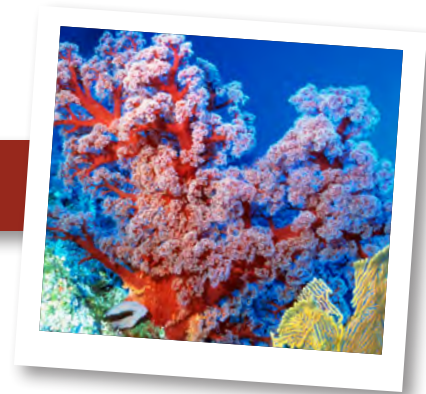
The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is the Australian Government agency responsible for managing the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management is directly responsible for managing Queensland's Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park and the island national parks. Under an agreement between the Australian and Queensland Governments, day-to-day management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is conducted in cooperation with Queensland and Australian Government agencies including the Department of Environment and Resource Management through the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, with additional assistance from Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol, Australian Maritime Safety Authority, Queensland Water Police, Australian Federal Police and Australian Customs and Border Protection Services.

Challenges	Management
Catchment runoff and declining water quality	Catchment runoff and declining water quality are significant challenges for the Great Barrier Reef. Much of its inshore area is being affected by increased sediments, nutrients and pesticides in catchment runoff. Changes to water quality on the reef can cause reduced hard-coral cover, increased diseases and crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks, and a reduced ability for the reef to recover from bleaching. Advances in agricultural practice has seen the reduction in sediment and nutrient inputs into some coastal rivers however a long lag time is expected before there are positive effects on marine water quality.
Fishing	Fishing on the Great Barrier Reef is an important pastime and source of income for coastal communities and the seafood industry in Queensland. There have been significant improvements made in reducing the impacts of fishing in the Great Barrier Reef including the introduction of by-catch reduction devices, effort controls, total allowable catches and revised possession and size limits. However, a small number of impacts from fishing and illegal fishing and poaching still pose a high level risk to this important ecosystem.
Coastal development	Coastal development near the Great Barrier Reef is increasing the loss of coastal habitats that support it. Mining and industrial activity has been driving population growth throughout the Great Barrier reef catchment and large areas of habitat that are important feeding and breeding grounds have been cleared, modified and infilled. The rubbish from developments also travels into the ocean where wildlife might mistake it for food, or become trapped, sometimes resulting in death.



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Climate change

Impacts from climate change have already been witnessed and all parts of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem are vulnerable to its increasing effects, with coral reef habitats the most vulnerable. Marine turtles and seabirds are also likely to be highly vulnerable. The average annual sea surface temperature on the Great Barrier Reef is likely to continue to rise over the coming century and could be as much as 1°C to 3°C warmer than the present average temperatures by 2100. In the last decade there have been two severe mass coral bleaching events resulting from prolonged elevated sea temperatures. In addition, Great Barrier Reef waters are predicted to become more acidic with even relatively small increases in ocean acidity decreasing the capacity of corals to build skeletons and therefore create habitat for reef biodiversity in general. Almost all Great Barrier Reef species and habitats will be affected by climate change, some seriously. The extent and persistence of the damage will depend to a large degree on the extent to which climate change is addressed worldwide and on the resilience of the ecosystem in the immediate future.

Read more

www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/great-barrier-reef/index.html



Australian Government
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