



## CTA-186-GBR Poor Condition

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# GREAT BARRIER REEF STATUS DOWNGRADED TO VERY POOR FOR FIRST TIME



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## ENVIRONMENT / TOURISM

The survival of the Great Barrier Reef continues to be threatened with the marine park's outlook today being downgraded today from "poor" to "very poor" due to coral bleaching and deforestation.

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The Federal Government's Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) has published its latest five-yearly Outlook Report for the Reef, concluding for the first time that the long-term outlook for corals and reefs along the 2300 kilometre long system was now "very poor".

The Great Barrier Reef cannot survive another decade of Federal Government inaction on the climate crisis, advises the Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) following the downgrade.

The 2019 Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report states: "without additional local, national and global action on the greatest threats, the overall outlook for the Great Barrier Reef's ecosystem will remain very poor, with continuing consequences for its heritage values also. The window of opportunity to improve the Reef's long-term future is now. Strong and effective management actions are urgent at global, regional and local scales. The Reef is core to Australia's identity and improving its outlook is critical."

The report came hours after the Federal Government released the latest national greenhouse gas emissions data that show emissions for the 12 months to March had exceeded those of any year since the 2012/13 financial year.

The AMCS advises that an official report also released today shows worsening water quality in five of six inshore regions of the Great Barrier Reef highlighting the urgency of the Queensland Government's proposed regulations to reduce run-off from farming.

The joint Queensland and Federal government report card for 2017 and 2018 gives a 'D grade' for the overall inshore condition of the Reef, advising that conditions had declined since the most recent 2016 report.

The report card also shows the sugarcane industry was the only agricultural industry to score an 'E grade' for the adoption of land management practices. Only 9.8% of sugar cane land was managed using best farming practices, the report says.

Imogen Zethoven, AMCS Director of Strategy notes "we've had nearly two decades to fix this problem but the rate of change is far too slow to clean up the Reef's waters. The report card underlines the need for new laws to tackle agricultural runoff damaging the Great Barrier Reef.

"The report card results make it clear that voluntary measures are not working fast enough to fix the problem of fertiliser and soil running off the catchment, muddying and contaminating the Reef's waters."

The report card gives a water quality grade of D for the Fitzroy and Mackay/Whitsundays regions, saying conditions had declined since the last report in 2016 report.

In the Wet Tropics, Burdekin and the Burnett Mary regions, water quality was given a 'C grade', but conditions had also declined since the last report.

Only in the far north region of Cape York, where water quality was given a B mark, had the water quality conditions held steady.

On targets to cut Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen (DIN, from fertilisers) and sediment, the score card gives an E grade. Between July 2016 to June 2018, DIN was reduced by a mere 0.3% (16 tonnes) across the whole GBR catchment. Over the same period, sediment was reduced by 0.5% (about 29 kilotonnes).

Zethoven added "this rate of progress is glacial. The adoption of best practice land management practices by some farmers in the Reef catchment is to be welcomed, but the rate of adoption is far too slow to prevent further

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deterioration of inshore reef ecosystems such as inshore corals and seagrass meadows that are vital habitat for many Reef species.

“This report makes it absolutely clear that regulations are needed to give the Reef a fighting chance in the face of all the threats it is dealing with.

“Our Reef is a global tourism magnet: it supports 64,000 tourism jobs and generates \$6.4 billion a year. We cannot afford to let poor water quality damage the Reef anymore.”

The World Wide Fund for Nature-Australia Head of Oceans Richard Leck said these comprehensive reports were based on the best available science and are sombre reminders of the challenges the Reef faces. However, it's not too late for the Reef and the solutions are in front of us.

Global warming is the primary reason the Reef's outlook was downgraded to very poor; pollution from farming is the major contributor to the Reef scoring D.

Leck noted "the Reef 2050 Plan is required to be revamped next year and must take climate change seriously and regulations to reduce farm runoff currently before the Queensland Parliament must be passed. The science is irrefutable - the time for delay is over.

“The Outlook Report makes one thing very clear, there is still time to secure a future for Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

“To achieve this, Australians must rise to the challenge of taking urgent and proportionate action on climate change.

“As one of the world's largest exporters of fossil fuels, this will require a national commitment to transition our current domestic and export coal energy base to 100% renewables by 2030.”

Leck went on to state "the benefits in rising to this challenge will not only help shore up Australia's economic future, but also dramatically increase our ability to retain a vibrant and prospering Great Barrier Reef.

“We know the Reef is resilient. Action on climate change and water quality will give the Reef the best opportunity to survive global warming.”

In its 2015 decision, the World Heritage Committee said it would reconsider the Reef in 2020. That timing was so that it could evaluate progress based on the 2019 Outlook Report.

Leck advised that the GBRMPA Outlook Report has major implications for the World Heritage Status of the Great Barrier Reef, adding "nobody wants to see the Reef placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

“Australia can continue to fail on climate policy and remain a major coal exporter or Australia can turn around the Reef's decline. But it can't do both. That's clear from the government's own scientific reports.”

[Click here](#) to access the reef report.

*Image of Sediment plumes Gladstone Harbour courtesy of WWF Australia*

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