



CTA-054-Action On Bleaching-GBR

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Great Barrier Reef tourism operators beg for action on bleaching



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Jorge Branco

Dozens of Queensland small businesses, many which wouldn't exist without the Great Barrier Reef, have issued a dire warning to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

The open letter published on Saturday comes as [new research predicts bleaching as severe bleaching](#) could become the "new normal", recurring biyearly by the mid-2030s.

The Great Barrier Reef. Photo: Climate Council

In a move contrary to recent attempts from tourism bodies to downplay the extent of the bleaching, 175 tourism operators, dive professionals and tradies labelled the mass damage a "disaster needing urgent action".



They called on the Turnbull government to rule out any financing, investment or help with associated infrastructure for the Abbot Point coal terminal expansion and Adani's controversial Carmichael mine, the largest in Australia.



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They pointed the finger at climate change, calling for investment in renewable energy projects, particularly in regional Queensland and a band on any new coal mines.

Eye to Eye Marine Encounters director John Rumney said some businesses had been afraid to speak out, worried it could mean bad publicity.

"But the long-term viability of all our businesses relies entirely on Reef staying healthy and it is in danger," he said, in a press release issued by the Climate Media Centre.

"The worst of the bleaching might now be over, but climate change isn't going to go away.



A diver checking out the bleaching at Heron Island in February 2016. This area was one of the first to bleach at Heron Island, which is located close to the southern most point of the Great Barrier Reef.

"We have to deal with the issue if we want to protect the reef, and our livelihoods."

[The National Coral Bleaching Taskforce's latest report found about 93 per cent of the reef was impacted by the event, with the most pristine stretch in the north worst affected.](#)

Coral bleaching at Lizard Island, Great Barrier Reef. Photo: Climate Council

Within the 1000km stretch north of Port Douglas, researchers estimated at least half of the coral would die.

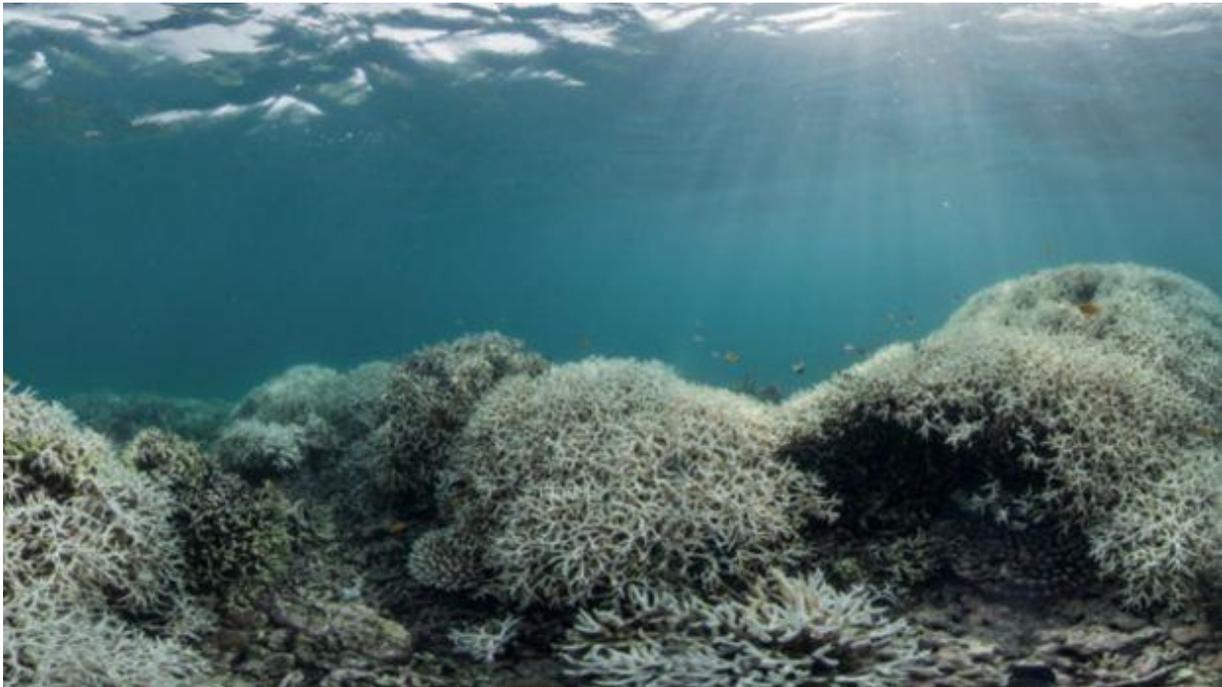


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The bleaching lessened the further south they travelled but only 68 of 911 individual reefs surveyed escaped bleaching entirely.



Coral bleaching at Lizard Island, Great Barrier Reef. Photo: Climate Council

The letter from the "stewards of the Great Barrier Reef", published in part in the Mackay Daily Mercury on Saturday, starts with numbers: Two million visitors annually. Almost \$6 billion to the economy and 69,000 jobs.

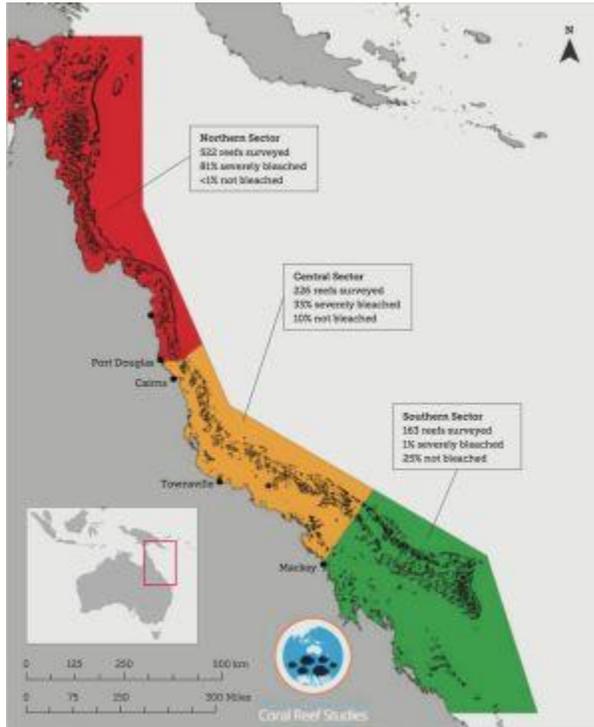


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"Global warming, driven by the mining and burning of fossil fuels like coal, is heating up our oceans and bleaching the reef," the letter reads.



Map of the Great Barrier Reef showing results of aerial surveys for 911 reefs. Source: Adapted from ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies / Tom Bridge and James Kerry. Photo: Climate Council

"We hope the majority of the reef can recover, but Australia must start doing everything it can to tackle the root cause of coral bleaching, which is global warming."

The businesses' call came as the Climate Council released its final report into the bleaching event, blaming rising ocean temperatures driven by climate change for the damage.

Extreme coral bleaching will become the "new normal" unless serious reductions in greenhouse gas emissions were achieved, the report warns.

"Climate change is very likely to make the extreme ocean temperatures that caused this year's event occur every two years during March by 2034," it reads.

Author Professor Will Steffen warned of "smoke and mirrors" around the reef's ability to recover, saying reefs would struggle to survive as bleaching events became more severe and closer together.

"Depending on how quickly the record-breaking ocean temperatures wane, the reef may be able to partly heal in some areas in the short-term," he said.

"But in the long-term, the reef's capacity to recover will depend on how much and how fast we reduce our greenhouse gas emissions in the next few years.

"Recovery could be impossible for many of the reefs currently affected if climate change is not arrested."

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The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing"....Edmund Burke