

UNESCO says Great Barrier Reef belongs on World Heritage Endangered List



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United Nations, November 30 (RHC)-- Because Australia's efforts to protect the Great Barrier Reef from damages wrought by the fossil fuel-driven climate crisis, pollution, and overfishing are falling short, the planet's largest coral reef system should be placed on a list of World Heritage sites considered "in danger," a pair of experts said this week.

"Despite the unparalleled science and management efforts" made by Australia in recent years, the Great Barrier Reef is "significantly impacted by climate change factors," Eleanor Carter of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Hans Thulstrup of the United Nations Educational,

Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) wrote in a report.

The much-anticipated report, based on a 10-day mission to the reef in March, warned that the climate emergency presents a "serious challenge" to the health of the biodiverse ecosystem, which was deemed a global wonder in 1981.

"The resilience of the property to recover from climate change impacts is substantially compromised, in particular—but not exclusively—due to degraded water quality," said the report. Soaring greenhouse gas emissions are causing oceans to heat up at an unprecedented rate, with disastrous consequences for marine life, and must be curbed immediately.

In addition, Carter and Thulstrup warned that not enough is being done to prevent agricultural runoff from polluting the reef's waters. The IUCN and UNESCO representatives advocated for greater investment to improve water quality and recommended adding the reef to the "World Heritage in danger" list.

According to The Guardian: "The report's recommendation the reef be placed on a list of World Heritage sites 'in danger' will be taken into account alongside responses from the Queensland and federal governments before UNESCO makes a formal recommendation to the World Heritage Committee before its next meeting."

As Agence France-Presse reported: To be included on UNESCO's World Heritage list, a site must have "outstanding universal value." A spot on the list usually means boosted tourism, and improved access to funds and to scientific expertise.

Those benefits are threatened when a site is declared "in danger"—which is currently the case of about 50 sites worldwide. Only three sites have ever been dropped from the heritage list completely. A UNESCO spokesperson told AFP that "a constructive dialogue is ongoing with the current government," which is led by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese of the Australian Labor Party.

Another unnamed source familiar with the matter described the report as "a roadmap submitted to the Australian government which should say what it intends to do with it and produce results." "The path to saving the Great Barrier Reef is narrow, but it exists," the source added. "Strong and rapid action can produce results."

The U.N.-backed reef mission was requested by Australia's ex-environment minister Sussan Ley after former Prime Minister Scott Morrison's right-wing government and its pro-fossil fuel allies, including Saudi Arabia, successfully lobbied against categorizing the Great Barrier Reef as endangered in the summer of 2021.

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