



Coral reefs at risk if climate ignored

By ANNE DAVIES
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THE world has lost 19 per cent of its coral reefs: a further 15 per cent are threatened within the next 10 to 20 years, and a further 20 per cent could be lost in 20 to 40 years, according to a report sponsored by the US and Australian governments.

And this is probably the best-case scenario.

Releasing the report in Washington, Clive Wilkinson, coordinator of the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, said the forecasts did not take into account the impact of climate change.

If climate change proceeded, as experts were predicting, it would lead to acidification of the seas, more coral reef bleaching incidents, more intense storms and potentially the destruction of reefs much sooner, Mr Wilkinson warned.

"We have about eight to 10 years to do something about it. Carbon dioxide is currently at 380 parts per million. We need to do something before it reaches 450 parts per million," he said.

Since the 2004 report reefs have marked lime, with some reefs improving because of bet-

KEY POINTS

- Expert warns we have eight to 10 years to act to save the world's coral reefs.
- The Great Barrier Reef has been stable since 2004.

ter management, but others being harmed by pollution, fishing practices, storms and warming waters.

The 2004 tsunami caused extensive damage to the coral reefs in the Indian Ocean but not at a scale comparable to human losses, the study noted.

In the northern hemisphere, 2005 was the hottest year on record since 1998 and this led to massive coral bleaching and hurricanes.

In the Coral Triangle — the area around Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines — human activity was the biggest threat to the reef.

The good news from Australia's perspective is that the Great Barrier Reef is relatively stable, with no big climate change or cyclone events damaging the reefs since 2004.

The Great Barrier Reef and the reefs off Western Australia were noted for their effective management.

However, the scientists noted that the reefs off PNG, notable for their diversity, had inadequate conservation and management processes.

Only 3 per cent of the Australian and PNG reefs had been lost, the report said. A further 4 per cent were deemed to be at critical stage and 10 per cent were classified as threatened. But 83 per cent of the reefs are considered under low threat.

Even healthy reefs will be under threat if climate change is not tackled in the next eight to 10 years, Mr Wilkinson said.

He warned that corals and their symbiotic algae could not adapt sufficiently to deal with warmer water temperatures, and that coral bleaching incidents would lead to higher levels of mortality unless climate change was tackled.

The other threat comes from increasing acidification of the oceans. Because oceans absorb carbon dioxide they will become more acidic, causing the calcium carbonate skeletons of the coral organisms to dissolve.

Mr Wilkinson said it was imperative that the world agree to keep carbon dioxide concentrations from exceeding 450-500 parts per million, to avoid extensive damage.



Benchmark: Scientific monitoring of the Great Barrier Reef has helped it set a benchmark for reefs worldwide

Our Reef sets pace for the rest

THE Great Barrier Reef has been rated among the healthiest coral reefs in the world in a new report.

Released yesterday, the report says the Reef and its management continue to set a benchmark for the rest of the world.

The introduction of no-fishing zones has been singled out for special praise.

"An example of best practice is a major increase in breeding populations of major target fishes in the 33 per cent of the Great Barrier Reef protected from fishing in 2004," Dr Clive Wilkinson said from Washington.

The Status of Coral Reefs of the World is an annual report prepared by the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network.

The report again warns human pressures are causing increasing damage to reefs across the world, but researchers have also noted that coral reefs worldwide have "effectively marked time".

Reef and Rainforest Research Centre chief executive officer Sheriden Morris said the rating did not mean Far Northerners could rest on their laurels.

"With the challenges that climate change is bringing to the Reef, it's important we continue our research and reduce the impact," she said.



Great Barrier Reef on top of the world

The Great Barrier Reef is one of the best managed and healthiest coral reefs in the world according to a report by the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network.

The Status of Coral Reefs of the World 2008 report found that although 19 per cent of the world's coral reefs have been lost in the past few decades, Australian reefs have continued to be relatively stable since 2004.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Chairman Dr Russell Reichelt said the report was a strong reminder that while all coral reefs are under threat, the Great Barrier Reef is faring better than most.

"The Great Barrier Reef is the largest, healthiest and one of the best managed of the world's coral reefs," Dr Reichelt said.

"Because of strong community support, protective legislation and an ecosystem based approach to management Australia's coral reefs have come out on the top of this year's status report.

"While this report is essentially good news for the Great Barrier Reef compared to other reefs around the world, we can't afford to be complacent and there is still much work to be done here to protect our reef."

Report author, Clive Wilkinson, said

Australia's coral reef management, research and monitoring was exemplary.

"Management of coral reefs in Eastern Australia on the Great Barrier Reef, and more recently off Western Australia, continues to set the benchmark for best practice around the world," he said.

"One of the standout features is that coral reef scientists and managers have formed strong partnerships to understand and manage our coral reefs."

The report found the oceanic and island reefs of the Coral Sea and, in particular, the Great Barrier Reef are amongst the best understood and managed in the world with considerable capacity and expertise in research and management.

It was also found that the 2004 rezoning of the Great Barrier Reef has shown significant ecosystem benefits.

But the pressures of coastal development, declining water quality, fishing, recreational use, outbreaks of crown-of-thorn starfish, coral disease and climate change and declines in high level predators have had a marked impact.

The report listed climate change as the key threat to all of the world's coral reefs with cyclones and poor inshore water quality remaining as major threats to the Great Barrier Reef.



Reef healthier than most

THE Great Barrier Reef is one of the best managed and healthiest coral reefs in the world according to a report released this year by the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network.

The report was titled 'Status of Coral Reefs of the World 2008'.

The report's author, Clive Wilkinson, said Australian reef management on the East Coast, Great Barrier Reef (GBR) and off Western Australia "set the benchmark for best practice around the world".

"One of the stand-out features is that coral reef scientists and managers have formed strong partnerships to understand and manage our coral reefs," Mr Wilkinson said.

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) chairman Dr Russell Reichelt said the report highlighted that while all coral reefs were under threat, the GBR was faring better than most.

He said that while the report's com-

mendations were good news, they were no reason to relax.

"There is still much work to be done here to protect our Reef," Dr Reichelt said.

Findings of the report included:

- the 2004 rezoning of the GBR has shown significant ecosystem benefits

- on-going pressures on the GBR include coastal development, declining water quality, fishing, recreational use, outbreaks of crown-of-thorns starfish (COTS) and other species

- major future threats to the GBR include climate change, cyclones and poor inshore water quality

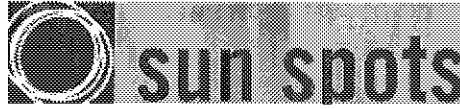
- recent pressures on the GBR included coral disease, declining resilience of some reefs (particularly inshore reefs), declines in high level predators, and climate change effects

- the GBR may be in a recovery phase from previous disturbances, indicating good resilience



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REEF IN GOOD HANDS

GREAT BARRIER REEF

THE Great Barrier Reef is one of the best managed and healthiest coral reefs in the world according to a recent report by the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network. The report entitled "Status of Coral Reefs of the World 2008" found that although 19 per cent of the world's coral reefs had been lost in the past few decades, Australian reefs were relatively stable and coral reef management, research and monitoring was exemplary.