

EMBARGOED UNTIL 9 AUGUST 2009

Great Barrier Reef Foundation

Valuing the Effects of Great Barrier Reef Bleaching

CLIMATE CHANGE COST TO THE GREAT BARRIER REEF \$37.7billion

The economic cost of a total and permanent bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef due to climate change would be \$37.7bn, according to a special report commissioned by the Great Barrier Reef Foundation. The landmark Oxford Economics report puts the present value of the whole Reef at \$51.4bn and finds that as many as 50% of tourists who would normally visit coral sites on the Reef would stay away, if it bleached permanently, resulting in a severe blow to national and local economies.

Foundation Chairman, Dr John Schubert, said the report provided a stark assessment of the cost of the world not acting on climate change.

“This report provides a wake-up call about the threat to one of Australia’s greatest natural assets and the potential cost to Australia,” Dr Schubert said.

“It also establishes for the first time the extent to which the Cairns region would be affected by a major bleaching event on the Reef.”

Dr Schubert said the report assessed the value of the Reef to the Cairns region at \$17.9bn, with a loss in value resulting from a total and permanent bleaching of \$16.3bn, or a staggering 90% of the assessed value of the Reef to the area.

“These figures paint a disturbing picture, both for tourism generally, and for those local communities that benefit directly from their proximity to the Reef,” Dr Schubert said.

The report states that currently the Reef’s present value is \$51.4 bn. The report also attaches a value to our willingness to pay to preserve the Reef, alongside the industry profits generated by Reef tourism or commercial fishing on the Reef.

Working to protect and preserve the Great Barrier Reef.

“It tells us that both Australians, and people all over the world, value the fact that the Great Barrier Reef exists. Whether or not we ever have the chance to visit it, we like to know it is there for ourselves and for our children. For the first time, this report captures all of these values in one figure.” Dr Schubert said.

Managing Director of the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, Judy Stewart, said, “The Great Barrier Reef has many advantages over other coral reefs. Its sheer scale and size, as well as the fact that it has been so well managed for so long, means that if any reef can make it, the Great Barrier Reef can.”

“Science has been telling us for years about the threats to the Reef. This report goes further than any before it, to quantify the costs of losing the Reef, alongside assessing its value to us. This is the major reason we decided to commission Oxford Economics to undertake the study,” Ms Stewart said.

“While it may alarm some people, its key message is that if we value the Reef at all, we must do all in our power to preserve it as well as the neighbouring communities that benefit from it. We are at a crossroads. We need to act now.”

“While we acknowledge that reducing emissions globally is fundamental to the Reef’s future, we must also develop the solutions and adaptation strategies which will directly address the impacts of climate change – impacts which are already being felt,” Ms. Stewart said.

This year, the Foundation has established its own Solutions & Adaptations Working Group, to identify new solutions and adaptation strategies to directly combat climate change impacts on the Reef - as and when they happen.

Much is also being done by government to support the research agencies at work on the Reef, as they try to unlock the secrets of resilience. Already, important work has focused on improving the quality of water through the implementation of major programs designed to reduce land-based pollution. The network of marine national parks protecting biodiversity across 33% of the Reef also seeks to build resilience. All of this effort is imperative to the ability of corals to recover from temperature-induced shocks.

“The Great Barrier Reef is our single greatest national indicator of how our climate is changing. We owe it to the communities that live along the Reef, to all Australians and indeed, the global community, to do all we can to secure its future,” said Dr Schubert.

Key report findings

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1. Loss in event of total and permanent bleaching of the GBR is \$37.7B (73% of assessed value of \$51.4B)
2. Loss to Cairns region in event of total and permanent bleaching \$16.3B (90% of assessed value of Reef to Cairns of \$17.9B)
3. Estimated 50% of the tourists who come to visit the Reef to see coral sites would stay away if the Reef bleached permanently

Copies of the report can be accessed from Sunday 9 August at www.barrierreef.org

Further information:

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