

Media Release

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New research shows carbon dioxide emissions threaten coral reef survival

New research showing coral reefs are at serious risk from the twin threats of global warming and rising ocean acidity levels means we must redouble research efforts to help save the Great Barrier Reef, the Great Barrier Reef Foundation said today.

Foundation Chief Executive Judy Stewart said the world-first research findings, published today in the highly respected *Science* journal, demonstrated the serious consequences which increasing carbon dioxide levels have on the Great Barrier Reef.

“The research has found that increasing carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere have a “double whammy” impact on coral reefs – causing the acidification of oceans as well as increasing ocean surface temperatures.”

Mrs Stewart said time was short if we are to conduct the research that will be needed to better understand the effects of climate change on the Reef, as well as to develop strategies to save it.

“Only 10 years ago, the paper’s lead author and Great Barrier Reef Foundation research partner Professor Ove Hoegh-Guldberg first proved a link between climate change, increasing water surface temperatures and the bleaching of world’s coral reefs. Bleaching is the sign of a reef under extreme stress caused by warmer than normal water temperatures. If these conditions persist for 30 days or more, corals will die.

“Since Professor Hoegh-Guldberg made the connection between climate change and coral bleaching, two major global bleaching events have occurred. Moreover, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has recently confirmed that if nothing is done, bleaching will affect 60 per cent of the reefs which make up the Great Barrier Reef every two years.”

Mrs Stewart said only by conducting more research could we discover how to assist the survival of the Reef in light of a changing climate.

“This is a new research frontier. Research holds the key to the survival of the Great Barrier Reef. The need to undertake more research and develop Reef survival techniques is now urgent. It won’t wait.”

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The Great Barrier Reef Foundation is Australia’s only independent fundraiser for coral reef research. Working in partnership with business, government and philanthropy, the Foundation’s purpose is to find and fund solutions to sustain the Great Barrier Reef.