

Read through the information below, which explains what is happening in the Great Barrier Reef. Whose job do you think it is to protect it? Talk about why you think so many people choose to visit the area.

What is a World Heritage Site?

World Heritage Sites are regarded as being universally important and 'belonging to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of the territory on which they are located'. They are listed by UNESCO. There are currently 32 recognised sites in the UK and 1,121 in the world.

Why is the Great Barrier Reef in danger?

UNESCO (the United Nations cultural body) says the Great Barrier Reef should be put on a list of World Heritage Sites that are 'in danger' due to damage caused by climate change. Scientists say the main reason is rising sea temperatures as a result of climate change, caused by the burning of fossil fuels. Stressful events such as storms, cyclones, floods and warming seas caused by this, all have a harmful impact on coral and are happening more and more around the world.

The Australian Environment Minister, Sussan Ley, disagrees with the suggestion to move the site to the 'in danger' list, she believes, "Climate change is the single biggest threat to all of the world's reef ecosystems... and there are 83 natural World Heritage properties facing climate change threats so it's not fair to simply single out Australia". However, UNESCO's report has said that key targets on improving water quality had not been met.



Paul Asman/Jill Lenoble

Flying over the Great Barrier Reef, Australia

Facts about the Great Barrier Reef

- It is found in the Coral Sea, off the coast of Queensland, Australia.
- The Great Barrier Reef is the largest coral reef system in the world.
- Astronauts could view the Great Barrier Reef from space; it is the size of 70 million football fields!
- Over 1,500 different types of fish live in the Great Barrier Reef. The smallest fish is called the stout infant fish and is 7mm long! The biggest is the whale shark, which can grow up to 12m long.
- Nemo, the popular Disney character from 'Finding Nemo' is based on the clownfish, which can be seen all over the Great Barrier Reef.
- Before the pandemic, around 2 million people visited every year!