

Her Excellency Sheikha Al-Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani,
Chairperson, World Heritage Committee

Ms. Irina Bokova, Director General, the United Nations Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)

Ms. Julia Marton-Lefèvre, Director-General, the International Union for the
Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

We are women of Australia and the world making this appeal directly to you,
the heads of the World Heritage Committee and its expert advisers, UNESCO,
and ICUN, who are currently considering the Great Barrier Reef for the 'World
Heritage in Danger' list.'

Although we wish it were otherwise, we respectfully submit that The
Great Barrier Reef is in Danger and we are urging the World Heritage
Committee to list it as 'World Heritage in Danger' to stop further irrevocable
damage and to protect it for generations to come.

The reef's plight is unbearably sad. It's story is the story of climate change.

Recognised as World Heritage in 1981 for its Outstanding Universal Value,
and before that as one of Seven Natural Wonders of the World, the reef is in
crisis. The pressures it now faces are undermining the very reasons for its
original listing as World Heritage.

- This vast incredible eco-system is being overwhelmed by climate
change with its destructive combination of heat-driven coral bleaching,
ocean acidification and turbo-charged tropical storms, as well as a
threats like the Crown of Thorns starfish, nutrient and chemical laden
run-off from the land.
- An estimated half of the reef's coral mass already has been lost since
the reef was inscribed on the World Heritage List.
- And now, on top of all of this, the massive industrialisation of the
adjacent coastline for coal and gas ports, are adding even more
development pressures including , sending millions of tonne of dredge
waste into reef waters and an anticipated doubling of shipping
movements through the reef to ship more fossil fuels around the world
adding more pollution to the atmosphere.

In this open letter we are urging the World Heritage Committee :

* to not be swayed by assurances and representations from the
Australian and/or State of Queensland governments that fears for the
reef are overblown and that its protection is in hand.

* That there be no diverting from the fact that the Reef is in danger and for you to proceed with its World Heritage in Danger listing this year or at the latest in 2015.

To relax the pressure now would only encourage further highly-retrograde decisions like the recent one to allow approximately three million tonnes of dredging spoil from a planned coal port development, at Abbot Point on the Queensland coast, to be dumped in World Heritage waters.

There comes a time when the self-defensive protestations of individual nations must be overridden precisely because World Heritage is so special, and the responsibility for its protection is shared globally. That time has arrived for the Great Barrier Reef.

SIGNED:

WHO WILL DECIDE THE FATE OF THE GREAT BARRIER REEF?

Three important international organisations, each of them led by a woman, hold the immediate fate of this remarkable World Heritage site in their collective hands. They are:

- World Heritage Committee, made up of the representatives of 21 nations, which has the power to add the reef to its list of 'World Heritage in Danger' when it meets for 2014 in Doha, Qatar, or again at its 2015 meeting – the Chairperson is the head of the Qatar Museums Authority, H.E. Sheikha Al-Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani
- UNESCO, the Paris-based United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, which provides the secretariat for the World Heritage Committee and advises it on technical matters – the Director-General is Ms. Irina Bokova
- IUCN, the Switzerland-based International Union for the Conservation of Nature, which provides formal conservation and scientific expertise to the World Heritage Committee – the Director-General is Ms. Julia Marton-Lefèvre