



Coral bleaching: Queensland Government invites Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to visit reef

By Chris O'Brien

Updated Thu 24 Mar 2016, 4:39pm

The Queensland Government has called on the Prime Minister to visit parts of the Great Barrier Reef which are dead or dying from coral bleaching.

The threat was on Sunday increased to its highest level, after researchers working on Lizard Island reported the worst bleaching in 15 years.

State Environment Minister Steven Miles said Malcolm Turnbull needed to show the "same level of commitment" as former prime minister Tony Abbott, who was "falling over himself" for the the joint launch of last year's 2050 Reef Sustainability Plan.

"I would like to invite, to call upon Malcolm Turnbull as the current Prime Minister ... to come and see what's happening," Dr Miles said.

"It's disturbing to see reefs ghostly white."

Dr Miles said the state was making progress on the 2050 Reef Sustainability Plan.

The plan, released in March last year, satisfied one of the key recommendations made by the United Nations' World Heritage Committee and formed a key plank in the Governments' bid to avoid the site being declared "in danger".

The Queensland Government said of the 54 targets the state promised it would deliver, nine had been completed in the past 12 months while "significant progress" had been made on another 33.

Dr Miles has said the state wanted to finalise its master plan for priority ports as well as a statewide maintenance dredging strategy.

He said action was needed to protect the reef from runoff pollution, as well as vegetation management laws which were currently before Parliament.

"I have no doubt that if [Mr Turnbull] could see these reefs first hand, he would step up and he would deliver for Australia a decent plan to address climate change, as well as additional support for our efforts," he said.

"The national Government went to Paris last year and committed to reduce Australia's greenhouse gas emissions, but they have not delivered any plan that anyone believes can achieve even those targets which are not our fair share.

"But in the longer run, what we need to do is address climate change."

A spokesman for Federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt said the Turnbull Government had taken unprecedented steps to protect the reef.

"We took the lead to implement a ban on dredge disposal in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and Queensland Labor eventually followed," the spokesman said.

"Our work to protect the Great Barrier Reef resulted in the World Heritage Committee declaring last July that Australia was a global role model for the management of World Heritage properties.

"We're investing more money and taking more action than ever before to protect this great natural wonder."

PHOTO: The Queensland Government has completed nine of the 54 targets outlined in the 2050 Reef Sustainability Plan, released last year. (Supplied: Coral Watch, University of Queensland)

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PHOTO: Fahey Reef, where University of Queensland researchers have filmed coral bleaching. (Google Maps)



PHOTO: Dr Miles said action was needed to protect the reef from runoff pollution. (Supplied: Coral Watch, University of Queensland)

Ammonia leakage from Nickel refinery

Meanwhile, Dr Miles said levels of ammonia were back within allowable limits in waterways near the Townsville nickel refinery.

Queensland Nickel Sales reported last week that ammonia in the creeks had exceeded what was allowed under its environmental authority.

"Testing performed in recent days has shown that levels have returned to below the thresholds required by their environmental authority," Dr Miles said.

"So that's good news that suggests that we're not seeing an ongoing pollution event."

He said monitoring would continue.

"That's very important because this plant is very close to the homes of many Townsville residents, it's on Halifax Bay which is part of the Great Barrier Reef.

"Any pollution event here could affect both people and the reef."



PHOTO: The flat reef at Lizard Island is more vulnerable to bleaching, researchers say. (Supplied: WWF)

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First posted Thu 24 Mar 2016, 2:05pm

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