



Wednesday

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Time is running out



WORRY . . . the reef is under significant threat from climate change

The EPA's State of the Environment report repeats warnings of the severe threat posed to the reef but fails to point out the inadequacy of current policy writes climate change expert and barrister Dr Chris McGrath

THE Environmental Protection Agency's latest State of the Environment report for Queensland repeats warnings of the severe threat posed by climate change to the Great Barrier Reef.

It fails to point out the inadequacy of current government policy to address this.

Reef scientists have been warning of the impacts of climate change for the GBR since mass coral bleaching occurred across the reef in 1998 and 2002.

Rising sea temperatures and increasing acidity of the oceans are now well-recognised as major threats.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded last year there is a very high confidence that 'significant loss of biodiversity is projected to occur by 2020 in some ecologically-rich sites including the Great Barrier Reef and Queensland Wet Tropics' due to climate change.

Following the release of the IPCC report, Professor Ove Hoegh-Guldberg from the University of Queensland and his colleagues reviewed the vulnerability of reef-building corals on the GBR for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

They concluded: "Successive studies of the potential impacts of thermal stress on coral reefs have supported the notion that coral dominated reefs are likely to largely disappear with a 2C rise in sea temperature over the next 100 years."

Dr Charlie Veron, former chief

scientist at the Australian Institute of Marine Sciences in Townsville, reviewed the expected impacts of climate change to the GBR in his new book, *A Reef in Time: The Great Barrier Reef from beginning to end*.

He concluded: "We are now facing the inescapable conclusion that the GBR, along with all the other coral reefs in the world, will be diminished beyond anything we have ever considered 'normal' as a direct result of human-induced climate change - and this will happen during the present century."

The EPA mentions, in passing, potential impacts to the GBR but makes no detailed analysis of this issue or any assessment of whether current government policies are likely to avoid this clearly dire outcome.

The EPA sycophantically notes that 'In April 2007 the Premier announced that Queensland would play its part in meeting a national greenhouse gas emissions target of 60 per cent below 2000 levels by 2050. This action commits the Queensland Government to ensuring the long-term prosperity of the state.'

This fails to recognise that the IPCC projected a 60 per cent reduction below 2000 levels in global emissions by 2050 is likely to put the world on track to stabilise mean global temperature rises around 2.4C above pre-industrial levels.

Such a temperature rise is likely to severely degrade the GBR, which means that the policies of the current Australian and

Queensland governments put us on track to witness the GBR as we have known it being lost in our own lifetimes.

It is largely hubris when the EPA tells us 'The Queensland Government is rising to the challenge of climate change with a broad approach involving a range of government agencies in partnership with the community and business'.

Queensland has taken important steps, such as the phase-out of broadscale land-clearing and the priority the Premier has given to addressing climate change, but the current response is still clearly inadequate to protect vital natural assets.

There is no doubt that avoiding the expected impacts of climate change to the GBR and other vital parts of the ecosystem will be extremely difficult but painting an inaccurate picture of the likely outcomes of current policies does not assist the government or the community.

We need frank and accurate information as a basis for developing a sound response to the threat of climate change.

Unfortunately, the EPA's latest report is neither frank nor accurate on the inadequacy of our current response to the threat posed by climate change to our greatest natural asset.

●Dr Chris McGrath is a Brisbane barrister. His PhD studied climate change and laws protecting the GBR.

THEY'RE VERY GOOD AT BEING VERY BAD

underbelly

TONIGHT 8:30 WIN

WHICH ONE IS THE SERIAL KILLER?

CANAL ROAD

SERIES PREMIERE TONIGHT 9:30 WIN

