

SEDIMENT DUMPING APPROVED NEAR THE GREAT BARRIER REEF



Australian government approved that millions of tons of sediment are going to be deposited close to the Great Barrier Reef, the UNESCO site.

Expansion of the Abbot Point coal port, situated near northern Queensland has meant that large amounts of mud are generated from the dredging process. The plan is to create space and build additional shipping terminals.

The Australian government has approved of the operation, meaning that all this sediment is going to be transferred to the popular Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The Park hosts one of the world's largest coral reef systems and is a popular tourist destination worldwide.

The environment department has promised that all precautions would be taken to protect the coral reef, involving long term monitoring of the water quality. They are also limiting the amount of direct deposition of mud onto the coral reef areas, and they are seeking technical advice on proper disposal.

They argue that the transferred sediment is free of any harmful substances or minerals, and that the material is similar in composition to that in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Up to 3 million cubic meters of sediment is expected to be generated by the expansion of the Queensland coal port.

Environmentalists are outraged, claiming that it would endanger the already fragile coral reef ecosystem. **It is not the first time that the Great Barrier Reef has been threatened by environmental disasters.** Recently, the coral reef has been vulnerable to coral-eating starfish and various other threats. UNESCO committee also voiced concerns about this recent development.

Undoubtedly, the Australian government has a difficult balance to make: the coal exports generate revenues of up to 48 billion dollars per year. In contrast, the tourism industry at the Great Barrier Reef only yielded about 5 billion dollars last year.

The argument is that there is more to be gained from the coal industry and a better economy means more jobs and better welfare for the country. This places nature conservation efforts and environmental protection at a lower priority.

One of the main conservationist groups is the Australian Marine Conservation Society, which has expressed strong objections to the new plans. The main concern is the potential danger of churning up of the sea floor and blocking sunlight to the coral reef beneath. This can starve the coral reef of much needed sunlight and also harmful substances can be released in the process.

The damage can spread miles across the ocean and affect large areas of coral reef. They are already putting pressure on the government with lobbying groups and considering the path of legal action. Its opinion is echoed across other conservation groups across the globe. The idea of potential pollution to a valuable and fragile natural resource can have devastating consequences.

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