

GLOBAL WARMING ENDANGERS AUSTRALIAN TOURISM INDUSTRY



It is generally accepted that airline flights, through their carbon dioxide emissions, contribute hugely to global warming, which, in turn, leads to higher sea temperatures. In Australia, the famous Great Barrier Reef is endangered by rising temperatures that could kill the corals. Tourism Minister Fran Bailey said recently that "Tourism is a 75 billion dollar (62.7 billion US) industry employing more than half a million Australians and is dependent upon a sustainable environment." She also claims that "the Great Barrier Reef employs 33,000 people and generates more than 5.8 billion for our nation."

Tourism is identified as one of the economic sectors most vulnerable to climate change. Environmentalists claim that jet travel is one of the fastest growing sources of carbon dioxide, and jet-setting politicians are regularly castigated for the amount of pollution that their journeys produce. Australian officials fear that there could be a decrease in the numbers of tourists coming to the continent as people become more aware of their own personal contribution to global warming. This is a big issue for the Australian tourism industry since long-distance airline flights are the most common means of travel for visitors to the country. Another fact is that the industry is Australia's second largest export industry after coal. One airline, Virgin Blue, acknowledges customers' feelings of responsibility and now includes an extra dollar or so on fares to help plant forests. Nevertheless, there is a debate whether planting has any significant effect. One problem is that even those companies that offer to plant trees can't agree on how many they need to plant. There is a risk that this will do little more than make people feel good, says Daniel Gschwind, of the Queensland Tourism Industry Council.

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