

THE GREAT BARRIER REEF BLEACHING HARMS AUSTRALIAN TOURISM



If the Great Barrier Reef continues to undergo major bleaching episodes – declining phenomenon of corals – Australian tourism will lose 174,000 foreign tourists and \$ 1.19 billion of revenue (approximately € 782 million) each year.

This estimate revealed in a report from the Australian Institute counts only the first three top visiting countries, namely the US, China and the UK.

The report focuses on the potential impacts of the coral bleaching at the Great Barrier Reef on Australian tourism sector. The conclusions were drawn from recent scientific and economic studies, but also from a series of surveys conducted amongst foreign and Australian tourists.

This investigation follows the worst bleaching episodes of the Great Barrier, listed as UNESCO World Heritage, that occurred in early 2016. It is the largest coral reef in the world, 2600 kilometers of length with an area of 344 400 km² that is endangered.

On April 20, a study by three Australian universities revealed that 90 % of the surveyed reefs showed signs of bleaching. According to the Bureau of Meteorology, an increase from 1 to 2.7 ° C of water's temperature could be the cause. The phenomenon is directly linked to global warming according to Melbourne University scientists, without which an important bleaching would have been virtually impossible."

Top Australian Tourism Attraction

According to surveys of the Australian Institute, international tourists put the Great Barrier Reef on the first place among the tourist attractions of the country. If coral bleaching continues, one third of American tourists, 55% of Chinese and 27% of British respondents would choose another destination for their holidays. The tourist areas of the Great Barrier Reef alone could lose 1.1 million visitors – Australian and international – and 931 million Australian dollars (approximately 617 million EUR).

Coral reefs are also part of the three top favorite places of French tourists. Since 2012, Australia travel agency Otherwise annually brings about 8,000 travelers from France. The product manager for Australia and New Zealand of the agency, Aurelia Devilliers, said that the condition of coral is not a hindrance for the French, as it can be for German tourists, for example. She believes that besides the Great Barrier Reef, Australia is full of other highlights that attract travelers.

Australian tourism industry is still concerned about the fate of the Great Barrier Reef. Its northern part is affected the most – in the state of Queensland. Devilliers said that the agencies do not take tourists to places where the corals are dead. But excursions and underwater dives are for the tourism industry an opportunity to educate tourists to preserve the world's heritage. "Travel agencies have a genuine desire to preserve this ecosystem. The economy of the region depends on the health of corals, especially in Queensland."

Thousands of Jobs Endangered

In 2005, an Oxford Economics study gave the coral reef economic value of 51.4 billion Australian dollars and assessed the impact of bleaching to 37.7 billion Australian dollars.

If tourists began to boycott the Great Barrier Reef, Australian economy would be directly impacted.

According to the research center Tourism Research Australia, Australian tourism is responsible for 130,900 jobs in Queensland, of which 39,000 are directly related to the barrier reef. The Australian Institute estimates that if nothing changes, the tourist areas around the Great Barrier Reef could lose about 10,000 jobs in tourism.

To reverse the trend according to the think tank the solution is in the country's energy policy. In 2014, Queensland exported 207 million tons of coal (Queensland Government), and if this state were a country, it would be the eighth largest world producer - as evidenced by the construction of the gigantic mine Gladstone in 2012 about 80 km far from the Great Barrier Reef.

In the final part of his report, the Australian Institute emphasizes that the coal industry threatens the tourism sector. It is also the thought of 74 % of international respondents to this survey, that "Australia should get out coal and replace it with clean energy in order to protect the Great Barrier Reef." And the majority of Australians surveyed believe that "the Great Barrier Reef is more important than coal for the economy of the state of Queensland, and it has a higher potential of creating jobs."

Just a short time before federal elections on July 2nd, which aim to renew the 150 seats in the House of Representatives and 76 Senate seats, the Great Barrier Reef is therefore a political issue.

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