

'NOW OR NEVER' TO SAVE BARRIER REEF: SCIENTISTS

CLIMATE CHANGE RAVAGES WORLD HERITAGE SITES

SYDNEY: Australia's Great Barrier Reef could be beyond saving in five years without "now or never" funding to improve water quality as climate change ravages the World Heritage-listed site, scientists warned yesterday.

The world's biggest coral reef ecosystem is under pressure from not only climate change, but farming run-off, development and the coral-eating crown-of-thorns starfish. The biodiverse side off the Queensland state coast is also suffering its worst bleaching in recorded history with 93 percent of corals affected due to warming sea temperatures.

"The current management regime for catchment pollutant run-off and climate change is clearly inadequate to prevent further decline," James Cook University researchers Jon Brodie and Richard Pearson wrote in a paper published in the *Estuarine, Coastal and Shelf Science* journal.

They added in a statement yesterday that without government funding of Aus\$10 billion (US\$7.2 billion) over the next decade to improve water quality, "the Great Barrier Reef will be in a terminal condition within five years". "What's happening is we're seeing climate change ramp up much more quickly than most scientists... believed," Bodie told AFP.

"One thing we can do is fixing water quality for the reef. For water quality management, I think it is now or never because we have to do the management now to give us some resilience against cli-



In this undated handout picture taken received yesterday from James Cook University shows life on the Great Barrier Reef in Queensland. — AFP

mate change." Bodie said the poor water quality was due mainly to sediment from grazing lands, which causes water to be cloudy and affects the growth of coral and seagrass. Fertiliser run-off, particularly nitrogen, from the sugarcane industry was also causing crown of thorns outbreaks as the nutrients were fuelling the growth of the predatory coral-feeding starfish, he added.

The funding would go on programs such as planting trees along stream banks to stop erosion, the scientists said. A spokesman for Environment Minister Greg

Hunt said the government was doing "more than ever before" to protect the reef for future generations.

"Through our Aus\$210 million Reef Trust, we are investing in projects that directly improve water quality in the Great Barrier Reef. This is part of a broader Aus\$2 billion investment by Australian governments to protect the reef," he said. According to a 2013 Deloitte Access Economics study commissioned by the government, the reef contributes around Aus\$6.0 billion annually to the economy, mainly through tourism. — AFP

DEEP CHANGES URGED TO AVOID MASS DEATHS FROM SUPERBUGS

LONDON: Ten million people could die every year from 2050 onwards unless sweeping global changes are agreed to tackle increasing resistance to antibiotics, which can turn common ailments into killers, a report warned yesterday. Commissioned by the British government, the Review on Antimicrobial Resistance set out steps to fight the emergence of "superbugs" as infections become immune to existing drugs, allowing minor injuries and common infections to become deadly.

"It needs to be seen as the economic and security threat that it is, and be at the forefront of the minds of heads of state," wrote Jim O'Neill, the economist who led the review. The overuse of antibiotics should be reduced by cutting the vast quantities of medicines given to farm animals, improving diagnoses to stop unnecessary prescriptions, and a global public awareness campaign, the paper urged. At the same time, researchers should be encouraged to develop new antibiotics through a global fund for research and rewards for those who manage to develop new drugs.

The cost of the measures was estimated to be \$40 billion (35.6 billion euros) over ten years—far less than the cost if the growing problem is not addressed.

"There is no excuse for inaction given what we know about the impact of rising drug resistance," the paper said. Governments will face the cost "sooner or later", it added. "They can either do so proactively by taking action now and pay less for better outcomes, or remain unprepared and end up spending much more taxpayer money on far worse outcomes further down the line."

The paper argued that the response could be funded through countries' health budgets or through taxes on pharmaceutical companies that do not invest on antibiotic research. O'Neill, an economist known for coining the term "BRIC" to describe large emerging countries and who was asked by the British government to chair the review, noted that one million people had died of antimicrobial resistance since the review started in mid-2014. The World Health Organization (WHO) has already warned antimicrobial resistance may result in "a return to the pre-antibiotic era," when millions of people died in pandemics before drugs were discovered that could treat them. — AFP

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