

Podcast 93 - The Great Barrier Reef

by Rob McCormack - Friday, August 18, 2017

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Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia, with Rob McCormack
Podcast Number 93 – The Great Barrier Reef

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Hi,

The Great Barrier Reef lies off the coast of northern Queensland. It is the world's largest coral reef system and one of the world's great natural wonders. In this podcast I would like to tell you a little about this amazing natural marvel.

The Great Barrier Reef stretches over a distance of around 2300km down the coast of northern Queensland, starting from near the tip of Cape York, Australia's most northern point, going down to the town of Bundaberg, which is around 360km north of Brisbane. The reef lies close to the coast, sometimes only 15 kilometres offshore while at other times it is around 150 kilometres offshore. It is made up of around 3000 separate coral reefs and makes up 10% of the world's coral reefs. An interesting fact is that it is the only living thing which can be seen from space.

The reef and the islands within it are an incredibly beautiful and rich environment. It contains more than 400 types of living coral, around 1500 different species of tropical fish, over 200 species of birds and around 20 types of reptiles including turtles, sea snakes and crocodiles. The colours of the coral and the underwater life have to be seen to be believed. There are over 900 islands and cays.



Picture by csharker. <https://pixabay.com/en/users/csharker-43284/>

The Great Barrier Reef is a precious world resource. In a sense, it belongs to the entire world and Australia has the responsibility of looking after it. To show how important it is for the world, UNESCO listed it in 1981 as a world heritage site. This means that its importance to humanity is recognized by the United Nations and it is agreed that it must be protected and preserved. Australia's government and Australians understand this and we take our responsibility very seriously with regard to protecting the reef.

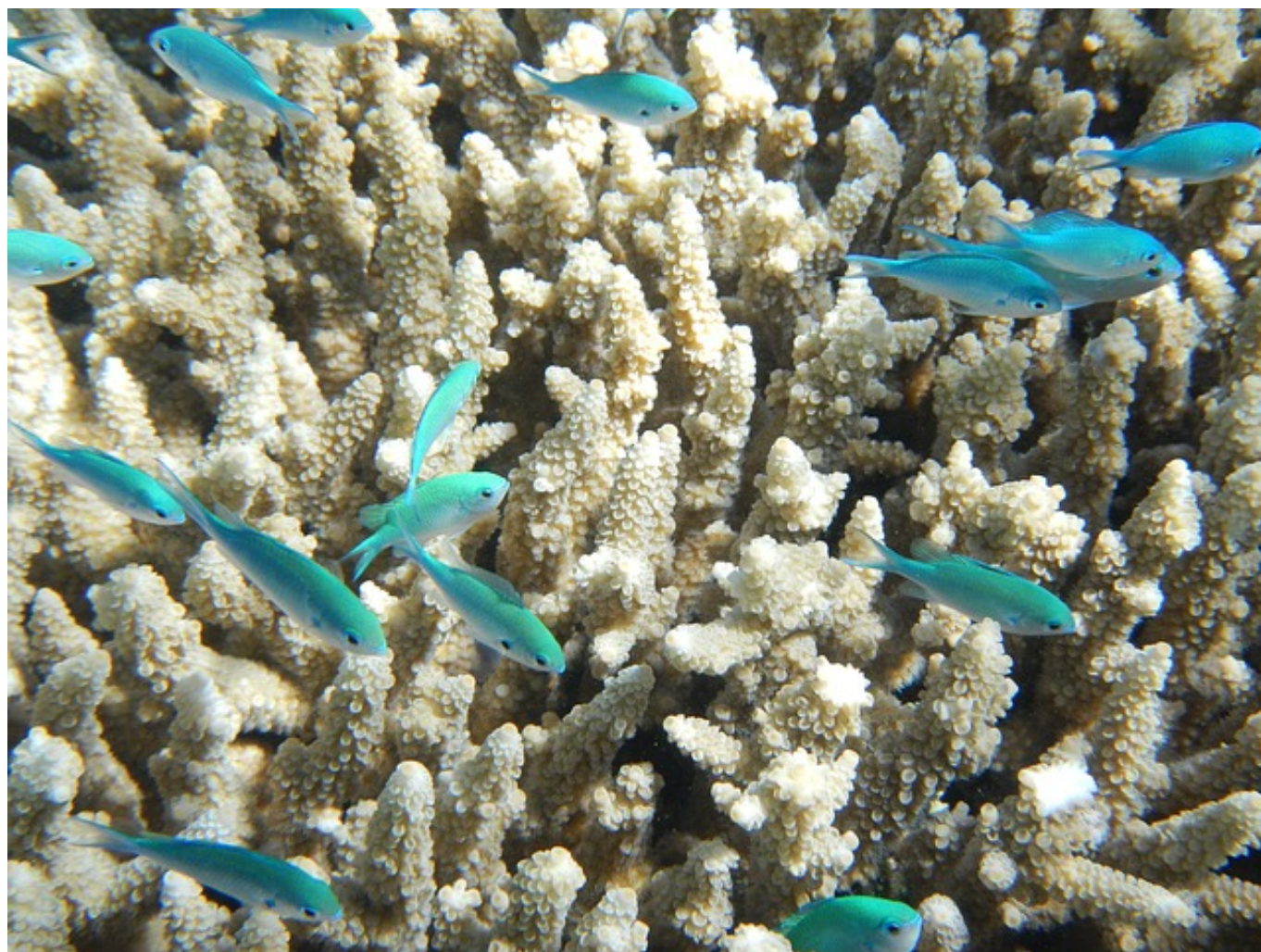
In 1975, to help protect and preserve the reef, the Australian Government created a special marine park which covers most of the area occupied by the reef. To manage the park, and hence protect the reef, a special organization was created. It is called the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and it is controlled by the Federal Government, in partnership with the Queensland Government.

The Authority protects the marine park and the reef by creating rules and regulations which all users of the marine park must follow. It also monitors what is happening within the park to make sure that the marine park and the reef remain protected, while still allowing people to enjoy the wonderful sights of the reef and enjoy the reef environment. It issues permits to companies and other groups so they can use the park while following all the rules designed to protect the reef and its environment. It also has a key role in educating everybody about the marine park and the reef, so that activities by humans on and near the reef are properly controlled.

The reef certainly needs to be protected, so the authority has a very important job to do. The main dangers

to the reef are from human activity, although there are also some natural dangers to the reef. For example, large ships must navigate through that area and it would be so easy for the reef to be damaged, especially if a ship was to run aground and possibly spill oil or fuel which would damage the reef. Ships must only use approved routes through and near the reef, which helps to reduce the risk of an accident. There are also special ships' pilots, who can guide visiting ships safely through the reef if required. Despite that, there have been around 1600 ship wrecks in or near the reef. The last one occurred in 2010 when a large ship ran aground, spilling oil onto the reef.

Another danger to the reef is from tourism. Every year around 2 million people visit the reef. I'm not surprised that so many people go to the reef, not only Australians but also people from all over the world. After all, it's a beautiful place so it's important that people can go there to experience it. But when so many people visit one place, there is a real danger that it can be damaged. Imagine if each person took away a small piece of the reef as a memento. Very soon the reef would be destroyed. To help prevent this, the entire reef has been divided into special zones. When you are visiting the reef, you need to follow the rules about what you can and can't do in each zone. It is said that the best things to collect from the reef are memories and photographs – that way the reef will be preserved for future generations to enjoy.



Picture by csharker. <https://pixabay.com/en/users/csharker-43284/>

There are also many rivers which flow into the sea adjacent to the reef. As you might expect, pollution from these rivers in Northern Queensland is also a concern for the reef. These rivers pass through farm lands where fertilizers and insecticides are regularly used. Of course, some of these chemicals will be washed into the rivers and end up in the ocean around the reef, especially after periods of flood. These chemicals can actually kill the coral so this is something which the government and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority are helping farmers to reduce, so as to keep the reef healthy.

Another impact on the reef is climate change. As the temperature of the ocean slowly increases, this affects the health of the coral and can make them turn white, a process called bleaching. Bleached coral can die so this is a major concern. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has a plan to help make the reef more resilient to climate change.

In addition to the effects from human activities, the reef also has a natural enemy – the crown of thorns starfish. This large starfish loves to eat coral and an outbreak of starfish can quickly destroy a coral reef. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has a program to remove and control these starfish. This will require continuing effort into the future.

Incredibly, like many Australians, I have not yet seen the Great Barrier Reef. I do have friends who have visited North Queensland and who have taken a trip out to the reef. They say the beauty of the reef and its amazing abundance of sea life is something really worth seeing. One day I will make the journey and see it for myself.

https://youtu.be/F_LnepMSuM4

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

[WpProQuiz 81]

Vocabulary

abundance = when there is a lot of something

accident = when a mistake is made and a ship, car or truck hits something

adjacent = next to

amazing = when people find something hard to believe. When something is very, very good

approved routes = an agreed and safe way through

belongs = when something is owned

cays = small islands made of coral

chemicals = special types of materials used to make things – often poisonous

coast = where the land meets the sea

contains = holds

controlled = when someone can decide what happens

created = made

damaged = when something is broken

dangers = things that might hurt a person or thing

designed = made according to certain rules

despite that = even though, nonetheless, notwithstanding

destroyed = when something is completely broken into small pieces

effort = work

entire = everything, all

environment = the natural world, or part of it, in which we live

experience = to see, feel, smell, touch or hear something

fertilizers = special substances or chemicals to make plants grow better

future generations = your children and their children

heritage site = a place which is so important that it must not be lost or changed

humanity = all of the people on earth

impact = effect

incredibly = when something is hard to believe

insecticides = special substances to kill insects

marvel = something which is very, very special

momento = a small piece of something which reminds you of it

monitors = watches and records what is happening

natural = things made by nature, not made by man humans

navigate = to find your way

occupied = when a place is filled up by something

occurred = happened

offshore = away from the coast, in the direction of the sea

organization = a group of people who work together

partnership = when you work with another person or group

permits = an agreement that you can do a certain thing

pilots = people who know the way and can show you the way

pollution = when land, air or water is made dirty

precious = when people love something very much

preserved = when something is kept the same, without changing

properly = correctly

protected = when something cannot be damaged or hurt

recognized = when you know that something is true

reduce = lower, make smaller

regulations = rules

reptiles = a type of animal which includes snakes, lizards and crocodiles

resilient = strong and able to recover quickly when damaged or hurt

resource = something which is useful

responsibility = when you must do something

rich = (here) when there are many, many different things in the environment

risk = when something is likely to happen

run aground = when a ship sails into water that is too shallow

separate = (here) when things are not together

space = the place away from the earth

species = a type of animal or plant

spill = to spread something around

starfish = a type of sea creature in the shape of a star

stretches = when something goes from one place to another place far away

tip = the top

tourism = when people visit a place to relax, have fun and see the sights

tropical = found near the equator

types = varieties, styles, categories

UNESCO = United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

wonders = things which are very, very special and wonderful

wrecks = when a ship has crashed into rocks or sunk

zones = areas.

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