

Ports and shipping

What does the Outlook Report say about ports and shipping?

Ports and shipping through the Great Barrier Reef are important to industries and services in regional Queensland. Exports from the region also contribute to the economy. Increased mining and industrial activity over the last 10 years has led to a gradual increase in the number of voyages undertaken through the Great Barrier Reef Region.

Use of the Region for ports and shipping is mainly driven by global economic factors and is not reliant on the health of the ecosystem. Mining and industry are also fuelling growth in ports and shipping with proposals for significant expansion in at least seven of the 10 major trading ports along the Great Barrier Reef coast.

Climate change is likely to result in rising sea levels, and more intense storms and cyclones. There is likely to be flow-on effects to the communities and industries that depend on the Great Barrier Reef. The likely impacts on ports and shipping include increased costs of shipping resources, increased energy demand and demand for construction techniques that reduce the likelihood of damage to infrastructure.

Key factors that affect vulnerability and adaptive capacity of a settlement such as a port include the type, size and location of infrastructure, the socio-economic characteristics of surrounding regional communities and institutional arrangements to respond to the effects of climate change.

How effectively is shipping managed in the Marine Park?

Shipping in the Great Barrier Reef Region is managed by a number of Australian and Queensland Government agencies, while port management is the responsibility of the Queensland Government. Shipping rules are uniform nationally and there is high-level coordination of everyday activities and incident response.

Most routine shipping activities have negligible consequences on the Marine Park and almost all ships travel safely along the designated shipping routes of the Great Barrier Reef with little, if any, impact.

The Outlook Report identifies that comprehensive management arrangements mean that there have been few incidents threatening Great Barrier Reef values relative to the large number of shipping movements in and through the Region. Ports management appears to have protected natural values, but the independence of the individual port corporations makes consistency across jurisdictions a challenge.

Although subject to careful environmental impact management, further development of ports within the Great Barrier Reef Region (such as an increase in construction of new shipping berths and shipping channels or an increase in maintenance or dredging activities) are likely to have local impacts on the marine environment.

There are 10 major trading ports along the Great Barrier Reef coast.

The facilities associated with most of these ports are within the Great Barrier Reef Region, but not within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

Over 3500 ships operated in the Great Barrier Reef in 2007, making over 9700 voyages.

Shipping cargo includes coal, sugar, iron ore, timber, oil, chemicals, live cattle and general cargo.