

Coastal development

What does the Outlook Report say about coastal development?

Coastal development is increasing the loss of coastal habitats that support the Great Barrier Reef. Human population increases within the Great Barrier Reef catchment are projected to be nearly two per cent per annum. This will place greater pressure on the ecosystem and increase use of the Great Barrier Reef Region.

Coastal development is affecting coastal habitats that support the Great Barrier Reef. Mining and industrial activity has been driving population growth throughout the Great Barrier Reef catchment at rates faster than the Australian average, especially along the coast.

Extensive areas of habitats that support the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem have been infilled, modified or cleared. All these habitats are important as feeding and breeding grounds for marine species and as sediment traps and nutrient filters for water entering the Great Barrier Reef.

The litter transported to the ocean by urban runoff may be ingested by wildlife such as marine turtles and seabirds or cause entanglement especially as the feeding strategies of some animals means that they are naturally attracted to areas of debris. Ingestion may interfere with feeding and cause intestinal blockages, poisoning, or other injuries that may result in death. Debris on beaches can interfere with a marine turtle's ability to nest successfully.

Changes to the ecosystem because of climate change are likely to have serious implications for dependent industries and communities. The potential for increased sea level rise and weather variability (including an increase in cyclones) will affect coastal development and planning.

How effectively is coastal development managed?

In many areas, population growth is severely stretching local government infrastructure and facilities and leading to degradation of coastal ecosystems. A growing population leads to an increase in infrastructure and services and if poorly planned and implemented, these can further modify the coastal environment and cause sedimentation, water quality issues and drainage impacts.

Increasing coastal development and consequent impacts on coastal ecosystems remains an ongoing factor affecting the long-term health and resilience of the Great Barrier Reef ecosystem.

The Outlook Report recognises that management of issues like coastal development is challenging given the broad scale and complex jurisdiction involved. The Report identifies integrated planning, knowledge and compliance in managing coastal development as requiring improvement.

There are 72 coastal urban centres (i.e. populations greater than 200) directly adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef coast, with four centres of populations greater than 50 000.

It has been variously estimated that 70 to 90 per cent of coastal wetlands have been lost and many vegetation types on the remaining dune systems are now rated as 'of concern' or 'endangered.'

There is expected to be a 40 per cent increase in the population living in the Great Barrier Reef catchment by 2026.