

HD **Obama: protect Barrier Reef from climate change**

BY Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow at University of Canberra

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US president Barack Obama has given Australia a sharp prod on climate change, saying he wanted his future grandchildren to be able to enjoy the Great Barrier Reef.

Obama, [addressing an enthusiastic audience](#) including mostly young people at the University of Queensland, also wryly referred to the “healthy debate” that had taken place in Australia on the climate issue.

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“Here in the Asia-Pacific nobody has more at **stake** when it comes to thinking about and then acting on climate change,” he said.

“Here a climate that increases in temperature will mean more extreme and frequent storms, more flooding, rising seas that submerge Pacific islands. Here in Australia it means longer droughts, more wildfires. The incredible natural glory of the Great Barrier Reef is threatened.”

Obama said that worldwide, the past summer was the hottest on record. “No nation is immune, and every nation has the responsibility to do its part.”

He said one of the things that the US and Australia had in common was that they produced a lot of carbon. Partly this was the legacy of wide open spaces and the frontier mentality and an incredible abundance of resources. “So historically we have not been the most **energy** efficient of nations – which means we’ve got to step up,” he said.

In the US, carbon pollution was near its lowest levels in almost two decades, and under his climate action plan “we intend to do more”.

In Beijing, Obama announced [new post-2020 goals](#) as part of a deal with **China** which set out a timetable for peaking its emissions.

Obama said the reason the **China** commitment was so important was because if **China**, with its large population, had the same per capita emissions as advanced economies like the US or Australia the planet wouldn’t stand a chance.

“So them setting up a target sends a powerful message to the world that all countries – whether you are a developed country, a developing country or somewhere in between – you’ve got to be able to overcome old divides, look squarely at the science and reach a strong global climate agreement next year.

“And if **China** and the United States can agree on this, then the world can agree on this – we can get this done and it is necessary for us to get it done.”

Obama said he had not had time to go to the Great Barrier Reef but “I want to come back, and I want my daughters to be able to come back, and I want them to be able to bring their daughters or sons to visit. And I want that there 50 years from now.”

Obama [announced](#) the US would contribute US\$3 **billion** to the Green Climate Fund to help developing nations deal with climate change.

Obama said in a message directed particularly to the young people in the audience that combating climate change could not be the work of government alone. Citizens, especially the next generation, had to keep raising their voices. “You deserve to live your lives in a world that is cleaner, that is healthier, that is sustainable. But that’s not going to happen unless you are heard.”

He said it was in the nature of the world that “those of us who start getting grey hair are a little set in our ways.

“We make investments and companies start depending on certain **energy** sources, and change is uncomfortable and difficult.

“And that’s why it is so important for the next generation to be able to step in and say ... it doesn’t have to be this way. We have the power to imagine a new future in a way that some of the older folk don’t always have.”

Obama reaffirmed the commitment he made when visiting Australia three years ago to deepen America’s commitment to the Asia-Pacific region. He said that when he became president, leaders and people across this region were expressing their desire for greater American engagement.

“So as president, I decided that given the importance of this region to American security, American prosperity, the United States would rebalance our foreign policy and play a larger and lasting role in this region.

“That’s exactly what we’ve done. Today, our alliances, including with Australia, are stronger than they’ve ever been. American exports to this region have reached record levels. We’ve deepened our cooperation with emerging powers and regional organisations.”

The US had an “ironclad” commitment to the sovereignty, independence and the security of every ally “and will expand co-operation between allies, because we believe we are stronger when we stand together”.

He said the US would continue to modernise its defence posture across the region, and continue broadening its co-operation with emerging powers and emerging economies.

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult to, own shares in or receive funding from any **company** or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has no relevant affiliations.

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