

# The Sydney Morning Herald

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HD **Tourism rise risks loving reef to death**  
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Massive new tourism resorts with price tags of more than \$5 billion on the Great Barrier Reef have raised concerns the fragile World Heritage-listed region is in danger of being loved to death.

The projects include the controversial \$4.3 billion Aquis Great Barrier Reef Resort proposed for Yorkeys Knob in Cairns – including a casino, nine luxury hotels, a sports stadium and high-end retail shopping.

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Then there is the state government-approved \$600 million resort on Great Keppel **Island**, stage one of which is set to open mid-next year.

For the tourism lobby the developments are good news for an industry that raises \$5.7 billion in revenue annually, attracting hundreds of thousands of domestic and international visitors. But views differ on how the tourism developments affect the reef's fragile ecosystem.

Daniel Gschwind, chief executive of the Queensland Tourism Industry Council, does not believe the investments will adversely affect the reef. He says the tourism industry is "absolutely dependent" on the reef's sustainability and preservation.

"To maintain the level of income that's generated by tourism to the reef and the 50,000 jobs it generates, we depend on its ecological integrity being maintained, because that's our competitive advantage and what sets us apart from other like attractions," Mr Gschwind says.

Wendy Tubman, co-ordinator of the North Queensland Conservation Council, says the developments were starting to risk "loving the reef to death, of killing the very thing that people have come to see".

"The unprecedented level of tourism development now being proposed is over the top, with some of the proposed developments being the equivalent of small towns," Ms Tubman says.

Citing research released by the Australian Institute of Marine Science in 2012, which showed coral cover has decreased by 50 per cent over the preceding 27 years, Ms Tubman says that, "the reef is just not able to take more human-induced impacts without great risk of collapse."

And while each development may have only a small impact, we could be seeing "death by 1000 cuts", as we do not yet know what the cumulative impacts will be.

Mr Gschwind counters with a UNESCO mission report on the reef from 2012 that found the tourism industry did not pose any significant threat to the reef.

The UNESCO report makes the following observation: "**Commercial** marine tourism is now planned and managed sustainably, with minimal environmental and social impacts such as crowding. Through this continuous, effective management, **commercial** marine tourism is no longer considered as a major threat to the OUV [outstanding universal value] of the **property**, provided current management measures continue."

A research scientist at James Cook University's Australian Centre for Tropical Freshwater Research, Jon Brodie, says tourism is a relatively minor issue when it comes to the reef's future.

"Great Barrier Reef tourism has been known for a long time to have minimal impacts on the reef," Mr Brodie says.

"It's the least of our problems, given that we're not managing port development at all, we're not doing anything about climate change, or about agricultural pollution."

#### 1. Port Douglas

The 170-room QT Port Douglas **hotel** opened in June 2012 after a \$6.5 million revamp.

#### 2. Yorkeys Knob, Cairns

First stage of \$4.2 billion Aquis Great Barrier Reef Resort approved. To include nine luxury hotels, an 18-hole golf course, a 25,000-seat sports stadium and a casino.

#### 3. Dunk **Island**

Reopened for day-trippers after the 2011 cyclone.

#### 4. Orpheus **Island**

Boutique five-star resort re-opened in 2012 after a \$5 million revamp.

#### 5. Hayman **Island**

\$50 million makeover with plans to re-open in July as One&Only Hayman. Owner Mulpha Australia to continue expanding the Hayman Private Residences and Hayman Marina Residences.

#### 6. Airlie Beach

Town has received a \$23 million facelift. Peppers Coral Coast Resort rebranded to Peppers Airlie Beach.

Stage two of Port of Airlie includes a second resort and integrated ferry, cruise and bus terminal. Hawaiian **property group** Outrigger has opened the first stage of the Boathouse Apartments port development.

#### 7. Long **Island**

The 23-room beachfront Palm Bay Resort, previously under Peppers management, has relaunched as a boutique health and event centre.

Long **Island**-Paradise Bay **Island** Resort re-opened in May 2013.

#### 8. Hamilton **Island**

Owners exploring development of another luxury resort to allow families, unlike the existing Qualia Resort. Hamilton's Beach Club Resort to undergo multimillion-dollar makeover this year.

#### 9. Dent **Island**

New 100-room **hotel** and 200-home **site** approved.

#### 10. Lindeman **Island**

Formerly Club Med's only Australian resort; **sold** to **Chinese** investors for \$12 million and slated for a \$200 million makeover.

#### 11. Great Keppel **Island**

New \$600 million resort approved, including 750 resort villas, 300 apartments, a **hotel**, marina and 18-hole golf course.

The reef in numbers

344,400

Size in square kilometres of Great Barrier Reef Marine **Park**

3000

Number of coral reefs

1050

Number of islands, inshore mangrove islands and coral cays

2000

Depth in metres of continental slopes on outer reefs

820

Estimated number of tourism operators\*

1500

Estimated number of vessels and aircraft allowed to operate in marine **park**

SOURCES: GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE **PARK** AUTHORITY; GREATBARRIERREEF.ORG  
\*BASED ON 2006 FIGURES

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