

'Make or break': UN environment head Erik Solheim warns against coal projects



Peter Hannam



10 reading now

 SHARE

 TWEET



MORE

The world's coral reefs are at a "make or break point" and every nation should think twice about developing new coal mines, including those planned for Queensland, the United Nations environment chief Erik Solheim said.

Mr Solheim, in Australia on a whirlwind trip to meet coral experts and visit the Great Barrier Reef, said coral reefs were one of the planet's most important ecosystems, home to a quarter of the

Discovery

Fairfax Media

has a special party trick ...



MORE SCIENCE VIDEOS

PLAYING NOW

Peacock spider's dance for love

UP NEXT

Collecting whale blow mucus by drone

Climate change drove decline of Aussie ...

BM. mei

Peacock spider's dance for love

Five species of peacock spiders have been discovered in the Grampians, but you'll need to look closely for their stunning performance.

However, recent severe coral bleaching caused by warming waters was among their leading threats.

"Reefs are in peril," Mr Solheim told Fairfax Media at the start of the International Year of the Reef, aimed at lifting awareness of their plight.

RELATED ARTICLES

['Serious case of negligence': Scientists blast controls on coral-eating starfish](#)

[Near-record hot 2017, heat burst point to warming world](#)

"We have seen a huge amount of bleaching incidents in reefs all over the planet and their rapid decline," he said. "We are at a make or break point where we can take possible steps forward or [oversee] the decline of the reefs."

All countries should reconsider opening new coal regions – such as Queensland's Galilee Basin where India's Adani Group is among firms planning mega-mines – not least because solar and wind ventures were now highly competitive.

"Those who open up a lot of coal now may not only have an environmental problem but very soon [also] an economic problem because coal is more costly than renewables," he said.



BREAKING NEWS ALERT
Get the latest news and updates emailed straight to your inbox.

SIGN UP

By submitting your email you are agreeing to Fairfax Media's [terms and conditions](#) and [privacy policy](#).

He noted New York City had not only divested \$US5 billion (\$6.27 billion) in fossil fuel assets, but begun suing Shell, ExxonMobile and other oil giants for climate damage.



UN environment chief Erik Solheim says coal's time is running out. Photo: Facebook

"You see activists suing and big investors asking 'why we are putting our money into something which can be an economic liability and a political liability for the future?'"

This year had also begun with Fiji seeking nomination of its Great Sea Reef – the third-largest in the southern hemisphere – for added protection as a Ramsar site. "That's a huge step forward," Mr Solheim said.



Richard Fitzpatrick inspects recent bleaching of coral in the Great Barrier Reef at Vlasoff Reef near Cairns. About half the corals have died in the past two years. Photo: Christian Miller

He also hailed the decision on Tuesday by the European Commission to pass its first Europe-wide plan, a move that would force all plastic packaging to be recyclable by 2030.

MOST POPULAR

- 1

Study trims Earth's warming response range as greenhouse gases rise
- 2

Weekend heatwave to meet last year's record number of hot days
- 3

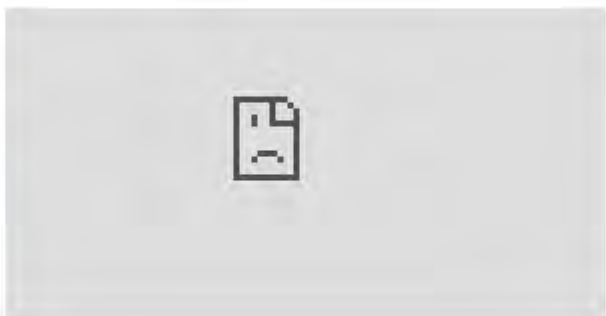
'Serious case of negligence': Scientists blast controls on coral-eating starfish
- 4

2017 solar installations jump by half

4

2017 solar installations jump by nair to hit record 1GW
- 5

Wallaby helped catch the Harbour Bridge wallaby



PROPERTY NEWS

Emily moved north for cheap rent, now ...

The Sydney suburbs set to see big ...

FOLLOW THE AGE

Get notified when the big things happen.





NEWSLETTERS