

World Heritage Committee agrees not to place Great Barrier Reef on ‘in danger’ list

Move follows fierce lobbying campaign by the Australian government which said it was blindsided by Unesco recommendation

The 21-country World Heritage Committee has ignored a scientific assessment from the UN’s science and culture organisation that the reef was clearly in danger from climate change. Photograph: Sarah Lai/AFP/Getty Images

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The **Great Barrier Reef** will not be placed on a list of world heritage sites “in danger” after a global lobbying effort from Australia against the proposed listing.

The 21-country World Heritage Committee on Friday ignored a scientific assessment from the UN’s science and culture organisation, **Unesco**, that the reef was clearly in danger from climate change and should be placed on the list.

Unesco will instead be asked to carry out a mission to the 2,300km reef and Australia will need to send a progress report to the agency by February 2022.

Ahead of Friday’s meeting, the Australian government had conducted a fierce lobbying campaign to block the danger listing. More than a dozen ambassadors flew from Canberra to Cairns, Queensland, for a **snorkelling trip on the reef**.

Australia’s environment minister, Sussan Ley, was dispatched to Europe on an **RAAF diplomatic jet** to visit Budapest, Madrid, Sarajevo, Paris, Oman and the Maldives.

Australia – a major producer and exporter of coal and gas – initially **won support from oil-rich Saudi Arabia and Bahrain**, both members of the committee, to delay any decision on the danger listing until at least 2023.

A document tabled to the committee earlier this week showed other members of the committee supporting Australia were Saint Kitts and Nevis, Ethiopia, Hungary, Mali, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Russia and Spain.

Norway forced a change at the meeting, early on Friday afternoon Paris time, with the committee agreeing the reef should come before the committee again next year.

Unesco's call was the first time a world heritage site had been recommended to be placed on the "in danger" list primarily because of the impact of climate heating.

Ley had claimed Australia was "blindsided" and she accused Unesco of allowing the decision to be politicised. The minister argued the agency should have visited the reef before making the recommendation.

Unesco **rejected those accusations in public statements** and in a face-to-face meeting with Ley in Paris and said the "in danger" recommendation **should have been seen as a global call to action** for the reef.

Environment groups **in Australia were united** in backing the "in danger" call, alongside a group of **celebrities and prominent figures** including UK actor and activist Joanna Lumley, Aquaman actor Jason Momoa and Prince Albert of Monaco.

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