

Future Problem Solving Program Australia Inc

Habitats: Australian Final 2001 Middle / Senior Division

Australia 2025

Lachlan Nguyen, 45, environmental psychologist for the State Government of Northern Territory, as interviewed by ABC (Inc)

10 " What we have here is a travesty of justice as far as the ancient environment of our continent is concerned. In the latter parts of the 20th century, the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) was seen as one of the world's natural wonders, with most of the fragile environment covered by the regulations of a World Heritage listing and the establishment of a Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The water was clear, free of contaminants that would cloud the water and prevent the sun's rays from reaching the living coral under the water, or that would poison the delicate habitat of the coral polyp. World Heritage status meant that the area was free from mining and exploration for oil. All this was covered by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act of 1975, which seemed to give the Australian people some sense of security that one of our national icons – and let's be honest, an international icon which has given us substantial economic benefit through recreational fishing, ecotourism and all its related services – was going to be saved from environmental vandalism. A 25-year Strategic Plan for the Reef was put in place in 1994 – the future of the Reef seemed assured, despite the impact
20 of worldwide phenomena like global warming which has led to the death of part of the GBR because of coral bleaching.

But the lifespan of that plan ran out six years ago, and what do we have in its place? A lot of vacillation and passing the buck between state and Federal governments that has seen the vacuum filled by economic pressures. In the 1990s, the Reef accounted for about 40% of Australia's economic benefit from ecotourism: now it is down to less than 20%. Back in 2001, prawns and other forms of aquaculture were the growth industry of North Queensland: the habitat in the waters off the coast and the GBR was ideal for a wide range of crustaceans and molluscs. These days, farmers have left the industry in droves as polluted water has downgraded the reputation for quality produce on which their sales depended. "

30 Opinions are divided as to the reasons for these changes. Some local experts have speculated about the contribution of poor land management practices on the mainland adjacent to the GBR, such as the continual clearing of land for agriculture in Central North Queensland and the excessive use of fertilisers and herbicides. Others blame the impact of global warming, the effects of which have increased the pressure on areas such as Queensland to produce even more and more of Australia's food as the southern states get drier.

The political aspects of the GBR are seen by some people as being of more fundamental importance. In 2020, the Commonwealth Government abandoned the EPBC (Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act) and, in turn, the GBR Marine Park Act , the legislation which had set up the GBR Marine Park Authority to manage the use of the Reef as a whole. As a consequence, the Reef is being exploited for oil and natural gas using the new system of sonic drilling, itself a child of the techniques of seismic testing used for oil exploration at the beginning of the century.
40 Many feel that the state and federal governments have both given in to pressure exerted by the resource companies over a number of years because it was politically expedient, primarily because of the increasing global shortage of petroleum. Environmental technical engineers lay the blame on the unseen long term effects of sonic drilling on the coral structure itself, using these as an example of the increasing unreliability of the compulsory Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) undertaken before any habitat is developed for use. Whatever the case, the Great Barrier Reef is now crumbling away and is rapidly deteriorating as a marine habitat.

The impact of the decline of the Great Barrier Reef is being felt all over Australia as the moral implications of what is being done starts to enter the consciousness of the new generation of leaders. Environmental psychologists like Lachlan are riding a wave of prosperity. Governments, non-government organisations such as Greenpeace – still surviving the internal feud that almost killed it five years ago – and entrepreneurs employ professionals like Lachlan to help them resolve the moral dilemmas about environmental decision making. In a final attempt to break the nation out of this environmental deadlock, the Commonwealth government has hired your international team of expert problem solvers to address the issues at hand and to suggest a solution that provides more hope for the survival of the Great Barrier Reef habitat.
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Habitats: Australian Final 2001
Junior Division

Australia 2025

Lachlan Nguyen, 45, environmental psychologist for the State Government of Northern Territory, as interviewed by ABC (Inc)

" What we have here is a disaster, as far as the ancient environment of our continent is concerned. In the latter parts of the 20th century, the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) was seen as one of the world's natural wonders, with most of the fragile environment covered by the regulations of a World Heritage listing and the establishment of a Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The water was clear, free of contaminants that would cloud the water and prevent the sun's rays from reaching the living coral under the water, or that would poison the delicate habitat of the coral polyp. World Heritage status meant that the area was free from mining and exploration for oil. All this was covered by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act of 1975, which seemed to give the Australian people some sense of security that one of our national symbols was going to be saved from environmental vandalism. A 25-year Strategic Plan for the Reef was put in place in 1994 – the future of the Reef seemed guaranteed, despite the impact of worldwide phenomena like global warming which has led to the death of part of the GBR because of coral bleaching.

But the lifespan of that plan ran out six years ago, and what do we have in its place? A lot of passing the buck between state and Federal governments as to who is responsible for the health of the GBR. In the 1990s, the Reef accounted for almost half of Australia's economic benefit from ecotourism: now it is down to less than 20%. Back in 2001, prawns were the growth industry of North Queensland: the habitat in the waters off the coast and the GBR was ideal for a wide range of crustaceans and molluscs. These days, farmers have left the fish farming industry in droves as polluted water has downgraded the quality of their produce, on which their sales depended. "

Opinions are divided as to the reasons for these changes. Some local experts have thought that poor land management practices on the mainland next to the GBR might be to blame, such as the continual clearing of land for agriculture in Central North Queensland or the excessive use of fertilisers and herbicides. Others blame the impact of global warming, the effects of which have continued to increase over recent years.

The political aspects of the GBR are seen by some people as being of more importance. In 2020, the Commonwealth Government abandoned the GBR Marine Park Act , the legislation which had set up the GBR Marine Park Authority to manage the use of the Reef as a whole. As a consequence, the Reef is being exploited for oil and natural gas using the new system of sonic drilling, which uses concentrated sound waves to drill through rock. Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) must now be undertaken before any habitat is developed for use, but environmental technical engineers do not believe these studies are reliable enough to predict potential damage. Whatever the case, the Great Barrier Reef is now crumbling away and is rapidly deteriorating as a marine habitat.

The impact of the decline of the Great Barrier Reef is being felt all over Australia, as the implications of what is being done starts to concern the new generation of leaders. Environmental psychologists like Lachlan are in great demand. Governments, non-government organisations and entrepreneurs employ professionals like Lachlan to help them work through the moral questions about environmental decision making. The Commonwealth government has hired your international team of expert problem solvers to address the issues at hand and to suggest a solution that provides more hope for the survival of the Great Barrier Reef habitat.