

THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

Coral reefs have been called the rainforests of the ocean because they are so rich in biodiversity. They are home to a quarter of all marine life. The largest coral reef system on our planet is the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. It stretches for more than 2000 km and can even be seen from space. This system of reefs and islands provides refuge to an amazing variety of marine plants and animals. It is home to more than 3000 types of shell and over 1600 fish species, as well as over 600 different corals.

The Great Barrier Reef has built up over millions of years, but today its future is at risk, and this is due to human activity. Pollution and overfishing have affected the delicate balance of the environment. As we burn fossil fuels the water temperatures are rising and the seas are becoming more acidic. This causes corals to bleach and die. In 2016 more than half the corals in some parts of the northern Great Barrier Reef turned white through coral bleaching. Globally, over the last thirty years the world has lost half of its coral.

The Great Barrier Reef is one of the world's most popular tourist attractions. It brings in well over US\$5.7 billion per year. But its value goes beyond that. A world without coral reefs would be a much poorer place for us all. We can take steps to stop climate change and protect the natural wonders of our coral reefs.

