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SCUBA News is published by SCUBA Travel.

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What's New at SCUBA Travel?



[Diving Vietnam](#)

Vietnam has 3260 km of coastline: discover the main diving areas and the best places to go in our newly updated guide. <http://www.scubatravel.co.uk/pacific/vietnam.html>



[Diving the Galapagos](#)

Read about the incredible diving in the Galapagos, the world's first marine heritage site. We've updated our guide with more dive sites and liveaboards reviewed. <http://www.scubatravel.co.uk/americas/galapagos.html>



[Underwater Photos in Djibouti](#)

Djibouti, at the most southerly end of the Red Sea, is little dived. We have a new photo gallery of some of the underwater life there. <http://www.scubatravel.co.uk/photodjibouti.html>

For regular announcements of what's new at the SCUBA Travel site see our Twitter feed at <http://twitter.com/SCUBANews>,

the Diving Board at <http://www.scubatravel.co.uk/forum/viewforum.php?f=2>

or our Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/SCUBANews>

From the Diving Board

[Best Diving Spot in Australia?](#)

Northern Great Barrier Reef is easily the best diving in Australia. Places like the Ribbon Reefs and Cod Hole are incredible.

Freddo_Frog,

<http://www.scubatravel.co.uk/forum/viewtopic.php?t=1957#p4940>

Disagree? Post at the [Diving Board](#)

World's Largest Marine Reserve: Australia or Maldives?



Two weeks ago Australia announced the creation of the world's largest marine reserve, covering the Great Barrier Reef and the Coral Sea. Oil and gas exploration will be banned but commercial fishing will be allowed in many areas.

Australia's other marine reserves will increase from 27 to 60, covering one third of the nation's seas.

The announcement was broadly welcomed by environmental groups, but they also said that the measures didn't go far enough. They called for places like [Rowley Shoals](#) and [Ningaloo Reef](#) off Western Australia to also be protected.

The IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare) commented that "All three of the recognised blue whale feeding grounds in Australian waters are still open to negative impact from offshore petroleum exploration and production. The Environment Department has had its hands tied throughout the whole process in any attempts to address the threats to marine life from the oil and gas industry. The network, for the most part, addresses areas only where the industry doesn't operate or isn't looking to operate in the future."

Earlier this month a U.N. report said the **Great Barrier Reef was under imminent threat** from industrial development and may be considered for listing as a world heritage site "in danger" in February next year.

Also, allowing commercial fishing threatens marine life sustainability. For example, researchers have found that a Marine Protected Area would only be effective in protecting reef shark populations at Osprey and Shark Reef in the Coral Sea if fishing of sharks was banned.

Meanwhile, days later, the Maldives trumped the Australian declaration when the President announced that the whole of the **Maldives would become a marine reserve** by 2017. The commitment will see the Maldives become the first country in the world to become a marine reserve.

The Maldives economy is built primarily on tourism and fisheries. The marine reserve will allow only sustainable and eco-friendly fishing. It will exclude destructive techniques. Trade in sharks, turtles and many species of fish in the Indian Ocean is already illegal in the Maldives.

Further Reading

[Australia Creates World's Largest Marine Park](#)
[Maldives to Become World's Largest Marine Reserve](#)
[Will Marine Reserve Protect Coral Sea Sharks?](#)

Creature of the Month: The Stromatolite Builders

Part of the joy of diving is a fabulous coral reef: the enormous structure laid down by tiny polyps. Long before polyps were building their reefs, another type of being was building edifices underwater. These were single-celled creatures called cyano-bacteria, whose descendants are not only still around today but are still building underwater.



Stromatolites, as their structures are called, were laid down in shallow seas. Some are tiny; some as big as a house. The finest fossil examples are in Western Australia. A bed there is dated 3430 million years ago! To put that in context, dinosaurs died out just 65 million years ago.

The ancient stromatolite builders were responsible for the release of oxygen into the earth's atmosphere. They combined the sea's calcium salts with carbon dioxide, liberating oxygen. Because of their actions oxygen concentration has risen from 1% to the 21% of recent times.

The stromatolite dominion lasted for more than half the history of life. They have all but faded away now, but some still hang on: building in Shark Bay in Australia and in the Bahamas.

The Australian modern stromatolites in Hamelin Pool where the water is twice as salty as normal seawater. Few predators and competitors can survive these conditions, allowing the microbes to flourish. The water is shallow so plenty of light reaches the cyano-bacteria, letting them photosynthesise. The stromatolites are one of the reasons that Shark Bay was voted a [Marine World Heritage Site](#). The others being its vast sea-grass beds, which are the largest and richest in the world, and its dugong (sea cow) population.

Further Reading:

Diving News From Around the World



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Over 30% of Species Threatened with Extinction

IUCN today released the latest update of their Red List of Threatened Species. The list shows that of the 63,837 species assessed, an alarming 19,817 are threatened with extinction: that's over 30%! Marine-wise, the figures are 36% of skates and ray, 33% of reef building corals and 18% of groupers under threat.

Mexico cancels controversial Baja resort project

Mexico has announced that it is cancelling provisional permits for an enormous, Cancun-sized resort planned for the Baja California shoreline in front of a protected coral reef, an area that is a model for environmental recovery.

Bahrain to expand artificial reefs drive

A major initiative which aims to save Bahrain's depleting fish stocks by placing artificial reefs into the sea in several areas is being expanded following its initial success.

Radar to control illegal fishing in Colombia and Costa Rica

Costa Rica and Colombia have agreed to install a network of 13 radars in Pacific Ocean waters to control illegal fishing and combat organized crime. In the meeting of foreign ministers, the officials of both countries reiterated their interest to implement joint measures against shark finning, among others.

No anchoring areas protect Keppel reefs

Community-initiated no anchoring areas are helping to protect reefs around the Keppel Islands in the southern Great Barrier Reef. Recent surveys in the Keppel Bay region showed that reefs inside the areas off limits to anchoring had much less physical damage than before the protection measures were put in place.

Governments make 'pitiful' progress on oceans

Little has been done to protect marine life since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, conservation scientists conclude. On pledges to protect key habitat and restrict the size of fishing fleets, they say progress has been "pitiful". "Our analysis shows that almost every commitment made by governments to protect the oceans has not been achieved," said Jonathan Baillie, director of conservation at the Zoological Society of London (ZSL).



One in ten natural World Heritage Sites in Danger

UNESCO's World Heritage Committee's annual meeting sees a total of 36 new sites considered for inscription as natural and cultural sites, and a series of monitoring reports on the sites already listed. But if IUCN's recommendations to add four World Heritage sites to the Danger List are accepted, one in ten of the natural World Heritage Sites will be officially "in danger." Among the natural sites under consideration for inscription are Rock Islands Southern Lagoon in Palau.



Reef Check Malaysia to help Sabah Reefs

Reef Check Malaysia, a non-profit organization, has launched a branch in Sabah to better enhance the health status of coral reefs there. On the survey on coral reefs in Semporna, Lim said it has found that activities such as fish bombing and coastal development were destroying the reefs.

Eco-friendly paint prevents spread of alien marine species

New environmentally friendly bottom paints have been developed in Sweden to prevent biofouling on ships' hulls. Such fouling can lead to higher fuel consumption and the spread of alien species that do not belong in the local marine environment.

Scientists hope whale-tracking data can reduce accidental deaths

Scientists are hoping to reduce the number of whales killed from ship strikes and entanglement in fishing nets by identifying high-risk areas along the West Coast of the United States. The WhaleWatch project will use data from the tagging and satellite monitoring of more than 300 whales, and combine it with environmental data and human activities to look for areas where whales and ships are most likely to intersect - and when it is most likely to occur.

How whales open their huge mouths

Researchers have discovered how very large whales co-ordinate their jaw muscles and bones to take gigantic mouthfuls of prey.

Giant reef fish headbutt rivals to score with the opposite Sex

First sighting of ramming behaviour in bumphead parrotfish during competition for females.

Diver finds lost wreck of Pirate King

Maritime archeologists are to investigate the site of a wreck at the Isles of Scilly to discover whether it is the remains of a ship belonging to a legendary pirate king.

Kenya to build Africa's first underwater museum

Construction on the museum, which will be dedicated to the study of marine life and shipwrecks, is set to begin soon.



El Nino weather and climate change threaten survival of baby leatherback sea turtles

When leatherback turtle hatchlings dig out of their nests buried in the sandy Playa Grande beach in northwest Costa Rica, they enter a world filled with dangers. This critically endangered species faces threats that include egg poaching and human fishing practices. Now, Drexel University researchers have found that the climate conditions at the nesting beach affect the early survival of turtle eggs and hatchlings. They predict, based on projections from multiple models, that egg and hatchling survival will drop by half in the next 100 years as a result of global climate change.

Australia Creates World's Largest Marine Park

Australia announced the creation of the world's largest marine reserve, covering the Great Barrier Reef and the Coral Sea. Oil and gas exploration will be banned but commercial fishing will be allowed in many areas.

Maldives to Be World's Largest Marine Reserve

Australia's claim to world's largest marine park was short-lived. Just days afterwards the President of the Maldives announced that all 1192 islands of Maldives to become World's largest marine reserve: the first country in the world to protect their entire sea.

Australia's Great Barrier Reef under clear threat: U.N.

Australia's iconic Great Barrier Reef is under imminent threat from industrial development and may be considered for listing as a world heritage site "in danger" within the next year, a U.N. report said this week.

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