

AUSTRALIA'S GREAT BARRIER REEF HIT BY RECORD BLEACHING

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73pc of surveyed reefs damaged, survey shows

SYDNEY

AUSTRALIA'S Great Barrier Reef is experiencing the most widespread bleaching on record, with 73 per cent of surveyed reefs damaged.

Often dubbed the world's largest living structure, the Great Barrier Reef is a 2,300km-long expanse, home to a stunning array of biodiversity, including more than 600 types of coral and 1,625 fish species.

But aerial surveys conducted by scientists show about 730 out of more than 1,000 reefs spanning the Great Barrier Reef had bleached, government reef authorities said yesterday.

For the first time, extreme bleaching — which is when more than 90 per cent of coral cover has bleached — had occurred everywhere on the Great Barrier Reef.

"The cumulative impacts experienced across the reef this summer have been higher than previous summers," the federally funded Marine Park Authority



This underwater photo taken earlier this month shows bleached and dead coral around Lizard Island on the Great Barrier Reef, located 270km north of the city of Cairns in Australia. AFP PIC

said in a statement.

A separate government report into this summer's event said up to 46 per cent of reefs had experienced record heat stress compared with 2016, when only 20 per cent of reefs were exposed.

This event is the fifth mass bleaching on the reef in the past eight years.

Bleaching occurs when water temperatures rise and coral expel microscopic algae, known as zooxanthellae, to survive.

If high temperatures persist,

the coral can eventually turn white and die.

Experts had warned urgent action was needed to reduce the impacts of coral bleaching, including reducing global emissions and increased local restoration projects. **AFP**