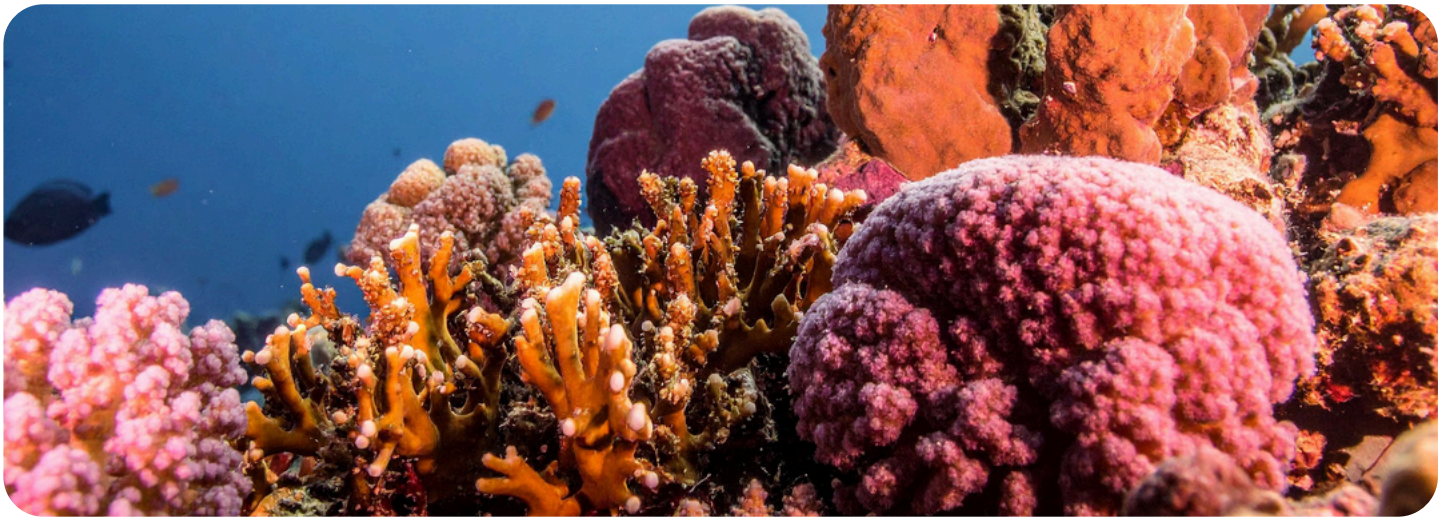
IELTS Proficiency

Topic: Climate Change

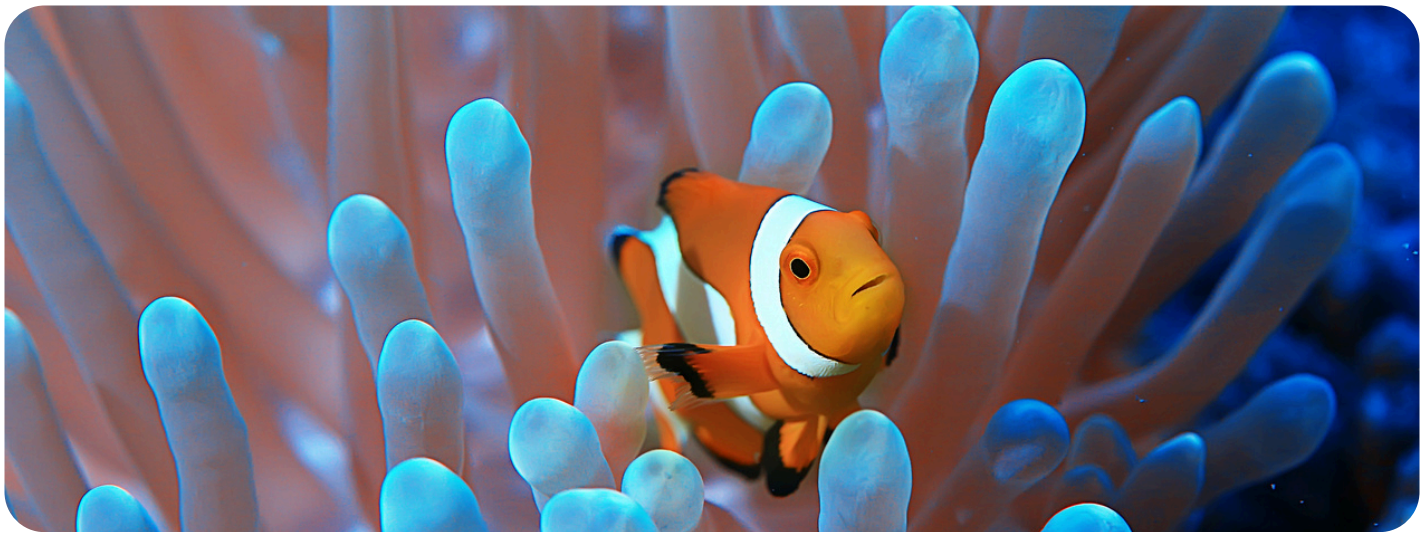
Marine Ecosystems in Crisis: The Great Barrier Reef

Stretching for more than 2,300 kilometers along the coast of Queensland, the Great Barrier Reef is the largest coral system on Earth and one of Australia's greatest natural treasures. However, this vast **ecosystem** is now **under serious threat**. In recent years, sea temperatures in the Coral Sea have reached **record highs**, creating long periods of marine heatwaves. According to Australian scientists, the summer of 2024 was the hottest in four centuries of recorded ocean data, and this rise in temperature is closely linked to **human-driven climate change**. These unusually warm waters have caused widespread coral bleaching and have **placed the entire reef under enormous stress.**

Coral bleaching occurs when sea temperatures rise even slightly above their normal level. Corals live in partnership with microscopic algae called *zooxanthellae*, which provide them with both food and colour. When the water becomes too warm, the corals **expel** these algae and turn white, leaving their limestone skeletons visible. Without their algae, corals lose up to 90 percent of their nutrition and become weak. If the water cools quickly, they can sometimes **recover.** But in the case of the Great Barrier Reef, the heatwaves have lasted too long for many corals to survive. A study from the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) found that at one site, over half of the bleached corals died within months after the 2023–2024 heatwave. Surveys of 124 reefs showed that coral cover in the northern region fell from around 40 percent in 2024 to 30 percent in 2025, while in the southern region it dropped from 39 to 27 percent.

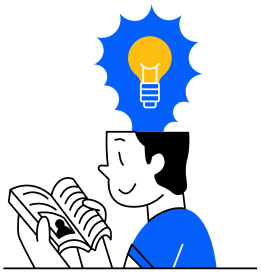


The loss of living coral has many serious consequences for **marine life** and for people. Corals are home to thousands of species of fish, plants, and animals. When the corals die, the reef loses much of its structure, and this reduces **biodiversity.** The flat and damaged reefs attract algae, which spread quickly and stop new coral from growing. This change affects the balance of the entire ecosystem. For people, the effects are also worrying. The Great Barrier Reef supports tourism, fishing, and coastal protection. Around 64,000 jobs **depend directly on it**, and it brings billions of dollars to the Australian economy each year. When corals die and fish populations fall, these industries suffer. The 2024 bleaching event affected nearly three-quarters of the surveyed reefs, and in some shallow areas, more than 90 percent of corals were affected — an event scientists described as the most widespread in history.



In response, scientists and conservation organisations are working hard to reduce further damage. They are using early-warning systems that track rising sea temperatures so that reef managers can limit human activity in affected areas. Research groups are also experimenting with new ideas, such as breeding corals that are more **resistant to heat** and planting them in damaged parts of the reef. Other programmes focus on improving water quality by **reducing pollution** and agricultural run-off that flows into the ocean. Cleaner water helps corals recover faster and makes them stronger against heat stress. Experts call this approach "**building resilience**" — reducing local pressures so that the reef has a better chance to survive in a warmer world.

Despite these efforts, the situation remains extremely serious. Marine heatwaves are becoming more frequent and intense, giving the reef little time to recover between events. Since 2016, there have been five mass bleaching events, each one affecting a larger area than before. The temperature peaks recorded in 2024 were the highest ever measured in the region. Scientists warn that if global temperatures continue to rise, the Great Barrier Reef could lose most of its living coral within decades. Local action can help, but it cannot solve the root of the problem alone. Only global reductions in greenhouse gas emissions can slow ocean warming and give the reef a chance to recover. For now, Australia's greatest natural wonder remains a symbol of both the beauty of marine life and the fragility of our planet's climate.



1.Match the Phrases to the Definitions

- Read each phrase carefully.
- Find the corresponding definition that best describes the phrase.
- Write the letter of the matching definition in the empty column next to the phrase.

	Word or Phrase	Letter	Definition
1	under serious threat		a. to make the amount of harmful substances in the environment smaller
2	record highs		b. able to tolerate high temperatures without being harmed
3	human-driven climate change		c. gases such as carbon dioxide that trap heat and cause global warming
4	place under enormous stress		d. in great danger of being harmed or destroyed
5	expel		e. to strengthen the ability to recover from stress or damage
6	recover		f. a community of living organisms interacting with their environment
7	marine life		g. the variety of species living in a particular area
8	biodiversity		h. the highest level ever measured or reached
9	ecosystem		i. climate change caused mainly by human actions
10	depend on		j. to allow almost no chance for rest or recovery
11	reduce pollution		k. animals and plants that live in the sea
12	heat-resistant		l. to need something or someone in order to function
13	build resilience		m. to cause great pressure or difficulty for something
14	give the reef little time to recover		n. to force something out or make it leave
15	greenhouse gas emissions		o. to return to a normal or healthy state after damage

2.Fill-in-the-Blank Activity – Verbs in Context

Complete the sentences using the correct form of the verbs below. This exercise focuses only on **verbs** from the passage *"Marine Ecosystems in Crisis."*
Use each verb **once only**. Pay attention to verb forms and collocations.

Verbs: *expel, recover, depend on, build resilience, reduce pollution, place under enormous stress, threaten, survive*

1. Rising sea temperatures have _____ coral reefs around the world, leaving them vulnerable to further damage.
2. Corals _____ tiny algae when the water becomes too warm, which causes them to lose their colour.
3. Some species may _____ if conditions improve quickly after a bleaching event.
4. Entire coastal communities _____ the reef for jobs and tourism income.
5. Conservation scientists are working to _____ by making marine ecosystems stronger against heat and storms.
6. Governments are trying to _____ by controlling agricultural waste and chemical run-off.
7. Scientists warn that repeated bleaching events could _____ the future of the Great Barrier Reef.
8. After the 2024 heatwave, some coral colonies began to _____ slowly, showing signs of new growth.

Check your answers at the bottom of the document.

3.Fill-in-the-Blank Activity – Prepositions in Context

Complete each sentence with the correct preposition from the box below. Each preposition may be used more than once.
The number in brackets shows how many times that preposition will appear in total.

Prepositions:
on (×2) from (×2) in (×1) to (×4) for (×1)

1. Thousands of jobs depend ___ the health of the Great Barrier Reef.
2. Some coral colonies slowly recovered ___ bleaching after the heatwave.
3. Prolonged heatwaves often result ___ widespread coral death.
4. Rising sea temperatures lead ___ coral bleaching.
5. Agricultural run-off contributes ___ water pollution near the reef.
6. Conservation projects focus ___ improving water quality.
7. Coral structures protect coastlines ___ strong waves.
8. The reef provides ___ local communities through tourism and fishing.
9. Scientists are trying to respond ___ repeated bleaching events.
10. Some new coral species are more resistant ___ heat.

Check your answers at the bottom of the document.

IELTS Speaking Questions: Topic – Climate Change

Part 1 – Introduction and Interview (4–5 minutes)

1. Do you think the weather in your country has changed in recent years?
2. How do people in your area usually deal with very hot weather?
3. Do you often talk about environmental issues with your friends or family?
4. What kinds of things do you personally do to help the environment?
5. Has climate change affected the way people live in your country?

Part 2 – Individual Long Turn (1–2 minutes)

Describe a time when you became aware of an environmental problem.

You should say:

what the problem was
where and when you noticed it
how it affected people or nature
and explain what you learned or felt about it.

Part 3 – Discussion (4–5 minutes)

1. What are the main causes of climate change today?
2. How can governments encourage people to protect the environment?
3. Do you think technology can help us recover from environmental damage?
4. How do environmental problems in one country affect other countries?
5. In your opinion, are people more aware of climate change now than in the past?
6. Do you think future generations will be more resilient to climate change than we are today?

Before you begin

This practice is based on the same topic as the reading passage — *Marine Ecosystems in Crisis*. Try to **use as many words and expressions from the text as you can** in your speaking answers (for example: *depend on, recover from, reduce pollution, resilient, biodiversity, marine life, result in,* etc.). This will help you develop topic-specific vocabulary and sound more natural and confident in your answers.

Part 1 – Introduction and Interview

You will answer short questions about familiar topics.
Each answer should be around **20–30 seconds long** — usually **2–3 sentences**.
You don't need long explanations here — just direct, relevant answers with a short reason or example.

💡 *Tip*: Try to use simple connectors like *because, for example, actually, to be honest, in my opinion etc.*

Part 2 – Individual Long Turn

You will receive a topic card and have **one minute to prepare** your answer.
Then you must speak for **one to two minutes** without interruption.
You can make short notes before you start — key words only, not full sentences.

💬 *Advice*:

- Begin with a short introduction (e.g. *I'd like to talk about…*).
- Organise your answer clearly — tell the story or describe the situation step by step.
- Use linking phrases such as *first of all, as a result, eventually, what impressed me most was…*
- Try to use some vocabulary from the reading text.

Thinking Questions for Part 2

If your topic is **"Describe a time when you became aware of an environmental problem"**, ask yourself:

1. When did this happen, and where were you?
2. What exactly was the environmental problem?
3. What caused it? (For example: heat, pollution, or overfishing?)
4. Who was affected — people, animals, or nature?
5. How did people respond or try to solve it?
6. How did you feel about the situation?
7. What did you learn from it or what do you think should be done?

Part 3 – Discussion

This part lasts around **4–5 minutes**.
You will discuss **broader and more abstract questions** connected to the same topic.
Your answers should be **longer and more analytical** — about **3–4 sentences per answer**.
Explain your opinion and give examples or reasons.

💡 *Tip*: Use structures like:

- *One reason for this is that…*
- *Another important factor is…*
- *It depends on…*
- *In contrast…*
- *As a result…*

Answer key

- Phrases and Definitions: 1–d, 2–h, 3–i, 4–m, 5–n, 6–o, 7–k, 8–g, 9–f, 10–l, 11–a, 12–b, 13–e, 14–j, 15–c
- Verbs in context: 1–placed under enormous stress, 2–expel, 3–survive, 4–depend on, 5–build resilience, 6–reduce pollution, 7–threaten, 8–recover
- Prepositions: 1–on, 2–from, 3–in, 4–to, 5–to, 6–on, 7–from, 8–for, 9–to, 10–to