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On a mission to protect nature & create awareness

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In our march towards a better world of technology and industrialisation, we often forget the consequences we stake on nature. Jessica Gnanadickam, advisor, Professional Development of Biology Teachers, Sydney Catholic School, Sydney, addressed the students of Stella Maris College, on this issue as part of the diamond jubilee celebrations of the college.

She began her session with a geographical description of the Great Barrier Reef — the only living thing visible from space. The reef which supports an abundance of marine life comprises of over 3000 individual reef systems and hundreds of tropical islands. The reef structure is composed of and built by billions of tiny organisms known as 'coral polyps'. "There are 30 species of whales and dolphins, 21 species of birds, 630 species of echinoderms and more than 400 coral species," she said.

When asked about her association with the Great Barrier Reef, she said, "Though I haven't done any research personally, I have learnt by reading the works of many scholars. That urged me to protect and create awareness about the reef," she shared. About the environmental threats Jessica said, "The greatest threat to the great barrier reef is climate

change, causing ocean warming which in turn leads to coral bleaching, pollution, fishing over, ship wrecks, industrialisation, tropical cyclones etc."

For 40 years the Great Barrier Reef Marine Oark Authority (GBRMPA) has managed this biologically diverse area, using scientific information and input from marine managers, researchers, experts and traditional owner.

"The GBRMPA activities include controlling crown-of-thorns starfish outbreaks, ensuring cumulative impacts are considered when assessing development proposals," she added.

Jessica also emphasised the achievements in conservation. "The world's first robot to control the crown-of-thorns starfish (COTS) on the reef, has completed trials. Five major industrial ports proposing to dump capital dredged material in the reef has been reduced to zero and extra protection has been provided to turtles and dugongs through tough law against poaching."

The biology professor believes that environmental biology is one of the most important subjects to be taught to students. "We depend a lot on our environment and

there is an urgent need to conserve it for the future," she added. When asked if youngsters were responsible for the environment, she said "I would like to think so. But I think only teachers can influence youngsters to have a responsible approach towards nature."



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