

Julie Bishop's high profile as foreign minister must surely be rivalling that of Kevin Rudd.

Bishop's visit to Iran – she's the first Australian minister to go there in more than a decade – has received a blaze of publicity at home.

Her headwear – sequined scarf, black hat, aimed at showing respect for local norms – attracted attention (including some criticism, notably from [conservative columnist Andrew Bolt](#)) and certainly ensured a lot of pictorial coverage, which also included her walkabout (bareheaded) in a local bazaar.

The trip's substance focused firstly on an intelligence sharing deal in which Iran agreed to provide intelligence about Australians who are fighting with Islamic State (IS), and secondly on trying to persuade Iran to accept back asylum seekers forcibly deported after being found not to be refugees.

There is debate about how much useful information will come out of the intelligence agreement, as well as some ethical questions about concluding such an arrangement with a country like Iran. On asylum seekers, Iran hasn't been willing to change its opposition to forcible returns but has said it will send officials for talks in Australia.

Regardless of the qualifications, however, the trip came across publicly as a success for Bishop.

Now the constantly-travelling Foreign Minister has arrived in Europe with one of the range of items in her bilateral talks being lobbying to try to ensure the Great Barrier Reef is not listed as in danger.

Since the threat of such a listing by UNESCO'S World Heritage Committee arose seriously, the Abbott government has been making huge efforts to prevent what would be a major international slap in the face for Australia.

The stakes are high. If the Great Barrier Reef were designated as in danger, there would be reputational damage to Australia and, specifically, brand damage to Queensland. It could make raising finance for development projects on the reef's coast more expensive.

One reason why the government was so furious about United States President [Barack Obama's speech](#) at the time of the G20, in which he used the Great Barrier Reef as an example of the devastation that climate change threatened, was that it fed into the "endangered reef" international story.

Bishop later strongly attacked Obama, saying she was surprised material she had given the Americans about what Australia was doing to protect the reef hadn't been reflected in his speech (in fact the material was about conservation not climate change).

The cash-strapped Abbott government has announced \$100 million to help reef sustainability, and the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan recently put out by the federal and Queensland governments has sought to address issues raised about the problems facing the reef.

Environment minister Greg Hunt has invested a great deal of effort in lobbying and policy work. The Australian ambassador for the environment, Peter Woolcott, has spent much of his energies on the reef campaign.

A draft decision will be brought down at the end of May by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, a broad civil society organisation, and UNESCO experts. That then goes in June to the World Heritage Committee which includes 21 countries.

Bishop is now in Paris where her appointments list includes UNESCO Secretary-General Irina Bokova. When she reaches Berlin Bishop will meet German Minister of State Maria Böhmer, who is chair of the World Heritage Committee. "The steps Australia is taking to protect and preserve the Great Barrier Reef will be a key focus of discussions" with her, Bishop said on Monday.

Julie Bishop's Barrier Reef mission

Written by The Conversation

Neither the Australian Marine Conservation Society nor WWF want the reef listed as in danger. Felicity Wishart, from the society, says more protections are required; the WWF's Richard Leck believes the World Heritage Committee should tell the federal and Queensland government to return in a year to outline what they have done.

Although nothing can be certain, as the crunch time approaches the federal government is feeling relatively confident about how things are going in its campaign to prevent the listing.

Ironically, one of the strong factors working in its favour has been the arrival of the new Labor government in Queensland. That government made changes to the draft sustainability plan – which had earlier copped some strong criticism - and sent an official to Paris to make sure the message was received.

If Australia prevails, Bishop and Hunt will get a lot of kudos but they will also owe some thanks to Annastacia Palaszczuk.

Read more <http://theconversation.com/julie-bishops-barrier-reef-mission-40498>