After two and a half years of Reef Rescue, we are now reaching the mid-way point of the federal government’s $200 million, five-year plan to improve water quality entering the Great Barrier Reef.

This seems like the perfect time to reflect on what the project has achieved in the Mackay Whitsunday region to date and to look forward to the future benefits that will occur over the next few years.

Since June 2008, water quality from catchments draining into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon have benefited greatly from the improved land management practices being implemented by farmers and graziers through Reef Rescue.

In the Mackay Whitsunday region alone, nearly $10 million has been provided through Reef Rescue water quality grants and this has been matched by over $18 million by industry service providers and landholders that are doing the on-ground projects.

“This has impacted on over 90,000 ha of land and that’s fantastic news for sustaining the local agricultural industry in our region and even better news for water quality and the Great Barrier Reef,” Reef Rescue Project Officer Chris Dench said.

Through monitoring and evaluation activities conducted, farmers and graziers have been able to use the incentives to purchase or modify equipment, erect infrastructure and implement management practices that they may not have been able to achieve for upwards of 10 years in some cases.

This includes sugarcane farmers Brian and John Stevens from Marion Creek catchment, south of Sarina, who used Reef Rescue to fast-track the implementation of their GPS-controlled traffic minimum tillage system across all of their farms from a 10 year plan to less than five.

Another great example of the effective work undertaken through Reef Rescue is the riparian fencing implemented by Geoff Bosel from Eden Lassie Creek catchment, north of Proserpine. Geoff used the funding to construct 7.8 km of riparian fencing and install four watering points, helping to reduce mustering time, increase bank stabilisation and reduce sediment entering the creek.

“It doesn’t matter what your best intentions are. If you have no income, you can’t act upon any of those plans,” Mr Bosel said.

For more great examples of how Reef Rescue incentives have been implemented, visit the Reef Catchments website at www.reefcatchments.com.au and search for ‘case studies’.

With the year three funding round (2010/11) in full swing, Mr Dench said it looked set to be the biggest year to date.

“There is around $6 million in incentives available and interest by farmers and graziers is still strong,” he said.

Year three of Reef Rescue will also see the Paddock to Reef monitoring program results quantify the improvements that the grants have had on water quality.

“There are some exciting times ahead for both industry and the environment,” Mr Dench said.

Reef Rescue is a key component of the Australian Government’s over $2 billion Caring for our Country initiative. Through Reef Rescue, $200 million will be invested over five years to address declining water quality and ultimately improve the Great Barrier Reef’s capacity to deal with climate change. In the Mackay Whitsunday region the program is made possible through...
With the first two years of the Reef Rescue initiative completed, the uptake of the water quality grants by the Mackay Whitsunday region’s sugarcane farmers has been a great success and a real credit to the local sugar industry.

Reef Catchments Land Projects Officer Phillip Trendell said the results were due to the hard work of all of the people involved in delivering Reef Rescue.

“We have seen around 350 growers involved in projects to date, which is around 30% of the industry in the Mackay Whitsunday region,” Mr Trendell said.

Now into year three, there is still a high level of interest and enthusiasm by growers to be involved and apply for the financial support available through the grants to adopt the eligible improved land management practices.

“We still have many growers getting involved for the first time to do their stage one activities, but we also have quite a few that are keen to conduct stage two projects. Some are even hoping to do stage three, if possible,” Mr Trendell said.

“At the moment, funding is only available for growers to complete their stage one and stage two activities, however we are always trying to be able to work with growers who are keen to do more.”

So far in year three, we have had two rounds of funding (September and November), with more rounds to come to utilise the funding available. The eligible activities have remained the same in year three and these include support for adopting a controlled traffic minimum tillage system (matching wheel spacing to row spacing, zonal tillage equipment, legume fallow establishment and GPS technology), knockdown herbicide strategies (shielded sprayers and high rise spray rigs) and improved nutrient management (sub-surface granular application and variable rate controllers).

“One thing that has been evident in year three is the increase in chemical and nutrient management activities wanting to be implemented by growers, which is pleasing to see that it seems to be now an even-spread across the types of projects without needing to change the program or delivery process,” Mr Trendell said.
Another innovative project being undertaken with the help of Reef Rescue is the development by Mackay Sugar Ltd. of a new ‘back-of-truck’ spreader to aid in the precision application of reduced rates of mill mud. For every seven million tonnes of sugar produced, 700,000 tonnes of mill mud is created and is an effective nutrient source that can be spread back onto blocks. In the past, mill mud has been applied all over the block at a nominal rate of around 150 wet tonnes/ha, which at times, may vary from 0 – 300 wet tonnes/ha. To resolve this problem, a new three-row spreader was designed and worked on to apply the mud directly onto the centre of the cane row at a rate of 50 wet tonnes/ha. This ensures no mud is distributed onto the wheel tracks where the risk of losses is greater and a limited source of nutrients will now go further and able to be supplied to more growers.

Recently, BSES has been collaborating with Mackay Whitsunday growers in a project funded through Reef Rescue to modify and adapt the Weedseeker® selective spraying technology for use in a sugarcane production system. Weedseeker® selective spraying technology uses weed sensing technology to detect weeds and fire herbicide on detection, rather than the current blanket spray approach more commonly used. This will greatly reduce the volume of chemical needed to spray a field, which will benefit the grower and the environment. In other crops, this technology has resulted in a reduction of between 50% and 80% of herbicide used. While this technology is still being adapted for use in the sugarcane production systems, early testing is positive and BSES plans to show the new system at upcoming field days in 2011.

Some of the other industry projects being undertaken in 2010/11 by regional industry service providers include: Break crops extension role, AgDat support role with access to AgDat remote units and the development of Nutrient Management Guidelines based on the reduced application rates of mill mud.

### Year 3 cane grants to date:

**Stage 1 (new growers):**
- 55 projects
- 60 landholders
- $860,000 in Reef Rescue funding
- 27 soil projects
- 20 chemical projects
- 21 nutrient projects
- 5 irrigation/stormwater sub-projects

**Stage 2 (returned growers):**
- 49 projects
- 63 landholders
- $1,127,000 in funding
- 28 soil projects
- 25 chemical projects
- 10 nutrient projects
- 12 irrigation/stormwater sub-projects
Grazing

Canberra visit to Mackay

Reef Catchments was proud to host a visit to the Mackay Whitsunday region on October 12 by Claire Howlette and Peter Cotsell, from the Australian Government Land and Coasts (AGLC).

Ms Howlette and Mr Cotsell are the Reef Catchments contacts within the federal government for Reef Rescue funding and visited the region because they were interested in seeing some of the great Reef Rescue projects that had been undertaken by sugarcane and grazing land managers in the Mackay Whitsunday area. The visitors were taken on a tour by Reef Catchments project managers to visit both sugarcane and grazing properties that had participated in the Reef Rescue project.

One of the properties visited by Ms Howlette and Mr Cotsell was River Run - a grazing property managed by Stephen and Leanne Forgarty and Darren and Melanie Hamblin.

“This was the first time that Ms Howlette and Mr Cotsell had the opportunity to visit a Reef Rescue funded grazing property in the Mackay region,” Reef Catchments Incentives Manager Jon Graftdyk said.

“Mr Fogarty took them on a tour of River Run, pointing out the riparian fencing and water points that had been constructed using Reef Rescue funding and explained how getting the river fenced was a really big achievement, as they were now able to manage the movement of cattle more effectively and maintain higher ground cover.

“Mr Fogarty also explained how participating in the pasture stocktake workshop gave him the opportunity to brush up on his skills and provide direction in estimating pasture yields and developing appropriate forage budgets.”

Following the tour of the property, the visitors examined the grazing land management plan which was developed by Mr Forgarty as part of his Reef Rescue project and presented him with a Reef Rescue plaque demonstrating his support for the Reef Rescue program.
Reef Catchments has developed an exciting new partnership with two of Australia’s leading technology companies.

The partnership between Agtrix and Taggle will extend the concepts of the already-existing sugarcane AgDat project to include specific requirements of the grazing industry and pilot the use of new cattle tag technology to demonstrate the capabilities of a low cost, lightweight, battery-powered cattle tag to the grazing industry.

Reef Catchments Incentives Manager Dr Jon Graftdyk said the pilot was providing the grazing community in the Mackay Whitsunday region with high quality tools in information management and dissemination to meet the growing expectations being placed upon the grazing industry.

“The primary purpose of the project is to support the sustainability of the grazing industry, both economically and environmentally, through the collection and provision of relevant and current information relating to on and off-farm activities,” Dr Graftdyk said.

The AgDat program has been developed to provide end-to-end data management of farm production and activity data. It has the facility to gather, collate and analyse operational data to generate and report performance indicators leading to wider adoption of Best Management Practices identified by programs such as Reef Rescue.

The partnership between Reef Catchments, Agtrix and Taggle also incorporates a world-first pilot trial of new cattle tag technology, developed by Taggle, which is demonstrating the potential for graziers to practically track where their cattle are in real time.

“To date, the pilot has developed the AgDat user web interface for the grazing industry and has established a Taggle network with about 200 tags on cattle over the two properties in the pilot area.

Reef Catchments is now looking to extend the scope of this project to include several more land managers using the AgDat program on their properties. Graziers interested in using the world-leading technology on the property should contact Dr Graftdyk at Reef Catchments on (07)4968 4216.
Even though horticulture receives a smaller amount of funding through Reef Rescue compared to sugarcane and grazing, Reef Catchments and Growcom are still very committed to supporting the Mackay Whitsunday region’s horticulture producers in implementing improved land management practices.

“It was an enjoyable learning experience to visit Dave Hunter (organic banana producer from St Helens Creek catchment, near Calen) and Tony Soden (eggplant producer from Eden Lassie Creek catchment, north of Proserpine) and develop up case studies on their farms and projects and see their efforts in helping to support Reef Rescue,” Reef Catchments Land Projects Officer Phillip Trendell said.

“I would encourage other producers in the region to get involved and hope they can gain the same benefits out of the program.”

Growcom is helping to deliver Reef Rescue in the region and part of the process includes working with producers to complete the relevant Farm Management System (FMS) modules to identify activities that can help improve both farm performance and environmental sustainability.

For more information, contact Growcom key contact officer Anna Geddes on (07) 47243544.
The Paddock to Reef sugarcane trials have now had the program’s first wet season water quality and cane productivity data collected and analysed.

The program was designed and implemented to better understand how management practices promoted by Reef Rescue and some new innovative practices compare in relation to productivity, profitability and water quality.

“The North Eton site recently attracted a visit from Climate Change Minister Kate Jones, to look at how sugarcane farming practices being implemented throughout the Mackay Whitsunday region were being analysed through the Paddock to Reef trials,” Reef Catchments Land and Water Coordinator Adam Folkers said.

“Over 1600 mm of rainfall resulted in around 13 run-off events at each of the trial locations during the 2009/10 wet season.

“Some interesting early results have shown a 1.8 m controlled traffic system averaged 18% less run-off compared to a conventional 1.5 m system.”

The release of the program’s first year technical report, listing all water quality and productivity data, was due to be released in October 2010.

Due to the relentless rain and the delay in harvesting, the report will now be available in early 2011 on the Reef Catchments website at www.reefcatchments.com.au. For more information contact Adam Folkers on (07) 4968 4208.

“The North Eton site recently attracted a visit from Climate Change Minister Kate Jones, to look at how sugarcane farming practices being implemented throughout the Mackay Whitsunday region were being analysed through the Paddock to Reef trials,” Reef Catchments Land and Water Coordinator Adam Folkers said.

“During the visit, the Minister was shown the Paddock to Reef paddock scale monitoring site and also had a chance to see some of the impressive equipment brought along by farmers that had been funded through Reef Rescue. It was great to see the Minister talking to the growers about what they were trying to achieve with the equipment and some of the wins and losses they had experienced along the way,” Reef Catchments Land and Water Coordinator Adam Folkers said.
Reef Rescue Newsletter

Reef Rescue year three off to a successful start

What a fantastic start to the third year of the Reef Rescue water quality grants in the Mackay Whitsunday region. There have been plenty of expressions of interest to complete a couple of funding rounds and some of the land managers who were in the first round have completed their projects already.

With incentives for eligible activities as high as 50% and an up-front payment to help get projects underway, there has never been a more ideal time to undertake that long planned project. Many participants are even returning to the grants for a second time to continue to implement the improved land management practices they had identified as a priority for their farms.

The Reef Rescue grants are being used by farmers, graziers and industry service providers to implement practical and, in some cases, innovative solutions to land management issues impacting on water quality.

With the partnership approach that Reef Rescue utilises to help support the implementation of these solutions, it will continue to prove that Australia, and more importantly the Mackay Whitsunday region, is at the forefront of implementing sustainable agriculture practices and environmental responsibility.

No need to wait

Due to the huge interest in the Reef Rescue incentives, in the past, some farmers and graziers had to wait longer than a year after putting in an expression of interest to be able to access funding.

This was due to the yearly allocation of grants being taken up before getting through all of them. The great news is that Reef Catchments has been able to get on top of this and with increased funding coming into the region, this will be no longer the case.

We are encouraging farmers and graziers who have previously not been involved in Reef Rescue to jump on board and possibly implement eligible projects immediately. With the first half of the five-year incentive program completed, only two and a half years remain - so there has never been a better time to submit an expression of interest.

Submitting an expression of interest is easy. Key contact officers for the grazing, sugarcane and horticulture industries are available within each industry to help walk applicants through the entire process.

For more information on Reef Rescue or any other program being implemented by Reef Catchments, visit www.reefcatchments.com.au or call (07) 4968 4200.

Helpful Links:

www.reefcatchments.com.au
www.canegrowers.com.au
www.growcom.com.au
www.agforceqld.org.au

For more information:

This newsletter is produced by Reef Catchments - the natural resource management organisation for the Mackay Whitsunday Isaac region. If you would like more information on any of the articles in this newsletter, or if you would like to submit a story idea for the next issue, please contact Reef Catchments on (07) 4968 4200.

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