

# 2014 water quality IMPROVEMENT PLAN

## West Hill Creek Management Area Progress Report

### Summary of progress

West Hill Creek catchment drains from the lower slopes of the Clarke Range through the coastal plane to enter the Great Barrier Reef lagoon in the High Ecological Value Declared Fish Habitat Area and Dugong Protection Area between Yarrwonga Point and West Hill Island. These inshore waters support regionally significant seagrass beds that are critical to sustaining local dugong and turtle populations. The catchment area also supports nationally important wetlands that are part of West Hill National Park. Extensive clearing for agricultural production has the capacity to impact on the hydrology of the wetlands and water quality, as well as impacting on fish community abundance and diversity. At present 75% of the catchment is utilised for grazing and 12% under cane production.

In 2007, the West Hill Creek estuary and freshwater stream were rated as moderate to high relative to other Mackay Whitsunday catchment areas. Since 2007 there have been some efforts to improve the quality of water leaving cane production areas and entering adjacent wetlands and High Ecological Value marine areas. These improved management practice initiatives provide a solid foundation from which to expand management practice improvement in the grazing enterprises of the West Hill Creek catchment.



*“Thanks to Reef Rescue we could fast-track our vision for best management practice improvements on our farm.”*

Third and fourth generation West Hill farmers, Brian and John Stevens

### Agriculture implementation highlights

- Cane farmers have improved the management of soil, nutrients and herbicides on more than 240 ha of the intensive cropping land in the catchment with Reef Rescue support to improve overall management practice from Class D to Class B

### Future priorities

Management practices that reduce atrazine and diuron loads continue to be a priority for cane production. Grazing management activities that reduce nitrogen and phosphorus loads for event water quality will be addressed through improved grazing management practices.

System repair actions that support an improvement in fish communities are the highest priority. Future management efforts will also focus on protecting and improving the coastal wetland extent and condition to support regeneration of inshore seagrass beds.



*Phil Degara programming precision GPS controlled traffic system on his sugar cane farm. Adoption of precision farming has been a key management practice improvement activity across the Mackay Whitsunday region that has contributed to on and off farm water quality improvements.*

### Ecosystem implementation highlights

*no ecosystem implementation activities in catchment area*