

## 2014 water quality IMPROVEMENT PLAN

# St Helens Creek

## Management Area Progress Report

### Summary of progress

St Helens Creek flows from the forested highlands of Eungulla National Park in the Clarke Range west of the township of Calen before entering the coastal plain and joining the estuary of Murray Creek at St Helens Bay. While the upper catchment is protected by National Park and reserves, the lowland areas have been extensively cleared for grazing and cane production, especially along the creek flats.

In 2007, water quality and ecosystem health was rated as moderate. Significant for ecosystem health priorities, St Helens Creek supports a remnant community of Jungle Perch, now rare in the Mackay Whitsunday region. Between 2007 and 2013, there has been considerable effort to improve agricultural management. As a result the water quality of St Helens Creek has improved.



*"Improved farming practices help to save dollars and improve water quality."*

Fourth generation St Helens Creek farmer, Andrew Pratt

### Agriculture implementation highlights

- Cane and horticulture farmers have improved the management of soil, nutrients and herbicides on more than 61% of intensive cropping land with Reef Rescue support
- Graziers have improved pasture management on more than 50 ha with Reef Rescue support

### Ecosystem implementation highlights

- Riparian management has been improved on more than 4 km of St Helens Creek by graziers who have installed riparian fencing and off-stream watering points with Reef Rescue support
- Barriers to fish migration have been prioritised and fish community type and abundance have been surveyed to inform system repair works

### Future priorities

Grazing and cane management practices that reduce nitrogen loads are the highest priority for continued improvement of event water quality. Management practices that reduce other nutrients and residual herbicides are a moderate priority.

System repair actions for instream habitat and riparian vegetation restoration and connectivity are of the highest priority to enable fish communities to gain the maximum benefits from the improvement in water quality.



*The upstream reaches of St Helens Creek retain diverse riparian and hillslope habitat providing excellent conditions for abundant and diverse fish communities. System repair actions and efforts in management practice change aim to restore these values to some downstream reaches.*