

RACECOURSE WETLAND RESTORATION | Ecosystem Repair Project



Australian Government

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THIS SITE? Reef Catchments has joined forces with the local cane industry to restore a heavily degraded wetland on 4 hectares on the outskirts of the Mackay city. Work is underway on land adjacent to Mackay Sugar's Racecourse Mill, focused on water quality and the reinstatement of a functioning wetland to improve landscape health and connectivity. Wetland restoration aims to bring back water and wildlife habitat, providing a refuge for native species including birds and the native fish population, which has dwindled over the years.

WHO'S INVOLVED? The project is a joint initiative of Reef Catchments and Mackay Sugar, with co-funding from the Australian Government Reef Programme.



PROJECT:

RACECOURSE MILL WETLAND RESTORATION, MACKAY SUGAR RACECOURSE MILL, MACKAY



PROJECT GOALS:

Water quality is the major focus of the works, and the reinstatement of a functioning wetland that will allow for a natural system more effectively remove pollutants from waterways in the Pioneer catchment. Mackay Sugar will also benefit from the improvements, with access to cleaner water and a larger water storage area for the mill to utilise.



CURRENT ACTIVITY:

Foundation works have been completed, with the site cleared and earth moved to create and enlarge the wetland dam areas. Revegetation of the site with more than 5000 native seedlings is currently underway.



STATUS:

During March and April 2015, 3000 seedlings have been planted in a major revegetation effort. More than 30 native species have been selected for the site, which previously has been sparse or heavily dominated by weed species.



MOVING FORWARD:

Approximately 2000 endemic species will be planted in the next month, completing the revegetation phase of the project. Works on the site will continue to June 2016, with Stage 1 works expected to be completed by June 2015.

BELOW: Reef Catchments NRM region



RACECOURSE MILL WETLAND RESTORATION | Update 1

Mackay Sugar and Reef Catchments have joined forces to help restore a heavily degraded wetland on Horse and Jockey Road, near Mackay Sugar's Racecourse Mill.

People using the road will have noticed foundation works beginning, with earth being moved and plants revegetated in sparse sections of the former wetland area. Catchment Solutions have been engaged as a contractor to carry out the on-ground site works.

Reef Catchments' Peter Muller said activities would be focused on improving water quality and landscape health.

"This is an exciting project that will aim to restore life to a degraded area on the edges of the Mackay city. The restoration of the wetland will bring back water and wildlife, including birds and the native fish population, which has dwindled over the years," Mr Muller said.

"Water quality is the major focus of the works, and the reinstatement of a functioning wetland will allow for a natural system that is able to more effectively remove pollutants from our waterways."

Matt Moore, project contractor from Catchment Solutions, said currently water draining off the bagasse pad ran into a dam.

"The dam will be incorporated into the wetland system and enlarged to create a first flush sediment detention basin with water plants. The system will effectively 'clean' the water as it moves through, removing nutrients such as phosphorous and nitrogen," Mr Moore said.

Mackay Sugar will also benefit from the improvements, with access to cleaner water and a larger water storage area for the mill to utilise.

"Improved quality of land and water delivers benefits for everyone in the immediate area. Activities on the site will improve the quality of water flowing to the Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens locally, as well as more widely to the Pioneer River Estuary and the Great Barrier Reef," Mr Moore said. "The wetland will strengthen the natural landscape of the Mackay region and build resilience to support multiple uses for the long-term future."

Mackay Sugar's Health, Safety and Environment Manager Carissa Mansfield said Mackay Sugar was extremely proud to partner with Reef Catchments to restore approximately four hectares of land adjacent to its Racecourse Mill.

"This project benefits the environment, our Racecourse Mill operations and provides the community a picturesque viewpoint along Horse and Jockey Road.

"The joint partnership between Mackay Sugar and Reef Catchments is a real testament of our commitment towards environmental sustainability," Ms Mansfield said.

Works on the site will continue to June 2016, with Stage 1 works expected to be completed by June 2015.

This project is a joint initiative of Reef Catchments and Mackay Sugar, through co-funding from Mackay Sugar and the Australian Government Reef Programme.



RACECOURSE MILL WETLAND RESTORATION | Update 2 (March 2015)

Phase two of a major wetland restoration project near Racecourse Mill is underway, with more than 5000 seedlings set to go in the ground by the end of April, 2015.

Peter Muller, Reef Catchments project coordinator, said 3000 seedlings had been planted on the 4 hectare site over the last two weeks, with 2000 more set to come in the next month.

"This is a major step in the wetland restoration project, which is a joint project between Mackay Sugar and Reef Catchments to restore a heavily degraded area of land directly behind Racecourse Mill," Mr Muller said.

He said revegetation of native plants was a critical stage of the wetland restoration process.

"Over time, as these trees mature, they will help recreate the original rainforest ecosystem and environment that was once typical to the Pioneer Valley Catchment.

"The eventual aim of the restored wetland is to provide a corridor, becoming a point of connection in the landscape that allows for the delivery of water quality and ecosystem benefits to a wider area."

More than 30 native species have been selected for the site, including Leichhardt and Damson Trees and Alexandra Palms. The seedlings have been provided by Mackay Tree Factory and the Pioneer Catchment Landcare Nursery.

The team from Whitsunday Catchment Landcare has been contracted to do the planting on-ground, making significant progress in a short period, with thousands of trees now in the ground.

Mr Muller said planting of endemic species (trees native to the area) also helped guard against invasive and environmentally damaging weeds.

"Tree species selected have been based on the regional ecosystem of the site. Before we started works, the site was mostly overgrown with weeds. By stocking the area heavily with endemic species, we hope to 'shade out' the weed species, some of which have become quite dominant over time – for example, water lettuce, water hyacinth, para grass and hymenachne," he said.

Revegetation could also help improve water quality by enhancing natural filtration.

"Improved water quality and the restoration of land, ecosystem and habitat health are the major focus of the works and we hope the community will notice benefits in these areas moving forward," Mr Muller said.

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