



SUPPORTING GROWER-LED INNOVATION IN MACKAY WHITSUNDAY ISAAC FOR MORE THAN TEN YEARS.



Evolving from the Mackay Whitsunday NRM Group, Reef Catchments has been working with sugarcane producers in the Mackay Whitsunday Isaac (MWI) region to improve the quality of water leaving sugar cane crops for over a decade.

In 2015, working alongside Catchment Solutions, Reef Catchments remains strongly connected to the Project Catalyst program, extending and amplifying the good work being done by Catalyst growers through a wide range of sustainable agriculture programs.

In MWI, Reef Catchments administers the Australian Government Reef Programme Water Quality Improvement Grants program that underpins Project Catalyst through the provision of funds for farm planning and equipment grants.

Currently Reef Catchments works with more than 140 farmers in total through Project Catalyst and aligned agricultural programs, including the Australian Government Game Changer program.

PROJECT CATALYST

Project Catalyst works with a network of forward-thinking cane farmers to progress the use of A-class or aspirational management practices for a more sustainable, productive farming future.

Project Catalyst sugarcane grower innovation trials in Mackay and the Whitsundays are managed by independent agronomists from Farmacist, with economic analysis undertaken by Queensland Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries.

The trials focus on the interests of growers and are run over a number of years with data updated and shared annually. Each trial investigates a practice that has the potential for sustainability and water quality benefits along with economic and productivity improvements.

Not all trials will be successful, however learnings are documented and shared, as understanding what does not work can be just as important to growers and industry as knowing what does.

Trials being implemented by Project Catalyst for 2014 include:

- Development of herbicide strategies based on the spatial location of different weed pressures
- Variable rate application of balance for different soil types with support from Vanderfield
- Identifying the benefits of extended fallow in farming operations
- Evaluation of controlled release urea
- Variable rate nutrient applications based on yield zones
- Evaluate Variable rate overhead low-pressure irrigation based upon distribution of soil properties



PHOTO: DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT GAME CHANGER PROGRAM

Fast Tracking the Adoption of Game Changing Sugarcane Nutrient and Pesticide Management (Game Changer) is an Australian Government Reef Programme project designed to push advanced management practices for nutrient and chemicals forward; ushering in change to deliver environmental and economic benefits to the Great Barrier Reef regions.

The project is being rolled out across four regions, with 70 on-farm demonstration trials currently being implemented on farms in the Wet Tropics, Dry Tropics and Mackay Whitsunday.

Game Changer is administered by Reef Catchments who work closely with Terrain NRM in the Wet Tropics and NQ Dry Tropics in the Dry Tropics.

A group of experts from across the sugar industry review the program's demonstration trials and have input in the communications and engagement strategies implemented to ensure quality and provide a link into key organisations such as Sugar Research Australia, CSIRO, QDAFF and a cross-section of sugarcane productivity boards from across the Great Barrier Reef.

In the first 12 months of the program farmers have been identified to work closely with agronomists for whole-of-farm planning support and to run on-farm demonstration trials showcasing practices that have the potential to dramatically cut farm runoff of nutrients (particularly nitrogen) and residual herbicides.

There is a focus on managing farms at a finer scale and identifying and matching crop needs to inputs.

For more information on how you can be involved in a wide range of sustainable agriculture initiatives, or to inquire about current funding available to growers, contact Reef Catchments:

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