



Reef Rescue a cause for celebration

The initial phase of the Reef Rescue program has been hugely successful at supporting landholders to implement activities to improve the water quality flowing to the Great Barrier Reef. In the Mackay Whitsunday region on-farm improvements were implemented across the sugarcane, grazing and horticulture industries with a total of just over \$88M invested to improve and update the practices of local producers and industries. This was made up of \$32M of investment from the Australian Government, \$41M from landholders and \$14M from industry organisations.

In five years the Reef Rescue program has attracted 2296 Expressions of Interest from local farmers and graziers. A total of 1286 projects were developed with 942 land managers receiving funding. This includes 718 cane farmers, 204 graziers and 20 horticulturalists.

High priority projects funded in the sugarcane industry included machinery modification to apply fertiliser below ground and using shielded or hooded spray units to reduce the reliance on residual herbicides. Graziers were funded to construct 302kms of riparian fencing to restrict stock access to creeks and waterways and 187kms of land type fencing to better manage stock. These practices have been validated (Paddock to Reef Program) to improve water quality in agricultural runoff.

Reef Rescue, also provided support for industry-wide projects that either increased knowledge or funded on-ground works to benefit productive land in the eligible industries. The results of the 121 industry projects have been far reaching. For example the fabrication of a fleet of mill mud trucks in two milling areas to apply their product banded on the rows rather than broadcast has reduced application by up to 100 tonnes per hectare. Other projects such the erection of GPS base stations to increase the range and uptake of GPS systems and providing work shops and planning for graziers to prevent and control erosion highlight the benefits gained via working with industry.

Reef Catchments established working groups early on that have provided a foundation for strong partnerships with industry and stakeholders. These relationships have been essential to the success of Reef Rescue. The Grazing and Cane Regional Working Groups have provided pathways for information flow, reviewed updates of the ABCD management practice frameworks, overseen the range of eligible activities and scrutinised potential industry projects.

The Reef Rescue program has directly impacted on the management practices used by farmers and graziers in the Mackay Whitsunday region, and this will have long-term benefits for water quality.

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Australian Government



Queensland
Government



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Mackay Whitsunday Reef Rescue Success 2009 – 2013

Chemical management
 388 chemical projects = 63,510ha under improved management
 Sugarcane projects: 379
 Horticulture: 9

Reef Rescue Water Quality Improvement Grants

Total Projects: 1286
 Total sugarcane projects: 978
 Total grazing projects: 273
 Total horticulture projects: 35



Grazing projects
 302 KMs of riparian fencing
 187 KMs of land-type fencing
 277 pasture monitoring sites
 278 off-stream watering points



Soil management
 532 soil projects = <100,00ha under improved management
 Sugarcane projects: 516
 Grazing (land type fencing and pasture monitoring): 464
 Horticulture projects: 16



Nutrient management
 384 nutrient projects = 60,908ha under improved management
 Sugarcane projects: 375
 Horticulture projects: 9



Water management
 226 water projects = 17,844ha under improved management



Land-managers involved: 942
 Sugarcane: 718
 Grazing: 204
 Horticulture: 20



121 total industry projects
 88 sugarcane industry projects
 28 grazing industry projects
 5 horticulture industry projects

Industry projects

21,380,680
 Reef Rescue on-farm investment

41,113,877
 Landholder on-farm investment

11,100,293
 Reef Rescue industry investment
14,490,179
 Industry funds for projects

Total-regional Reef Rescue investment
32,480,973
 Total region co-investment
88,085,029

Reef Rescue is an initiative of the Australian Government

Find out more at reefcatchments.com.au



Reef Catchments



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From our CEO

Welcome to the Reef Catchments Land and Water Newsletter, highlighting our Sustainable Agriculture subprogram.

Many of our readers may not be aware that Reef Catchments manages a sustainable agricultural program utilising over \$15M per annum of government, industry, rural producer and commercial investor funds to support Sustainable Agriculture Innovation and Best Practice. The Reef Catchments Sustainable Agriculture subprogram covers a range of initiatives within the NRM region and across Queensland. These initiatives are recognised as global best practice with countries such as Brazil, South Africa and China showing interest.

This subprogram represents the largest allocation of funding for research and extension for enhancing rural systems available to regional rural producers and industry sector groups.

Why the focus on rural systems?

In our region agricultural production in 2010/11 was worth over \$890M and agriculture and its aligned services provided the largest employment numbers of any sector. (Source ABS) Agriculture takes up over 85% of our region's land area. These rural production systems rely on healthy natural resources and equally can impact on the condition of those resources. Importantly rural producers want to leave healthy and productive land for the next generation.

Our rural investment programs all share the same underpinning values:

- voluntary and proactive engagement programs work with rural producers
- rural production systems are based on a healthy environment - healthy soil, clean, abundant water and clean air
- a triple bottom line - the practices we support must deliver increased production, enhanced prosperity and better environmental outcomes.

From planning, through to the delivery of projects Reef Catchments seeks involvement and engagement with rural producers, research bodies, peak bodies and agribusiness. Without the support of our partners the projects would not deliver the benefits we all desire.

I thank our many collaborators and look forward to continuing to work together for thriving sustainable agricultural industries in our region.

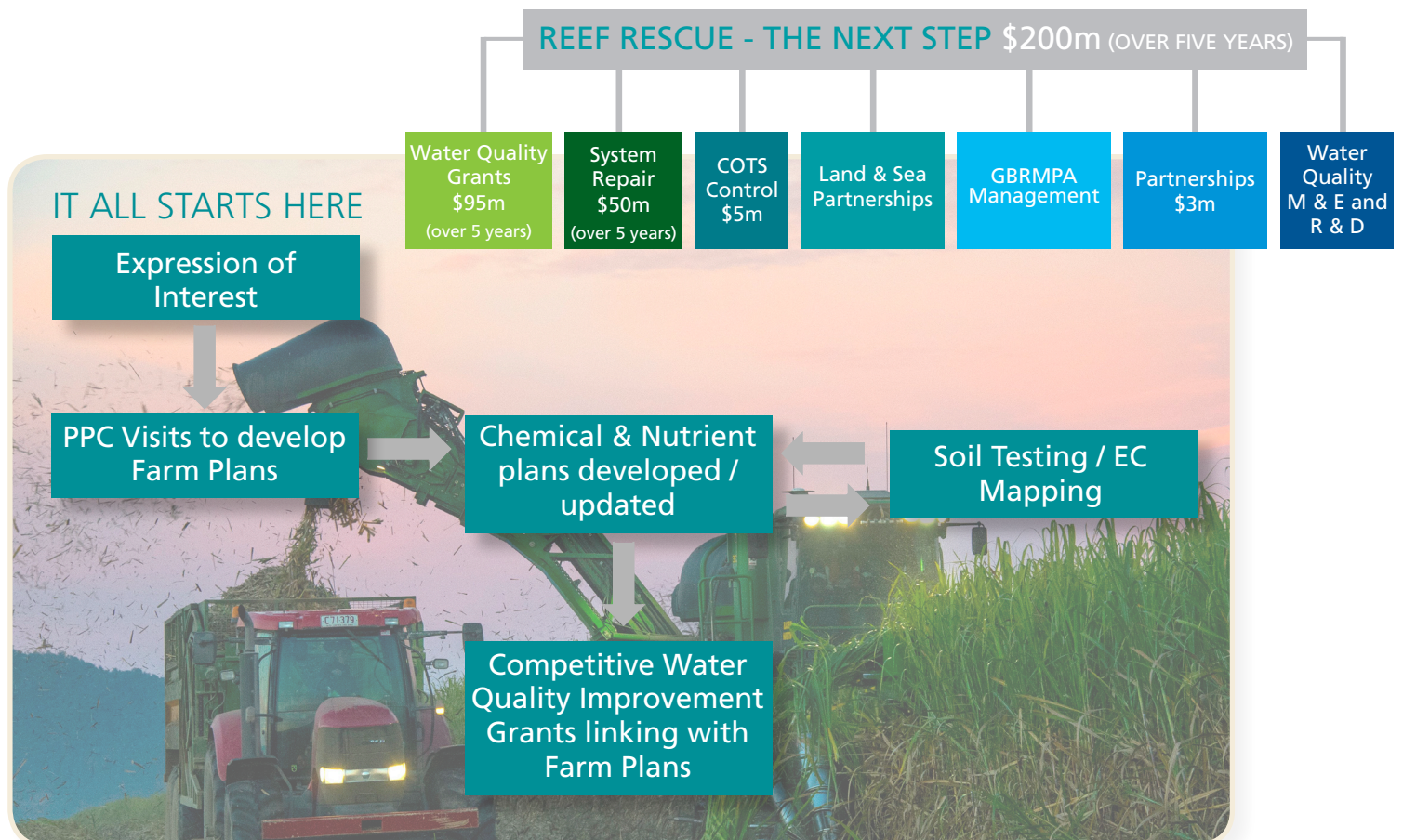
Rob Cocco
 CEO Reef Catchments

Introducing Reef Rescue: Version 2.0

The current Reef Rescue program delivery has changed considerably from the first five years. While the overall funding for the next five years has remained at \$200M for the six NRM regions and partners, the allocation and what is eligible has changed. Funding for improved land management practices has been reduced from \$146M to \$95M and a new area of funding - System Repair – has been allocated \$50M. Systems repair will focus on the restoration of ecosystems and catchments to further reduce and mitigate runoff and includes some funding for urban waterways, as well as projects such as bank stabilisation on rural land.

There is also an increase in funding for the control of the Crown of Thorns starfish, which a recently released scientific paper has rated, together with cyclones and bleaching, as the greatest risk to the Great Barrier Reef. While the breakdown of available funds has changed, the delivery model in the Mackay Whitsunday has also

changed in an effort to gain best value for money for both landholders and funding partners. The delivery previously focused on funding equipment that will bring about an improvement in management practice. The new delivery of Reef Rescue will focus on increased extension and working with past landholders to better utilise equipment purchased through previous funding. Sugarcane and grazing landholders will be eligible through the new delivery for the equivalent of six days per year one-on-one extension to work with an industry expert to develop detailed management plans for improved productivity and profitability. Through an improvement in these two aspects of farm management, an improvement to water quality will be achieved. Landholders participating in the program will be provided with expert extension over three years. Once they are involved in the planning component landholders will be eligible for water quality grants similar to the first Reef Rescue.



Step by Step with the Reef Rescue Water Quality Improvement Incentive program

Reef Rescue grants update: Sugarcane

A planned approach

While the first phase of Reef Rescue was hugely successful at engaging with landholders to implement practice change to improve water quality the new phase should be equally successful at encouraging uptake through it's strong focus on productivity and profitability. This new delivery will build on the successes of the first five years by working with landholders to find efficiencies within their management to improve profitability and working with industry experts promote practices which will improve productivity. There will also be greater emphasis on training or up-skilling growers to ensure that farm machinery is being used to its greatest potential.

"A number of the later GPS systems have a suite of features that are not being fully used by growers, the new Reef Rescue delivery model will enable these systems to be used to their potential saving time and money." Darren Deguara from GPS solutions.

Phil Deguara uses GPS for farm mapping



The new delivery model will be made available to growers in two phases; firstly a planning phase and second a water quality grants phase.

Phase 1: Planning

Growers expressing interest in the program will receive an initial visit from a Precision Planning Consultant (PPC) to work with them over a three-year period. It is hoped that during this time growers and planning consultants will work together to find efficiencies and improve productivity. Growers may trial a new practice that the PPC will support through advice and agronomic extension.

All growers will be supported by their PPC for the equivalent of six days to develop detailed block-by-block nutrient and chemical farm plans. Over the course of the three years PPCs will work with growers to update and manage these plans. Funding linked to these plans will be for soil tests above regulated

requirements and EC mapping of paddocks. There will also be some funding made available through the small grants component which will help growers upgrade their spray equipment. The only contribution from the growers at this stage is their time.

Phase 2: Grant applications

Once a grower has signed up to the three-year support offered they become eligible for the water quality grants component of Reef Rescue. Working with the grower, PPCs will submit an application for the equipment that is most important to help growers to implement their plans and improve their farm management and productivity.

If you are interested in participating in Reef Rescue please contact Reef Catchments on 4968 4200 or 4945 2321.



Reef Rescue grants update: Grazing

The new round of Reef Rescue is about to start, however there are a few changes to the program resulting in a new delivery model which offers more for our region's graziers.

The new phase of Reef Rescue seeks to focus on extension, training and increasing productivity as a way to improve the water quality draining to the Great Barrier Reef. Funding will be available for a grants component, which will be available to graziers that undertake the planning component.

Reef Rescue provides increased extension to support graziers;

- You will get a consultant for 6 accumulative days each year for three years to help with agronomic advice with regards to plant nutrition, weed control, stream or river stability or erosion control.
- A personalised stocking rate analysis, weed control plan, and nutrient plan will be conducted for your farm.
- You will receive laminated A3 maps of your property.
- Training will be provided as knowledge gaps are identified

The consultant will work with you to devise a property management plan that will determine projects to help improve productivity on your farm; these may include riparian and land fencing, watering points, stream bank and gully restoration, and land rehabilitation. An example of how this will work is outlined on the right. Reef Rescue funding awarded will be directly linked to your property plan.

(Wendy Riley with off-stream watering point)

Key Contact Reef Rescue Grazing
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Example Scenario: Reef Rescue Grazing:

1: Landholder would like to improve their property

A grazing family has noticed that the stream banks on their property are in a highly eroded state due to cattle accessing the water way. They have lost a few cattle during the last wet seasons when they have lost their footing on the slippery banks and drowned in the floodwaters. They have also noticed that the cattle are not utilising all feed and are concentrating on areas around water locations.

2. Land holder contacts Reef Catchments

Having heard about the Reef Rescue Water Quality Improvement Grazing Grants, the graziers call Reef Catchments to express their interest; after a few short questions to determine eligibility a planning consultant is scheduled to visit the farm. During a tour of the property it is determined that the best course of action is to install riparian fences along the stream bank to manage the access cattle have to the area, install off-stream watering points, and construct some land type fences to assist in improving the utilisation of the pastures on the property.

3. Grant application is submitted

The planning consultant works with the graziers to submit a grant application linked to the property management plan and addressing the main issue of stock access to the stream. A Reef Rescue Water Quality Improvement Grant will cover a percentage of the cost of the fencing and watering point project.

4. Planning and follow up projects

During the property visit a stocking rate analysis is conducted determining that the stocking rate is appropriate, however due to the cattle over utilising some areas of the farm these have become over grazed and run down. Erosion is becoming a problem and some small gullies are starting to form.

The maps are used to mark out the areas that need attention; weed problems, gully problems and future projects are all added and ranked on importance. The planning consultant suggests that once all of the necessary fencing and watering points are completed funding could be provided to address additional issues that will directly improve water quality. These are added to the long term farm plan and will become the basis of project applications for the next three years.

Healthy Waterways &

An introduction to system repair

Reef Catchments has been funded by the Australian Government to undertake system repair works across the three major river basins of the Mackay Whitsunday region. In the Plane Creek Basin, to the south, works will focus on natural systems, with in-stream works such as barrier removal, and fish-ways, bank stabilisation and riparian re-vegetation. The Pioneer River Basin, in the central area, is home to extensive intensive agriculture and urban development. As such works will include nutrient cycling wetlands, wetland restoration works and barrier removal. In the northern O'Connell River Basin the focus will be on maximizing natural landscapes in a similar way to the Plane Creek Basin. These on-ground works will be carried out with interested land managers, irrespective of industry, so long as the water quality and eco-system benefits are clear. Some of the work will be done in collaboration with local government and other organisations with sites prioritised for value for money, collaborative approach and environmental outcomes including risks associated with not taking action. System repair projects will work towards the multiple outcomes of

improving water quality, the creation of habitat for aquatic animals such as fish and platypus, re-creating natural passage and shelter for fish and other aquatic species and using natural materials and structures to slow stream flow to limit damage to banks during peak flow.

Each edition of Land and Water will showcase a System Repair activity, with an explanation of how the work functions, what outcomes could be expected and highlight a project in our region where the work has successfully been undertaken. System Repair works in the Mackay Whitsunday region will always be at or above best management practice and will seek to make the most of the latest science and engineering for riparian and in stream natural resource management. We look forward to working with new and existing partners to complete some high quality works to bring about the best outcomes for our region.

Healthy Waterways Contact:
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A-wier and O'Connell River engineered log jam



Reef Rescue System Repair

Bank stabilisation with log jams

Reef Catchments has been partnering with landholders, Griffith University and Pioneer Catchment Landcare to build some of the region's first Engineered Log Jams (ELJs) to stabilise eroding stream banks and help restore life to local rivers.

Construction of a series of log jams was completed in October at Owens Creek, near Gargett, at a badly eroding stretch of the river.

The log jam structures utilised 8 metre hardwood logs delivered from properties in Bloomsbury and Mirani.

Construction activities were led by noted Australian river expert and ELJ designer, Dr Andrew Brooks, from Griffith University.

Reef Catchments' Water and Waterways

Project Officer, Iona Flett, said the ELJ installation was an exciting concept designed to help restore the Mackay region's riverine health.

"The logs are arranged in a man-made 'jam' – essentially a criss-cross stack to slow and control water flow. This changes the behaviour of water flow, and over time will create pools and direct the channel away from the bank," Ms Flett said.

"As well as the pools, the logs themselves also provide a more natural river environment for native fish, including barramundi and jungle perch, who need snags and woody debris to hide under.

"The ELJs will stabilise the river bank, and native bank revegetation will also

play a key part in reducing erosion."

Gargett property owner, Andrew Meredith, said he was looking forward to seeing the results after trials with rocks had proved limiting. He said sitting back and doing nothing was not an option.

"The creek would only continue to widen and erode the bank, which on a personal level means a real loss of property. There would also be negative impacts further downstream," Mr Meredith said.

The project follows the success of an ELJ in the O'Connell River near Bloomsbury last year. The project is funded by the Queensland Government as part of the Everyone's Environment Grants program.

Water Quality Improvement Plan review and renew

The Mackay Whitsunday Water Quality Improvement Plan 2009 – 2014 is a seminal document that Reef Catchments has used to focus program planning for the past five years. The document, available for download on the Reef Catchments Website, breaks the region into 33 sub-catchments and identifies water quality and drivers of poor quality in each sub-catchment. Importantly it also identifies opportunities for improving water quality and long and short-term targets for improvement to meet the requirements for the natural and human uses of the water.

Reef Catchments is collaborating with industry and the public to review progress towards the water quality targets and to set new targets for an updated plan that will be the focus for the coming five years. Review documents have been through one round of public consultation and feedback is being collated. The updated documents will be taken to a group of industry Think Tanks and the Healthy Waterways Panel, a working group that brings together representatives from industry, relevant scientific fields, universities, local, state and federal government, for a final review before consolidation.

This review forms the basis of a new plan which will seek to address any failings to meet short term targets and continue the region's progress towards long term water quality improvement goals for 2050.

Reef Catchments is also embarking on a new round of water quality monitoring that will be incorporated into the new Water Quality Improvement Plan along with the introduction of a new system of monitoring using indicator species that will enable us to measure the benefits of water quality improvement to an ecosystem.



Innovation update



Burdekin Catalyst grower Rob Ahern with Mackay Whitsunday grower and Catalyst member Neil Walpole

Changing the game in sugarcane

Innovation is vital for keeping all industries relevant and successful in the long term. This is absolutely true for agricultural industries where margins are typically tight and time is scarce.

Reef Catchments has supported local innovative sugarcane growers through Project Catalyst, a partnership between sugarcane growers, Reef Catchments, NQ Dry Tropics, Terrain NRM in the Wet Tropics, The Coca-Cola Foundation, WWF and the Australian Government, for around five years. The excellent work done through this partnership program has been recognised by the Australian Government who awarded Reef Catchments a grant to identify game changing innovations for nutrient and herbicide management in sugarcane. This new program will work with the Project Catalyst partnership, other interested growers and industry researchers, to identify the next generation management practices to maximise productivity good water quality and economic outcomes.

This program will be run side by side with the Reef Rescue Water Quality Improvement Grants to fast track innovations that show themselves to be successful in the key parameters of productivity, profitability and water quality to the grants program. This will speed the widespread adoption of new practices resulting in more profitable and productive farms, cleaner water and a healthier Great Barrier Reef.

In the Mackay Whitsunday region this research will look at precision application of nutrients and herbicides. Analysis of productivity, economics and water quality will be completed, updated annually and shared with working groups and the sugarcane community.

To improve understanding of the innovations being trialed additional demonstration sites will be set up on the farms of interested growers. These sites will not have the detailed analysis, however growers will be given assistance in setting up and managing the site and data will be collected on productivity and basic agronomic outcomes.

Over the coming years Reef Catchments will be running field days and workshops and looking for motivated growers to get involved with demonstration sites.

Project Catalyst: The story so far

Project Catalyst is Reef Catchment's flagship innovation program. Fostering the innovative spirit inherent in so many sugarcane growers for the benefit of all lies at the heart of the program that brings the growers together with Queensland NRM bodies, WWF and The Coca-Cola Foundation.

In the program's first five years it has grown locally from 18 to 30 growers and has welcomed two other NRM regions, NQ Dry Tropics and Terrain NRM in the Wet Tropics, with each northern region supporting 20 growers. Participants range from large enterprises, to multi-generational family farms and smaller individual properties. All Project Catalyst farms are commercially viable and are run with productivity and sustainability in mind. Each grower receives high level farm planning and advice from respected agronomists (Farmacist in Mackay Whitsunday) and support to run a trial testing an innovative idea for their farm. The program also promotes farmer networks, through the annual Project Catalyst Forum and smaller local events. Open and frank discussion is vital with questions and ideas raised and trials dissected.

Trials raise a number of key questions. Firstly, does it work? This appears to be a simple question; however it is has a number of components. Is it practical; does the technology or product work as it should, does the cane grow the same, better or worse, what other factors may have impacted the trial? The second question is; is this economically viable. Economic analysis is undertaken by economists from QDAFF who work out economic returns on investment over time. The third question Catalyst asks is does this project improve water quality. Trials are run with a reasonable assumption that the innovation should improve the quality of water leaving a property. This is not put to the test until the first two questions are answered..

Catalyst has had some great success with innovation trials. A number of the practices trialed through Catalyst have been taken up by other growers and have been incorporated into the Reef Rescue grants program. Stand out practices include banding of

Reef Catchments research

Paddock to Reef paddock scale monitoring: *Three year findings*



Paddock to Reef monitoring site, Kaela McDuffie installing a new flume.

(continued from pg8)

mill mud at reduced and consistent rates, GPS across farm operations, varying nutrient rates within or by block, EC mapping to improve nutrient management and skip row farming.

Project Catalyst will revamp the trials management to improve the quality and detail of the analysis by concentrating time and funds on a smaller number of sites. Less intensive 'blue sky trials' could become new trials.

While Project Catalyst works closely with a small group of growers it exists to benefit all. We look forward to sharing knowledge with interested growers and industry over the coming years.

The paddock scale water quality monitoring funded through the Paddock to Reef Integrated Monitoring, Modelling and Reporting Program and Reef Plan Science programs has now been run in the Mackay Whitsunday region for four years. In this region we have two sites, one at Victoria Plains and one at Marian which measure sediment, particulate and dissolved inorganic nitrogen and phosphorous and residual herbicides loads as well as total run off resulting from different management practices. Agronomic data is also collected from each treatment.

Researchers at the Department of Natural Resources and Mines have brought together the results from the first three years in a Synthesis report that highlights the clear trends in runoff that have been measured. The synthesis reports are available for download from the Reef Catchments website as a summary and detailed technical report.

Key findings from the reports are as follows.

- Annual runoff was reduced by 14.5% with controlled traffic (1.8 m row spacing), despite the above

average rainfall over the three year monitoring period

- Sediment loss was reduced by having a green cane trash blanket and by reducing cultivations
- The amount of nutrients applied, timing of application and background soil nutrient levels were critical in reducing losses
- Timing of herbicide application was critical in reducing runoff losses
- Implementing best management practices did not significantly affect productivity

Further detail can be found in: Runoff and Water Quality from Sugarcane Farming Synthesis Report 2009/10 to 2011/12 Wet Seasons Mackay Whitsunday Region and Mackay Whitsunday Paddock to Sub-catchment Scale Water Quality Monitoring of Sugarcane Management Practices Final Report for the 2009/10 to 2011/12 Wet Seasons, both available for download from the Reef Catchments website.

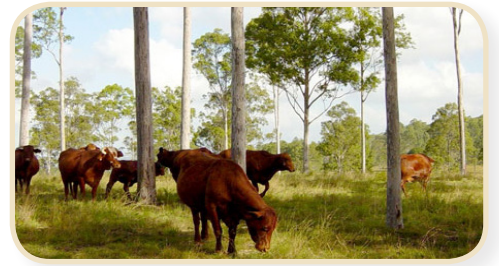
In 2012/13 the fourth year of monitoring was completed with two additional treatments investigating banding of residual herbicides, nutrient rates and row spacing. The report will be available shortly.



Innovation & Paddock to Reef Contact
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Cane harvest Mackay, grazing property Eungella, Barramundi farms horticulturalist Tony Bernard and an example of a grazing & forestry property in QLD



Sustainable production & development: *programs & support across the landscape*

Over the next three years Reef Catchments will work with land managers across the landscape, extending our research and support focus beyond sugarcane and grazing to the local horticulture, forestry and fisheries industries.

The combination of programs funded includes:

- Reef Rescue Water Quality Improvement Grants
- Reef Rescue System Repair
- Reef Rescue Game Changer Nutrient And Pesticide Management Practices
- Regional Landcare Facilitator and Sustainable Agriculture
- Project Catalyst
- Paddock To Reef Integrated Monitoring, Modelling And Reporting Program
- Action On The Ground Carbon Farming Research Trials

This suite of programs allows Reef Catchments to not only work with a broader range of land managers, but to undertake various works and projects that are integral to progressing sustainable agriculture in our region. Outside of the Reef

Rescue Water Quality Improvement Grants and farm planning packages, this includes; research trials and land manager networks, demonstration sites, workshops, field trips and guide books for all industries, paddock and stream based water quality trial sites, construction of in-stream structures to stabilise banks and re-vegetation of key sites, research trials for soil health and carbon sequestration, N₂O emissions monitoring of fertiliser treatments and working with industry to plan for climate variability.

We think this is pretty exciting and, while some of this work is already underway, we are looking forward to planning the bulk of it with industry leaders and farmers.

In coming months Reef Catchments will look to form a Regional Horticulture Working group and a Forestry Working group. A Fisheries Working Group will follow this. As with the active Sugarcane and Grazing Working Groups, these new groups will be important in decision making around the construction of Sustainable Agriculture Frameworks, the focus and selection of trials and how we work with and integrate with each industry.

We will bring you the latest news from all of these programs in this Land and Water newsletter, which will be distributed in print and via email eight times a year (four print and four via email). This way you will always be informed of workshops and field days and what we are learning through trials, demonstration and research.

In March 2014 our successful Grazing Forum will be expanded to celebrate all things Agriculture with the inaugural Ag Fest. Ag Fest will be run over three days and we will endeavour to bring together a range of specialist speakers from far and wide with our local research partners and industry experts for a combination of forum style presentations and in the field excursions.

Would you like to learn more about any of these programs, be involved with a working group or have a hot tip for an Ag Fest presenter? If so let us know.

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Land & Water Programs Snapshot

5 Primary production industries - each with its own working group
8 programs
\$7.5 million property improvement grants over 3 years
50 trial and demonstration sites ... and so much more.

Bank stabilisation and in stream repair Reef Rescue system repair

Products for land holders: construction of bed and bank stabilisation structures (i.e. log jams, A-weirs, re-vegetation and fencing), construction of fish ways, removal of fish passage obstructions, fish monitoring programs, bed and bank monitoring, nutrient treatment trains, wetland restoration and construction.



Research trials and monitoring Paddock to Reef Action on the Ground Carbon Farming Futures

Products for land holders: validation sites for improved sugarcane management practices with water quality monitoring, soil carbon trials for sugarcane, grazing and horticulture, N₂O emission monitoring trials for sugarcane, field walks, workshops, extension & communication products.



Innovation trials, demonstration and landholder networks

Project Catalyst
Reef Rescue Game Changer
Regional Landcare Facilitator Sustainable Agriculture

Products for land holders: innovation trials for sugarcane and grazing, demonstration sites for cane and grazing innovation, economic validation of innovative sugarcane management practices, A-class property planning and advice, Project Catalyst Innovation Network, Landcare Grazing Innovation Network, Project Catalyst Sugarcane Innovation Forum, field walks, workshops, extension & communication products



Property planning & grants

Reef Rescue Water Quality improvement Grants Sugarcane
Reef Rescue Water Quality improvement Grants Grazing

Products for land holders: Property planning (3 years), small grants (<\$500), large grants, field trials.



Improved management practice identification, working groups & demonstration

Regional Landcare Facilitator Sustainable Agriculture

Products for land holders: industry and land holder working groups, sustainable agriculture guides, Ag Fest, improved management practice demonstration sites, extension & communication products.



Key: Landholder groups:  Sugarcane,  Grazing,  Horticulture,  Forestry,  Fisheries

Land and Water



Mackay dominates Reef Rescue sugarcane awards

Mackay cane farmers Rodney Lamb and Tony Bugeja (pictured above) were honoured for their dedication to sustainability, innovation and research when they were awarded Reef Rescue Sugarcane Farmer of the Year and Runner Up Sugarcane Farmer of the Year respectively at the Reef Rescue Awards in Cairns this year.

Rodney Lamb: Reef Rescue Sugarcane Farmer of the Year

Considered an innovator in the industry, Marian cane farmer Rodney Lamb has a history of adapting and trialling new equipment for environmental and economic benefit. He has been working with Mackay Area Productivity Services and Reef Catchments to adapt his inter row spray shields to only spray when there is a weed detected in what is known as a Weedseeker. Rodney has also been involved in the Paddock to Reef Program, providing his land and labour for a paddock monitoring trial that has run since 2009. These trials have been important in improving understanding of best practices in sugarcane management and encouraging the local grower community to take up improved practices.

"I believe that having trials in our area is very important and was glad to be asked to host one on my property," said Rod. Rodney used the initial Reef Rescue program to adopt improved practices across his farm including improving his system of wide rows on permanent beds with GPS guided controlled traffic, purchasing an eight-row legume planter and low-pressure overhead irrigation used to incorporate nutrients and chemicals and reduce run off.

Tony Bugeja: Runner Up; Reef Rescue Sugarcane Farmer of the Year

The region's second candidate is known for his commitment to innovation and willingness to work with a range of partners for the sustainability of the sugarcane industry. Among other things, Tony Bugeja of Palmyra is a member of Project Catalyst, a sugarcane innovation partnership between sugarcane growers, NRM groups, WWF, the government and the Coca-Cola Foundation.

"I am very happy to be named runner up in the Reef Rescue Awards, and to come second to a farmer as worthy as Rod Lamb,"

"I value the Reef Rescue program for it's ability to improve the quality of water leaving farms and entering the Great Barrier Reef and for it's impact on the local cane industry. It gives us the extra funds to improve farm management at a much faster pace than we could do alone," he said.

Tony has used Reef Rescue funds to make important changes including fitting GPS guidance to all operations in his 1.8m controlled traffic farming system and the purchase of a nine-row spray unit with hooded shields to improve chemical application and reduce use of residual chemicals. The new spray rig links with the GPS units to map applications. Tony also had his farm's soil EC mapped through a Reef Rescue industry support program. His property was first mapped 13 years ago; showing he really is a true innovator.

Rodney and Tony represent two of the many standout participants in the Reef Rescue program and are a great example of the programs local success.

The Reef Rescue Awards are run by the Queensland Farmers' Federation and the Regional NRM Groups Collective.

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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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