

A Comprehensive Look at the Mackay Whitsunday Water Quality Program



As we celebrate the successful conclusion of the Mackay-Whitsunday Water Quality Program (MWWQP), we wanted to firstly remember the contribution of Kerry Latter to the program. Kerry was an invaluable advocate of the program and a core member of the Steering Committee where he played an instrumental role in the program's development ensuring the alignment between regional grower needs and the programs overarching goals.

The MWWQP was the largest of five sugarcane regional water quality programs under the Reef Trust Partnership. Since 2020, growers under the MWWQP have been implementing on-farm practice change with the support and agronomic advice of industry delivery providers. In total, eight projects were delivered under the MWWQP with delivery providers supporting growers to adopt practices that are profitable and sustainable. The increased number of projects under the MWWQP provided growers with greater choice in who to work with and options for where the participating grower wanted to focus their efforts.

Of the eight projects delivered, six projects centred around providing one on one tailored agronomic extension support, to produce on-farm benefits while directly contributing to important improvements in water quality flowing through to our local creeks and waterways. One project sought to increase knowledge and understanding of various management practices through the installation of trials, evaluating different management strategies related to pesticides and fertiliser management. The eighth project provided financial support as Major Grants to purchase equipment which has accelerated the adoption of practices bringing forward planned upgrades and purchases by a number of years.

The success of the MWWQP is reflected by the strong grower interest in participating, demonstrating their proactive effort towards shared environmental goals and stewardship. Since the start of the program a total of 300 growers have engaged in a total of 514 farm-level projects, positively impacting 50,000 hectares of sugarcane land under production. That represents approximately 30% of growers in the central region and 40% of available farmed land. Through the collective efforts of growers in the MWWQP implementing changes on the ground, there has been a modelled annual reduction of 28 tonnes of dissolved inorganic nitrogen (DIN) and over 6 million pesticide risk units (RU).



6M+ risk units of pesticide reduced annually against target of 2,960,100.



28 Tonnes of Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen (DIN) reduced annually against target of 26 Tonnes.



970 approx. sugarcane farming enterprises in the central region with **300** approx. engaged in **514** projects.



50,000 approx. of the almost 123,000 hectares of land under sugarcane production under new management practices.

Moreover, the program's approach extended beyond quantitative achievements. Other key cross-cutting initiatives included a regional practice change strategy, technical support for water quality monitoring and communication, and monitoring of a local wetland to better understand the contribution of wetlands in improving water quality.

Through the regional practice change strategy and with direct feedback from growers, the MWWQP facilitated the development of the CaneRise website. Serving as a central location for everything related to sugarcane growing in the Mackay-Whitsundays, including local grower stories, tools and resources, fact sheets, current projects, funding opportunities, and events across the region. This dedicated website supports growers in the Mackay-Whitsundays by highlighting numerous positive stories and achievements of the region's growers.

The program would like to acknowledge each participating grower, delivery provider and wider industry who has played an important role in the success of the program and creating improved water quality outcomes.

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