

## Major sediment reduction win for Reef thanks to O'Connell Streambank works

A targeted streambank remediation project in the O'Connell catchment is delivering significant water quality improvements for the Great Barrier Reef, preventing hundreds of tonnes of fine sediment from entering the lagoon each year.

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The O'Connell catchment in the Mackay Whitsunday region is recognised as the sixth largest contributor of fine sediment to the Great Barrier Reef Lagoon, making it a high-priority area for on-ground action.

Delivered by Reef Catchments and funded through the Queensland and Australian governments, the Streambank Remediation Program - O'Connell Sites (the Project) stabilised riverbanks at two actively eroding sites on the O'Connell River and Murray Creek, successfully stabilise riverbanks and reduce sediment run-off.

The Project is estimated to have prevented **over 472 tonnes of fine sediment** annually from entering the Great Barrier Reef Lagoon, contributing to regional water quality targets and supporting the long-term health and resilience of the Reef.

Reef Catchments Waterways Manager, Brendan Smith, said reducing fine sediment runoff is critical to protecting the Reef.

"Fine sediment runoff is a major threat to the Great Barrier Reef, degrading water clarity and smothering coral and seagrass while transporting nutrients and pesticides into the marine environment," he said. "Reef Catchments is working to address this by implementing catchment-level projects designed to reduce sediment loss before it reaches the Reef."

Beyond water quality improvements, The Project has delivered a suite of environmental and agricultural benefits, including protecting productive agricultural land, safeguarding endangered rainforest areas, improving riparian vegetation and habitat connectivity for native species and strengthening resilience to extreme weather events.

Murray Creek landholder, Peter Baretta, said erosion had been an ongoing challenge across the property.

"We've got six to seven kilometres of creek, and you get a lot of water flow quickly against your banks," Mr Baretta said. "Sometimes it just gets away from you. You're losing ground, you're losing pastures, and you're losing production."

"What they've done here... the amount it's saved is phenomenal. This area is home to so much wildlife - quolls, platypus, turtles, Ulysses butterflies - and you don't want to lose that. Protecting the banks means protecting that habitat."

Reef Catchments Project Officer – Waterways, Emily Wilson, said the project was delivering strong outcomes on the ground.

“This work is making a real difference for landholders and the environment alike,” said Emily. “Streambanks are healthier, vegetation cover is improving and waterways are far better positioned to withstand future flooding.”

“Importantly, the program is also supporting the local community by creating employment opportunities and building the capability of regional service providers, strengthening our ability to deliver similar projects into the future.”

Initial works were completed in late 2024 and involved a range of remediation tactics tailored to site conditions, including bank reprofiling, rock toe protection, pile fields, root ball logs and planting of over **5,500 native trees and shrubs**.

The sites have been tested by multiple significant weather events, including three major flooding events during the 2024-25 wet season and Tropical Cyclone Koji in January 2026. Both sites demonstrated strong resilience, with no additional damage at the O'Connell River site, while only minor maintenance works were needed at Murry Creek.

“It’s incredibly encouraging to see how well these sites have held up under real-world conditions,” Emily said. “These events are exactly what we design for, and the performance of these sites shows the value of investing in well-planned, science-based remediation.”

Ongoing monitoring and maintenance are supporting the long-term success of the works, with additional reinforcement and native vegetation planting undertaken in 2025 to further strengthen outcomes.

As vegetation continues to establish and root systems deepen, the sites are expected to deliver increasing long-term stability and protection.

“This is a long-term investment in the resilience of our waterways and the future health of the Reef,” Brendan added. “The more we build on projects like this, the closer we get to achieving meaningful improvements at a catchment scale.” The O'Connell sites project is part of the Streambank Remediation Program which is a partnership program funded through the Queensland Government’s Queensland Reef Water Quality Program and the Australian Government’s Reef Trust.

For additional details about the Streambank Remediation Program – O'Connell Sites, contact us or visit the Reef Catchments website ([www.reefcatchments.com.au](http://www.reefcatchments.com.au))

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## About Reef Catchments

Reef Catchments are the Natural Resource Management (NRM) group for the Mackay Whitsunday Isaac region. We are a non-government, not-for-profit organisation.

We facilitate change and work for long-term solutions to sustain, protect, and improve our region's natural resources and environment, now and into the future. Our team are skilled and outcome-focused people, all dedicated to looking after the environment in the Mackay Whitsunday Isaac region.

For more information: [www.reefcatchments.com.au](http://www.reefcatchments.com.au)

## Supporting Images:



Pictured above: Murray Creek before major works (left), Murray Creek after major works (right)



Pictured above: O'Connell River before major works (left), O'Connell River after major works (right)

Pictured below: Reef catchments Project Officer Waterways, Emily Wilson (right) with Landholders at the Murray Creek site.

