

Mackay Whitsundays

REEFWISE FARMING PROJECT

*Supporting farms, safeguarding
the Great Barrier Reef*

Overview

Reef Catchments recognises that improving water quality requires a combination of practice change, tailored agronomy advice, and targeted incentives. In response, the Mackay Whitsunday Reefwise Farming Project is being delivered between 2025 and 2028 to reduce pesticide and dissolved inorganic nitrogen (DIN) loads across the Mackay Whitsunday Isaac region.

To support this, Reef Catchments has engaged delivery partners including Sugar Research Australia (SRA), Nutrien Ag Solutions, Farmacist, and Mackay Area Productivity Services (MAPS) to provide tailored agronomy advice to 60 sugarcane growers. This support enables practical, on-farm changes that improve nutrient and chemical management, enhance productivity, and contribute to the protection resilience of the Great Barrier Reef.



Grower Entitlements

Growers participating in the Reefwise Farming project are entitled to:

- **Tailored agronomy advice** independent, farm-specific guidance on irrigation, nutrient and chemical management.
- **Co-investment equipment grants** 50:50 funding to help purchase fit-for-purpose equipment that supports best-practice management.
- **Practical learning resources** tools, guides, and materials to support confident on-farm decision-making.
- **Peer-to-peer learning opportunities** chances to share experiences and learn from other local growers.
- **Support for practice change** guidance and resources to trial, adopt, and embed best-practice approaches that boost farm productivity while directly contributing to important improvements in water quality
- **Access to program monitoring and evaluation** feedback on improvements and outcomes to inform future farm decisions.

Project Services

STAGE 1 Management Plans

Growers can choose to focus on either nutrient or chemical management, and together with Reef Catchments' delivery partners develop a management plan that will be reviewed and refined in subsequent years.

The initial management plan (Stage 1) guides and informs services under Stages 2 & 3, which support and refine actions tailored to the farm's goals and delivery partner recommendations.

Plan Type	What it covers
Irrigation Management Plans (IMP)	Irrigation Management Plans (IMP) will improve irrigation efficiency across sugarcane farming systems by assessing irrigation scheduling, energy use and infrastructure, including pumps, water delivery and application uniformity. Farm data, field observations and water use records will inform the assessment, with IrriSAT used where appropriate. Analysis will identify inefficiencies and improvement opportunities, including pump optimisation, system adjustments and improved irrigation timing, delivering on-farm recommendations to support irrigation management and productivity.
Nutrient Management Plan (NMP)	Nutrient Management Plans (NMPs) will go beyond basic regulatory requirements, covering macronutrients, micronutrients, and soil pH, while reviewing past Nutrient Use Efficiency (NUE) to identify underperforming areas and recommend practical actions. Historical soil test trends and other feedback are captured and documented to support informed, on-farm decision-making.
Chemical Management Plan (CMP)	Chemical Management Plans (CMPs) will be designed to meet regulatory requirements and provide guidance for chemical selection using the Pesticide Decision Support Tool, considering toxicity, persistence, and mobility to reduce pesticide Risk Units (RUs) leaving the property. Plans provide mapping and information to support best-practice chemical use, including buffer zones, soil types, restricted chemicals, and relevant weather conditions. Feedback and comments are documented, with actionable recommendations provided where necessary.

STAGE 2 Additional Management Services

Growers may be approved for one or more selected services, subject to eligibility, prioritisation, and available program resources. All services must align with Reef Catchments' water quality objectives. Service availability is subject to caps.

Service	What it involves	Caps and restrictions
EM Mapping	EC mapping of paddocks	One grower, 50 ha cap (project lifetime)
Satellite Yield Mapping	Crop vigour estimation via NDVI/VARI	One grower, 100 ha/year cap
Program Farming NMP Support	Digital platform for nutrient/chemical records and NMP development	One grower, year of application
Zero-Tillage Legume Planter	Access to planter and extension for break crop programs	One grower, year of application
Spray Rig Assessment	On-farm assessment of spray rig, boom, pump, nozzles and calibration	One grower, capped to two years
Chemical Mixing Site Assessment	Assessment of mixing and handling areas, storage, PPE and sensitive area proximity	One grower, capped to two years
Farm Emissions Profile	Whole-of-farm GHG and nutrient emissions assessment with management opportunities identified	Start and last year of funding

STAGE 3 Major Grants

Additional support services are available through the Reefwise Farming Major Grants component, providing targeted funding and technical support to implement on-farm practice changes identified through earlier planning.

Major Grants Investment Pathway
Up to \$50,000 co-contributions (50:50 Major grants pathway)
Zero-Investment pathway (irrigation and drainage planning)

This stage is designed to support the adoption of improved nutrient, chemical and irrigation management practices, while helping growers overcome financial and equipment barriers to change.

For information on Major Grants eligibility and the application process, refer to Factsheet 3 or visit the Reef Catchments website.



Expression of Interest

To be considered for future opportunities please scan the QR Code and complete the EOI form on our website.

