

Reef Catchments Secures \$9.6 Million to Restore Lagoon Creek Wetlands and Improve Great Barrier Reef Water Quality

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Reef Catchments has been awarded \$9.6 million in grant funding through the Australian Government's Reefwise Wetlands Program to deliver the Lagoon Creek Wetland Remediation Project, a large-scale wetland and riparian restoration initiative in the Proserpine sub-catchment of the Mackay Whitsunday Isaac region.

The project will address water quality and wetland condition along Lagoon Creek, a waterway that drains through sugarcane farmland and wetland systems before reaching the ecologically significant Goorganga Plain wetland complex and Repulse Bay. Agricultural runoff, invasive weeds and changes to natural water flow have degraded wetlands and riparian zones along the creek, contributing to water pollutant loads entering the Great Barrier Reef.

Reef Catchments CEO, Katrina Dent, said *"This funding reflects a genuine commitment to improving Reef water quality through landscape-scale restoration. What makes this project stand out is its whole-of-system approach, working with sugarcane landholders to design interventions that deliver water quality benefits for the Reef while also adding value to the farm. When environmental outcomes and landholder priorities align, you get projects that last. That is what we are building along Lagoon Creek."*

Working with Alluvium Consulting, Whitsunday Regional Council, local businesses and two adjoining landholders, Reef Catchments will design and implement a 4.5 km treatment train of coordinated restoration works, including the construction of treatment wetlands, installation of vegetated drains and grass buffer strips, streambank stabilisation, and riparian revegetation along Lagoon Creek.

Wetland rehabilitation works will target three wetland areas along the creek, addressing severe weed infestations, siltation, cattle access and loss of native vegetation, and will reconnect more than 60 ha of Endangered Regional Ecosystems.

Reef Catchments Land and Water Program Director, Bernie Cockayne, said *"The treatment train approach we are using along Lagoon Creek is recognised as best practice for this type of agricultural catchment. By connecting treatment wetlands, vegetated drains and riparian revegetation across 4.5 km, we are addressing water quality at multiple points in the system before it reaches the Goorganga Plain and Repulse Bay. We are also working to restore more than 60 hectares of Endangered Regional Ecosystems that have been degraded over many years. This is complex, detailed work, and it is exactly what this part of the catchment needs."*

The project area contains likely habitat for the Critically Endangered Eastern Curlew and Curlew Sandpiper, as well as other vulnerable migratory bird species, and for the Endangered Broad-leaf Tea-tree (*Melaleuca viridiflora*).

A core focus of the project is ensuring long-term maintenance by landholders. On-farm benefits, including improved drainage, irrigation water reuse and sediment repurposing, have been built into the project design to incentivise ongoing stewardship. A long-term maintenance plan will be developed with landholders, Reef Catchments and project partners.

The project contributes to the Reef Trust Long-Term Outcome of improving water quality entering the Great Barrier Reef. It is part of the Albanese Government's \$1.2 billion investment over nine years to protect and restore the Reef, funded through the Government's Reef Trust and contributing to Reef 2050 Plan priorities. The Great Barrier Reef has an estimated economic value of \$95 billion and directly supports 77,000 jobs.

The Lagoon Creek Wetland Remediation Project runs from February 2026 to March 2030.

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Funding

This project received grant funding from the Reefwise Wetlands Grant Program — which is funded through the Australian Government's Reef Trust.

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About Reef Catchments

Reef Catchments is the Natural Resource Management (NRM) organisation 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, and improve our region's natural resources and environment, now and into the future.

With over 22 years of regional leadership in natural resource management, Reef Catchments operates from offices in Mackay and Proserpine, facilitating over 50 skilled staff across more than 40 active projects spanning sustainable agriculture, waterway health, reef resilience and biodiversity.

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