

New Strategy charts course for healthier waterways and a stronger Mackay Whitsunday region

Mackay Whitsunday Regional Water Quality Strategy 2025 - 2035

2 September 2026– For Immediate Release

A new 10-year strategy to improve water quality across the Mackay Whitsunday region has been launched, providing a clear roadmap to protect local waterways, support productive landscapes and strengthen the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef.

Developed by Reef Catchments in partnership with C2O Consulting and The University of Queensland, the Mackay Whitsunday Regional Water Quality Strategy 2025-2035 sets out how water quality can be improved across the region's four major catchments (Proserpine, O'Connell, Pioneer and Plane basins) over the next decade. The strategy is guided by three goals: improved water quality, resilient landscapes and empowered communities.

Although the Mackay Whitsunday region covers just two per cent of the Great Barrier Reef catchment area, it contains around 20 per cent of the Reef's coastline, more than 500km² of seagrass meadows, over 3,000km² of coral reefs and nationally significant wetlands, including the Goorganga Plains wetland complex. The region is also home to approximately 175,700 people and contributes more than \$22 billion to Queensland's economy each year.

Reef Catchments Program Director (Land and Water) Bernie Cockayne said the strategy recognised the strong connection between healthy landscapes, healthy waterways and strong regional communities.

"This strategy is about making sure the water leaving our catchments is cleaner when it reaches the coast and the Reef. This benefits the environment, and also benefits our industries, communities and the many livelihoods that depend on healthy waterways."

The strategy identifies nutrients, sediment and pesticides as the key pollutants affecting regional waterways and outlines practical actions including streambank rehabilitation, wetland restoration, revegetation and sustainable farming practices.

"The Mackay Whitsunday region punches well above its weight. What happens on our land has a direct impact on our rivers, estuaries, coastal waters and ultimately the Reef. This strategy helps focus our efforts where they can make the biggest difference."

The strategy aligns with the Queensland and Australian Governments' Reef 2050 Catchment Water Quality Strategy, ensuring local actions contribute to Reef-wide outcomes. Progress is measured through the Reef Water Quality Report Card, with regional projects helping drive improvements across the broader Great Barrier Reef catchment.

"Whether you're a landholder, local council, a Traditional Owner group, industry group or simply someone who cares about this region, there's a role for you to play. Improving water quality is a shared responsibility and achieving lasting results will take all of us working together."

The Mackay Whitsunday Regional Water Quality Strategy 2025-2035 was developed with funding from the Australian Government's Landscape Repair Program.

For more information about the the Mackay Whitsunday Regional Water Quality Strategy 2025-2035 and its supporting Synthesis Report and summary guide please visit <https://reefcatchments.com.au/regional-water-quality-strategy/>

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Supporting Items

- [Pre-recorded interview](#) with Bernie Cockayne, Reef Catchments Director – Land and Water
- [B-roll footage](#) of regional landscapes

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.

In FY2026, Reef Catchments managed funding of \$32 million to enable key environmental projects. Through partnerships with community, researchers, local councils and State and Federal government agencies, Reef Catchments works to improve natural resource conditions and community capacity to engage in long-term environmental solutions.

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