



LAUNCH OF NEW REPORT CARD FOR MACKAY-WHITSUNDAY WATERWAY HEALTH

A new pilot report on the health of Mackay-Whitsunday waterways has highlighted data gaps and the need for more action to be taken to secure the long-term health of our basins, estuaries and the Great Barrier Reef.

The Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership pilot report card has today launched in Mackay. Still in the early phases, the report clearly highlights missing links in water quality monitoring and research, while also identifying regional strengths and key areas of concern.

Partnership Chair, Di Tarte, said importantly the new initiative would help prioritise where efforts should be directed to improve waterway health.

"Thanks to the pilot report card, the community is provided with ongoing, relevant information necessary to secure a strong future and the long-term health of the Mackay-Whitsunday waterways and the adjacent area of the Great Barrier Reef," Ms Tarte said.

The Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership represents the first collaboration of diverse sectors focused specifically on waterway health in the Mackay-Whitsunday area, consisting of 28 organisations working together to share leading and transparent independent science.

Collectively, the group has access to regional data and information representing over \$4M of investment in monitoring and research programs.

"For the first time, the Partnership brings together organisations and information from a wide range of sectors for a collaborative approach to assessing the health of our waterways and identifying management priorities – from government, mining and ports, to agriculture, fisheries, tourism, traditional owners and environmental and NRM groups," Ms Tarte said.

"This approach ensures insight into whole-of-catchment waterway health, from basin to estuary and out to the marine environment and adjacent Great Barrier Reef. With diverse organisations coming to one table, it is also testament to a high level of commitment to waterway health from the Mackay-Whitsunday region.

"The pilot report card is a first step towards tracking trends in waterway health and the progress of management activities to respond in areas where improvements are needed."

It includes results on environmental and community social values of waterways, as well as stewardship by industry.

Results demonstrate a clear need for more action and investment into the Mackay-Whitsunday region to effectively improve water quality moving forward.

"While there are certainly areas in the region with encouraging results, there are also clear areas where improvement is needed, and some areas where we have no data at all," Ms Tarte said.

The condition of the region's waterways ranged from B's (Good) to D's (Poor). Of the Mackay-Whitsunday region's five major freshwater basins, just one reported a grade of B (the O'Connell), two scored C (Don and Proserpine) and two scored D (Pioneer and Plane).

Major estuaries rated more positive overall water quality scores of B for the Gregory River, Vines Creek, and Carmila Creek; C for Rocky Dam Creek, Plane Creek and Murray and St Helens Creek; and D for Sandy Creek.

The marine results were mixed, from D for the Inshore Central region, to a C for the Northern and Whitsunday regions, to a B Offshore.

There was no data available for the southern inshore reporting zone (east of Carmila), flagging a critical need for monitoring programs to be established in this area.

Contaminants have been identified as a key issue in the Pioneer and Plane basins. Wetland extent and riparian vegetation also appear to be a key concern within the region's basins and estuaries. The condition of the Whitsunday inshore marine area (C) is also of concern given this area's importance to the tourism industry.

Ms Tarte said importantly, the pilot report also showed that the Mackay-Whitsunday community placed an exceptionally strong value (A) on waterways for the lifestyle and social benefits provided.

"From fishing, snorkelling and diving to simply enjoying a walk on a beautiful and pristine beach – these results show the region strongly values the lifestyle its waterways provide, and are committed to ensuring they remain intact for the next generation to enjoy."

She said responsibility for water quality improvements did not fall on any one industry or sector, but required a partnership approach.

"We are seeing evidence of good work and on-going improvements across the board, for example by farmers, ports, recreational fishers, the tourism sector, local government and individuals.

"Responsibility for waterway health cannot be charged to any one sector alone. When it comes to the future of our waterways and the Great Barrier Reef, we all have an important part to play," Ms Tarte said.

The Partnership welcomes comment and feedback from the community on the pilot report card.

To view and download a full copy of the pilot report and for further details on the breakdown of results, values and grades visit: www.healthyriverstoreef.org.au

The Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership is hosted by Reef Catchments (Mackay Whitsunday Isaac) natural resource management group.

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ABOUT THE MACKAY-WHITSUNDAY HEALTHY RIVERS TO REEF PARTNERSHIP

The Mackay-Whitsunday Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership brings together diverse stakeholders to focus on the health of the five regional basins and adjacent coastal marine areas of the Great Barrier Reef. The Partnership supports the development of an annual Mackay-Whitsunday waterway health report card, based on rigorous independent science and straightforward public reporting, providing the community with the information needed to make informed decisions around waterway health and management.

Partners recognise that more can be achieved together than alone and acknowledge the value of collaboration in realising outcomes beyond those that could be attained by any single agency or organisation. Partners are committed to sharing regional knowledge, program actions and monitoring and research information to assist in a broader understanding of the health of basins, rivers and Reef. The Partnership is utilising best available science, with access to leading data that collectively represents over \$4 million of partner investment in waterway and marine monitoring programs.

PARTNERSHIP MEMBERS

- Central Queensland University
- Conservation Volunteers Australia
- CSIRO
- Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
- Growcom
- Isaac Regional Council
- Mackay Canegrowers Limited - CANEGROWERS Mackay
- Mackay Conservation Group
- Mackay Recreational Fishers Alliance
- Mackay Regional Council
- Mackay Sugar
- Mackay Tourism Limited
- North Queensland Bulk Ports Corporation Ltd
- NQ Dry Tropics Ltd
- Pioneer Catchment & Landcare Inc
- Queensland Farmers' Federation
- Queensland Resources Council Ltd
- Reef Catchments Limited
- Regional Development Australia Mackay-Isaac-Whitsunday Inc
- Resource Industry Network
- Sarina Landcare Catchment Management Association Inc
- State of Queensland acting through the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection
- Whitsunday Catchment Landcare Ltd
- Whitsunday Charter Boat Industry Association
- Whitsunday Regional Council
- Whitsunday Regional Organisation of Councils (ROC)
- Whitsundays Marketing and Development Ltd

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IMAGE: High resolution attached -

Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership Panel members, from left:

Matthew Fullerton (Department of Environment and Heritage Protection), Katrina Dent (Partnership deputy chair and Reef Catchments), David Wachenfeld (Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority), Partnership Chair Di Tarte, Kevin Kane (North Queensland Bulk Ports), Dan Staley (Whitsunday Regional Council), Kerry Latter (Canegrowers), Lance Murray (Mackay Recreational Fishers Alliance), Samarla Deshong (Koinjmal Traditional Owner), David Brewer (CSIRO), Partnership executive officer Charlie Morgan and Ellen Roberts (Mackay Conservation Group).

