

2014 – 2017 **ANNUAL REPORT** SUMMARY



HEALTHY RIVERS TO
REEF PARTNERSHIP
MACKAY-WHITSUNDAY



ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

Launched in 2014, the Partnership is a collaboration between community, Traditional Owners, farmers and fishers, industry, science, tourism and government who recognise that more can be achieved by working together than as individuals. The primary purpose of the Partnership is to achieve an annual Mackay-Whitsunday regional waterway health and stewardship report card. The report card uses the best independent science and integrates a range of Great Barrier Reef (GBR) wide and regional monitoring programs to measure waterway health in an environmental, social, economic and cultural context.

<http://healthyriverstoreef.org.au/about-us/>

FROM THE CHAIR

In just three years the Mackay-Whitsunday Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership has achieved results that many other similar initiatives have taken up to a decade to achieve. We have done this by drawing on the expertise within the Region, the commitment and financial support of Partners, and the learnings from other regions including South East Queensland and Gladstone as well as the Great Barrier Reef Water Quality Protection Plan.

Working collaboratively the Partners have provided the regional support required to successfully deliver an annual report card on waterway health. However, this success has only been possible by the dedicated work of our two full-time staff, the many technical experts who come together as the Regional Report Cards Technical Working Group, the oversight and guidance of the Reef Water Quality Independent Science Panel, and the communication and administrative support of our host, Reef Catchments.

Our approach of drawing on existing monitoring programs and gradually enhancing them, has worked. The annual report card provides an important value add to the data already being gathered.

It has also highlighted the gaps in our knowledge, which are beginning to be addressed through new monitoring and collaborative research programs. Based on Partners' and community feedback we are adjusting how the data is reported and the look and feel of the report card.

Partners have identified that the next challenge is making better use of the report card in identifying management actions to ensure that the Region's waterways remain healthy and improve where needed. This is essential for achieving the Partnership's vision of healthy rivers and Reef contributing to a prosperous and iconic region.

Diane Tarte,
Independent Partnership Chair



OUR PARTNERS



OUR LINKAGES

The Mackay-Whitsunday regional report card is relevant to a range of GBR-wide and regional plans and links with State, regional and local programs and reporting. Examples include:

- The Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan – under Water Quality Action 23 (expand integrated water quality monitoring and report card programs in priority catchments e.g. Mackay-Whitsundays).
- Reef Water Quality Protection Plan 2013 – Our report card is aligned to the GBR report card and utilises relevant data from Paddock to Reef monitoring programs within the Region.
- Mackay-Whitsunday Water Quality Improvement Plan – The Partnership utilises the environmental condition information from the WQIP to ensure consistency for management priorities, environmental values and ecologically relevant targets.
- Other Queensland regional partnerships – We work closely with similar initiatives in South-East Queensland, Fitzroy, Gladstone, Townsville and the Wet Tropics to ensure consistency in reporting is realised where appropriate.
- National Report Card Network – the Partnership contributes to a national network of report card practitioners, where report card initiatives from all over Australia meet and share their knowledge and experiences.

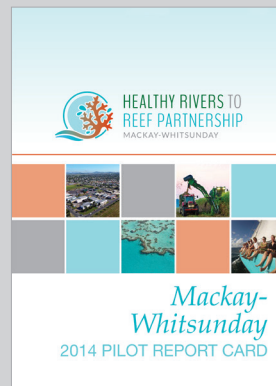
OUR JOURNEY



The Partnership was officially launched on the 1st of October 2014 in Mackay by the Queensland Minister for the Environment and Heritage Protection, the Hon. Andrew Powell. Our first priority was establishing an open and transparent method to capture the health of the catchments and waterways through an annual report card. Work on the pilot report card commenced. A total of 21 Partner organisations signed a Memorandum of Understanding, demonstrating their support for waterway health in the region.

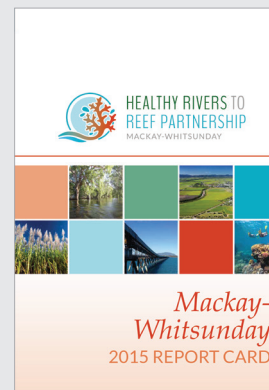
2015

2015 saw the start of the Partnership's operations including the development of the Technical Working Group, the Communications and Engagement Strategy and the Partnership's Governance arrangements. The Partnership's Executive Officer, Charlie Morgan, was employed in mid-2015. The 2014 pilot report card was released in Mackay on 25th October 2015, alongside a snapshot of Partners' activities to improve waterway health in the Region, the Activities Spotlight. The 2015/6 financial year ended with 28 Partner organisations on-board.



2016

The Partnership welcomed its new Technical Officer, Emma Carlos, in January 2016. A full review of the pilot report card program design was undertaken and the Partnership invested in projects to fill data gaps in the next report card (for example an assessment of fish barriers in freshwater and estuarine environments). A new communication and engagement strategy was developed which included showcasing the report card in regional secondary Schools, a social media program and regular e-newsletters. The 2015 report card was launched in Mackay on 24th October 2016 by the Hon. Dr. Steven Miles, Queensland Minister for the Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef. Alongside a revised Activities Spotlight, a document outlining the Partnership's methods to improve subsequent report cards, Future Directions, was released. Many stakeholders in the Region were briefed on the results of the report card including Federal and State MPs, Boards of Partner organisations, community groups, landholders and school children. The Partnership's website was upgraded to feature an interactive report card results platform. Twenty-two Partner organisations re-confirmed their membership to the Partnership in the 2016/17 financial year.



2017

2017 has seen a series of technical reviews of the 2015 report card, alongside the strengthening of future report cards. The Partnership has invested in the development of freshwater and estuarine flow indicators as well as coordinated the baseline monitoring in the southern inshore marine reporting zone for water quality, seagrass and coral condition. An Activities Spotlight database, outlining where Partner organisations are undertaking activities to improve waterway health, has been developed. The 2016/17 communications and engagement strategy was delivered and included a series of focus group sessions to gain important feedback on the 2015 report card. The Partnership has been successful in securing funding to commence a 2-year study into the poor water clarity in the Whitsundays, something the 2015 report card highlighted. Work on the 2016 report card is complete (released 24th October 2017). It is available to view on our website: www.healthyriverstoreef.org.au



OUR VISION

Healthy rivers and Reef contributing to a prosperous and iconic region where people visit, live, work and play.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The focus of the Partnership for the 2014 – 2017 period was to consolidate and streamline the process for the development of the annual report card. To build a better report card year to year, the Partnership:

- Used existing monitoring data and made it suitable for report card use; for example the fish barrier work which was already included in the Mackay Whitsunday Water Quality Improvement Plan.
- Integrated different datasets to report on one indicator; for example the North Queensland Bulk Ports and Marine Monitoring Program coral data sets, which were more closely aligned.
- Designed new monitoring programs where data does not exist; for example in the southern inshore zone for water quality, seagrass and coral condition assessments.
- Increased our understanding of how sectors in the region contribute to best environmental management practice; by contributing to a Queensland Government led review of our non-agricultural stewardship assessment frameworks.

BY THE NUMBERS

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Total Income (including carryover)	\$250,000	\$646,411	\$785,903
Membership fees	\$250,000	\$585,204	\$485,300
Expenditure	\$199,268	\$485,249	\$512,167
In-kind contributions	No record	\$99,060	\$62,630
Cost of existing monitoring programs which make up the report card	\$4 million	\$3.14 million	TBC

OUR HOSTS

Reef Catchments Limited has acted as the Partnership's host since its inception in 2014. As the Natural Resource Management (NRM) Regional Body for the Mackay-Whitsunday-Isaac Region, Reef Catchments plays a pivotal role in developing broad NRM strategies and programs for the region, including the Mackay Whitsunday Water Quality Improvement Plan. Reef Catchments has provided a suite of in-kind contributions to the Partnership since 2014.



www.reefcatchments.com.au



FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Partnership is working hard to improve the annual report card year on year including filling data gaps, improving citizen science linkages and improving the report card program design as new/improved information is released (for example new water quality guidelines for the Region). For further information head along to the Partnership's website here:

<http://healthyriverstoreef.org.au/news-and-events/>



DATA MANAGEMENT

- The Partnership decided to use the Spatial and Scientific Information Management for Reef (SSIMR) environment for long term data storage and management. Administered by the Queensland Government, the data stored in the SSIMR environment will be for the life of the Mackay-Whitsunday Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership.
- The development of a fit-for-purpose structure in the SSIMR environment began in early 2017 and data from the 2014 and 2015 report cards is progressively being uploaded as the structure is finalised.
- Partnership specific data sharing agreements are being finalised with AIMS, JCU and NQBP, who do not release their data publicly. These agreements will not only allow the Partnership to use relevant data for the report card but also allow its long term storage in the SSIMR environment.

REPORT CARD DATA

Report card data is being used in a number of ways amongst different stakeholders. Here are a few examples:

- Urban stewardship assessment results are being used by Councils in the region to identify areas of improvement in their environmental management systems.
- The Cultural Heritage project developed with the Traditional Owner Reference Group in 2016 has catalysed the Group to build further capacity for site-based heritage assessments.
- Water clarity results for the Whitsunday region in the 2014 and 2015 report cards have been used to trigger further investigations into both the historic water quality in the area, and the drivers behind observations included in the report cards. A \$500,000 project being led by CSIRO and AIMS commenced in June 2017 and includes the use of a water quality logger being fitted to one of Tourism Whitsundays' largest and most distinctive vessels, the tall ship Solway Lass.

TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP

During the 2014/2017 period, the Regional Report Cards Technical Working Group (TWG) provided a vital review function for the Partnership's annual Program Design, which included both the pilot and 2015 report cards. This was achieved through a series of workshops throughout February – May 2016 and 2017. Indicator-specific scoring ranges have been amended between the pilot and 2016 report cards to allow easier comparison across other report card products. The new scoring ranges utilised in the 2016 report card better reflects the use of regional guidelines for water quality.

The TWG have also provided a series of recommendations on ecological monitoring priorities to fill data gaps in the report cards. An example of this is the commencement (and expansion in 2017) of the fish community health monitoring program in the Region's freshwater systems.



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WITH THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS

The Partnership wishes to thank all Partners for their valuable input since 2014, including generous in-kind contributions. We recognise that more can be done together and thank you for your on-going support.

WITH THANKS TO OUR **RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS**

The Partnership also wishes to thank our Research Organisation Partners including the Australian Institute of Marine Science, CSIRO, the Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation, James Cook University, and the Department of Natural Resources and Mines.

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