

# THINK WATERWAY HEALTH

# MACKAY-WHITSUNDAY

PARTNERS FORUM REPORT: SUMMARY



HEALTHY RIVERS TO  
REEF PARTNERSHIP  
MACKAY-WHITSUNDAY

## 24 organisations committed

to a shared, community-led approach to the long-term management of Mackay-Whitsunday waterways and marine environments.

### REPRESENTED AT THE TABLE

AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT, PORTS + RESOURCES, INDUSTRY, FISHERS, TOURISM, GOVERNMENT, TRADITIONAL OWNERS, SCIENTISTS, CONSERVATION.

### THE MACKAY-WHITSUNDAY HEALTHY RIVERS TO REEF PARTNERSHIP (HR2RP) LAUNCHED IN OCTOBER 2014.

One of the primary purposes of the Partnership is to produce an annual report card for the Mackay-Whitsunday Region on waterway health and stewardship. The report card integrates the best available independent science (e.g. local data from Ports), with Great Barrier Reef (GBR) and regional monitoring programs to measure waterway health in an environmental, social, economic and cultural context. Through much discussion, the Partnership has identified a need for stronger advocacy within the context of management actions and reporting progress to water quality targets. Further investment and clarification is required to develop this. Via this summary document, the Partnership is pleased to present key insights from its Partner's Forum. The event was held in March 2018 and attended by diverse stakeholders from the government, community and industry sectors.

## KEY MESSAGES

**1) EARLY RESULTS** from the joint AIMS/CSIRO Whitsunday water quality project suggests turbidity issues reported by the local tourism operators and the report card monitoring programs is being caused by a layer of very fine sediment (a 'fluffy' layer) that is likely being transported into the marine zone from the Proserpine and O'Connell River systems. These fluffy particles are very small and sink much more slowly, contributing to longer residence times compared to heavier sediments.

**2) A REEF RESTORATION** session revealed that GBRMPA is working to further understand both coastal and marine ecosystem

resilience. Projects include catchment and waterway changes, looking at how changed landscapes operate before prioritising action, and investigating all the drivers influencing Reef health in order to identify coral reefs that are more 'fortunate' than others.

**3) THE TOURISM INDUSTRY** in the Whitsundays is met with issues in the face of climate change and major disturbances (such as Cyclone Debbie) with industry response examples including moving to non-reef based tourism activities.

**4) POLLUTANTS, BASINS AND SUB-CATCHMENTS** were prioritised using a range of information including the new Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan (WQIP) and the Mackay Whitsunday Isaac WQIP. It was emphasised that maintaining current water quality (i.e 0% pollutant load reduction targets) is important and should be considered when assessing changes in existing land use. Key priority pollutants and basins were identified as shown in the table below.

### Key priority pollutants and basins have been identified as follows:

#### Priority Pollutants:

1. Pesticides
2. Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen
3. Sediment
4. Particulate nutrients

#### Priority Basins

1. Plane (Rocky Dam, Alligator, Sandy)
2. Pioneer (Pioneer, Mackay City)
3. O'Connell (Blackrock, Murray)
4. Proserpine (Myrtle, Lethebrook)
5. Don

# SUB-CATCHMENT PRIORITIES

Three sub-catchment case studies were presented on a range of specific management information relating to load reduction and ecosystem health targets (Mackay Whitsunday Isaac WQIP). The key points for management prioritisation for the focus sub-catchments were identified:

## MACKAY CITY SUB-CATCHMENT

- Stormwater and waterway/marine debris were identified as important issues in this sub-catchment
- Progress towards achieving targets set for pesticides is much too slow, partially due to a lack of extension
- More support is needed for landholders including the provision of 'alternatives' in the case of agricultural land use change
- Further collaboration is needed between the multiple stakeholders using this sub-catchment, particularly in the urban space
- Education is needed on stormwater in general including its connectivity through the landscape including urban centres
- The group agreed more relevant conclusions would be reached on this exercise with more local stakeholders in the room

## MYRTLE CREEK SUB-CATCHMENT

- Pesticides and DIN from agricultural land uses were considered management priorities however information is needed on contribution from urban and rural residential land uses as these are increasing in this sub-catchment
- Further extension, monitoring and behavioural change is needed
- Application of mill mud on top row of cane is an effective way of reducing DIN losses on-farm (has been trialled successfully elsewhere)
- An audit may be required on some of the BMP targets for this sub-catchment to identify where the most effective projects have been undertaken and where investments are needed

## SANDY CREEK SUB-CATCHMENT

- Pesticides, nutrients and sediments from agricultural land use are considered to be the management priorities in this sub-catchment
- There have been lots of prior investment in activities or projects in this sub-catchment but more needs to be done including landholder extension/BMP, habitat/waterway restoration, erosion and sediment control projects, sediment tracing, upgrades to existing infrastructure (e.g. Sewage Treatment Plans) and capacity building prior to the introduction of the proposed Reef regulation

THERE WAS CONSENSUS that the process of pollutant, basin and sub-catchment prioritisation for the Region was important. Attendees at the Partner's Forum felt that incorporating more local technical knowledge in each sub-catchment prioritisation would improve the outputs. This should include involving local landholders in sub-catchment scale management prioritisation discussions, both to share local knowledge and increase buy-in.

THE ROLE OF THE PARTNERSHIP session highlighted strong support for the Partnership to be involved in the development of the next Mackay Whitsunday Isaac Water Quality Improvement Plan (WQIP). The Management Committee were tasked with discussing this in more detail and a series of recommendations will be made back to the Partnership later in 2018.