



HEALTHY RIVERS TO
REEF PARTNERSHIP
MACKAY-WHITSUNDAY-ISAAC



2017 – 2020 ANNUAL REPORT SUMMARY

CHAIR'S REPORT

I was appointed Chair in July 2018, having had a keen interest in the Partnership since the original signing of the Partnership agreement in 2014. The progress of the Partnership in those first three years under Di Tarte's leadership, was extraordinary. A Partnership of this type had not been tried in our region before, and it is fair to say it has worked extremely well.

We have welcomed new Partners to the table and grown to 30. Monitoring and reporting have also expanded, thanks to the generosity of some of our partners. Since the Report Card's inception, six short years ago, we have always ensured rigorous science and monitoring. Even the impacts of the global pandemic, which presented monitoring challenges, has not significantly impacted the Report Card.

In 2019, we produced our first Stewardship Report to highlight the community and industry response to improving our waterway health. In 2020, we expanded this further with the [Above](#)



[and Beyond Report](#), which showcased 19 stories from our partners, demonstrating their work and commitment to the [Report Card](#). Making a difference takes time, and often, the change is incremental and not immediately noticeable. However, every partner is committed to our shared vision of healthy rivers and reef, contributing to a prosperous region.

In 2020, we farewelled our inaugural and very talented and hardworking Executive Officer Charlie Morgan and welcomed Bonny Stutsel to the role, and I know she will carry on the great work.

The Report Card changes that have occurred in the past three years have not only been substantial but have been beneficial to increasing our knowledge of the region's environment and waterway health and with the continued commitment of the partners and the exceptional work of the Technical Officers, the Report Card data and information will continue to be enhanced.

Julie Boyd

ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

Launched in 2014, the Partnership is a collaboration between the community, Traditional Owners, farmers and fishers, industry, science, tourism, and government, who recognise that more can be achieved by working together. The Partnership's vision is for 'healthy rivers and reef contributing to a prosperous region where people visit, live, work, and play'.

The Partnership's primary purpose is to develop an annual integrated waterway health report card for the Mackay-Whitsunday-Isaac Region (herein

the Report Card). The Report Card includes socio-economic, cultural, and environmental health indicators relating to the region's waterways and the reef. Additionally, the Partnership creates a yearly Stewardship Report. The Stewardship Report outlines management responses to improve Report Card indicators. It is a compendium of Partner projects that summarises how our region's sectors are going above and beyond to maintain or improve waterway health. It is designed to complement the waterway health Report Card.



OUR PARTNERS



ABOUT OUR HOSTS



Reef Catchments Limited has acted as the Partnership host since its inception in 2014. Reef Catchments are the Natural Resource Management (NRM) body for the Mackay-Whitsunday-Isaac Region. The organisation plays a pivotal role as advocates for the Great Barrier Reef, as facilitators of best land management practice in agriculture, and as a trusted entity to work in Partnership for positive regional environmental and social outcomes. Reef Catchments also provides in-kind contributions to the Partnership, such as currently facilitating the water sample collection for the Proserpine Water Quality Pilot Monitoring Program.

OUR OBJECTIVES

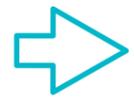
While the focus of the 2014-2017 period was to consolidate and streamline the process for the development of the annual Report Card, the 2017- 2020 period focussed on building an established governance, communications, technical and administrative foundations to improve Partnership membership, build a better Report Card and engage with more people about waterway health. Our strategic objectives during this period and until July 2022 are:



Securing the Partnership's financial position and enhancing a representative Partnership membership base to provide stability, diversity, and sustainability to the initiative.



Use the best data available to report on Human Dimensions (cultural, social, economic, and governance) aspects of waterway health.



Maintain and, where possible, improve confidence ratings in Report Card data.



Collaborate with Partners to assist Reef Catchments in producing an updated Mackay-Whitsunday-Isaac Water Quality Improvement Plan (WQIP), to contribute to better regional environmental outcomes and establish ecosystem targets for future Report Cards.



Fill existing report card gaps.



Improve established stewardship or best management practice reporting mechanisms for the region's major industries (urban, tourism, agriculture, ports, heavy industry, and aquaculture).



Continue to develop stand-alone communications (in addition to the annual waterway health Report Card and Stewardship Report) to build support for the Partnership and advocate for regional activities and priorities.

OUR LINKAGES AND NETWORKS

The Partnership's operations, specifically the waterway health Report Card, is relevant to a range of Great Barrier Reef planning, reporting, and programs, notably:

THE REEF 2050 LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

The formation of the Mackay-Whitsunday-Isaac Partnership was an action under the superseded 2015 plan. Regional Report Card partnerships are now foundational programs in five of the seven themes of the current Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan.

THE REEF 2050 WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Regional Partnerships are highlighted as key delivery agents for a range of water quality action, reporting and evaluation outcomes.



HEALTHY RIVERS TO REEF PARTNERSHIP
MACKAY-WHITSUNDAY-ISAAC

THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT REEF TRUST PARTNERSHIP

The Partnership has been recognised by the Great Barrier Reef Foundation as an important delivery mechanism for components of the Reef Trust Partnership. For example, by integrating citizen science data into regional Report Cards under the Community Reef Protection component of the Reef Trust Partnership.



THE MACKAY-WHITSUNDAY-ISAAC WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (WQIP)

The Partnership uses the environmental condition information from the WQIP to ensure consistency for management priorities, environmental values, and ecologically relevant targets. The relationship between this key regional plan and the regional Report Card is planned to be strengthened in the next iteration of the WQIP. This will be achieved via the designation of a range of relevant regional targets, which will be used to communicate progress to meeting targets in future report cards.

THE QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT REEF WATER QUALITY PROGRAM

This program also funds projects that our Partners are delivering in the region.



International Report Card Network

The Partnership is a proud and active member of both the Great Barrier Reef Regional Report Card Network and the International Report Card Network. Membership and active participation in these Networks mean Partner representatives and staff can engage with other report card practitioners to collaborate, innovate and share knowledge.



OUR CONTINUED JOURNEY

2017/18 23 PARTNERS



2016 Report Card released in October 2017.

Funding was obtained for Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) to investigate the historical context of water quality in the Whitsunday inshore zone based on the tourism industry's feedback on reduced water clarity over time.



Substantial technical reviews of the 2015 Report Card undertaken.

Non-agricultural stewardship frameworks reviewed by the Queensland Government.

Addressing data gaps (2017 Report Card):

- ▶ Estuarine and freshwater flow indicator development commenced.
- ▶ Coral condition reported in the northern and central marine zones for the first time.
- ▶ Southern Inshore Project began establishing baseline information on water quality, coral, and seagrass in the area offshore of Carmila (An area in a reporting region that lacked monitoring data).

Social Economic Long-Term Monitoring Program re-run in the region.



The Partnership established a Communications Network.

2018/19 26 PARTNERS

Partners Forum held in March 2018 to determine priority areas for Partnership/ Partner investment in projects both spatially and by pollutant.

A portfolio of regional investment priorities was created for the Partnership.

International Year of the Reef celebrations – 21 Partners pledge actions to help regional waterways and the Reef.



2017 Report Card released in December 2018 – cutting lag time of data collection for the Report Card from 18 months to 14 months.



Interactive Report Card system upgraded due to user feedback.

Filling Report Card gaps (2018 Report Card):

- ▶ Water quality data for the southern inshore zone and the northern inshore zone were reported for the first time since the 2014 pilot Report Card.
- ▶ Two additional freshwater water quality sites were established and reported (O'Connell and Plane Creek basins).
- ▶ Additional pesticides were included in the freshwater and inshore zone assessments, taking the total number of pesticides assessed from 13 to 22.
- ▶ Freshwater flow data was reported in the Pioneer and O'Connell basins for the first time.
- ▶ Fish community health data was reported in the Proserpine basin for the first time.

A report on Cyclone Debbie was released to highlight the region's response, including data on Whitsunday ecosystems condition 18 months on.



Steps were taken to improve Report Card confidence, with the 2018 Report Card seeing an increased number of water quality monitoring sites in the Plane Creek and O'Connell Basins.

Indigenous cultural heritage assessments were updated, and results were released in the 2018 Report Card.

2019/20 31 PARTNERS



2018 Report Card released in July 2019 – lag time further reduced to 12 months between data collection and release of the Report Card.

A pilot Stewardship Report was released in October 2019.

Whitsunday Blueprint project commenced – a collaboration between the Partnership, Reef Catchments, North Queensland Bulk Ports and Whitsunday Tourism Operators to deploy and maintain water quality logging equipment around the Whitsunday Islands. Future Report Card's will include data from the loggers.

30th Partner joins (Mackay Tourism)

Program Planning moves to three-year cycles (current iteration 2019 – 2022).



Additional funding from the Australian and Queensland Governments announced in June 2020.

Filling Report Card gaps (2019 Report Card):

- ▶ A supplementary estuarine water quality monitoring project was established to build data confidence in pesticide datasets.
- ▶ For the first time, the proportional contributions of each pesticide were quantified in the report card, contributing to a clearer picture of the overall pesticide risk to our waterways.
- ▶ Fish barrier data were reported in the Don Basin in the 2019 Report Card for the first time.
- ▶ Coral data were reported in the southern inshore zone for the first time.

Partnership wins joint Business and Higher Education Research Trust (BHERT) award with North Queensland Bulk Ports and TropWATER at James Cook University (JCU) to celebrate leading university and business collaborations.



Pilot Urban Water Stewardship Framework (UWSF) conducted with Whitsunday Regional Council in 2019.

2020 TO DATE 30 PARTNERS



2019 Report Card released in July 2020.

2019 Stewardship Report released in November 2020, representing the first time the Partnership has dived into a 'management response' to the Report Card.

Filling Report Card gaps (2020 Report Card):

- ▶ An additional Proserpine basin water quality site established to fill a data gap after discovering the previous site was unsuitable for reflecting ambient freshwater conditions. To be included in the 2021 Report Card.
- ▶ Work commencing to integrate a marine debris metric into the Report Card.
- ▶ Citizen science data integration has increased data confidence and community connection to future Report Cards.
- ▶ Urban Water Stewardship Framework process conducted across the region. Engaging regional Councils to benchmark urban impacts to waterway health.
- ▶ Planning is underway (in collaboration with Central Queensland University) to address a water quality data gap in the Carmila estuary.

COMMUNICATIONS HIGHLIGHTS

Here are a few highlights from our communications (comms) and engagement efforts from 2017 to now. These are in addition to our quarterly e-newsletters and the media campaigns leading up to Report Card release, which includes radio, online, print, and social media campaigns.

2017/18

- ▶ Reef 2050 Comms Network joined.
- ▶ Facebook page achieved an increase of 50 followers.
- ▶ E-newsletter subscriptions increased from **153 to 226.**
- ▶ Quarterly collaborative stories with our Partners, for example, the Sandy Creek grower-led water quality feature.
- ▶ Focus group sessions were undertaken with our Partners to get feedback on the 2016 Report Card.
- ▶ First Cyclone Debbie feature released – an initial snapshot of how the Cyclone impacted the region from the catchments to the inshore areas.
- ▶ Why video developed – animation video explaining the who, why and how of the Partnership.
- ▶ **Partners Forum – full report and comms summary produced.**
- ▶ Website user testing was undertaken – online interactive Report Card platform upgraded to facilitate easier engagement. Content key messages added to assist in the interpretation of complex Report Card data.
- ▶ Scoping of a schools project undertaken – using Report Card results to create interactive catchment stories.



2018/19

- ▶ Comms workshop was undertaken with a specialist consultant and the Management Committee to identify core activities and comms investment areas where opportunities present themselves.
- ▶ Partner interviews were undertaken to understand how the Report Card is used and the Partnership value to members.
- ▶ The Partnership sponsored the ReefBlitz project October 2018 – a month-long series of events to engage the community in citizen science and on-ground local action contributing to Reef health and resilience. Some stats:

8 clean up events delivered across the **Mackay- Whitsunday** region,

more than **770kg** of **debris collected**, made up of **11,247 items** (mostly plastic),

197 volunteers, **373** volunteer hours, **10,542 m** of distance cleaned.

- ▶ Quarterly Partner features on our website – fishways (Mackay Regional Council).
- ▶ Supporter option for the Partnership created.
- ▶ Cyclone Debbie report – update on how our communities and ecosystems have responded to the Cyclone 18 months on.
- ▶ Partners Forum – full report and comms summary produced.
- ▶ Stand-alone summary of the Cultural Heritage Assessment project produced.
- ▶ Comms summary of the CSIRO/AIMS Historical Context of water quality.

2019/20

- ▶ Our name changed to the Mackay-Whitsunday-Isaac Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership.
- ▶ Value proposition document updated.
- ▶ Conceptual model video produced which highlights the various influences from catchment land use to the marine environment and illustrates how this is captured in the Report Card.
- ▶ Articles in regional print media (Core Life magazine, Rural Weekly and the Billet

- ▶ Report Card explainer produced by the Office of the Great Barrier Reef (OGBR) to highlight the various regional Report Card Partnerships and the indicators they include.
- ▶ Participated in the OGBR-led evaluation of the five Reef Regional Report Card Partnerships and the What's Our Grade Evaluation Report Card.
- ▶ Regular interviews on ABC Tropical North on a variety of topics.
- ▶ Presentation at Mackay's Project Catalyst Forum with over 200 representatives of the agricultural industry present.



2020 TO DATE

- ▶ Value proposition video recorded – Partner testimonials about what the Partnership means to them.
- ▶ Southern inshore educational materials project completed. This project provided local residents of Clairview and other interested parties with an educational resource about seagrass ecosystems and dugongs, as well as more information about the Partnership's southern inshore project.
- ▶ Second stewardship report – titled 'Above and Beyond 2019/20' – released November 2020.



ENGAGEMENT STATISTICS:



304
Facebook page followers



E-newsletter subscriptions increased from **226 to 1021.**



The number of website users has grown over time

- ▶ **2017 FY:** 2,099 users
- ▶ **2018 FY:** 3,013 users
- ▶ **2019 FY:** 3,634

TOTAL: 8,521



Usage snapshot

SESSIONS TOTAL: 15,243

- ▶ **New visitor:** 14.8%
- ▶ **Returning visitor:** 85.2%



OUR PARTNERS AND FUNDING

The slight fluctuation of Partnership member numbers has not significantly impacted the Partnership's financial position during this reporting period (2017 - 2020).

Additional Australian and Queensland Government funding was announced in June 2018 for the 19/20 financial year and in June 2019 for the 20/21 - 21/22 financial years to support the ongoing delivery of the Partnership's program. The Partnership acknowledges the continued financial contribution from both the Australian and Queensland Governments since the Partnership's inception in 2014.

Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal (DBCT) has funded the Southern Inshore program (water quality, seagrass and coral surveys offshore of Carmila) since 2017. This has enabled the Partnership to start filling a key identified knowledge gap in the Report Card product. In 2019 DBCT and Dalrymple

Bay Infrastructure (DBI) made a joint commitment to fund the Southern Inshore program for the next three years (to the 22/23 FY). This will ensure this project's longevity, establishing baseline environmental conditions in an area known for its seagrass habitats and dugongs.

DBCT Sustainability
**Handling
with care.**



During the reporting period, Reef Catchments Limited have provided significant in-kind and financial contributions to the Partnership. Examples include co-funding the Partnership's first estuarine pesticide monitoring program in its first year (2018/19) and co-funding all of the Traditional Owner Reference Group's (TORG) Cultural Heritage assessment projects.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Partnership is committed to improving a range of program components notably data coverage (to improve confidence in our Report Card) and our management response through stewardship activities. We are also committed to improving our community impact, reach and legacy. To ensure we can achieve our shared vision, we strive for continued Partner retention and growth. For information on our 3-year operational objectives, download our Program Plan (2019-2022), available on our website's publications section.

FUTURE REPORT CARD IMPROVEMENTS:

- ▶ Expand catchment monitoring sites to improve confidence in sediment and nutrient reporting. This could take the form of a multi-partner citizen science project.
- ▶ Develop estuarine or marine fish indicators.
- ▶ Resolve outstanding methodology differences in coral and seagrass datasets across established monitoring programs.
- ▶ Develop the Partnership's first socio-economic monitoring program to determine how our local communities view waterways, including assessing their economic benefits.
- ▶ Fill knowledge gaps - the link between pesticide concentrations in the freshwater and estuarine environments and fish health.
- ▶ Progressing or advocating for other industrial stewardship frameworks alongside Urban (i.e. ports, heavy industry, tourism, aquaculture).
- ▶ Integrating multiple citizen science datasets into future report cards. Ensuring we work collaboratively with other Report Card Partnerships to identify and target citizen science investments.
- ▶ Integrate a marine debris metric or indicator into future report cards.
- ▶ Continue to question the role of the Partnership to refine our objectives to best serve our shared vision.



WITH THANKS TO...

We recognise that more can be done together and acknowledge all partners for their valuable input and support since our inception in 2014. A big thank you also to our Management Committee members for the time they invest in guiding the Partnership.

OUR TRADITIONAL OWNERS

The Mackay-Whitsunday-Isaac Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership acknowledges the Traditional Owners from the Land and Sea Country of the region, including the Yuwibara, Koinmerburra, Barada, Widi, Ngaro, and Gia and Juru Peoples, and pays respect to the ancestors, the Elders both past and present, and to the people.

OUR SCIENCE COMMUNITY

The Partnership also wishes to thank our Science Community, without which we would not have a report card. This includes all members of our Technical Working Group, the Reef 2050 WQIP, Independent Science Panel and all our other scientific friends, including the Australian Institute of Marine Science, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, James Cook University, Central Queensland University, The University of Queensland, CSIRO and the Department of Environment and Science. Thank you.



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REEF PARTNERSHIP
MACKAY-WHITSUNDAY-ISAAC

Got a question? Get in touch

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Photo credits: Jonathan Reichard (Reef Catchments) and Tourism Whitsundays.