



FAQs | Wet Tropics Pilot Report Card

WHO DEVELOPED THE PILOT REPORT CARD?

The pilot report card was developed by the Wet Tropics Healthy Waterways Partnership - a collaboration of community, industry, research institutions and all levels of government. The Partnership was formally established in June 2016 and is an action under the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan.

WHO ARE THE PARTNERS?

There are 19 financial partners: Cairns Regional Council, Ports North, Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators, Terrain Natural Resource Management, Australian Prawn Farmers Association, Queensland Government, Dawal Wuru, Queensland Water and Land Carers, Pioneer North Queensland, CAirns REcreational Fishing Industries Stakeholders (Carefish), Australian Banana Growers' Council and the Wet Tropics Sugar Industry Partnership (CANEGROWERS*, Herbert Cane Productivity Services Ltd, Tully Cane Productivity Services Ltd, Tully Sugar, MSF Sugar, Australian Cane Farmers Association, Sugar Research Australia, Mossman Agricultural Services).

[*CANEGROWERS Cairns, CANEGROWERS Herbert River, CANEGROWERS Innisfail, CANEGROWERS Mossman, CANEGROWERS Tablelands, CANEGROWERS Tully]

Many other organisations have also been involved in developing the pilot Report Card by contributing time, resources and data.

WHAT IS ITS PURPOSE?

The report card is a simple tool that presents complex scientific data in a way that is easy for everybody in the community to understand. It helps determine how well we are looking after our waterways and where to focus our efforts to improve the quality of water flowing into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon.

WHAT DOES IT REPORT ON?

The pilot report card grades the condition of all the waterways in the Wet Tropics Natural Resource Management region for 2014/15, which includes nine freshwater basins from the Daintree in the north to the Herbert in the south, eight estuaries, four inshore marine zones and one offshore marine zone.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN FINDINGS?

- The majority of Wet Tropics waterways are graded as 'moderate' for 2014/15, indicating that there is room for improvement.
- A number of scientific monitoring data gaps have been identified, which the Partnership is seeking to address for future report cards.

WHAT AFFECTED THE GRADES?

The pilot report card grades need to be viewed in context, for example:

- The reporting period 2014/15 was a very low rainfall year, which can result in better basin water quality scores compared to wetter years.

Reduced rainfall can lead to lower runoff and erosion as well as reduced nutrient and pesticide mobilisation from the soils.

- Freshwater grades are lower largely due to historic loss of wetlands.
- Estuary habitat and hydrology grades are lower due to historic loss of riparian, mangrove and saltmarsh extent.
- Inshore marine grades are lower due to seagrass decline as a result of regional climate patterns compounded by recent cyclones and storm events.

HOW WERE THE GRADES DETERMINED?

A number of waterway health indicators were chosen by the Partnership's Technical Working Group. These include water quality and habitat and hydrology. Each of these indicators is comprised of several sub-indicators. Fish population health is also considered a good indicator of waterway health but insufficient data was available for the pilot report card. A fish index is under development for future report cards.

Each indicator has a set of benchmarks representing a standardised scale from very good to very poor. The benchmarks are compared to data using formulas and then weighted and averaged to provide a reporting zone score.

HOW WAS THE DATA COLLECTED?

The data was collated and pooled from several organisations who are already

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monitoring waterway health indicators for research or compliance. These include the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS), Paddock to Reef Integrated Monitoring, Modelling and Reporting Program, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) Marine Monitoring Program, James Cook University (JCU), Ports North, Cairns Regional Council and the Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation. This is the first time that data for the entire region has been pooled to provide a comprehensive regional picture of waterway health.

HOW RELIABLE IS THE DATA? The scientific integrity of the report card is assured by a Technical Working Group of specialist scientists. An Independent Science Panel has also assessed the methods and results to ensure the Partnership was informed by open, transparent, credible and independent peer reviewed science.

WHAT PERIOD OF TIME DO REPORT CARDS COVER?

Annual reporting covers a full year stretching from July of one year to June of the next. This takes into account the dry and wet season cycle, ensuring that each wet season is included in one reporting period. The data provided for the pilot report card is from the 2014/15 year (July 2014-June 2015).

WHAT ABOUT CORAL BLEACHING? During the period 2014/15 no bleaching was observed on the reefs surveyed. The coral bleaching that occurred in the summer of 2015/16 will be reported on in the next report card.

WHAT DOES THE PILOT REPORT CARD MEAN GOING FORWARD? The pilot report card provides a baseline for comparing changes and observing trends in waterway health in future

years - report cards will be produced annually. It also enables us to identify where additional monitoring is required to provide a more complete robust picture for future report cards.

HOW DOES THIS REPORT CARD COMPARE TO THE GREAT BARRIER REEF REPORT CARD? The Great Barrier Reef Report Card details loads entering the Great Barrier Reef from agricultural land uses. The Wet Tropics Pilot Report Card seeks to measure the effect of all land uses, not just agriculture, on waterway health.

For more information go to: www.wettropicswaterways.org.au

Additional FAQs relating to the Queensland Government's involvement:

HOW IS THE QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT INVOLVED IN THE PARTNERSHIP? The Queensland Government is one of 19 organisations that make up Wet Tropics Healthy Waterways Partnership. The Queensland Government supports the Partnership through providing significant funding, monitoring data and in-kind support, and provided the secretariat role for 2016.

The Queensland Government's Department of Environment and Heritage Protection is a member of the Partnership and also sits on the Partnership's Management Committee, which provides operational support to the Partnership.

HOW MUCH FUNDING DOES THE QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT PROVIDE? The Queensland Government contributed \$250,000 during the 2016-17 financial year. This is part of the Queensland Government's \$6 million commitment over four years to support regional waterway health report cards, including those currently developed for Gladstone Harbour,

Mackay Whitsunday and Wet Tropics regions. The Queensland Government also provided \$100,000 of seed funding in 2015-16 to help establish the Partnership.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THE REPORT CARD FOR THE COMMUNITY?

The report card is a simple tool that presents complex scientific data on waterway health in a way that is easy for everybody in the community to understand. It helps to inform actions that guide how we are looking after our waterways and where to focus on efforts to improve the quality of water flowing into the Great Barrier Reef.

WHAT IS BEING DONE TO IMPROVE WATERWAY HEALTH IN THE REGION?

The pilot report card shows areas where further focus may need to be placed in terms of waterway health. Partners are working hard to improve the health of our waterways and marine environments within their own organisations. The intention is to showcase the good work of Partners on the Partnership's website into the future.

WHAT IS THE QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT DOING TO IMPROVE WATERWAY HEALTH? The Queensland Government ranks the protection and management of the Reef as one of its most important priorities and is making a significant investment to address its major challenges. We contribute \$35 million annually on water quality initiatives, and recently committed an additional \$100 million over five years to help achieve our ambitious reef water quality targets that are set out in the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan.