



MEDIA RELEASE

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Working Together Pays Off For Waterways

From planting hundreds of thousands of trees and clearing our beaches of plastic, to improved land management practices in the banana and sugar cane industries; this year's Wet Tropics Report Card reflects how community efforts and actions are being rewarded with improved waterway health.

The Wet Tropics Report Card 2017, released today, has recorded improved conditions in most of the region's rivers and estuaries, with ratings of Good or Moderate.

The region's highest performer was the Daintree with its freshwater basin graded Very Good and the estuary graded Good.

The Report Card assesses data from July 2015-June 2016 to report on the health of the nine catchments in the Wet Tropics. As an initiative of the Reef 2050 Plan its purpose is to track and measure changes in the condition of Wet Tropics waterways and help determine where and how to focus efforts to make improvements.

It is produced by the Wet Tropics Healthy Waterways Partnership, a collaboration of 47 organisations from industry, research, community groups and all levels of government.

Chair Ryan Donnelly said that since last year's Pilot Report Card the Partnership had improved the methods used to generate the grades and addressed a number of monitoring gaps.

"An additional four estuaries are now being monitored and the Cairns Regional Council and Cassowary Coast Regional Council have expanded their estuary monitoring to include additional indicators. We have also undertaken new research to determine the effect of barriers on fish movement between freshwater basins and estuaries.

"This means we now have a comprehensive picture of the current condition of our waterways so we can track future progress," he said.

While the good to moderate grades across the board signal good news for our waterways, water quality in the Barron estuary declined to a Moderate grade due to higher chlorophyll-*a* concentrations (the pigment found in algae). Further investigation into the increased algae was undertaken by the Partnership but it was not considered a significant problem and likely to be caused by low river flows and warm conditions during the 2015-16 reporting period.

Mr Donnelly added that while reports cards are a useful tool they must be viewed within context.

"Climate plays a significant role in waterway conditions. During this reporting period there was a continuation of below average rainfall, which can result in reduced sediment, nutrient and pesticide runoff. Conversely, if we have a big wet season it may flush pollutants from the land into rivers and creeks," he said.



Wet Tropics

Healthy Waterways Partnership

This year's report card also highlights some of the actions being taken by the community to improve waterway health.

During the year 2015-16, over 200,000 trees were planted, which help to stabilise streambanks and reduce sediment and nutrient loads entering waterways, and over 35,000 pieces of plastic were cleared from beaches. The banana and sugar cane industries also provided training to farmers to help them change land management practices while several regional councils are trialling steam technology to manage weeds instead of herbicides.

Mr Donnelly said that the Report Card was an important tool and a significant achievement by the community.

"The 47 partners working together to produce the Report Card are committed to improving waterway health in the Wet Tropics and these results show we're heading in the right direction," he said.

More detailed information about the grades and the methods used to generate them can be found on the website: wettropicswaterways.org.au

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About Wet Tropics Healthy Waterways Partnership

The Wet Tropics Healthy Waterways Partnership involves 47 partner organisations including industry, science, community groups, farmers and fishers, Traditional Owners and all levels of government. For more information go to www.wettropicswaterways.org.au

