



FAQs | 2017 WET TROPICS REPORT CARD

WHAT ARE THIS YEAR'S MAIN FINDINGS?

- The majority of Wet Tropics waterways are graded as 'Moderate' (C) or 'Good' (B) for the 2015-16 reporting period.
- The Daintree was the highest performer - graded 'Very Good' (A) in the freshwater basin and good in the estuary.
- Water quality declined in the Barron estuary, most likely due to low river flows and corresponding dry and warm conditions.

WHAT AFFECTED THE GRADES?

- Climate can have a significant effect on the results.
- The reporting period 2015-16 was another below average rainfall year, which can result in reduced sediment, nutrient and pesticide runoff.

WHAT NEW DEVELOPMENTS HAVE THERE BEEN THIS YEAR?

- Last year's Pilot Report Card (the first one) identified a number of monitoring gaps.
- This year the Partnership was able to plug some of these gaps to present a more complete picture of the region's waterway health.
 - An additional four estuaries are being monitored for water quality.
 - Cairns Regional Council and Cassowary Coast Regional Council have expanded their monitoring to include additional indicators for the Report Card.
 - The Partnership has undertaken new fish barrier research to determine how easily fish are able to move between freshwater and estuary environments.
 - Data on aquatic weeds undertaken by local governments has been compiled and scored for the first time for the whole region.
 - A flow indicator is also being developed to determine river flows required to maintain healthy freshwater and estuary environments.

WHAT ABOUT CORAL?

- The results for the 2015-16 reporting period show an improvement for coral.
- However, offshore reefs were surveyed before the effects of the coral bleaching in early 2016 were fully evident.



WHAT IS BEING DONE TO IMPROVE WATERWAY HEALTH?

- Some of the actions taken in 2015-16 include:
 - Over 200,000 trees were planted by community groups and councils, which helps stabilise streambanks and reduces sediment and nutrient loads into waterways.
 - The agriculture industry is working hard to improve on-farm practices to reduce runoff, with significant funding provided by the Australian and Queensland Governments.
 - Community groups cleared 2.62 tonnes of marine debris during beach clean ups, including over 35,000 pieces of plastic.
 - Regional councils are trialling the use of steam technology to manage weeds along roadsides and beaches instead of herbicides.

WHO DEVELOPED THE REPORT CARD?

- It 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.
- The development of regional report card partnerships at major ports and priority catchments is an action under the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan.
- The Wet Tropics Report Card is made possible with funding from the Queensland Government's Queensland Reef Water Quality Program as well as additional funding from the Partnership's 47 partners, including the Australian Government.
- This is one of several regional report card partnerships supported by the Queensland Government. Report cards are also produced annually for Gladstone Harbour, the Fitzroy Basin and Mackay Whitsunday regions. A Townsville partnership is currently being established.

WHY WAS IT DEVELOPED?

- To track changes in the condition of the region's waterways.
- To measure progress being made by all the various reef projects being undertaken.
- To help identify where to focus on-ground efforts and investment and make informed decisions about the health of local waterways that flow to the Great Barrier Reef

HOW WERE THE GRADES DETERMINED?

- A number of waterway health indices were chosen by the Partnership's Technical Working Group, which give an indication of waterway health ie. how well our waterways are functioning as an ecosystem.
- The indices include water quality and habitats. Fish community health is also considered a good measure of waterway condition and a fish index is under development for future report cards.
- Each of these indices is comprised of several indicators. Each indicator is assessed on a scale from very good to very poor. The scales apply benchmarks for each indicator such as guidelines values, and are then standardised and averaged to provide a reporting zone score.



Wet Tropics

Healthy Waterways Partnership

HOW WAS THE DATA COLLECTED?

- The Wet Tropics Report Card analyses and integrates data from a range of different organisations involved in water quality and ecosystem health monitoring for research or compliance.
- The Report Card is the only place where all of these data sets are compiled and integrated together.
- The organisations contributing data 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, Cassowary Coast Regional Council and the Queensland Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation.

HOW RELIABLE IS THE DATA?

- There is a high confidence level in the data with the scientific integrity of the Wet Tropics Report Card assured by a Technical Working Group of specialist scientists.
- The Reef 2050 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.

WHY DOES IT PAINT A DIFFERENT PICTURE TO THE GREAT BARRIER REEF REPORT CARD?

- The two report cards are not reporting in the same way and are measuring different things. The Great Barrier Reef Report Card reports on estimated pollutant loads entering the reef at the end of catchments from agricultural land uses and is based on modelling. The Wet Tropics Report Card measures concentrations in local waterways within the catchment as an indication of ecosystem health.
- The Wet Tropics Report Card also seeks to assess the effects of all land uses, not just agriculture.

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

