

Photo credit: Conor Moore



Wet Tropics
Waterways

2024-25 ANNUAL REPORT

Celebrating 10 Years



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE CHAIR

Marking 10 years of the Wet Tropics Waterways Partnership feels both significant and energising.

Established under the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan, the partnership was created to bring people together around better, more locally relevant information on waterway health, and to build trust, collaboration and shared stewardship across our region.

Over the past decade, that intent has translated into strong networks, credible science, and a growing community of partners who genuinely care about the health of our rivers, estuaries and coastal waters.

This year has also been my first as Chair, and I have greatly enjoyed working with the team, meeting partners, and connecting with many long-standing friends of the partnership. After the launch of our 10th Report Card in July 2025, the partnership navigated a leadership transition, with our previous Executive Officer, James Donaldson, departing to pursue new career and family opportunities. Louise Hatley stepped into the role in an acting capacity, providing steady leadership, continuity and momentum while the partnership recruited Rowan Hutchison into the position on a permanent basis. I value and appreciate the efforts of James, Louise and Rowan during this period of change, which has positioned the partnership strongly for growth, resilience and impact over the next 10 years.

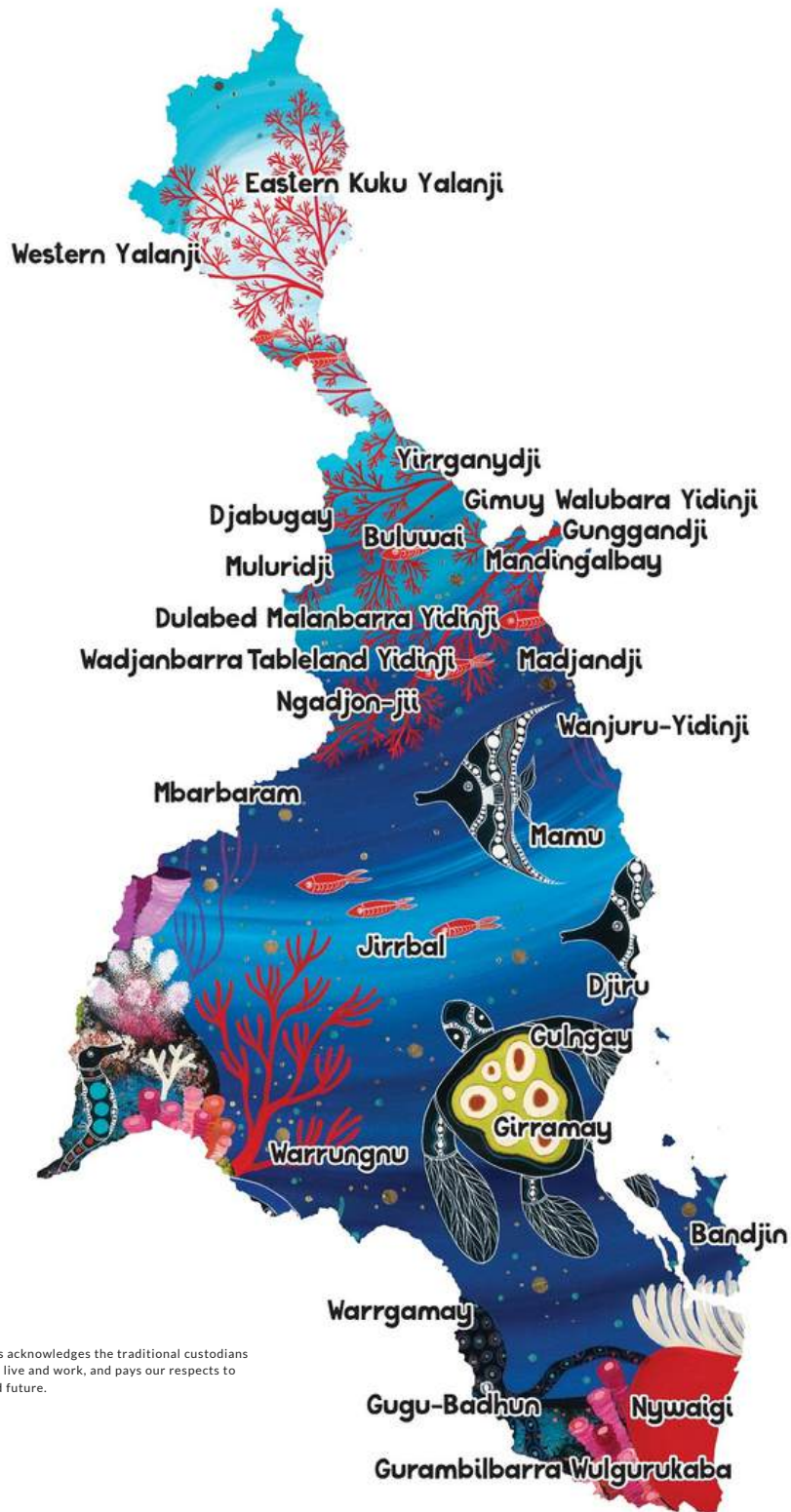
I also want to acknowledge the dedication of the broader team, who continue to work hard behind the scenes to evolve and strengthen the Wet Tropics Waterway Health Report Card. From its 2015 pilot to the more comprehensive and trusted program it is today, this work reflects sustained effort to improve monitoring, expand indicators, upgrade data systems, and ensure the program remains fit for purpose.

Looking ahead, I am optimistic about what we can achieve together as we strengthen collaboration, expand community engagement, and continue to support the ecosystems and communities that depend on healthy waterways.

Simon Costanzo, Independent Chair

10 YEARS OF REPORT CARDS





Wet Tropics Waterways acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work, and pays our respects to elders past, present and future.

THE WET TROPICS REGION

The Wet Tropics region boasts some of Australia’s most beautiful and unique waterways, spanning two adjacent world heritage areas. The Wet Tropics is home to the highest diversity of freshwater fish species in Australia, as well as the incredible diversity of life on the Great Barrier Reef. However, pressure from urbanisation, industry and agriculture impact the health of our waterways, so understanding the impact of these pressures is helping us develop a long-term vision and strategy for protecting our waterways.

TRACKING PROGRESS TOWARDS REEF 2050

Launched in 2016, Wet Tropics Waterways is an initiative of the Reef 2050 Long Term Sustainability Plan, with links to the Reef Water Quality Report Card and Water Quality Improvement Plan. Our goal is to monitor waterway health across the region and bring the community together to raise awareness, share ideas and take action to enhance our waterways.

Waterway health can fluctuate year to year, however the longer term datasets we are gathering can help us to get a better understanding of conditions through time and inform priority investments into the future.

Financial Statement

Income

Carried forward: \$125,490

Government: \$581,000

Partners: \$68,000

Other: \$3,091

TOTAL: \$777,581

Expenditure

Operations \$183,590

Communications: \$129,094

Report Card: \$226,341

Urban Stewardship: \$36,425

Admin/Management Fee: \$58,904

TOTAL: \$634, 354

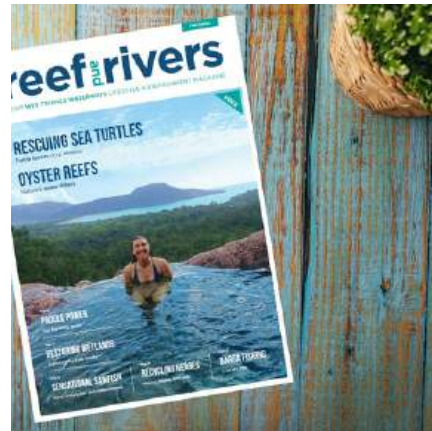
SURPLUS: \$143, 226

2024-2025 HIGHLIGHTS

500 report cards distributed



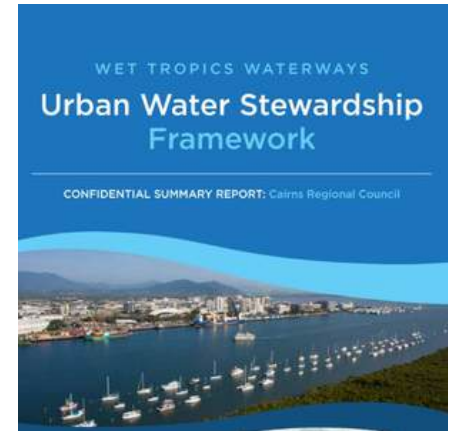
3000 magazines distributed



Media coverage on ABC, CH7, 4CA



3rd Urban Water Stewardship Report - 8 council workshops



Photography competition - 50+ entries



Forum - Hooked on Healthy Waterways



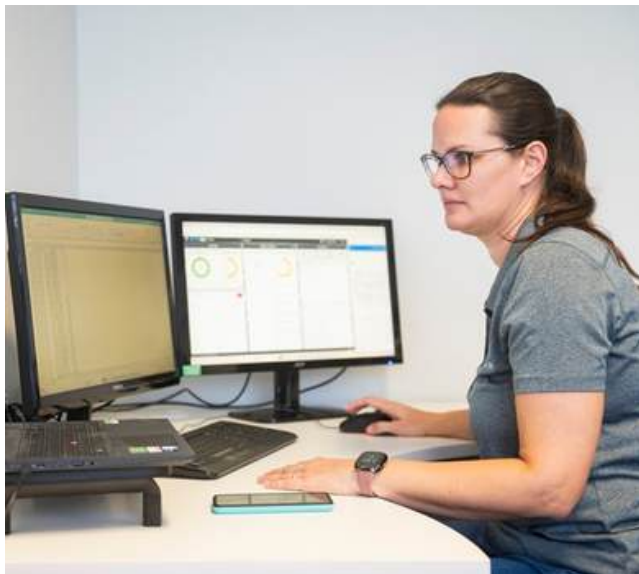
10 Year Strategic Planning Workshop



Aquarium labelling rolled out to 6 additional aquariums



SCIENCE & DATA



Wet Tropics Waterways collates and analyses monitoring data from a range of government, research and community sources. The results published in the annual Wet Tropics Waterway Health Report Card are reviewed by a Technical Working Group and an Independent Science Panel.

Program Design Review

This year our Senior Science Technical Officer, Dr Richard Hunt, commenced a Program Design Review to ensure monitoring and reporting frameworks remain fit-for-purpose and responsive to emerging priorities.

Data Management Information System (DIMS)

Our science team have also been progressing the implementation of a shared DIMS with other GBR Regional Report Card Partnerships to improve data security and governance. This will enable greater consistency of indicators and metadata and increased efficiency of analysis and reporting for report cards and Reef 2050 reporting.

Updated Data Streams

Each year additional indicators are incorporated to build a more comprehensive picture of waterway health. This year updated data streams included marine pesticide monitoring and expanded catchment indicators, to strengthen the evidence base for decision-making.

A Litter Data Sharing Agreement was also finalised across four regional partnerships, which will establish a consistent framework for the collection, storage, sharing and reporting of litter data.

Updated Data Visualisations

The regional Dashboard on our website has been refreshed, improving communication of long-term trends and making monitoring results more accessible to non-technical audiences.

EVENTS



Hooked on Healthy Waterways Forum
September 2024
One day workshop held at JCU focused on fish habitat.
15 speakers, 3 panel discussions
Sponsored by JCU & OzFish
80+ attendees



Theory of Change Strategic Planning Workshop
March 2025
One day workshop with partners to map out the future direction of the partnership
Facilitated by Charlie Morgan
20+ attendees



10 Year Anniversary Report Card Launch
July 2025
Celebration event to mark the launch of the 10th report card
60+ attendees

BLOOMFIELD COD PROJECT



Wet Tropics Waterways are collaborating with Griffith University on the NESP project 'Conservation and Recovery Actions for Rare and Threatened Wet Tropics Freshwater Fish. The project is focused on the Bloomfield Cod, a rare species that occurs in a limited section of the Bloomfield River. Its main threat is introduced species.

Key Activities

- Engagement workshop with Bloomfield Rangers to raise awareness of the project and to discuss developing a community awareness program.
- Worked with Kuku Yalanji Elders to develop culturally appropriate communication materials and facilitate on-Country knowledge sharing related to freshwater ecosystem health.



Outcomes and Significance

- Strengthened Indigenous participation and stewardship in regional waterway management.
- Integrated traditional ecological knowledge with scientific monitoring and recovery strategies.
- Contributed to Reef 2050 goals by respecting cultural values and supporting sustainable management of catchments and reef ecosystems.

PEOPLE

Wet Tropics Waterways is overseen by an Independent Chair and a management committee who are nominated from our partnership network. In 2024-25 Phil Laycock stepped down as the Chair in late 2024 and was replaced by Dr Simon Costanzo in March 2025. The management committee were: Jeff Baines (Cassowary Coast Regional Council), Catherine Horne (Cairns Regional Council), Rachel D'Arcy (Office of the Great Barrier Reef & World Heritage), Maree Baade (Tablelands Regional Council), Michael Rasheed (TropWater), Jacinta Caraballo (Ports North), Darryl Ebenezer (QWaLC), Joe Marano (Innisfail Canegrowers), Kate Milton (Hinchinbrook Shire Council), Brian Singleton (Cairns Airport) and Charles Hammond (Terrain NRM).

Our Governance Charter is available from our website at www.wettropicswaterways.org.au

Wet Tropics Waterways has a team of five people who are employed by Terrain NRM under a hosting arrangement. The team for 2024-25 were:

James Donaldson
Executive Officer



Dr. Richard Hunt
Science Technical Officer



Elaine Seager
Communications Officer



Martine Newman
Science Technical Officer





THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

