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**FAQs | 2020 WET TROPICS REPORT CARD**

**WHAT ARE THIS YEAR’S MAIN FINDINGS?**

* **Overall:** The majority of Wet Tropics waterways were graded ‘Moderate’ or ‘Good’ for the July 2018-June 2019 reporting period.   
  They maintained a similar condition to the previous year. However, these grades are an average of the entire year and don’t show the underlying changes of each waterway health indicator score.
* **Climate:** 
  + Monthly rainfall was extremely variable, ranging from the highest on record (Daintree) to the lowest on record (Herbert).
  + This was the first year since we started producing the report cards that we’ve had a typical (prolonged) wet season.
* **Flood events:**
  + Significant flooding caused high concentrations of suspended nutrients near river mouths during and after flood events (Russell, Mulgrave & Tully).
  + In early 2019, there was significant damage caused to some waterways. The worst affected areas are being stabilised with engineered rockwalls and revegetation in the Douglas, Hinchinbrook and Cassowary Coast areas. This aims to reduce the risk of future erosion and sediment runoff.
* **Coral:** Offshore coral cover was moderate. Recent bleaching events (2016-17) and COTS outbreaks have impacted condition although some reefs were showing signs of recovery.
* **Seagrass:** Condition still remains very poor in the Moresby Estuary although very early signs of recovery were reported. These meadows would still benefit from restoration. Seagrass condition in Trinity Inlet and inshore zones has improved.

**WHAT AFFECTS THE GRADES?**

* Climate and land management (both urban and agricultural) are the main factors affecting the amount of sediment, nutrients and pesticides in runoff into the GBR lagoon.
* As a community, we can help regulate pollutant levels that run off into waterways by managing urban development and agricultural land use practices.

**WHAT’S NEW FOR NEXT YEAR?**

* **Fish:** Currently the only two basins with fish index data are the Mulgrave and Russell but this will be expanded to more freshwater basins next year. We will be focusing on how residents can help to minimise the threat posed by pest fish and plants in our waterways by correct disposal of unwanted exotic aquarium fish and plants, and exotic fish species caught while fishing.
* **Urban**: The Office of the Great Barrier Reef is developing a framework to benchmark the level of management practice being applied to urban development, stormwater management and sewage treatment activities to help identify where urban water quality management can be improved.

**WHAT ARE THE MAIN RISKS TO THE GBR?**

* Climate change is the biggest threat to the reef as ‘marine heatwaves’ become more common in response to global heating.
* Poor water quality flowing off the land is the second biggest risk.

**WHAT IS BEING DONE TO IMPROVE WATERWAY HEALTH?**

* There are many projects taking place throughout the Wet Tropics to improve reef water quality and waterway health. Some of these include:
  + working with farmers to adopt farming practices with a lower risk to water quality;
  + restoration of wetlands;
  + fixing gully and streambank erosion;
  + restoring riparian vegetation; and
  + promoting expansion of new catchment repair systems currently being trialled, such as bioreactors, sediment basins and constructed wetlands.

**WHO DEVELOPED THE REPORT CARD?**

* Wet Tropics Waterways - a partnership of community, industry, research institutions and all levels of government.
* The Partnership was established in June 2016 as an action under the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan.
* It is funded by the Queensland Government’s Queensland Reef Water Quality Program as well as additional funding from the Partnership’s 50+ partners, including the Australian Government.
* Regional report cards within regions of the Great Barrier reef catchments are also produced for Gladstone Harbour, the Fitzroy Basin, Mackay Whitsunday and Townsville.

**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 lagoon.

**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, Douglas Shire Council, Cassowary Coast Regional Council and the Queensland Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation.

**For more information go to** [**www.wettropicswaterways.org.au**](http://www.wettropicswaterways.org.au)