

WRICMA Inc.

Whitsunday Rivers Integrated Catchment Management Association



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Coordinator
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Po Box 104
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12th of September, 2002

Greg Murtough
Research Manager
Productivity Commission
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RE: Invitation to participate in Great Barrier Reef Study

Greg,

The Whitsunday Rivers Integrated Catchment Management Association (WRICMA) is a community based catchment management group with an interest in resource management. We currently manage a revegetation/vegetation management project, Water quality monitoring project (in conjunction with the Australian Centre for tropical Freshwater Research), Waterwatch and a community nursery. Last year we released our NRM strategy and are actively working towards meeting the goals outlined in the report.

The WRICMA have a good working relationship with the sugarcane industry in the Whitsunday region. The organisation actively supports the Proserpine Sugarcane industries initiatives in improving on-farm water use and reducing off farm impacts. The WRICMA also have a good relationship with the Local Marine Advisory Committee.

There appears to be a need to gather more information on the extent of land based impacts on the GBR and also the impacts of marine based uses of the offshore areas. In terms of impacts on waterways the WRICMA and ACTFR are close to releasing the final results of the water quality monitoring project. The project has run for over 18 months and water quality samples have been analysed from 18 sites in the Whitsunday region from the Proserpine, O'Connell and Gregory river systems. The aim locally and regionally is to work towards developing catchment water quality guidelines that include targets for the various physical and chemical water quality parameters.

The WRICMA have a great interest in ensuring that the GBR is managed in an economically and environmentally sustainable manner. We as an organisation see the gathering of scientifically valid data and the responsible dissemination of the data are paramount to the management of the reef system. Attached is a brief submission based on the issues paper.

Yours sincerely

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**Submission to the Productivity commission
addressing issues concerning the**

**"Industries in the Great Barrier Reef Catchment and
measures to address declining water quality**

**Scott Hardy
Coordinator**

Whitsunday Rivers integrated catchment Management Association

September - 2002



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Item 1.

The WRICMA and the Australian Centre for Tropical Freshwater Research (ACTFR) are finalising the results of an 18 month water quality monitoring project. The project has collected water samples at 18 sites in the Proserpine, O'Connell and Gregory river systems in the Whitsunday region. Preliminary results have shown that the water quality problems in the Whitsunday region are similar to those in the Burdekin area. The results have shown that some of the rivers have elevated nutrient levels but the natural levels of nitrates and Phosphates are higher than those targets as outlined in the ANZECC guidelines. Locally, the water quality project has a high level of support from the agricultural and environmental sectors. From stakeholder meetings the agricultural and environmental sectors wish to continue the monitoring, develop a project to investigate the natural nutrient levels in regional streams, develop catchment based water quality guidelines and targets and gain funding to further investigate "hot spots".

It is recognised locally that the sewerage treatment plant at Proserpine (primary/secondary) does contribute to the nutrient levels in the lower Proserpine river and urban stormwater has an impact on Pioneer Bay. The Whitsunday Shire Council has engaged consultants to monitor the water quality of Pioneer Bay.

From the data gathered in the water quality project there is a growing recognition that agriculture does impact on the waterways, but this impact is highly variable across the region and the local sugarcane industry are concerned about its causes. With further access to funding the water quality monitoring program could continue to gather useful data that will add to our knowledge of how the local aquatic ecosystems function and the level of impact agriculture and urban land uses have on the reef environments.

The WRICMA also manage a community based Waterwatch project.

Item 2.

The impacts of the sewerage treatment plant on the Proserpine river does increase the level on nutrients in the lower Proserpine river.

Item 3.

Obviously the tourism industry, commercial fishers and recreational fishers are exposed to the greatest economic risk from deteriorating water quality in the GBR area. More research in the resilience of the various marine ecosystems could be useful in determining the critical limits and limits of acceptable change to these environments.

Item 4.

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The Commission could assist local ICM groups to conduct further research in partnership with agencies like the ACTFR at James Cook University. There is a greater level of support for local projects managed by local people rather than Government based projects. The local ICM groups have the communication linkages in place and have the knowledge, but we need the money to run these programs.

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