

WILDLIFE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF QUEENSLAND

Cairns Branch



PO Box 1350
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Great Barrier Reef Study
Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2, Collins Street East
MELBOURNE VIC 8003

Thank you for the copy of the Draft Research Report on Industries in the GBR Catchment and Measures to Address Declining Water Quality.

Members have found the report very interesting and consider that the issues affecting reef water quality to have been well recognised and substantiated.

Some minor comments on details in the report

3.3 Policies on unintended water quality impacts

The comment from WWF regarding the adverse impact of the Sugar Industry Infrastructure Package is fully supported. In the Far Northern region, expansion in the Tully Riversdale area resulted in extensive clearing and drainage of wetland areas. This land is only marginally suitable for sugar cane growing and was also identified habitat for the critically endangered Mahogany Glider. The expansion in that area appears to have been commercially unviable and the major financial difficulties of the South Johnstone Sugar Mill were apparently related to some extent to its involvement with development of land in that area.

There are several details in the report that it is considered should be noted, generally relating to reporting on the sugar industry including;
Tables 6.1 and 6.2 reports the adoption of practices, such as artificial wetlands and replanting native vegetation at rates that have certainly not been apparent to interested people in our region.

Similarly retention of native vegetation and remnant vegetation is generally related to the unsuitability of these areas for cultivation rather than deliberate conservation.

Steve Goosems (Wet Tropics Management Authority) reported in 1996 that over 80% of lowland vegetation in the wet tropics lowlands below 80 metres AHD had been cleared. As this figure included mangrove areas as well as areas protected by State Forest and National Park, and there has been an expansion in land under cane since

then, it can be seen there are limited areas available for retention of natural vegetation on cane lands.

However we fully support the comment by the Johnstone Ecological Society that noted that there were good examples of sustainable farms as well as very poor ones.

While it is essential to improve the performance and farming practices in many cases if water quality improvements are to be achieved, it should not occur in a way that rewards poor or negligent practices. Where possible improved farming operations should be encouraged by incentives that apply following adoption rather than payment for undertaking improvements that may or may not actually achieve the desired results. Eg Tax breaks for completed works.

Members of this Society appreciate the opportunity to participate in this planning process

Yours sincerely

Neil Warburton
President