Workshop on using herbicides

A HERBICIDE management workshop will be held at Lou Raiteri's shed at 4.30pm this afternoon, courtesy of Reef Catchments and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

The workshops will include the practical demonstration of two types of spray rigs that can help reduce the cost of controlling weeds, as well as information on nozzle selection and regional updates from the Reef Programme and regional catchment monitoring.

A DAFF Dual Herbicide Sprayer will also be on display. The session will look at the application spray pattern through the use of UV dye and inflorescent light.

All workshops start at 4.30pm and run to 8pm, with a barbecue dinner and refreshments provided. Phone Belinda Billing on 0488 730 021 for details.
Farmers can save money and reef

REEF Catchments and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) have collaborated on a series of workshops to educate farmers on how to improve herbicide management on sugarcane farms.

Farmers met with representatives last Wednesday to observe a practical demonstration of two types of spray rigs that can help reduce the cost of controlling weeds, as well as information on nozzle selection and regional updates from the national landcare Reef Programme and regional catchment monitoring.

DAFF has developed a spray rig to accurately apply a range of residual and non-residual herbicides against cane stool.

Phil Trendell, senior project officer from DAFF, said farmers had enjoyed the demonstrations.

“They’ve seen how this machinery works,” Mr Trendell said.

“The nozzles have been quite popular – we’re using what we call a patternator to demonstrate the range of coverage and drift [that] farmers get from different nozzles they use.”

Reef Catchments contact officer Scott Underdown said the environmental impact was taken into consideration.

“Moving away from residuals is a big plus,” Mr Underdown said.

“We won’t say to move away from them – there’s always a place for them.”

Reef Catchments catalyst grower Lou Raiteri said the new spray rigs were very effective.

“They cut down our chemicals going out to the reef dramatically,” Mr Raiteri said.

“Some commendation has to go to the government.

“They could have come at us with a big stick. Instead they’ve allowed growers to be ambitious – mainly with chemical equipment. “If I do nine hectares it only sprays three hectares of chemical on cane – the other six is round up.” Growers were also given information on the Reef Programme and how to access funding for effective long-term farm management. Go to reefcatchments.com.au.

MIGHTY MACHINE: Reef Catchment’s Scott Underdown, DAFF senior project officer Phil Trendell and Reef Catchment’s catalyst grower Lou Raiteri with one of the new sprayers.

PHOTO: JOSH DUTTON
TRAVEL INSPIRES TRIAL

Resistance to disease key aim of new method

Dominick Czakilew
dominick.czakilew@daily-mercury.com.au

OAKENDEN cane farmer Joe Muscat is set to trial a new farming system called Amuza at his property south-west of Mackay.

Mr Muscat first came across this method when he visited Brazil’s Sao Martinho sugar-growing region as part of his Nuffield Agricultural Scholarship.

Working with Reef Catchments under their federally-funded Sustainable Agriculture program, Mr Muscat plans on establishing the first Amuza trial to be conducted in Australia. Mr Muscat said the potential benefits were huge.

“In Brazil, they claim that it improves the productivity by 10%,” he said.

“Anything really needs to be investigated to determine whether we can get the same improvement rate over here. ‘Unless we do the trial, we will never really know,'”

The Amuza system requires the trial site to undergo preparation for planting once harvesting is completed.

The method includes applying a sub-surface prescription blend compost, based on the needs of the soil.

Tissue culture, or single eye sugarcane sets, are then planted in two rows with four or six rows skipped.

The skipped four or six rows are planted with peanuts, soybeans or sun hemp, depending on the soil carbon.

Mr Muscat said the process then repeated itself with two rows of tissue culture or single eye sets followed by four to six rows of a legume.

The legume crop is then incorporated into the soil and the one eye sets or tissue culture cane is harvested and planted across the paddock.

Mr Muscat said the system addressed the biology of the soil.

“The clean plant source gives you the best resistance to pest and disease,” he said.

“And it’s also putting organic material back into the profile.”

Mr Muscat and his wife, Christine, have a long history of bringing innovation to the Mackay Whitsunday region. The couple grows sugarcane with rotational fibre crops on their 130-hectare property.

The Muscats’ farm was fully converted to 1.8m rows with a controlled traffic system in 2008.

In 2013, Mr Muscat received a Nuffield Scholarship to support his research into best practice in production, manufacturing and marketing of fibre crops.

Unless we do the trial we will never know

JOE MUSCAT
NEW SYSTEM: Oakenden cane farmer Joe Muscat is set to trial a new farming system called Amuza.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED
Cane farmers and Mackay Sugar are stepping up efforts to protect the Reef from harmful pollutants. They have embarked on projects to restore local wetlands and improve water quality.
Mackay Sugar and Reef Catchments have teamed up to improve water quality and landscape health at Racecourse Mill, with stage three of the project nearly complete. Peter Muller, Reef Catchments says the project will improve water quality going into the reef.
The United Nations has declared 2015 as the International Year of Soils and local NRM group Reef Catchments is determined to make this a year where local farmers are supported to build their understanding of healthy soils.

The Reef Catchments Sustainable Agriculture Program focuses on working with farmers to improve soil health. Reef Catchments Sustainable Agriculture co-ordinator Belinda Billing said that farmers from sugarcane, grazing and horticulture had frequently addressed their need to be more equipped with knowledge to better manage agricultural soils.

“Through our Sustainable Agriculture program we are supporting trials and demonstrations of practices that seek to build healthier, more productive soils,” Ms Billing said.

“We are also running regular events on the subject and working with collaborators to support like-minded projects.”

She noted farming industries around Australia were suffering a decline in yield that is thought to be the result of soil degradation; this includes our local sugarcane industry.

The key messages of the International Year of Soils highlight the importance of looking after what many experts believe to be the foundation of society.

To learn more about Reef Catchments Sustainable Agriculture program visit www.reefcatchments.com.

To learn more about the International Year of Soils visit www.fao.org/soils-2015.
Compere talks about the importance of wetlands to the rest of the ecosystem, particularly running off chemicals from farmland before it flows out into the Great Barrier Reef. He plays a report on Racecourse Sugar Mill standing on what used to be wetlands. Catchment Solutions has been tasked to rebuild the wetlands and representative Matt Moore talks about the process. Carissa Mansfield from Mackay Sugar talks about the partnership with Reef Catchments.
Work under way to rebuild degraded wetland

A rehabilitation project in Mackay is bringing a degraded wetland back to life, recreating creeks, ponds and tracts of native vegetation.

http://ct.moreover.com/?a=20256309941&p=1i4&v=1&x=1S5qgycay8Rp1E2v4X31qQ
Project to rebuild a degraded wetland in Mackay

Mackay Sugar and Reef Catchments have teamed up to rebuild a degraded wetland next to Racecourse Mill in Mackay. Matt Moore from Catchment Solutions, which is contracted to do the work, discusses the process and Carissa Mansfield from Mackay Sugar...

http://ct.moreover.com/?a=20256005567&p=1i4&v=1&x=u60MOUhXdJlHNY3QSPEf9Q
Racecourse Mill wetland project in Mackay

Mackay Sugar and Reef Catchments have teamed up to rebuild a degraded former wetland.

http://ct.moreover.com/?a=20255833191&p=1i4&v=1&x=yWmcYSbC-HKZLy6dCYzBUg

Power By Moreover 1.7 News
David Sparkes report on Mackay Sugar and Reef Catchments' project to rebuild a degraded wetland next to Racecourse Mill in Mackay. Matt Moore from Catchment Solutions, which is contracted to do the work, discusses the process. Carissa Mansfield from Mackay Sugar explains why the company is backing the project.
FRUIT SALAD MIX
There's never a quiet time got fruit grower

Brian Camilleri is the king of diversification.

The 62-year-old Sarina farmer produces watermelons, papayas, mangos, custard apples and avocados, just to name a few.

The greater majority of his produce, including two truckloads taken to the Showgrounds Farmers Markets each Saturday, is sold in the Mackay region.

He said there was never a "quiet time" on his 60-hectare farm near Sarina.

"The mangoes, papayas and melons produce all at once," he said.

"And papayas go all year round."

Mr Camilleri was proud to show off some of his bigger produce.

This season he grew mangoes that weighed in at more than 2kg.

The average weight of a Bowen mango is about 400g.

Mr Camilleri said the support of his family was the secret to his farming success.

"My wife [Fernanda] has a real eye for detail," Mr Camilleri said.

She runs the shop. "And my son has a background in IT, so he does most of the technical side of it."

Mr Camilleri's three other children - Sandra, Mark and Justin - also help with the business if needed.

"I have an accountant, lawyer and carpenter with them," he said.

As well as skills and help from family members, Mr Camilleri also studied sugar chemistry when he was younger.

He agreed that his knowledge of farm nutrition was a great benefit to his business.

"People spend a lot of money on machinery," he said.

"But I spend my money on my soil."

Farming runs deep through the Camilleri family, with his grandfather once supplying fresh fruit and vegies to the American Red Cross during wartime.

"His farm was at Mt Jukes," Mr Camilleri said.

"Then my father Joe Camilleri's farm was at Blacks Beach."

"We used to send truckloads of melons to the southern markets from there."

In 2009, Camilleri's Fresh Fruit opened near the Hay Point turnoff.

While diversification was a challenge, it was also essential, Mr Camilleri said.

"We wouldn't have survived without it," he said.

"We now basically only grow what we can sell out our own outlets."

Selling fresh fruit at the markets is something Mr Camilleri really enjoys.

"We have had some customers who have been buying off us for 30 years," he said.

Mr Camilleri had noticed some trends in customers.

"The healthy eating trend has done us a lot of good," he said.

"People looking to juice with nuts and bullets."

"You can pick them because they will buy seven times, you know, one for each day of the week."
PLANNING FOR FUTURE

Climate workshops well attended by farmers

We had more than 60 growers attend the workshops, which aimed to allow them to understand climate drivers that impact on rainfall in our region.

"This is very important for our local land managers, who are particularly exposed to forecast changes in weather, rainfall and climatic events. Australia has the highest natural climate variability in the world and the Mackay Whitsunday region has one of the highest levels of variability in all of Australia. This variability and knowledge of what drives it is very important in helping our sugar growers make future decisions, for example about fertilising, spraying or making infrastructure changes."

The workshop covered the following elements linked to weather and climate:

- Current climate outlook for the region
- El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) including SOI Phases
- Recent developments in international forecast systems (ECMWF)
- The Madden Julian Oscillation (MJO) (40 day wave)
- Discussion of farm management decisions linked to seasonal forecasts
- Links to climate information sources

Presenters included Neil Clift (senior industry development officer, QGAF) and climatologist Professor Roger Stone (University of Southern Queensland).

AGFORCE PROJECTS
FREE CSG AND MINING INFORMATION SESSIONS AND WORKSHOPS

Emerald CSG, Mining and Regional Planning Information Session, Tuesday 3 March, 9am to 1pm

During this unmissable information session you will hear updates on CSG, mining and regional planning. Learn about resource industry developments including landholder rights and responsibilities, changes to access laws, potential groundwater impacts and the supporting Water Good Framework. You will also find out about the Regional Planning Interests Act (RPIL), Priority Agricultural Areas (PAA) and Strategic Cropping Areas (SCA). This semester, the trend is for a rise in development applications and these come with additional risks. We'll be talking about how you can best protect yourself.

Registrations are essential. Please visit www.agforceprojects.org.au to secure your place, or call (07) 3238 6048.

Middlemount CSG and Mining Information Session, Wednesday 4 March, 9am to 1pm

This information session will discuss the latest industry developments and your rights and responsibilities when negotiating with a resource company. The team will also cover points to consider during the negotiation process including water use, compensation provisions, changes to land access laws, tips on property planning and mapping.

Moua Advanced CSG and Mining Negotiation Support Workshop, Thursday 5 March, 9am to 1pm

AgForce Projects are now holding Advanced Negotiation Support workshops for landholders that are in the process of negotiation. Have negotiated or are negotiating an agreement with a resource company, in addition to hearing the latest on industry and government developments, we’ll have the opportunity to discuss community concerns with other landholders in your area and share experiences, as well as discuss specific issues with AgForce Projects. AgForce Projects encourages landholders to bring supporting documents with them, if they are experiencing issues they would like to discuss.

Water Supply Scheme
Storage
Fill Cap (m³)
Current Cap (m³)
% Full
Blue Green Algae Status
Sample Date
Down Burn River
Burkella Dam
112,400
101,405
90%
MED
12 Jan 15
Kondiah Dam
65,000
55,431
85%
MED
19 Jan 15
Dumbleton Weir
8,000
6,680
75%
LOW
19 Jan 15
Mariah Weir
3,000
3,000
100%
LOW
19 Jan 15
Miriam Weir
4,600
3,013
65%
LOW
19 Jan 15
Tennabura Dam
147,560
133,653
92%
HIGH
12 Jan 15
Pioneer River
Peter Faust Dam
491,400
421,880
85%
HIGH
19 Jan 15

Storage Summary

Rural Weekly // FRIDAY, JANUARY 30, 2015
WEATHER

PLANNING FOR FUTURE

Climate workshops well attended by farmers

OUR region’s climate is highly variable – what do climate and seasonal forecasts mean for our farmers and how can they start planning ahead?

This month Reef Catchments, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the University of Southern Queensland came together to hold two Seasonal Forecasting Tools for the Sugar Industry workshops for farmers in the Mackay Whitsunday region.

Reef Catchments Climate and Landscapes Systems co-ordinator Robyn Bell said the workshops were well attended.

“We had more than 60 growers attend the workshops, which aimed to allow them to understand climate drivers that impact on rainfall in our region,” Dr Bell said. “Farmers were provided with tools to use for medium-term forecasts to help improve decision making on the farm.

“This is very important for our local land managers, who are particularly exposed to forecast changes in weather, rainfall and climatic events.

“Australia has the highest natural climate variability in the world and the Mackay Whitsunday region has one of the highest levels of variability in all of Australia.

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“We had more than 60 growers attend the workshops, which aimed to allow them to understand climate drivers that impact on rainfall in our region.”

ROBYN BELL

LEARNING: Farmers take part in the Seasonal Forecasting Tools workshops. PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED
MACKAY Sugar and Reef Catchments have joined forces to help restore a heavily degraded wetland on Horse and Jockey Rd, near Mackay Sugar’s Racecourse Mill.

People using the road will have noticed foundation works beginning, with earth being moved and plants revegetated in sparse sections of the former wetland area.

Catchment Solutions has been engaged as a contractor to carry out the on-ground site works.

Reef Catchments’ Peter Muller said activities would be focused on improving water quality and landscape health.

“This is an exciting project that will aim to restore life to a degraded area on the edges of the Mackay city. The restoration of the wetland will bring back water and wildlife, including birds and the native fish population, which has dwindled over the years,” Mr Muller said.

“Water quality is the major focus of the works, and the reinstatement of a functioning wetland will allow for a natural system that is able to more effectively remove pollutants from our waterways.”

Matt Moore, project contractor from Catchment Solutions, said that currently, water draining off the bagasse pad ran into a dam.

“The dam will be incorporated into the wetland system and enlarged to create a first-flush sediment retention basin with water plants. The system will effectively clean the water as it moves through, removing nutrients such as phosphorous and nitrogen,” Mr Moore said.

Mackay Sugar will also benefit from the improvements, with access to cleaner water and a larger water storage area for the mill to utilise.

“Improved quality of land and water delivers benefits for everyone in the immediate area. Activities on the site will improve the quality of water flowing to the Mackay Regional Botanic Gardens locally, as well as more widely to the Pioneer River Estuary and the Great Barrier Reef,” Mr Moore said.

“Mackay Sugar’s Health, safety and environment manager Carissa Mansfield said Mackay Sugar was extremely proud to partner with Reef Catchments to restore approximately four hectares of land adjacent to its Racecourse Mill.

“This project benefits the environment, our Racecourse Mill operations and provides the community a picturesque viewpoint along Horse and Jockey Rd,” Ms Mansfield said.

“The joint partnership between Mackay Sugar and Reef Catchments is a real testament of our commitment towards environmental sustainability.” Works on the site will continue to June 2016, with Stage 1 expected to be completed by June 2015.
WETLAND SOLUTION: Matt Moore from Catchment Solutions at the wetland restoration site near Racecourse Mill.
Free forecasting workshop for farmers

THERE’S only one day left to register for a free workshop on season forecasting tools for the sugar industry in Proserpine on Wednesday, January 21.

The half-day workshop, to be held at the Proserpine Community Centre, is the collaboration of Reef Catchments, Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) and the University of Southern Queensland.

The workshop has been designed to improve understanding of the region’s climate drivers, providing tools that can be used to access and interpret climate forecast information.

Registrations close tomorrow (Thursday, January 15) and Reef Catchments climate and landscapes systems co-ordinator Dr Robyn Bell strongly encourages all local growers to attend as this kind of information specific to the region can be sparse.

“We know regionally that high natural variability in rainfall and temperature occurs throughout the region from year to year yet there are now a number of forecasting tools available to predict the likelihood of rain in the short to medium term. These tools are of great assistance in making future decisions about fertilising, spraying or making infrastructure changes,” she said.

“We are now working to try and equip our growers with the tools and knowledge they need to bring together forecast changes in climate and weather patterns with future farm planning and property management.”

Key speakers at the workshop will be DAFF senior industry development officer Neil Cliffe and climatologist Professor Roger Stone from the University of Southern Queensland.

To RSVP call 4945 2321 or email debbie.legge@reefcatchments.com.
WEATHER

PLANNING FOR FUTURE

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Station: Seven Mackay
Program: Seven News Mackay
Location: Mackay
Producer: 
Aired On: 6/02/2015 6:08:39 PM
Duration: 1 mins 40 secs
Compere: Rob Brough
Summary ID: M00060536170
Demographics: Male 16+ 6634 Female 16+ 9858
Interviewees: Belinda Billing, Reef Catchments
Interviewees: Stacey Hadlow, Cane Farmer

Proserpine cane farmer Stacey Hadlow is looking to shake up the sugar sector as it faces some of its biggest challenges. Hadlow has created a machine which he says not only improves his crops but saves time, money and the environment. It costs around $100,000 to customise his tractor, with funding from Reef Catchments helping him to afford the fit out.
WETLAND WORK UNDER WAY

MACKAY Sugar and Reef Catchments have joined forces to help restore a heavily degraded wetland on Horse and Jockey Rd, near Mackay Sugar’s Racecourse Mill.

People using the road will have noticed foundation works beginning, with earth being moved and plants revegetated in sparse sections of the former wetland area.

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“The wetland will strengthen the natural landscape of the Mackay region and build resilience to support multiple uses for the long-term future.”

Mackay Sugar’s Health, safety and environment manager Carissa Mansfield said Mackay Sugar was extremely proud to partner with Reef Catchments to restore approximately four hectares of land adjacent to its Racecourse Mill.

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Works on the site will continue to June 2016, with Stage 1 works expected to be completed by June 2015.
WETLAND SOLUTION: Matt Moore from Catchment Solutions at the wetland restoration site near Racecourse Mill.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED
Whitsunday Regional Council installed 3 pollutant traps in Cannonvale Botanic Gardens. Mackay Regional Council announced $60,000 for reef catchments.
Aussie Sugarcane Farmers Receive Funding Boost to Help Preserve One of the Seven Wonders of the Natural World

The Coca-Cola Foundation today announced a further $500,000 The Project aims to reduce the environmental impacts of sugarcane production on the Great Barrier Reef by providing funding for technical expertise, economic analysis and opportunities for...

http://ct.moreover.com/?a=20492680758&p=1i4&v=1&x=Vqj4oqIiHiQWxVo1_kVtAw
SUGARCANE FORUM
LOOKING TO FUTURE
Sustainability under microscope

HEALTH and a sustainable future were the key topics at the Case IH International Sugarcane Forum at Sanctuary Cove in Queensland recently.

More than 100 growers and key industry representatives came together at the For Life themed conference, where key speakers discussed what improvements were needed for the environmental and commercial sustainability of the industry.

International speakers, including Gaurav Sood from India, Richard Bennett from South East Asia, and Australian John Pearce, who has been working in the sugarcane industry in Brazil, shared details on what is happening in their markets, identifying opportunities and challenges that could have applications in Australia.

Local speakers such as Paul Deane, senior agricultural economist for ANZ Research, provided insights into developments in the Asian markets and shared predictions for the months and years ahead, while Robert Quirk discussed the benefits of Bonsucro’s sustainability standards.

Project Catalyst, a pioneering partnership aimed at reducing the environmental impacts of sugar production on the Great Barrier Reef, was also discussed.

A group presentation included Belinda Billing from Reef Catchments, Ian McConnel from WWF, Rob Cairns from Syngenta and growers involved in Project Catalyst.

“Now in its fifth year, Project Catalyst is reducing the negative impacts on the reef by showcasing the benefits of more efficient farming practices,” Rob Cairns, Syngenta head of corporate affairs in Australasia, explained. “Not only does this result in better water quality, which we’ve been able to prove, it’s also generating higher economic returns for farmers.”

Continuing Case IH’s commitment to supporting rural mental health, Alison Fairleigh, of Mental Illness Fellowship NQ, addressed the conference on the importance of mental health in the sugarcane industry.

“A sustainable rural industry requires a sustainable rural workforce and this includes all areas of mental health,” Mrs Fairleigh said.

The event was also an opportunity to reflect on the innovations made by Case IH in the area of sugarcane mechanisation.

Focusing on 50 years of product research and development, the conference highlighted the importance of research into more efficient farming practices, and the importance of matching mechanisation with agronomy.
WORKING TOGETHER: Growers and industry representatives at the CaseIH Sugarcane Forum at Sanctuary Cove recently. PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED
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PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED
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Opportunities for graziers and local cane farmers

WHITSUNDAY landholders in the Proserpine mill area are encouraged to apply for the Reef Programme Water Quality Improvement Grants. Over the next five years $200 million of funding for selected activities across the Great Barrier Reef has been provided by the Australian Government.

A Reef Programme Water Quality Improvement Grant entitles graziers and farmers to paddock-by-paddock nutrient and chemical plan with the programme’s precision planning consultant, free EC (electro conductivity) mapping, soil testing (above regulated requirements) and development of a total Property Management Plan to evaluate current operations as well as $500 to spend on chemical equipment upgrades.

Reef Catchments key contact officer Scott Underdown said the grants would assist with more effective and profitable long-term farm management. “Whether it be improving their nutrient applications or chemical equipment, even irrigation for their property, they should give us a call to see what their options are,” he said.

Canegrowers Proserpine cane BMP facilitator and grower services manager Christine Peterson has been appointed to a precision planning consultant role for the programme as of last week.

“I’ll be providing assistance to growers to complete pest management plans, nutrient management plans and also part of the process will be growers do an initial plans and reviews of those plans for the next two-three years,” she said.

Ms Peterson said she was more than happy to take on the role. “(I) encourage any growers who are in the system to give me a call if they want assistance with anything. New growers obviously have to go through the expression of interest online but existing ones are welcome to contact me with any enquiries,” she said.

Anyone who is interested in applying for the Reef Programme Water Quality Improvement Grants should submit an expression of interest at www.reefcatchments.com or phone Scott Underdown on 0437 344 851.
Continuing interview with Robert Cocco, CEO, Reef Catchments. Compere says environment seems to be one of the top priorities for the people living in coastal regions while farmers are pressured to reduce runoff for many years. Compere mentions ALP's commitment to reduce farm chemicals. Cocco discusses what they have achieved, saying there is now 20 to 40% reduction. Compere mentions a plan on the establishment of a task force and investigation of a water quality trading scheme. Cocco talks about the sentiments he has been hearing from the regions. Cocco says Mackay Regional Council has been very engaged in helping them and has been an integral partner to the work they are doing.
Steel grass sets New York bouquets alight

Emily Smith
emily.smith@dailymercury.com.au

NEW YORK flower bouquets are about the last thing you’d guess Angela and Ross Bailey’s mountainside expeditions to result in.

But thousands of their Xanthorrhoea (commonly known as grass tree) stems are harvested and sent to floral industries around the world every year.

Mrs Bailey said harvesting the stems had occurred in the region for years and she sets out two of three times a week to collect armfuls from her Sarina property for export.

"Grass trees grow in the rockiest, steepest, hardest places to get," Mrs Bailey said.

"It’s a good workout, collecting them all.

"I cut each one with a sickle and put it on the ground in the direction I’m headed, so I don’t get lost. It’s like leaving a trail of breadcrumbs."

In order to get perfect stalks, the couple set fire to their trees each year.

"Fire makes them thrive," Mrs Bailey said.

"They want the stalks perfect and fire gets rid of all the fungus, and gets them greener and fresher."

The stems are then trucked to Cedar Hills Flowers and Foliage, which has exported products from Australia to the global floral industry for more than 20 years.

Sarina stems go mostly to Europe and North America where they are marketed as ‘steel grass’ for the stems’ hardness and texture.

While grass trees take decades to grow, Mrs Bailey said the stems grew quickly and with almost no labour input, making them one of the most sustainable crops.

"They like the stems to be about a metre, which takes between three and six months to grow to after being harvested," she said.

"They don’t need to be fertilized, you don’t need to work the soil or anything. They just grow faster when it rains."
FLORAL HARVEST: Ross and Angela Bailey harvest grass tree stems, which are exported for use in floral arrangements in New York and Paris.

PHOTO: REEF CATCHMENTS.
HELP FOR FARMERS

ADVICE HOLDS WATER
Simple tips to reduce moisture loss and soil erosion

Emily Smith
emily.smith@dailymercury.com.au

THEY say people are a product of their environment. So after growing up in the New Mexico desert, working out ways to store water in the landscape was an obvious interest for river and wetland restoration practitioner Craig Sponholtz.

“I lived in a very eroded landscape,” Mr Sponholtz said. “On a basic level I wanted to learn how to make the landscape I lived in just that little bit wetter.”

“Water is critical when you live in a dry place.”

The practice transferred well to the Australian landscape and the American stopped by Mackay last week to give farmers some tips.

Stopping soil loss through erosion with hand-built structures was one of the main techniques he highlighted.

“A gully can act like a sink. Restoring it can help water spread out across the country and help lots of other aspects,” he said.

“I often take examples from the things nature does – the ways streams and rivers heal themselves are often the same physical processes that can be replicated in a gully.”

He said many of the erosion problems he saw were the cumulative effect from a range of environmental changes.

“Often people need to look at problems in different ways,” he said.

“When you share information, it helps people understand what part they played in that.”

Solid plant cover would lead to good drainage – a critical part of stopping soil erosion, he said.

But Mr Sponholtz warned there were never quick-fix solutions.

“It’s about understanding the impact of management decisions,” he said. “Farmers need to recognise symptoms so they can address the cause directly.

“But it’s also about interacting with farmers and understanding how they make management decisions.”

During a restoration project at Mossman, Mr Sponholtz said he was surprised a farmer did not leave a strip of native vegetation between his cane crop and the river.

But after asking why that was not standard practice to prevent erosion, he was told the grower needed to farm that country to provide a certain quota of cane to the sugar mill.

“So you have to look at problems in different ways. Sometimes management decisions are political,” he said.

Mackay Reef Catchments water and waterways project officer Iona Flettsaid Mr Sponholtz’s visit tied in with the company’s system repair project.

“Craig highlighted that farmers can use hand-built structures to prevent erosion – they don’t always need lots of machinery.”

Mrs Flettsaid gully erosion had become a priority for farmers and about 20 of them came to Mr Sponholtz’s demonstration.

She encouraged anyone wanting help with the problem to go online to www.reefcatchments.com.au.

“Water is critical when you live in a dry place”

– CRAIG SPONHOLTZ
WATER FOR THOUGHT: American scientist Craig Sponholtz stopped by Mackay to give farmers tips on how to retain water in their landscape as well as prevent erosion.

PHOTO: EMILY SMITH
Reef Catchments sustainable agriculture officer Daniel O'Keeffe
, who started in the role last month.

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Daniel O'Keeffe is the new sustainable agriculture project officer at Reef Catchments

Reef Catchments sustainable agriculture project officer Daniel O'Keeffe is the new to North Queensland. He discusses his new job.

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Reef Catchments sustainable agriculture officer Daniel O’Keeffe, who started in the role last month.

Daniel O'Keeffe is the new sustainable agriculture project officer at Reef Catchments

Posted June 04, 2015 09:57:04

Reef Catchments sustainable agriculture project officer Daniel O'Keeffe is the new to North Queensland. He discusses his new job. Read story. David Sparkes Source: ABC Rural

Duration: 1min...

Reef Catchments sustainable agriculture officer Daniel O'Keeffe

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Reef Catchments sustainable agriculture officer Daniel O'Keeffe, who started in the role last month. David Sparkes

Topics: rural, sustainable-and-alternative-farming, environment, environmental-management...

Daniel O'Keeffe is the new sustainable agriculture project officer at Reef Catchments

Reef Catchments sustainable agriculture project officer Daniel O'Keeffe is the new to North Queensland. He discusses his new job.

New sustainable agriculture officer comes to town

Meet the new guy in north Queensland's agricultural sector. Daniel O'Keeffe has just arrived in Proserpine, to become Reef Catchments' new sustainable agriculture officer, and he is hoping to build connections with farmers across the region.

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New sustainable agriculture officer hopes to connect Reef Catchments with farmers

Posted       June 04, 2015 09:57:04Meet the new guy in north Queensland's agricultural sector. Daniel O'Keeffe has just arrived in Proserpine, to become Reef Catchments' new sustainable agriculture officer, and he is hoping to build connections with...

Sparkes says Daniel O'Keeffe is the new Sustainable Agriculture Officer of Reef Catchments and has been building connections in the wider region. O'Keeffe says he grew up in the agriculture industry down in southern NSW before moving up to Qld. He says his role with Reef Catchments Mackay is responsible for setting up sustainable agriculture trials. O'Keeffe says liaising with farmers is also part of his job.
Cattle farmers in the region are preparing for hotter, dryer days as El Nino takes hold. There was a forum on the challenges and opportunities facing the local cattle industry and biosecurity at the Mackay Entertainment and Convention Centre. Electricity for irrigation is becoming a big issue also. Cattle farmers are also starting to reinvest in cane. Farmers are thankful for the slight rise in cattle prices.
Interview with Michael Bowlen(*), Grazing Project Officer, Reef Catchments. He speaks about the primary industry work he is currently doing in Mackay, Whitsunday and Isaac Region. He says matching the constraints of climate with the business’ demand is one of the greatest challenges graziers face these days. He mentions the Reef Catchments can facilitate inquiries and serve as a source of information in support to these graziers. He says the forum next week in Mackay will gather graziers from the three regions where they can talk about issues that are concerning them locally. He says the graziers can also consult with industry leaders and academics regarding these issues that affect them. He mentions some guest speakers that will be at the forum next week, including AgForce’s Lauren Hewitt and MLA’s Geoff Niethe.
Forum to boost coast production

FROM how to win the ‘world cup’ of cattle when it comes to breeding, to biosecurity, soil health and new pasture varieties for the region – everything beef will be up for discussion at this year’s annual Sustainable Grazing Forum for producers on the Queensland coast.

Held at the Mackay Entertainment and Convention Centre on June 3, the forum is expected to attract more than 100 local graziers from the Mackay, Whitsunday and Isaac regions.

Forum co-ordinator, Reef Catchments’ Michael Boland, said the day would focus on both the challenges and opportunities faced by coastal beef producers.

“The forum is one of the only events focused specifically on graziers in our region,” Mr Boland said.

“It will look at both challenges and opportunities in beef production on the Queensland coast, providing graziers with the information they need to improve land and pasture management, and highlighting where efficiencies could be gained – for example, in the area of genetics.”

Geoff Niethe, research co-ordinator from Meat & Livestock Australia, will present on building the best foundation for a breeder herd.

“If you want to win the world cup, you need to have a good junior sports development team coming up through the ranks,” Mr Niethe said.

“If you want to win the world cup, you need to have a good junior sports development team coming up through the ranks. I will be considering how to select and prepare the right heifers from a young age for maximum life-long productivity in the herd. For example, we know from data that cows targeted at certain times of the year are more likely to calf again in a 12-month cycle. Information like that can be critical in adding value to the herd.”

Ross Dodt, senior industry development officer for DAFF, will speak on the challenges facing the Mackay, Whitsunday and Isaac beef industry.

“A problem for many regional beef properties is insufficient scale,” he said.

“For example, properties in Area III of the brigalow ballot scheme were originally sub-divided on the basis they would run 800 head of cattle.

“Technology has enabled producers to stock at higher rates than this, but the temptation for some has been to stock at unsustainable rates, hastening problems such as pasture rundown, unwanted pasture species encroachment and deteriorated land condition.

“Producers are also feeling the ‘terms of trade’ pinch in a commodity-based market of ‘how do we juggle the challenge of trying to decrease the cost of production while also raising quality animals that are worth more per head?’”

Mr Dodt said there was no “one hat fits all” solution, but that beef producers needed the right information to make an educated decision on how to move forward.

Graziers interested in learning more are invited to RSVP to the free event before May 29 to secure their place.

● Contact Reef Catchments on (07) 4968 4200 or email info@reefcatchments.com
Eungella grazier Kel Tennent received funding for improved land management through the Reef Program, which allowed the Tennents to complete 2.8km of riparian fencing, install three off-stream watering points, complete a stocktake pasture course, implement pasture monitoring and improve pasture management.
Dent takes the lead in resource control

THERE'S a new kid on the conservation block with the appointment of Reef Catchments' natural resource management (NRM) leader for the Mackay Whitsunday region.

Katrina Dent comes to the role with 20 years experience in regional planning, having helped draft the Mackay Whitsunday Isaac Regional Plan.

Mrs Dent said she hoped to help progress the sustainable use of the region’s resources.

“I see natural resource management and planning as a key contributor to a sustainable community,” she said.

“I will be working within Reef Catchments to identify new and additional projects that can be undertaken to progress and enhance the natural recourses of Mackay, Isaac and the Whitsundays.”

Reef Catchments chief executive officer Robert Coco said managing the area’s resources was an important part of keeping the community alive.

“Management of our natural assets today will set our path for tomorrow and it is crucial to find the right balance for sustainable development,” he said.

“Katrina brings a wealth of expertise and insight into regional planning and is ideally placed to help facilitate best practice resource management across our region, community and industries.”
Kleidon highlights that Reef Catchments has been responsible for many environmental projects. Recently, Katrina Dent(*), who has had experience in local and state governments, has been appointed as the new manager of Reef Catchments. Dent discusses how her previous skills will translate to her new position. Dent says going to state government loses connection with the community that is why she came to Reef Catchments with her governance and planning knowledge to manage growth and environment and obtain positive ground outcomes. Dent says they are building a new team for a lot of programs for the coast, businesses, energy and resources. Kleidon commends Reef Catchments for setting up a good framework and having goals to achieve. Dent says they have funding arrangements from Federal and State Government for some local projects.
Program Preview
- Continuing interview with Katrina Dent(*), manager, Reef Catchments, to talk about how her town planning experience is going to serve Central Qld in her new role.
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Program Preview
- Continuing interview with Katrina Dent(*) about how her town planning experience is going to serve Central Qld in her new role as manager of Reef Catchments.
- Discussion about erosion and its prevention.
Interview with Katrina Dent(*), Manager, Reef Catchments Mackay, to talk about being a former town planner. Dent says she spent being a town planner in Rockhampton for nine years and in Mackay for eight years. Dent shares what brought her from Rockhampton City Council to Mackay, recalling her work with the Qld Government’s Department of Local Government and Planning. Dent reckons there is a difficulty in selling regional centres in terms of the diverse activities and cultural experiences. She thinks it is unfortunate that people in Brisbane are a bit naive on what there is in Mackay. Dent mentions the importance of having a vision for the next 20 years and being ready as well. Dent thinks Mackay is now in a better place than it was before.
Research has found that local cane growers are helping to meet ambitious targets for cutting back chemical run off to the Great Barrier Reef. More than 50% of farmers across the region have changed their ways in hope of saving the GBR. Farmers are working to reduce their chemical imprint. The Australian Government Reef program is leading the change yet more work needs to be done.
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Philpott says after a decade of research and trials, harvesting has began on the Mackay region's first ever commercial rice crops. The two-day harvest began two days ago on 11 hectare plot McCane property(*) North Palmyra just West of Mackay. The crop is a project of Agronomy Consultant Pharmacist(*) who gives cane growers in the region a new source of income. Philpott plays an interview of David Sparkes with Rob Eccles, managing director, Catchment Solutions. Eccles talks about how the rice are being harvested.
Soil health workshop for farmers

FARMERS concerned about their soil health should head along to a Reef Catchments breakfast and workshop Tuesday. Event co-ordinator and Marian farmer Simon Mattsson said he would aim to raise awareness about the dire state of the regions’ soils and...

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http://ct.moreover.com/?a=21404074692&p=1i4&v=1&x=uvG4n27clDFw2ExsXwusmw
Soil health workshop

FARMERS concerned about their soil health should head along to a Reef Catchments breakfast and workshop Tuesday. Event co-ordinator and Marian farmer Simon Mattsson said he would aim to raise awareness about the dire state of the regions' soils and describe ways of boosting soil carbon levels. Phone Reef Catchments today on 4968 4200 or email info@reefcatchments.com to secure a spot.
Soil health still a dirty word

FARMERS across the region are encouraged to educate themselves on soil health at a Breakfast and Soil Health Field Day on Tuesday, May 26. Event co-ordinator and Marian farmer Simon Mattsson says the challenge of restoring and improving soil health is one of the biggest issues facing sugar producers in today’s market.

The Soil Health Field Day will include a breakfast and presentations from industry leaders at the Mackay Wests Leagues Club, followed by a farm field tour to view a soil health trial focused on introducing plant diversity. The event receives funding and support from Reef Catchments, the Australian Government, Canegrowers, Wilmar, Mackay Sugar, MAPS, Mackay Rural Supplies, North Queensland Tropical Seeds and Superior Fertilisers. Farmers are urged to RSVP to Reef Catchments by Thursday, May 21, on 4968 4200 or email info@reefcatchments.com.

SOIL MATTERS: Marian farmer and Nuffield Scholar Simon Mattsson will speak on soil health. PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED
Interview with Simon Mattsson, Nuffield scholar. Kleidon says nitrogen has been implicated in growing outbreaks of crown-of-thorns starfish. Mattsson has established through his study that the nitrogen is an actually a symptom and not a cause. Mattsson feels the Government need to tackle the problem from the ground up and look at carbon in soils. Mattsson says some plant species offer a way of maintaining soil in an open fashion for one harvest to the next. He says having the soil compaction issue addresses will greatly help soil health. Not only has the compaction issue needed to be addressed, but also the lack of carbon and calcium in soils. Mattsson says increasing carbon levels in the soil can be done conventionally by adding compost but it will have very little potential to stay in the soil. He mentions other guest speakers who will be with him on a field day, namely composting expert Gerry Gillespie and NSW farmer Colin Seis who is a winner of 2014 Bob Hawke Landcare Award. Mattsson says Seis is the pioneer of pasture cropping. He says the Reef Catchments has been helping him with registration and feedback forms. Kleidon says Mattsson will present on 26 May at 7 until 4.
Kleidon mentions the Caring for our Country Reef Rescue program was initiated by the Australian Government which committed $200m over five years to improve the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef. According to Simon Mattsson, farmer, Mackay, the focus on nitrogen reduction is misguided. Mattsson says nitrogen is a symptom and not the cause. He says the amount of nitrogen in the reef will not change because there is not enough carbon in the soil to hold the nutrients where they are supposed to be. He talks about his nitrogen runoff problem.

Rob Cocco, CEO, Reef Catchments, thinks there is a great opportunity in terms of improving soil health. Cocco says they are seeking to focus on key farming practices that will yield in significant imports in terms of the water quality. Cocco says they are hoping the Mackay and Whitsunday regions are beneficiaries of investments from the Federal Budget.
Managing erosion in the Burnett and Mary catchments is among the top priorities of the state government's strategy to improve the quality of water and to protect the Great Barrier Reef from agricultural land use through the Queensland Government's Reef Water Quality Research Development and Innovation Strategy released yesterday. The scheme sets the targets to achieve up to an 80% reduction in nitrogen and up to a 50% reduction in sediment flowing from key reef catchments by 2025. The strategy also focuses on key catchments in the Wet Tropics, Burdekin, Fitzroy, and Mackay-Whitsunday and targets priority pollutants.
Help reef by cutting chemicals, erosion

Pamela Frost
pamela.frost@apn.com.au

MANAGING pesticide from the Mackay and Fitzroy regions and combating erosion from the Mary and Burnett catchments have been listed among the top priorities in a State Government strategy to protect the Great Barrier Reef.

The State Government released the reef water quality strategy in Townsville yesterday, only weeks ahead of UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee’s decision on whether to list the reef as ‘in danger’.

The government strategy report contained a list of priorities for Queensland coastal catchments to help reduce degraded water quality on the reef.

Combating erosion from cattle grazing and cropping in the Fitzroy region was listed among the first priorities to improve reef water quality along with reducing nitrogen from fertiliser in the wet tropics and erosion in the Burdekin.

Addressing pesticide from sugarcane in all catchments in the Mackay and Whitsundays region was listed as a second priority.

Reducing fertiliser nitrogen from sugarcane in the Mackay and Whitsundays area was listed as a third priority, along with erosion management from grazing in the Mary and Burnett catchments.

Also listed as a third priority was reducing pesticide from grazing and cropping in the Fitzroy region.

The report said whole farm pesticide and weed management was critical to limiting the impacts on reef water quality.

“Pesticides pose a risk to freshwater, inshore and coastal ecosystems, as their presence in waterways and in the reef lagoon reduces the resilience of aquatic ecosystems,” it said.

The report also explained how erosion from cropping and grazing affected the reef.

It said emerging research had shown that fine fractions of soil from grazing, cane and other cropping lands were the most likely to reach and impact on reef systems, particularly in wider flatter reef catchments such as the Burdekin and Fitzroy catchments.

– APN NEWSDESK

SPEAK UP: What do you think? Get in touch on 4970 3023 or newsroom@gladstoneobserver.com.au.
New report: Combating Mary River catchment erosion is a priority

Rescuing reef’s water

Pamela Frost
APN Newsdesk

COMBATING erosion from the Mary and Burnett River catchments, and managing pesticide from the Mackay and Fitzroy regions have been listed among the top priorities in a State Government strategy to protect the Great Barrier Reef.

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Addressing pesticide from sugarcane in all catchments... was a second priority.
Kleidon says Qld is leading a way in natural resource management activities and projects. She says Reef Catchments members and stakeholders have been invited to witness firsthand the activities happening across the region. Rob Cocco, CEO, Reef Catchments, explains why they hold these types of annual field days. Cocco says they aim to showcase the works to local community and to give an opportunity to stakeholders some issues they may want to work on in the future. He thinks the region performs quite well despite the pressure existing for a long time. Cocco says their major priorities revolve around enhanced condition of the catchment and improvements on water quality and reef health. Cocco mentions their work with Mackay Sugar about a waterway that needed repair. He says there is a substantial amount of area that requires significant repairs and improvements on waterways.
IMPROVING THE SUPPLY

WORK HARD ON WATER

Statistics look bad but farmers are turning it around

Troy Kippen and APN Newsdesk

STARTLING statistics have revealed a severe water quality in the Fitzroy region and the Mackay and Whitsunday region but farmers are working to turn around the figures.

The Mackay and Whitsunday region has had a 45% drop in water quality. Earlier this month the Australian Bureau of Statistics released the first ecosystem accounts that examined data taken over the past decade.

It showed seagrass condition had dropped by more than half in the Fitzroy area; going from 100 points when data started being collected in 2005–06 to just 38 points in 2012.

There has also been a decline in seagrass condition in the Mackay and Whitsunday region, going from 100 points in 2005 to its lowest level of 21 points in 2011.

It then bounced back to 38.4 points in 2012.

Water quality has been following similar patterns.

The report stated climate change, declining water quality from catchment runoff and loss of coastal habitats from fishing and coastal development were the main factors affecting the reef’s condition.

The score decreased from 100 points to 59 points between 2005 and 2011 in the Fitzroy area.

It dropped to 54 points in the Mackay and Whitsunday region during the same timeframe.

Reef Catchments has several programs in place to improve the water quality of runoff from catchment areas, such as Project Catalyst, Game Changer, and the Australian Government Reef program in recent.

Critically, work being done by Queensland cane farmers is now estimated to cut pollutant loads to the Great Barrier Reef by about 183 tonnes each year.

“The primary purpose of Project Catalyst is to reduce the environmental footprint that sugarcane has on freshwater and the Great Barrier Reef,” Reef Catchments CEO Robert Cocco said.

“We do this by supporting a network of innovative farmers that are speeding the adoption of cutting edge management practices.”

Factbox

Project Catalyst decreases in the 2014 growing year:
72 tonne for particulate nitrogen
34 tonne for particulate phosphorus
64 tonne for dissolved inorganic nitrogen
13 tonne for filterable reactive phosphorus
551kg for pesticide

QUALITY: Simon Mattsonn is one of the farmers trying to turn around the north’s water quality issues.
Bad soil health holding back Queensland’s Mackay region says cane grower and Nuffield scholar

A cane farmer who recently travelled overseas to investigate soil health says the bad soil health is holding back productivity in Queensland’s Mackay region. Simon Mattson runs a cane farm in Marian, west of Mackay, and is a Nuffield Scholar focusing...

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Bad soil health holding back Queensland's Mackay region says cane grower and Nuffield scholar

A cane farmer who recently travelled overseas to investigate soil health says the bad soil health is holding back productivity in Queensland's Mackay region. Simon Mattson runs a cane farm in Marian, west of Mackay, and is a Nuffield Scholar focusing on...

Simon Mattsson, cane grower, Marian, who recently investigated soil health in New Zealand and South America, says the issue is also holding back productivity in Mackay. Mattsson is preparing to host a field day on his property to give farmers better information about the problems they face as well as some solutions. Mattsson says the soil issues in Mackay include compaction, lack of carbon and lack of available calcium. He explains carbon is what enables soil to be alive. Sparkes says the field day will be on 26 May at Mattsson's property in Marian. Contact reef Catchments for details.
Experts explain the impact of soil health on farms

THERE is one thing that affects every Australian farmer - soil health. But understand the health of the soil is difficult when it all happens underground.

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Experts explain the impact of soil health on farms

THERE is one thing that affects every Australian farmer - soil health. But understand the health of the soil is difficult when it all happens underground.

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Experts explain the impact of soil health on farms

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Troy Kippen
Troy.kippen@dailymercury.com.au

THERE is one thing that affects every Australian farmer – soil health.
But understand the health of the soil is difficult when it all happens underground.

A Reef Catchments’ Soil Health Field Day aims to change all that by explaining the impacts of compaction and how to test for and maintain calcium and soil carbon levels.

Growers are invited to learn more at the second annual Soil Health Field Day on May 26.

The day includes a breakfast and soil health presentations from experts at Wests Leagues Club, Walkerston, followed by a field tour at Simon Mattsson’s property at Marian.

Information will focus on how to address and improve soil health on-farm for the long term.

Speakers include:

- Colin Seis (pasture cropping): Widely recognised in Australia as a pasture cropping pioneer, Colin provides first-hand insight into his own experiences improving soil health, including through plant diversity and no till methods.

- Gerry Gillespie (City to Soil Project): Gerry will provide an overview of composting for increased soil carbon. Gerry’s method for compost can be done on-farm without the need for expensive turners.

- Simon Mattsson (cane farmer): Local grower and Nuffield Scholar, Simon Mattsson, has just returned from his Nuffield travels and will present findings after spending time overseas exploring soil health issues in New Zealand, Chile, Peru and Brazil.

Simon will also provide an update on his rotational crop trial at Marian.

The event will be followed by a composting workshop on May 27 for those with an interest in learning techniques firsthand.

Cost is $30 a person and people can phone 4968 4200 to book or for more information.

GUEST SPEAKER: Marian cane farmer and Nuffield Scholar Simon Mattsson has spent time overseas learning more about soil health issues.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED
Reef Catchments project coordinator Peter Muller discusses a wetland rehabilitation project next to Racecourse Sugar Mill in Mackay.

Reef Catchments project coordinator Peter Muller discusses a wetland rehabilitation project next to Racecourse Sugar Mill in Mackay. It is a joint project between Mackay Sugar and Reef Catchments.

Racecourse Mill wetland

Racecourse Mill wetland in Mackay is the site of a rehabilitation project involving Mackay Sugar and Reef Catchments.

Reef Catchments project coordinator Peter Muller at Racecourse Mill wetland. The area is being rehabilitated.

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Racecourse Mill wetland
in Mackay is the site of a rehabilitation project involving Mackay Sugar and Reef Catchments

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Racecourse Mill wetland - ABC Rural (Australian Broadcasting Corporation)

Posted April 10, 2015 09:10:20

Racecourse Mill wetland in Mackay is the site of a rehabilitation project involving Mackay Sugar and Reef Catchments.

Topics: sugar, rural, wetlands, environment, mackay-4740

Reef Catchments project coordinator Peter Muller at Racecourse Mill wetland.jpg

Posted April 10, 2015 09:10:20

Reef Catchments project coordinator Peter Muller at Racecourse Mill wetland. The area is being rehabilitated.

Mackay’s Racecourse Mill wetland project takes shape to protect the Barrier Reef from sediment and nutrient runoff

Updated April 10, 2015 09:25:58

Four thousand native seedlings are taking root in Mackay in a wetland project that aims to change a weed-infested wasteland into a thriving ecosystem, and to filter runoff water from surrounding farms. The site, ...

Mackay wetland project starts to take shape

Four thousand native seedlings are taking root in Mackay in a wetland project that aims to change a weed-infested wasteland into a thriving ecosystem, and to filter runoff water from surrounding farms. The site, next to Racecourse Sugar Mill, was...

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Sparkes recalls the wetland rehabilitation project they have visited next to Mackay's Racecourse Mill in December. At that time, hundreds of tonnes of earth have been shifted to create creeks and ponds, but the site was mostly bare without any vegetation. After four months, 4,000 indigenous seedlings have been planted and a thousand more is expected by the end of the month. Carlos Bueno, worker, wetland rehabilitation project, talks about preparing soil. Sparkes says the project is being undertaken by Mackay Sugar which owns the mill and Reef Catchments. Peter Muller, Coordinator, Reef Catchments, says the revived wetland will improve and filter the quality of water running out to the Great Barrier Reef from farms in the catchment area. He says they are reinstating the tree species that were there before, including Alexandra palm and Damson.
REEF Catchments held an information session last month to help control an outbreak of pond apple discovered in Habana.

Reef Catchments project officer Iona Flett said the pond apple tree had been discovered during a monitoring walk as part of ongoing surveillance funded through the Queensland Government NRM Program, which helps ensure the Mackay area remains free of the weed species.

“The tree was found on a creek line and was fruiting,” Ms Flett said.

“It is a concern and it is critical we alert landholders to the fact that pond apple control may need to be taken, because there have been no new outbreaks in the Mackay region for quite some time. "As a region, we have been very successful in an on-ground approach to eradicating pond apple, thanks to terrific co-operation from landholders. "We want to make sure this continues and would encourage all landholders in the area to come along next Tuesday and see first-hand how to manage any incursions they might find.

“Pond apple has the potential to significantly impact the natural areas of the Mackay Whitsunday region and can also affect our agricultural industries, including cane and grazing.”

Pond apple (Annona glabra) is regarded as one of the worst weeds in Australia because of its invasiveness, potential for spread and economic and environmental impacts.

Infestations were first reported in Mackay in 2009, with outbreaks identified in Andergrove and more widely in the Reliance Creek catchment.

Thanks to several years of intensive on-ground eradication activity, the weed is being slowly but surely eradicated from the Mackay and Whitsunday region.

The pond apple eradication project is a joint initiative of Reef Catchments, Pioneer Catchment and Landcare Group, Mackay Regional Council and the Mackay Regional Pest Management Group, through funding from the Queensland Government.
WATCH OUT: Pond Apple (Annona glabra) is regarded as one of the worst weeds in Australia.

PHOTO: ADAM REECE
HUGE PLANTING PROJECT AT MILL SITE

WETLAND HAS 5000 REASONS TO RETURN

About 30 species of native planted to battle weeds and restore health

PHASE two of a major wetland restoration project near Racecourse Mill is underway, with more than 5000 seedlings set to go in the ground by the end of April.

Reef Catchments project co-ordinator Peter Muller said 3000 seedlings had been planted on the four hectare site over the past two weeks, with 2000 more set to come in the next month.

“This is a major step in the wetland restoration project, which is a joint project between Mackay Sugar and Reef Catchments to restore a heavily degraded area of land directly behind Racecourse Mill,” Mr Muller said.

He said revegetation of native plants was a critical stage of the wetland restoration process.

“Over time, as these trees mature, they will help recreate the original rainforest ecosystem and environment that was once typical to the Pioneer Valley Catchment.

“The eventual aim of the restored wetland is to provide a corridor, becoming a point of connection in the landscape that allows for the delivery of water quality and ecosystem benefits to a wider area.”

More than 30 native species have been selected for the site, including Leichhardt and Damson trees and Alexandra palms.

The seedlings have been provided by Mackay Tree Factory and the Pioneer Catchment Landcare Nursery.

The team from Whitsunday Catchment Landcare has been contracted to do the planting on-ground, making significant progress in a short period, with thousands of trees now in the ground.

Mr Muller said planting of endemic species (trees native to the area) also helped guard against invasive and environmentally damaging weeds.

“Tree species selected have been based on the regional ecosystem of the site.

“Before we started works, the site was mostly overgrown with weeds.

“By stocking the area heavily with endemic species, we hope to ‘shade out’ the weed species, some of which have become quite dominant over time – for example, water lettuce, water hyacinth, para grass and hymenachne,” he said.

Revegetation could also help improve water quality by enhancing natural filtration.

“Improved water quality and the restoration of land, ecosystem and habitat health are the major focus of the works and we hope the community will notice benefits in these areas moving forward,” Mr Muller said.

The project is a joint initiative of Reef Catchments and Mackay Sugar, through co-funding from the Australian Government Reef Programme.

Works on the site will continue to June 2016.

Reef Catchments is currently seeking to partner with private landholders and farmers on similar wetland restoration works across the region.

For more information contact Reef Catchments on 4968 4234.
DIGGING IN: Reef Catchments' Iona Fleet and Carlos Bueno, from Whitsunday Catchment Landcare.
BAYER BACKS
REEF PROJECT
Continuing its support of Project Catalyst to cut environmental impact

BAYER CropScience has reinforced a strong commitment to Australian sugarcane innovation and sustainable production, announcing its ongoing support to Project Catalyst Australia at the annual Growers Forum in Townsville this month.

Project Catalyst is a pioneering partnership aimed at reducing the environmental impacts of sugarcane production on the Great Barrier Reef through innovative farming practices.

The project seeks to test and validate practices that are good for farmers and also good for the reef, driving on-farm innovation.

Improving water quality from agricultural catchments is vital to improving the resilience of the reef in the face of many threats, including a changing climate.

Bayer CropScience head of new business development Richard Dickmann said the company was delighted to extend support of the project.

"Project Catalyst is a perfect partner for Bayer as we share a commitment to improving reef water quality and the role of innovation as a key driver of delivering sustainable farming outcomes," he said.

Since starting the collaboration with Bayer, Project Catalyst farmers have undertaken trials targeted at optimising herbicide application, leading to three new registration projects and new weed control protocols.

The Bayer local team worked with growers to develop more than 50 optimised herbicide treatment plans to improve the rate, timing and placement of herbicides on the growers' farms.

"Together, Bayer CropScience and Project Catalyst growers are highlighting changes in the management practices of weeds, disease and insects in the sugarcane industry," Mr Dickmann said.

Reef Catchments Group chief executive Rob Cocco thanked Bayer CropScience for its support.

Bayer and Catchment Solutions have both agreed to broaden work on the targeted application of herbicides, as well as the potential delivery of projects in the area of digital agriculture.

"We are focused on initiatives that lead simultaneously to better yields, better water quality and better economic return for the sugarcane industry," Mr Cocco said.

Project Catalyst is a pioneering partnership of diverse stakeholders and more than 75 forward-thinking cane farmers.

We share a commitment to improving reef water quality
WORKING TOGETHER: Team Bayer (from left) Tim Murphy, Richard Dickmann, Robert Cocco, Sue Cross and Royce Bishop.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

PARTNERSHIP GETTING RESULTS

WORKING TOGETHER: Team Bayer (from left) Tim Murphy, Richard Dickmann, Robert Cocco, Sue Cross and Royce Bishop.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED
Eco Barge attracts national interest

ECO BARGE Clean Seas founder Libby Edge met with World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Coca-Cola South Pacific and Catchment Solutions (Reef Catchments) on Thursday to discuss all things turtles and Eco Barge.

The entourage, which was made up of WWF CEO Dermot O’Gorman, national project coordinator Ian McConnell, Coca-Cola South Pacific CEO Roberto Mercale and Reef Catchments senior project consultant Rob Eccles, visited Bloomsbury cane farmer Scott Simpson before meeting with Ms Edge at Eco Barge HQ in Jubilee Pocket.

All three organisations are partners in Project Catalyst, an initiative that strives to reduce the nutrient, fertiliser and pollutant run-off on the Great Barrier Reef. Ms Edge said Thursday was an interesting day for the national visitors as the Whitsunday Turtle Rescue Centre was hosting students from James Cook University who were examining deceased turtles to understand why they had died.

Ms Edge then took the men on a tour of the rescue centre and briefed them on the Whitsunday Marine Debris Removal Program.

Coca-Cola South Pacific CEO Roberto Mercale looked on in awe and said he had great admiration for Ms Edge. “I like turtles and I like seeing such a young woman making a change – you can see the passion in her eyes,” he said.

Ms Edge said to date they have removed over 120 tonne of debris in the Whitsundays. On Friday the men travelled to Bowen to visit a turtle project WWF had been involved in for nearly 10 years.

WWF CEO Dermot O’Gorman said the project monitors turtle health and population size in the Bowen region and that they looked forward to assessing its developments.
SPECIAL VISIT: Catchment Solutions (Reef Catchments) senior project consultant Rob Eccles, World Wildlife Fund CEO Dermot O’Gorman, Eco Barge Clean Seas founder Libby Edge, Coca-Cola South Pacific Roberto Mercale and World Wildlife Fund national project coordinator Ian McConnell at Eco Barge HQ last Thursday.
Bayer backs reef
Project Catalyst signs MOU with pesticides expert

A LEADING agricultural pesticides company has reaffirmed its commitment to the innovative sugar industry program, Project Catalyst. Bayer CropScience and Catchment Solutions (Project Catalyst co-ordinators) signed an MOU at the annual Project Catalyst growers’ forum in Townsville last month to extend the partnership between Bayer and Project Catalyst for the fourth year running.

Project Catalyst is a pioneering partnership aimed at reducing the environmental impacts of sugarcane production on the Great Barrier Reef through innovative farming practices. Richard Dickmann, Head of New Business Development for Bayer CropScience, said the company was delighted to extend its support for Project Catalyst.

“Project Catalyst is a perfect partner for Bayer as we share a commitment to improving reef water quality, and the role of innovation as a key driver of delivering sustainable farming outcomes,” Mr Dickmann said.

Since starting the collaboration with Bayer, Project Catalyst farmers have undertaken trials targeted at optimising herbicide application, leading to three new registration projects and new weed control protocols.

Bayer’s local team worked with growers to develop more than 50 optimised herbicide treatment plans to improve the rate, timing and placement of herbicides on growers’ farms.

PARTNERS: Tim Murphy (Bayer) and Richard Dickmann (Bayer) with Robert Cocco (Reef Catchments Group CEO), Sue Cross (Bayer) and Royce Bishop (Reef Catchments Group chair). PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED
Cane producers trial sustainable way to protect profits and Great Barrier Reef

By MATTHEW NEWTON

STANDING in the baking hot sun on an unseasonably warm day, Bloomsbury cane farmer Scott Simpson has the undivided attention of Coca-Cola South Pacific chief executive officer Roberto Mercale and World Wildlife Fund Australia chief executive officer Dermot O’Gorman.

Coca-Cola and WWF are partners with Reef Catchments in Project Catalyst, a network of just under 80 farmers up and down the Queensland coast that are trialling innovative farming practices to produce sustainable sugar cane.

Hosted by Catchment Solutions’ (the commercial arm of Reef Catchments) Rob Eccles, the two CEOs visited Mackay farmers Gerry Deguara and Tony Bugeja, before heading to Mr Simpson’s farm.

Speaking with animation, Mr Simpson explained his “skip row” cane trial and its benefits to the two men, who were clearly impressed with his results.

“It’s been an incredible experience,” Mr Mercale said.

“It’s one thing to read about it and it’s another thing to come here with Gerry and Tony and Scott and just see the great things that they do, the passion with how they do it and the impact that they’re having,” he said.

Mr O’Gorman was equally as enamoured with what he saw during his visit.

“I’ve been out to the farms a number of times over the last four-five years, and to see the progress and also the confidence from Scott to talk about what he’s

Continued P2
Innovative trials win supporters

From P1

“Farmers can be the hero in trying to help save the Great Barrier Reef, they just need the right support and that’s where companies like Coca-Cola come into the partnership.

“(Coca-Cola) is one of the world’s largest buyers of sugar so it sends a signal to the market that that’s where the future is; producing sustainable sugar that will meet consumer demand but saving the Great Barrier Reef as well, which the consumers also want to see.”

The Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2014 stated that poor water quality from land-based run-off continued to be one of the greatest risks to the reef’s future, and the recently elected State Labor Government is promising to slash the amount of nitrogen flowing on to the reef from key catchments by 80% and total suspended sediment by 50% by 2025.

Mr Simpson’s “skip row” trial is an example of innovative farming practices that at first glance seem crazy.

With traditional farming methods, cane is planted 1.5m apart. But with Mr Simpson’s trial, the rows are spaced 1.9m apart and the in-between row is planted with legumes, which return nutrients and organic matter to the soil.

“The major benefits of skip row is you use half the fertiliser and half the grub control. It’s half the distance for the cane harvester to travel,” Mr Simpson said.

“You can access the paddock at any stage of growing the crop and the pour rate of the harvester is probably up around 140/tonnes an hour. The normal rate is about 90/tonnes an hour, depending on how good the crop is,” he said.

Mr Simpson is expanding his trial, which is in its seventh year.

“Mr Simpson had a request for his fellow growers. “I’m just doing the trials on my farm and the figures are working out really good and at the very least, all I could ask other farmers to do is to trial it on some of their difficult-to-harvest blocks,” he said.

“If farmers would like to have a talk to Sugar Services Proserpine’s Peter Sutherland about it, Peter will show them the figures.”

PHOTO: MATTHEW NEWTON

CHANGE: Bloomsbury cane farmer Scott Simpson talks to Coca Cola South Pacific CEO Roberto Mercale and World Wildlife Fund CEO Dermot O’Gorman.

PHOTO: MATTHEW NEWTON
Bayer CropScience plans to expand its partnership with Project Catalyst in helping reduce the impacts of the cane sector on the Great Barrier Reef. The agreement aims to speed up more sustainable products and practices. Richard Dickmann, Bayer CropScience, says there has been major improvement in herbicide levels and cane farm runoff but more can always be done. David Sparkes interview with Rob Cocco, CEO, Reef Catchments. Cocco says improving herbicide products and practices is a high priority when it comes to protecting the Great Barrier Reef.
Farms turning green

By ASHLEY WALMSLEY

A LIKELY increase in the protection of the Great Barrier Reef will put greater focus on greener farming methods.

The new Queensland Labor government has appointed member for Mount Coot-tha Steven Miles as Minister for the Great Barrier Reef, a move that suggests the government will adhere to its pre-election promise of spending some $100 million over five years to reduce damage to the Great Barrier Reef.

The Queensland Labor 2014 State Policy Platform states that the party will “provide incentives to primary producers to assist transition to lower impact agricultural practices, particularly in Great Barrier Reef catchments. Labor will limit the use of agricultural fertilisers, pesticides and other petrochemicals.”

Craig Van Rooyen and Conor O’Brien are hoping to be on the front foot when it comes to using more biological growing methods.

Mr O’Brien is the CEO of Multikraft Probiotics Australia, a company that specialises in the use of beneficial micro-organisms that can be used to produce high-quality composts. These composts in turn reduce on-farm chemical use while improving yields and bolstering plant climate tolerance.

Mr O’Brien was in Bundaberg recently to inspect crops on the macadamia, lychee and mango farm of Mr Van Rooyen, who has been using the liquid form of the product.

Such ‘greener’ farming practices are likely to take greater prominence, with the Queensland government committing to achieve an 80 per cent reduction in pollution run-off into the Great Barrier Reef by 2025.

Initially focused on improving animal health, Multikraft became aware of the horticultural and broadacre possibilities after seeing crop improvements that used the livestock waste.

“At the end of the day, we are an environmental company, working in a ‘feel-good’ business that can be of benefit to the farmers, businesses, the planet and society in general,” Mr O’Brien said.

“We are able to reduce chemical fertilisers by having our microbes in the soil to make the nutrients available for the plants.

“This, combined with improving the soil structure through a combination of composting and liquid soil application, reduces run-off and leaching into the waterways and on to the Great Barrier Reef.”

Multikraft does not require specialist compost turners or machinery.

“Our specialised composting process can be carried out with regular farm machinery and because we make a large pile that doesn’t need regular turning, the costs of labour, machinery and fuel are reduced.

Mr O’Brien said there was less odour released than turning conventional composting.

“The compost is also mature within eight weeks, which is half the time of most traditional composts.

“We can also make a lot more compost in the same area, as the piles are much bigger.”

Mr Van Rooyen is no stranger to adopting more environmentally friendly farming techniques, having worked with researchers on non-lethal deterrents for fruit bats.

He applies the Multikraft liquid product through fertigation, followed up with a foliar spray at a later date.

“The big benefit for me is all about soil health. This product encourages plant and soil health because it’s adding good microbes into the soil.

“The microbes also ensure the fertiliser is more readily absorbed into the plant so there’s better nutrient uptake by the orchard.

“Therefore, two things occur – I have a healthier tree and better quality fruit, and secondly I’m able to reduce my chemical fertiliser input.

“By having a healthier tree, there’s less use of fertilisers and pesticides.”
Member for Burnett Stephen Bennett with nut, lychee and mango grower Craig Van Rooyen and Multikraft CEO Conor O’Brien, inspecting the quality of the macadamia crop which uses biological farming methods.
Project Catalyst and cane industry innovation

By Matt Kealley, CANEGROWERS Manager - Environment

Innovation is something that has been occurring in the Queensland cane industry since its inception. There has been remarkable change over the years, from hand cutting to mechanical harvesting, burning to green cane trash blanketing, irrigation technology, precision agriculture and fertiliser application. This innovation will continue as there will always be a problem to solve, efficiencies to develop and the perpetual question of “What if?”

Project Catalyst is an innovation program that has been going for six years. Supported by Reef Catchments, NQ Dry Tropics and Terrain NRM, WWF, the Coca-Cola Foundation and other partners and sponsors, it’s supported 72 growers with projects designed to test and progress the use of aspirational management practices to improve water quality. The total investment to date is $3.25 million and the projects are supported by independent agronomists from Farmacist with economic analysis undertaken by the Queensland Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (QDAFF).

Bum Ashburner, Malcolm Petrie and I recently attended the 2015 Project Catalyst grower forum in Townsville to listen, understand and discuss with the growers and sponsors the ideas being tested.

With the continual pressure on growers to adopt improved practices for the health of the Great Barrier Reef, CANEGROWERS is vitally interested in how the innovation projects and ideas can translate to the broader industry and support the continuous improvement cycle advocated by the industry through Best Management Practices and the Smartcane BMP program.

Personally, I think it is great to see involvement from the corporate sector in the innovation space as well as the continued investment by Coca-Cola. What I am keen to understand is the idea / innovation / proof of concept being tested; the hypothesis behind the trial; the methodology of the ideas being trialled and the outcome and data from that trial. I would like to appreciate if the trials are new concepts, or are they building on ideas from other cane growing regions or other agriculture industries.

It is also important to understand how Project Catalyst and other programs including the “game changer” program funded by the Australian Governments Reef Programme, the nitrogen reverse auction project supported through Reef Trust (Australian Government) and grower group innovation projects can complement the research and development currently being undertaken by others in the industry, be this through Sugar Research Australia, CSIRO, universities, independent agronomists or cane productivity services organisations.

I have had this discussion with many growers, government and WWF about innovative research. A grower can take any idea and implement it on their farm at any time – that is up to them and entirely their decision. However if the expectation is for industry to promote the idea without the appropriate research, development, peer review and analysis, then we have an impasse.

I am particularly interested in what has worked so we as an industry can further progress the projects to the R&I stage, validate them, critic-proof them using peer review processes and extended them for broader industry uptake. This is how the commercialisation process works; it is the core of continuous improvement and is vital for change on an industry-wide scale.

More importantly, I would also like to understand what hasn’t worked and why. Unsuccessful research shouldn’t be seen as failure, but as an opportunity to improve the hypothesis and retest or conclude the idea doesn’t work. Either way, it’s important that industry is made aware of these results to ensure that unsuccessful research is not replicated.

Day one of the forum heard about the global perspective with a presentation on the Brazilian sugar industry. Robert Quirk from NSW Canegrowers spoke about his role on Bonsuero and Joe Muscat talked about his 2013 Nuffield scholarship work on fibre crops.

The national perspective outlined Syngenta’s work, heard from Chris Condon (Tully grower) who spoke about his journey from cattle to cane and Next Gen farmers Gerard Puglisi and Phil Degrada who spoke about their work with young farmers.

The local farming session discussed Catalyst projects being undertaken in the Burdekin, Wet Tropics and Mackay. Two projects that interested me were Stephen Accormer’s trial on growing corn as a rotational crop to improve cane yield; and the Reinaudo family’s variable rate nutrient application within block.

I will be taking a keen interest on the nitrogen trial, as Nitrogen Use Efficiency (NUE) has been central to the government policy, reef programs, Smartcane BMP program, water quality targets and productivity needs for industry. This trial will contribute to the NUE debate and therefore must be reported in a balanced manner and be prepared to undergo scientific review to ensure it has the best chance of informing the science around NUE.

The Catalyst Dinner was a great opportunity to network with growers and people in the industry. The Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Stephen Miles was a guest at the dinner and spoke about the government’s reef policy. The Minister outlined the new 80% water quality targets, the taskforce and the approach government will be taking over the next 12 months. I had the opportunity to speak with the Minister about the Smartcane BMP program and the work the industry has been doing around water quality and best management practice over the last decade.

Day two included a visit to the Australian Institute of Marine Science to hear about their research on chemicals and sediment on corals. The field tour concluded with visits to the farms of Joe Tama and Joe Linton in the Burdekin.

All in all, I enjoyed the conference, the enthusiasm by the growers and the opportunity to hear about some of the ideas being tested. Regardless of what is portrayed in the press, I remain supportive of innovation and will continue to ask how the innovation projects and ideas can translate to broader industry uptake to support the health of the reef and the health of the industry.
Next Gen attends International Sugarcane Forum

Next Gen farmers Gerard Puglisi, Phil Deguara and Sam Deguara attended the Case IH International Sugarcane Forum in December, which brought together over 100 growers and key industry representative together to discuss the health and sustainable future of the industry.

Held at Sanctuary Cove from December 14-16, ‘For Life’ was the theme of the conference and key speakers discussed what could be done to improve the environmental and commercial sustainability of the industry, and ultimately help farmers get more out of their investments.

The word ‘collaboration’ came up repeatedly, with most agreeing that despite the disparate challenges presented to sugarcane growers all over the world, collaboration from all those involved in the industry will be the key to its future.

International and local speakers

International speakers, including Gaurav Sood from India, Richard Bennett from South East Asia, and Australian John Pearce who has been working in the sugarcane industry in Brazil, shared details on what is happening in their markets, identifying opportunities and challenges that could have applications in the Australian market.

Local speakers such as Paul Deane, Senior Agricultural Economist for ANZ Research, provided insights into developments in the Asian markets and shared predictions for the months and years ahead while Robert Quirk discussed the benefits of Bonsucro’s sustainability standards.

Project Catalyst, a pioneering partnership aimed at reducing the environmental impacts of sugar production on the Great Barrier Reef, was widely discussed and celebrated at the conference.

A group presentation included Belinda Billing from Reef Catchments, Ian McConnel from WWF, Rob Cairns from Syngenta and growers involved in Project Catalyst: Lou Raiteri, Joe Muscat, Gerry Deguara and Robert Bonassi.

“Now in its fifth year, Project Catalyst is reducing the negative impacts on the reef by showcasing the benefits of more efficient farming practices,” says Rob Cairns, Syngenta Head of Corporate Affairs, Australasia. “Not only does this result in better water quality, which we’ve been able to prove, it’s also generating higher economic returns for farmers.”

Commitment to supporting rural mental health

Continuing Case IH’s commitment to supporting rural mental health, Alison Fairlie, Mental Illness Fellowship Q, addressed the conference on the importance of mental health in the sugarcane industry.

“A sustainable rural industry requires a sustainable rural workforce and this includes all areas of mental health,” Alison says. “If you don’t have a healthy and sustainable workforce you can’t have sustainable rural industries.”

“Suicide in Queensland is 2.2 times higher in the agricultural industry than any other industry – only with collaboration will we start to see real change in these statistics.”

Innovations made in sugarcane mechanisation

The event was also an opportunity to reflect on the innovations made by Case IH in the area of sugarcane mechanisation.

Focusing on 50 years of product research and development, the conference highlighted the importance of research into more efficient farming practices, and the importance of matching mechanisation with agronomy.

Sugar Research Australia’s Cam Whiteing presented on the topic of harvesting best practice.

John Pearce talked about the history of Austoft and Case IH in the global sugarcane industry while Michele Monzio Compagnoni from Case IH Asia Pacific Product Marketing provided a preview of upcoming sugar harvesting machinery developments.

Australian Case IH representatives took delegates on product walkarounds, pointing out key features of the brand’s current Austoft cane harvesters and various tractor models.

The conference ended with an engaging panel session on the future of the industry featuring Paul Deane, Rob Cairns, Cam Whiteing and award-winning cane grower and Next Gen Officer, Gerard Puglisi. The panel was hosted by prominent rural woman, Robbie Sefton.
Delegates at the Case IH International Sugarcane Forum.

Press clip
CENTRAL REGION

Crushing: Mackay Sugar finished crushing in early December processing nearly 5.5 million tonnes of cane at 14.3 PRS. Mill performance and cane supply had an indifferent performance. Mackay Sugar intends to address these issues to give a more acceptable result for next year.

The weather at the end of last year finished with useful rain, but conditions became very dry. At the end of December useful falls started and have continued throughout January. There have been optimum growing conditions, bringing the crop on quite well for this year.

Yellow Canopy Syndrome: The effects of YCS are in the district again this year. Growers are quite concerned by visible signs in the crop for the coming season. It is obvious YCS is not specific to any variety. SRA had information meetings in December on the issue. Three research projects have been introduced to find out more on the issue – they are:
- Solving the sugarcane Yellow Canopy Syndrome;
- What biological factors cause or drive the development of YCS; and,
- A novel polyphasic framework to resolve the Yellow Canopy Syndrome Paradox.

It has been observed that YCS is not just associated with sugarcane but vegetation in the surrounding areas as well.

Red witch weed: Four cane growers and one grazier have suffered through what has been a long drawn out process. The National Management Group, which is the peak decision-making body for national eradication programs, is chaired by the Federal Department of Agriculture. The NMG’s main role is to consider response plans and budgets for national eradication programs. NMG considers the technical feasibility and determination of cost sharing. Meetings with NMG have been rescheduled to February for finalising a plan. The issue of cost sharing of the resolution continues to be the stalemate. Redwitch weed is a notifiable Class 1 pest and as of yet, the mechanism to resolve the eradication program has not yet been established.

Wetland work at Racecourse Mill: Mackay Sugar and Reef Catchments have joined to restore a degraded wetland area on Horse and Jockey Road. The activities will focus on improving water quality and landscape health. Water quality is the main focus of the works which are intended to reinstate a functioning wetland, which will allow a natural system to more effectively remove pollutants from the waterways. Currently water from a bagasse pad runs into a dam. Mackay Sugar will benefit from the improvements, with access to cleaner water and a larger water storage for the mill to utilise. The water flows into the Botanical gardens then on to a Pioneer River estuary. This project will enhance the water quality entering these areas.

Steve Fordyce
Southern Qld
February 11, 2015
Project Catalyst has held their 7th Growers Forum in Townsville with more than 180 people in attendance. The partnership between Reef Catchments and their sponsors has only grown stronger as a result and has become more evident through the quantification of the reductions.

Interview with Ian McConnel, Global Commodity Lead for Beef, WWF [World Wildlife Fund].

McConnel shares the plan to expand the concept from cane farms to cattle. He says what they do in WWF is finding a way where sustainability that underpins good beef production can be recognised by the consumers. McConnel says Canadians are doing a fantastic work for sustainable beef while Brazilians are leading in trying to spread truth around deforestation issues and how beef production can be a solution to biodiversity in Brazil. He adds WWF is trying to bring together all the groups to be part of the solution. McConnel says the Project Catalyst is a fantastic example of bringing together a positive group of people who knows that good farming is a solution to save issues about and in protecting the Great Barrier Reef. He says they are trying to replicate Project Catalyst for its beef industry counterpart called Project Pioneer which is at a pilot phase at the moment. McConnel explains how nitrogen is one of the biggest impacts on the Great Barrier Reef.
Improving water quality to reduce the impacts of nutrient loading on the Great Barrier Reef has been the main focus of Project Catalyst since 2008 when a partnership between Reef Catchments, WWF [World Wildlife Fund] and the Coca-Cola Foundation was formed. Rob Cocco, CEO, Reef Catchments, says the attendance at the Project Catalyst Growers Forum was fantastic, with almost 200 people there. Cocco says the forum was about celebrating the efforts the producers have undertaken. Cocco talks about a video they produced that showcases what can be achieved having partnership with Coca-Cola Foundation. Cocco says Project Catalyst gives producers the confidence to try something different and push themselves beyond what they thought they can do.
Robert Coco, CEO, Reef Catchments Group, says the industry is starting to see results after attempts to reduce run-offs.
Compere says Reef Catchments and Project Catalyst have formed unique partnerships with many great organizations to reduce the footprint of agriculture on the reef. Interview with Rob Cocco, CEO, Reef Catchments. Cocco announces the Coca-Cola Foundation, with support from WWF, is seen fit to grant the Reef Catchments with another $500,000 of investment for this financial year in delivering Project Catalyst. Cocco says the money is used to provide evaluation on new farming technique systems. Compere says the next Project Catalyst Grower Forum 2015 will be held in Townsville. Compere says Coca-Cola is one of the world’s most recognised brands. Cocco says the Project Catalyst Grower Forum provides a unique platform to have a broader discussion about issues on suppliers, farmers, and processors.
**Program preview**

- Announcement by Reef Catchments in relation to the continuation of Project Catalyst.
Interview with Joe Muscat, Mackay District farmer and former Nuffield Scholar. Compere says farmers are talking about new measures at Project Catalyst farm in Townsville to stop nutrients and chemicals from running off into waterways. Compere mentions more than a third of the catalyst farmers are from the Mackay Whitsunday region. Muscat says they are using measures for the slow release of nitrogen. He says it is a new product. He says the whole program enables best practice. He says it allows farmers to test all range of areas to improve the current farming system. He says they are looking at the herbicide application and the nutrition. He says key farmers, the Coca-Cola Foundation, Reef Catchments and WWF are the founding groups for the catalyst program. He says the program definitely changed his perspective towards WWF. He says they need to work together to solve the issue. He says they are manipulating the different ratios of urea to improve the situation. He says the yield and the economics go hand in hand. He hopes to get latest information.
MORE than 150 growers and representatives from Queensland’s major areas of sugar production donned suit and tie for the Project Catalyst Growers Forum dinner on March 2.

The function at Jupiter’s in Townsville was part of a three-day forum focused on sugar innovation.

Growers from Mackay, Whitsundays, the Burdekin and the Wet Tropics joined leading organisations from the sugar industry, including Wilmar, Canegrowers, Sugar Research Australia (SRA), the Australian Cane Farmers Association (ACFA), Bayer CropScience, Netafim, Syngenta, Case IH, Suncorp and Inkerman Lime and Gypsum.

Steven Miles, Queensland Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection, National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef, also attended.

Now in its sixth year, Project Catalyst is a pioneering partnership between cane farmers, The Coca-Cola Foundation, WWF-Australia, Catchment Solutions and corresponding NRM groups in key sugar production regions – Reef catchments, NQ Dry Tropics and Terrain NRM.

Project Catalyst trials are ongoing year-round on farms across the state, with the forum the major platform for the discussion of trial progress, outcomes and results.

Major partner The Coca-Cola Foundation has announced a further $500,000 grant to Project Catalyst Australia, bringing its total investment into the Project to $3.25 million over the past six years.

The project aims to support growers to speed the adoption of innovation for improved practice change, focused on reducing the environmental impact of cane on water quality and the Great Barrier Reef.

To date, more than 75 cane farmers involved in Project Catalyst farm trials have helped improve run-off and drainage water quality of an estimated 102,000 megalitres across 20,345ha of land.
LEFT: Meg Star, Betty Raiteri, Maria Simpson and Angela Large.

Belinda Billing, Chris Blackburn and Phil Ross.

RIGHT: Mark, David and Tina Ellwood, with Bruna and Tom

LEFT: John and Jill Fox, with Carolyn and Ian Considine.

John Perna, Nelson Reinaudo and Victor Reinaudo.

Gilbert.
Growers share sweet solutions

BY MATT SHERRINGTON

INNOVATIVE cane farmers from around the region assembled at Jupiters Hotel and Casino in Townsville from March 1-3 for the Project Catalyst Sugar Forum, where they showcased the practices they are using to reduce the impact of agriculture on the Great Barrier Reef.

The focus of the forum was to share ideas and outcomes, and celebrate the major steps being taken to improve the environmental and economic outcomes of Queensland sugar production.

The forum highlighted the outcomes of growers working as part of Project Catalyst to reduce the impact of pollution on the Great Barrier Reef.

As part of the project, cane farmers in catchment areas adjacent to the reef are encouraged and supported to make changes to reduce nutrient, fertiliser and pollutant run-off.

To date, 78 cane farmers involved in Project Catalyst farm trials have helped improve run-off and drainage water quality of an estimated 102,000 megalitres – an amount equivalent to the water it would take to fill 40,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Trials have been implemented across 20,345 hectares of land during the six years the program has been running.

Critically, work being done by Queensland cane farmers is now estimated to cut pollutant loads to the reef by about 183 tonnes each year.

Reef Catchments CEO Robert Cocco said the primary purpose of Project Catalyst was to reduce the environmental footprint that sugarcane had on freshwater and the Great Barrier Reef.

“We do this by supporting a network of innovative farmers who have adopted cutting edge management practices,” Mr Cocco said.

Tony Bugeja, a Project Catalyst cane farmer from Mackay, said he was a firm believer in combining environmental responsibility and good sense.

“As the saying goes, there is no point being green if you’re in the red. But we have found in our experience that it comes down to just doing things more efficiently – when there is a dollar value and an improved environmental outcome, why wouldn’t you try something different?” Mr Bugeja said.

“Of course, I want to leave this farm and land for my son in a better condition than when it was given to me.”

Gerard Puglisi from the Next Generation program spoke at the forum about the importance of ensuring that a fresh crop of young farmers was brought into the fold, and detailed the events and networking opportunities that Next Gen provided for them.

“The average age of a cane farmer is between 62 and 64 years old,” Mr Puglisi said.

“The generation who came after them mostly took jobs in the mines, so we have a generational gap that we must fill if we want to keep our industry running efficiently down the line.”

“The industry has identified a need to encourage and support young farmers, harvesters, millers and researchers into a career in agriculture.

“Now that the mines may not be as enticing as they used to be and the future of sugar is looking brighter, now is the time when we have to showcase the appeal of ag to young people and assist however we can to ensure they stay on-farm.”

Now in its sixth year, Project Catalyst is a pioneering partnership between cane farmers, the Coca-Cola Foundation, WWF-Australia, Catchment Solutions, NQ Dry Tropics and Terrain NRM.

Farmers are involved from major areas of sugar production and corresponding NRM catchments in Mackay and the Whitsundays, the Burdekin and the wet tropics.

“I want to leave this farm and land for my son in a better condition than when it was given to me.”
Next Generation program representatives Phil Deguara and Gerard Puglisi spoke at the Project Catalyst Sugar Forum held in Townsville earlier this week.
Rob Cocco says the new reef water quality targets are ambitious but not impossible to reach
Reef Catchments CEO Rob Cocco speaks about the next stage of Project Catalyst. Read moreSource: ABC Rural | Duration: 4min 17secTopics: rural, great-barrier-reef, environment, sugar, townsville-4810

Coke has been tipping millions into innovation for Queensland’s sugarcane farmers

Coke has upped its investment to improve yields of Australian sugar cane farmers as well as reduce the amount of chemicals they use and boost their tech arsenal. This week Coke invested another $500,000 into its Project Catalyst initiative, taking...

Aussie Sugarcane Farmers Receive Funding Boost to Help Preserve... 

The Coca-Cola Foundation today announced a further $500,000 grant to Project Catalyst Australia, which will bring their total investment into the Project to $3.25 million over the past six years. For the full multimedia release, click here...

http://ct.moreover.com/?a=20490370687&p=1i4&v=1&x=ELB8j81bhrdgMj3_wyFZYw
Local farmers have started a world wildlife fund, highlighting ways they're trying to prevent sediment run off from reaching the Great Barrier Reef. A clip shows cane farmers explaining how they fight pollution. The Qld Government has committed to an 80% reduction in pollution by 2025. The Coca-Cola Foundation has announced a $500,000 grant for the project.
Local cane farmers have featured in a World Wildlife Fund Australia production. In the film, farmers highlight the methods they have employed to stop sediment run-off from reaching the Reef. Project Catalyst aims to reduce the environmental impacts of sugar cane production on the reef through farmer-led initiatives. The new State Government has committed to an 80% reduction in pollution run-off to the reef by 2025, while the Coca Cola Foundation has announced a further $500,000 grant for the project.
Cane farmers from across the State are meeting to discuss the best farming practices to achieve a sustainable sugar industry in Queensland. The 'Project Catalyst' conference aims to protect the environment while remaining competitive in international markets. The conference is being hosted by North Queensland Dry Tropics.
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Seven principles of a successful agribusiness

Nuffield Farming Scholar Joe Muscat and Rob Cairns

Photo: Supplied

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A 'Catalyst' for change

FORWARD thinking cane farmers will gather in Townsville from Sunday, March 1 to Tuesday, March 3, to share ideas, outcomes and celebrate major steps being taken to improve the environmental and economic outcomes of Queensland sugar production at the...

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Cane growers urge reef policy makers to 'spend time on the farm'

Posted March 03, 2015 10:27:34

Canegrowers attending a land management forum in north Queensland have urged the state government to recognise their efforts to improve farm run-off within the Great Barrier Reef catchments. More than 160 farmers,...

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Chris Condon says policy makers need to recognise the industry's efforts to improve farm runoff. Cane growers attending a land management forum in north Queensland have urged the State Government to recognise their efforts to improve farm runoff...

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Attendees unite for Project Catalyst dinner

MORE than 150 growers and representatives from Queensland's major areas of sugar production donned suit and tie for the Project Catalyst Growers Forum Dinner held on March 2. The function was held at Jupiters Hotel and Casino in Townsville as part of...

http://ct.moreover.com/?a=20608356266&p=1i4&v=1&x=GuZXDdVmLzxo3_76YJl-ag
Growers gather to hear sweet results

MORE than 150 growers and representatives from Queensland’s major areas of sugar production donned suit and tie for the Project Catalyst Growers Forum dinner on March 2.

The function, held at Jupiters, Townsville, was part of a three-day forum focused on sugar innovation.

Growers from Mackay Whitsunday, the Burdekin and the wet tropics joined leading organisations from the sugar industry, including Wilmar, Canegrowers, Sugar Research Australia, the Australian Cane Farmers Association, Bayer CropScience, Netafim, Syngenta, Case IH, Suncorp Bank, and Inkerman Lime and Gypsum. Steven Miles, Queensland Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection, National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef, was also in attendance.

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To date, more than 75 cane farmers involved in the farm trials have helped improve run-off and drainage water quality of an estimated 102,000 megalitres across 20,345 hectares.
Project Catalyst and cane industry innovation

By Matt Kealley, CANEGROWERS
Manager - Environment

Innovation is something that has been occurring in the Queensland cane industry since its inception. There has been remarkable change over the years, from hand cutting to mechanical harvesting, burning to green cane trash blanketing, irrigation technology, precision agriculture and fertiliser application. This innovation will continue as there will always be a problem to solve, efficiencies to develop and the perpetual question of "What if?"

Project Catalyst is an innovation program that has been ongoing for six years. Supported by Reef Catchments, NQ Dry Tropics and Terrain NRM, WWF, the Coca-Cola Foundation, and other partners and sponsors, it’s supported 72 growers with projects designed to test and progress the use of aspirational management practices to improve water quality. The total investment to date is $3.25 million and the projects are supported by independent agronomists from Farmacist with economic analysis undertaken by the Queensland Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (QDAFF).

Burn Ashburner, Malcolm Petrie and I recently attended the 2015 Project Catalyst grower forum in Townsville to listen, understand and discuss with the growers and sponsors the ideas being tested.

With the continual pressure on growers to adopt improved practices for the health of the Great Barrier Reef, CANEGROWERS is vitally interested in how the innovation projects and ideas can translate to the broader industry and support the continuous improvement cycle advocated by the industry through Best Management Practices and the Smartcane BMP program.

Personally, I think it is great to see involvement from the corporate sector in the innovation space as well as the continued investment by Coca-Cola. What I am keen to understand is the idea / innovation / proof of concept being tested; the hypothesis behind the trial; the methodology of the ideas being trialled and the outcome and data from that trial. I would like to appreciate if the trials are new concepts, or are they building on ideas from other cane growing regions or other agriculture industries.

It is also important to understand how Project Catalyst and other programs including the “game changer” project funded by the Australian Governments Reef Programme, the nitrogen reverse auction project supported through Reef Trust (Australian Government) and grower group innovation projects can complement the research and development currently being undertaken by others in the industry, be it through Sugar Research Australia, CSIRO; universities, independent agronomists or cane productivity services organisations.

I have had this discussion with many growers, government and WWF about innovative research. A grower can take any idea and implement it on their farm at any time – that is up to them and entirely their decision. However if the expectation is for industry to promote the idea without the appropriate research, development, peer review and analysis, then we have an impasse.

I am particularly interested in what has worked so we as an industry can further progress the projects to the R&D stage, validate them, critic-proof them using peer review processes and extended them for broader industry uptake. This is how the commercialisation process works; it is the core of continuous improvement and is vital for change on an industry-wide scale.

More importantly, I would also like to understand what hasn’t worked and why. Unsuccessful research shouldn’t be seen as failure, but as an opportunity to improve the hypothesis and retest or conclude the idea doesn’t work. Either way, it’s important that industry is made aware of these results to ensure that unsuccessful research is not replicated.

Day one of the forum heard about the global perspective with a presentation on the Brazilian sugar industry. Robert Quirk from NSW Canegrowers spoke about his role on Bonsucro and Joe Muscat talked about his 2013 Nuffield scholarship work on fibre crops.

The national perspective outlined Syngenta’s work, heard from Chris Condon (Tully grower) who spoke about his journey from cattle to cane and Next Gen farmers Gerard Puglisi and Phil Deguara who spoke about their work with young farmers.

The local farming session discussed Catalyst projects being undertaken in the Burdekin, Wet Tropics and Mackay. Two projects that interested me were Stephen Accornor’s trial on growing corn as a rotational crop to improve cane yield; and the Reinaudo family’s variable rate nutrient application within block.

I will be taking a keen interest on the nitrogen trial, as Nitrogen Use Efficiency (NUE) has been central to the government policy, reef programs, Smartcane BMP program, water quality targets and productivity needs for industry. This trial will contribute to the NUE debate and therefore must be reported in a balanced manner and be prepared to undergo scientific review to ensure it has the best chance of informing the science around NUE.

The Catalyst Dinner was a great opportunity to network with growers and people in the industry. The Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Stephen Miles was a guest at the dinner and spoke about the government’s reef policy. The Minister outlined the new 80% water quality targets, the taskforce and the approach government will be taking over the next 12 months. I had the opportunity to speak with the Minister about the Smartcane BMP program and the work the industry has been doing around water quality and best management practice over the last decade.

Day two included a visit to the Australian Institute of Marine Science to hear about their research on chemicals and sediment on corals. The field tour concluded with visits to the farms of Joe Tama and Joe Linton in the Burdekin.

All in all, I enjoyed the conference, the enthusiasm by the growers and the opportunity to hear about some of the ideas being tested. Regardless of I am impressed with the work, I remain supportive of innovation and will continue to ask how the innovation projects and ideas can translate to broader industry uptake to support the health of the reef and the health of the industry.
Cane farmers from across the state are meeting to discuss the best farming practices to achieve a sustainable sugar industry in Queensland. The 'Project Catalyst' conference aims to protect the environment, while remaining competitive in international markets. This year the conference is being hosted by North Queensland Dry Tropics.
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Reef Catchments CEO Rob Cocco speaks about the next stage of Project Catalyst. Read moreSource: ABC Rural | Duration: 4min 17secTopics: rural, great-barrier-reef, environment, sugar, townsville-4810

Future in Their Hands

2050 Plan on Hamilton Island Page 3

Prime Minister Tony Abbott unveiling Reef

Guardian

Sunday Coast

First with the News in the Whitsundays
Reminder to be cross safe on River

PHOTO OF THE WEEK

Supports

Innovative

Local News
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More importantly, I would also like to understand what hasn’t worked and why. Unsuccessful research shouldn’t be seen as failure, but as an opportunity to improve the hypothesis and retest or conclude the idea doesn’t work. Either way, it’s important that industry is made aware of these results to ensure that unsuccessful research is not replicated.

Day one of the forum heard about the global perspective with a presentation on the Brazilian sugar industry. Robert Quirk from NSW Canegrowers spoke about his role on Bonsucro and Joe Muscat talked about his 2013 Nuffield scholarship work on fibre crops.

The national perspective outlined Syngenta’s work, heard from Chris Condon (Tully grower) who spoke about his journey from cattle to cane and Next Gen farmers Gerard Puglisi and Phil Deguara who spoke about their work with young farmers.

The local farming session discussed Catalyst projects being undertaken in the Burdekin, Wet Tropics and Mackay. Two projects that interested me were Stephen Accornoro’s trial on growing corn as a rotational crop to improve cane yield; and the Reinaudo family’s variable rate nutrient application within block.

I will be taking a keen interest on the nitrogen trial, as Nitrogen Use Efficiency (NUE) has been central to the government policy, reef programs, Smartcane BMP program, water quality targets and productivity needs for industry. This trial will contribute to the NUE debate and therefore must be reported in a balanced manner and be prepared to undergo scientific review to ensure it has the best chance of informing the science around NUE.

The Catalyst Dinner was a great opportunity to network with growers and people in the industry. The Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Stephen Miles was a guest at the dinner and spoke about the government’s reef policy. The Minister outlined the new 80% water quality targets, the taskforce and the approach government will be taking over the next 12 months. I had the opportunity to speak with the Minister about the Smartcane BMP program and the work the industry has been doing around water quality and best management practice over the last decade.

Day two included a visit to the Australian Institute of Marine Science to hear about their research on chemicals and sediment on corals. The field tour concluded with visits to the farms of Joe Tama and Joe Linton in the Burdekin.

All in all, I enjoyed the conference, the enthusiasm by the growers and the opportunity to hear about some of the ideas being tested. Regardless of I am portrayed in the press, I remain supportive of innovation and will continue to ask how the innovation projects and ideas can translate to broader industry uptake to support the health of the reef and the health of the industry.
Attendees unite for Project Catalyst dinner

MORE than 150 growers and representatives from Queensland's major areas of sugar production donned suit and tie for the Project Catalyst Growers Forum Dinner held on March 2. The function was held at Jupiters Hotel and Casino in Townsville as part of...

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Aussie Sugarcane Farmers Receive Funding Boost to Help Preserve One of the Seven Wonders of the Natural World

SYDNEY, Feb. 19, 2015 /PRNewswire-AsiaNet/ -- The Coca-Cola Foundation today announced a further $500,000 grant to Project Catalyst Australia, which will bring their total investment into the Project to $3.25 million over the past six years.

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Aussie Sugarcane Farmers Receive Funding Boost to Help Preserve...

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Coke has been tipping millions into innovation for Queensland's sugarcane farmers

Coke has upped its investment to improve yields of Australian sugar cane farmers as well as reduce the amount of chemicals they use and boost their tech arsenal. This week Coke invested another $500,000 into its Project Catalyst initiative, taking...

Cats on the prowl

THE conclusion of a feral cat monitoring survey in Slade Point has revealed some interesting results. A total of six cats were captured on camera in Slade Point’s environmental reserves over a 15-day period.

Reef Catchments, Mackay Regional Council and North Queensland Bulk Ports employed local consulting firm Kleinfelder to set up 10 motion-detecting cameras in environmentally significant areas of Slade Point to monitor the prevalence of feral cats.
Feral cat monitoring survey complete in Slade Point

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Interview with Stefanie Wabnik, Project Officer, Reef Catchments, to talk about the information session about feral cats held last night. Wabnik says the session went really well and they had an intimate crowd. She says it had been a very informative and interactive approach to monitoring feral cats in the Slade Point area. Wabnik says a resident has reported witnessing horrific things caused by feral cats. She says this project aims to raise awareness in the community and mentions the Mackay Regional Council is being very proactive in that quest. She says they have now established good relationships with the partners including Mackay Regional Council, Reef Catchments and North Qld Bulk Ports to further monitoring feral cats within Slade Point and other areas. Philpott adds this story can be seen at the council's website Connecting Mackay.
Feral cats at Slade Point are causing havoc for local wildlife and turtles, in which a 15-day cat-trapping and recording process has been deemed necessary. The results begin to show, where there is a huge number of cats in the area. An info-session to provide further insight into the problem for residents will take place tomorrow at the Sea Breeze Resort. Stefanie Wabnik, Reef Catchments, says that the community has been able to provide some vital information for the project.
Philpott says Slade Point residents are invited to attend an information session tomorrow evening at the Seabreeze to learn more about the prevalence of feral cats and Reef Catchments will be there to provide information. Stefanie Wabnik, Reef Catchments, says there were reports there are quite a few feral cats residing in the Mackay Harbour area and North Queensland Bulk Ports. She says the information session aims to understand the feral cats’ abundance and occupancy within the area of Slade Point Reserve. Wabnik clarifies that a feral cat is a declared pest animal and should not be caught by humans or housed in a domestic situation. She mentions the threat of feral cats to Slade Point where people go to bird-watch. She says they want to promote responsible pet ownership in the community as well.
Locals invited to learn about feral cats in Slade Point

LOCALS are being invited to attend an information session on Tuesday, May 12 to learn more about the prevalence of feral cats within Slade Point. The session will cover topics including what makes a cat feral, why they are a problem, pest management...

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A NEW program is trying to gain an insight into feral cat behaviour and the effects on native wildlife populations. The program will involve the monitoring and control of feral cat populations around Mackay. Mackay Regional Council, Reef Catchments Mackay and North Queensland Bulk Ports are running the program.

Phase one will focus on specific areas of concern in Slade Point. Reef Catchment project officer Alice Spencer said the program would be seen as a trial and could be expanded to include other suburbs and areas in later phases. Monitoring will begin this month.