

Mackay hotel patrons vote with their butts to help the environment

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A well-known Mackay watering hole is using an unusual device to help keep pollutants out of our waterways.

Smokers at McGuire's CBD Hotel can now use their finished cigarette butts to vote on a question put to them by the hotel management. In doing so, they ensure that their discarded butts, a major pollutant of Mackay's waterways, are disposed of properly.

The burning question posed earlier this week was: who would win in a fight, a kangaroo or an emu?

The idea for this bin came from Sunshine Coast Council, but it is the first in Australia to be made almost entirely of recycled materials.

Cigarette butts can take at least eight to 10 years to break down in the environment. It is a common misconception that they are biodegradable, but the plastic in the filter prevents that. Unfortunately, here in Mackay, many thousands of cigarette butts enter our storm water regularly.

Reef Catchments has been auditing stormwater drains in the Mackay CBD, identifying that cigarette butts are by far our biggest pollutant. To try to combat this, Reef Catchments have installed the butt voting bin at McGuires, with the help of Cleanwater Group.

Other pollutants, such as plastic fragments and plastic food packaging have also been identified as high priority items.

Reef Catchments Coastal Project Officer Cass Hayward said: "The cigarette butt voting bins have been shown to reduce cigarette butt litter in other places around the world. I hope that Mackay can similarly benefit. It is hugely important to start reducing our impact on the oceans, and reducing the amount of waste that ends up there is a good first step.

"Many don't realise that the stormwater drains wash straight into the ocean, so what you throw on the ground or throw out your window ends up there too."

The 'What a load of rubbish! Sorting out its source' project is funded by the partnership between the Australian Government's Reef Trust and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation.

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Picture caption: McGuire's manager Richard Baxter with the butt voting bin

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