

# Queensland Wetlands Program (QWP) Phase 3—Critical Reef Support Project

This project is facilitating and supporting the management of wetlands in the catchments of the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) from a whole-of-landscape perspective. It is achieving this through training and support, and the development of products and tools specific to the needs of stakeholders, for example, the Wetland Field Assessment Toolkit and recording and display of project summaries for on-ground works on wetlands.

Stakeholders are engaged to identify regionally specific needs and outcomes that are being used to determine work programs. The project is also integrating the latest wetlands information and management tools into government and non-government policies and guidelines being developed for the GBR.

## Background

Wetlands and adjoining riparian communities are an essential part of catchments and are important in maintaining the health of the GBR. They are recognised as playing a vital role in water quality improvement, as well as providing a range of other unique ecosystem services.

In recognition of the importance of wetlands in the GBR catchments, the Queensland and Australian governments, through the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan 2013, have set the target: 'there is no net loss of the extent, and an improvement in the ecological processes and environmental values, of natural wetlands'.

The range of activities underway by government and non-government partners to achieve this target cover the whole management spectrum from policy and planning, through on-ground support to monitoring, communication and coordination.

This project is one of four projects funded by the Queensland Government's 'Queensland Regional Natural Resource Management Investment Program', under the Queensland Wetlands Program (QWP):

- Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (EHP)—Critical Reef Support
- Department of Science, Information Technology, Innovation and the Arts (DSITIA)—Monitoring change in wetland extent across the Great Barrier Reef Catchments
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF)—WATER (Wetlands in Agriculture: training, extension and resources).

## Objectives

Project objectives are ensuring:

- increased up-take of best practice wetlands management tools and information to assist with improving the health of the GBR catchment and reef through state, local and federal government programs, regional NRM groups, industry and other stakeholders programs
- wetlands management is addressed consistently as part of statutory and planning processes, and that policies and legislation are made consistent with the latest wetland management tools
- critical information and access gaps identified as limiting the usefulness of existing wetlands management tools are addressed and filled
- a GBR wetlands network is established to meet expressed needs and embed wetlands best practice in day-to-day management practices
- greater understanding of wetlands issues and values by the Queensland reef community
- a coordinated and integrated wetlands program for the reef is maintained.

## Project activities

Much of the information and management tools required for wetlands management in the reef catchments have already been developed under the QWP Phases 1 and 2. Feedback from stakeholders highlights the need for education and training to increase uptake and use.

Planned activities include:

- visiting regional areas to identify options for new products, education and training needs for existing products and opportunities for integration
- releasing a Wetland Field Assessment Tool and further refining the tools and providing education and training to meet stakeholder needs
- developing a stakeholder guide on the critical role of wetlands in GBR catchments in maintaining broader landscape health
- developing a system to report and display on-ground wetlands activities being undertaken by in GBR catchments
- establishing and maintaining a GBR wetlands network with key stakeholders including regional NRM groups and local government, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and others
- delivering key GBR wetlands information on the *WetlandInfo* website including collation and the display of wetlands management activities which have been, or are, underway through various programs
- promoting wetlands and media articles
- working with government and non-government organisations to ensure that wetlands are properly considered in any policies and guidelines developed for GBR catchments.

## Project governance

The project is being undertaken by officers from EHP.

All products and performance reports will be approved through the Queensland Wetlands Program Governance Group prior to release.

The Queensland Wetlands Program supports projects and activities that result in long-term benefits to the sustainable management, wise use and protection of wetlands in Queensland. The tools developed by the Program help wetlands landholders, managers and decision makers in government and industry. The Queensland Wetlands Program is currently funded by the Queensland Government.

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Revised January 2016

QWP/2013/25