

Farms with runoff on the health of the Great Barrier Reef and catchment areas

Considerable on farm water testing has been carried out over the years in the Herbert River farming community. The overwhelming majority of these tests have shown that farm water runoff is of good quality. However all these tests seem to be totally disregarded by certain academic institutions and the current Queensland Government.

An example of this is that despite the over fishing and trawler net by-catch destruction of past years, all rivers and creeks in the Herbert River Valley have an abundance of marine life such as fish, crabs, prawns, yabby beds in mud banks, and other forms of crustaceans.

All of these rivers and creeks have farm lands all around their flow path and if not, are still heavily influenced by farm water runoff. One would think that if farm water runoff was of poor and damaging quality all of these rivers and creeks surrounded or influenced by farm lands would have the marine life in these eco systems severely depleted or non-existent. This supposed destruction would then be evident from the inner reef lagoon right out to the outer reef. NO SUCH TRAIL OF DESTRUCTION EXISTS. The relevance of this debate has been strongly supported by the research of the late Professor Bob Carter who was sacked by his University, and in recent times by Professor Peter Ridd who was also sacked by James Cook University. Professor Peter Ridd has told one and all through the media and at special presentations that the science on this particular debate cannot be trusted. Despite the upheaval in the validity of the science presented in relation to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, the Queensland Government still insists on implementing draconian legislation which is not based on years of honest experience and good science.

May I remind you that the sugar cane farmers of the Herbert River Valley and much of the Sugar Industry at large, during harvest time, drop all sugar cane tops and trash to cover the ground in each particular cane block. The result of this harvest practice is a trash blanket cover over 57,000 hectares of farm land in the Herbert River Valley alone, backed up by a proliferation of well-established on farm silt traps of which the majority offer many years of being in place, demonstrating the extremely low amounts of on farm soil runoff, despite the area of extra cane land freshly cultivated with new cane plants for the following years crop.

Acknowledgement of this outcome was supported by CSIRO research in the Herbert River Valley involving trash blanketing of the cane fields conducted by Johnson, who reported that water and soil runoff from trash blanketed cane fields was similar to runoff from pristine rain forest land. Nevertheless the successful advancement of new farming practices does not seem to matter to the Queensland government and their academic advisers when formulating the highly restrictive legislation empowered by destructive fines which quite simply intimidate all farmers from attempting to grow larger sustainable crops.

The Sugar Industry as a whole generates large funds from both growers and millers under existing statutory regulations. These funds are channelled into Sugar Research Australia as well as voluntary contributions to the District Productivity Boards. The sole purpose of these Industry research bodies is to embark on a responsible scientific approach in developing long term sustainable productivity increases. Farmers take on board this information and carry out tests over years of trial and error throughout many different types of soil and varying climatic conditions.

Unwarranted political and bureaucratic interferences resulting in restrictions to farm practices which have withstood the test of time in producing larger sustainable sugar crops despite Mother Nature's unpredictable behaviour will ultimately direct the sugar industry into poor production levels. This

scenario will ultimately stifle new business and job opportunities in cane fields, sugar towns, and provincial cities such as Cairns, Townsville and Mackay.

In addition to the above the huge amount of record keeping that is expected of us as cane growers is forcing many off the land. Our income is made from growing sugar cane, not from sitting in an office every day to record every detail of a day's activity in order to avoid a huge fine placed on us by the current State Government. We are passionate about keeping the Great Barrier Reef in pristine condition and believe that most farmers do their utmost best to care for the reef and the environment where we live and grow sugar cane.

Unfortunately where the current Queensland Government is taking us is the beginning of a national disaster.

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