



Healthy Waterways Report Card 2015

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the Healthy Waterways Monitoring Program and Report Card?

Since 2000, not-for-profit organisation Healthy Waterways has been delivering one of the most comprehensive freshwater, estuarine and marine Monitoring Programs in Australia. Healthy Waterways manages the Program on behalf of our member organisations. The Monitoring Program provides a regional assessment of the ecosystem health for each of South East Queensland's major catchments, river estuaries and Moreton Bay zones. Healthy Waterways synthesises the data and information to produce an annual Report Card, which provides a clear understanding of the health of our waterways, and highlights any issues that require intervention.

In 2015, the Monitoring Program and Report Card have evolved to provide a deeper understanding of the current pressures on waterway condition and, importantly, what needs to be done to enhance the social and economic benefits they provide.

What is different in the 2015 Healthy Waterways Report Card?

This year, the Healthy Waterways Monitoring Program and Report Card have evolved to:

- include additional indicators in the environmental condition assessment that now measure the amount and impact of mud (sediment) entering the waterways, and the extent of key habitats (such as riparian vegetation).
- introduce a new Waterway Benefits Rating, which measures the level of social and economic benefits our waterways provide to local communities.
- begin to explore the 'actions' and the willingness and ability of landholders and community groups to help protect and improve the waterways.

Why has the Healthy Waterways Report Card evolved?

Since Healthy Waterways began monitoring, reducing point source pollution (i.e. nutrients) has been a key focus. Through extensive wastewater treatment plant upgrades over several years, point source pollution has improved significantly and is now a reduced pressure that we continue to monitor. **The increasing amount of mud (sediment) entering the waterways has now become a critical issue.** As a result, Healthy Waterways has refocused their independent monitoring to help address this pressure and inform the protection and restoration of key habitats, such as riparian vegetation which stabilises creek and river banks, and seagrass which supports a diversity of plants and animals.

The new Waterway Benefits Rating has been introduced to provide a benchmark that will measure future improvements and increases in the social and economic benefits that our waterways provide to the community. This provides a deeper understanding of the impact environmental condition has on waterway benefits, and the action required.

This holistic monitoring approach provides a powerful tool to identify, prioritise and evaluate best practice waterway management that will achieve significant environmental outcomes and enhance the community's quality of life. The evolved Monitoring Program will provide critical information to support the Council of Mayors (SEQ) Resilient Rivers Initiative by informing priority actions and supporting the setting and tracking of targets to deliver increased agricultural productivity, secure drinking water and improve flood and climate protection.

What is new in the Environmental Condition Grade?

As in previous years, Environmental Condition Grades are calculated against established guidelines. The majority of previously measured indicators are still assessed, with new indicators included to account for, and measure, key habitats (i.e. riparian vegetation, mangroves etc) and additional pressures on waterway health (i.e. mud). The estuarine and freshwater results which were previously graded individually are now rolled into one overall grade per catchment. **This evolved calculation and expanded monitoring means the 2015 grades cannot be directly compared to previous years.** This evolved approach will allow us to more efficiently assess and compare the health of different catchments in the future.

Can I compare 2015 Environmental Grades to previous years?

The 2015 grades are not directly comparable to previous years due to the evolved methodology used. The 2015 environmental condition grade includes the assessment of new indicators and the estuarine and freshwater results, which were previously graded individually, are now rolled into one overall grade per catchment.

Does this mean grades for previous years are no longer useful?

The environmental grades are now tracking different objectives that address new environmental pressures. While the grades from previous years are not directly comparable to the grades moving forward, the data behind the grades continues to play a critical role in assessing long term improvements or changes to waterway condition in South East Queensland. The data behind the grades is available on the Healthy Waterways website.

How can I find out if my local waterway is in better or worse condition than last year?

It is possible to determine whether different elements of your waterways i.e. freshwater stream health and estuarine water quality have improved or declined. If you would like to know more, please contact Healthy Waterways via info@healthywaterways.org

What is the Waterway Benefits Rating?

The Waterway Benefits Rating is a new assessment that has been introduced in 2015 to help us to better understand how the social and economic benefits our waterways provide will be affected by changing environmental conditions. In 2015, the Waterway Benefits Rating measured the following components:

Social: community values and satisfaction with waterways, and their ability to use them.

Economic: economic benefits generated through recreational use in and around our waterways, and recreational fishing, as well as the contribution that relevant catchments make to providing clean drinking water.

These components are combined to reach an overall Waterway Benefits Rating for each catchment, which uses a 1-5 star rating system (minimum to maximum benefits).

How can I find out what is being done to improve my local waterways?

Through the 2015 Report Card, Healthy Waterways has gathered information around the number of landholders and community groups engaged in waterway initiatives, and the actions they are undertaking to protect and improve waterway health across the region. Information about projects being undertaken by local and state governments and water utilities has also been gathered. Visit the Healthy Waterways website to find out about the activities or waterway initiatives being undertaken in your area.

What can the community do to help protect our waterways?

There are many individuals and community groups dedicating their time to the protection and improvement of our waterways through activities such as riverbank stabilisation, tree plantings and picking up litter.

Community members who would like to get involved in protecting their local waterways can take part in waterway health initiatives through their local community or catchment group. Find out more about groups in your local area on the Healthy Waterways website.

What can be expected from the Report Card in future years?

This year, Healthy Waterways began to explore what motivates action among landholders and community groups to protect and improve waterways. This 'action' component will evolve to include additional groups and actions being undertaken within priority waterway management themes (i.e. erosion and sediment control). In 2016, evolving our understanding of people's willingness and ability to protect waterways will help to motivate and enable action that will reduce the pressures on waterway health, and enhance waterway benefits.



Find out more about the Report Card results, what's happening in your area and how you can get involved www.healthywaterways.org

