

Media Release

CONFIDENTIAL AND EMBARGOED UNTIL 11:30AM WEDNESDAY 16 NOVEMBER 2016

Report Card results revealed for South East Qld's waterways

The annual Healthy Waterways and Catchments Report Card has been released, revealing improvements in the grades of many South East Queensland waterways.

Chairman of the Healthy Waterways and Catchments Science Committee, Professor Stuart Bunn, said the grades for South East Queensland's catchments have either improved or remained the same as last year.

"The largest improvements in the region were in the coastal catchments, with most climbing from C (fair) to B (good) aside from Noosa which retained the highest catchment grade in South East Queensland (A-), Professor Bunn said.

"Overall Moreton Bay retains a B+, with most bay zones maintaining the same grade or experiencing only marginal declines.

"The majority of western catchments, which are highly valued for food production and drinking water, saw little to no change aside from slight improvements in Mid Brisbane and the Bremer.

"The improvements in grades across the region are largely due to a 70% decrease in the amount of sediment pollution entering our waterways, associated with below average rainfall this year.

"Despite this decrease, an estimated 15,000 dump trucks worth of sediment still entered the waterways, carrying other pollutants such as nutrients," he said.

Professor Bunn said sediment pollution remains the number one pressure threatening South East Queensland waterways and the many social and economic benefits they underpin.

"The amount of sediment pollution entering the waterways is driven by rainfall, but is also strongly affected by the condition and management of the land. This year the upper catchment region suffered below average rainfall, and as a result pollutant loads declined. This reduces the threat downstream and the condition of coastal waterways tends to improve during these times," Professor Bunn said.

"We need to build the resilience of our catchments against future rainfall events if we are to maintain the improvements we have seen this past year, and protect the benefits our waterways provide through tourism, recreation, drinking water supply and agriculture.

"A comprehensive sediment assessment conducted by Healthy Waterways and Catchments has revealed priority hot spots that are most vulnerable to erosion.

"In rural areas, the primary source of sediment pollution is stream bank and gully erosion, while in the urban catchments sediment runoff from poorly managed construction sites is a key issue.

"The amount of sediment pollution entering our waterways during all future rainfall events can be significantly reduced by improving erosion and sediment control on construction sites, implementing stormwater management infrastructure in urban areas, stabilising riverbanks and gullies in rural areas and supporting best practice farming," he said.

Chairman of the Healthy Waterways and Catchments Board, Mr Stephen Robertson, said the condition of our waterways underpins and affects the many social and economic benefits that support healthy and happy communities.

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“The Waterway Benefits Rating this year has shown communities across South East Queensland are generally receiving high to very high social and economic benefits from the waterways.

“On a whole, the waterways of South East Queensland generate \$6 billion through tourism each year, and around \$2-3 billion through local recreation.

“Local communities also value the waterways highly for the lifestyle and livelihood benefits they underpin, and 67% of the region reported using their local waterways to help them relax,” he said.

Mr Robertson said Healthy Waterways and Catchments is working to protect these benefits by empowering and connecting landholders, community groups, government and industry with the trusted science, tools and on-ground action required to make real and lasting change for the environment.

Minister for the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef, The Hon. Dr Steven Miles, said the Queensland Government was proud to support a partnership with Healthy Waterways and Catchments—which began some 16 years ago.

“South East Queensland is a dynamic and growing region, so it is vital we work together to achieve the right balance between development and preserving our natural environment,” Dr Miles said.

“We know the release of sediment from urban areas is an ongoing challenge and these results highlight the need to accelerate our efforts in this area.

“The government is working closely with Healthy Waterways and Catchments, local councils and the building and construction sector to reduce sediment emissions from urban building and development sites.

“We also continue to work closely with the horticulture and grazing industries on best management practice programs. These are important programs which aim to keep valuable agricultural soil out of our waterways and in the paddocks where it belongs.”

The full list of Healthy Waterways and Catchments Report Card results for South East Queensland can be found at www.healthywaterways.org/reportcard

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About Healthy Waterways and Catchments Ltd

Healthy Waterways and Catchments is a new entity combining not-for-profit organisations Healthy Waterways and SEQ Catchments. The strength of this union lies in our ability to bring together scientific expertise with enduring and strong partnerships, enabling us to mobilise action that will help build a resilient region. Our aim is to protect our unique and beautiful land and waterways from the numerous pressures they face. This includes population growth and extreme weather events, which can cause sediment pollution and habitat loss. These pressures not only impact environmental condition, but threaten the many social and economic benefits our waterways provide. This includes recreation, agriculture and a clean drinking water supply.

For more information visit healthywaterwaysandcatchments.com.au