



TOWNSVILLE MONSOON CAUSES MINIMAL IMPACTS SO FAR TO MOST ENVIRONMENTS

Media Release
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The Townsville Dry Tropics Report Card 2019 (the Report Card) into the health of the region's waterways suggests the February 2019 flood event had minimal impacts so far to most environments.

Chair of the Dry Tropics Partnership for Healthy Waters Diane Tarte said the Report Card indicates that overall, water quality across the Townsville region is moderate to very good.

"The February 2019 flood event saw 1.13 million metric tonnes of water discharged from the Ross River into Cleveland Bay, causing riverbanks to erode and nutrients, sediment and litter from the urban environment to flow into the rivers and marine environment," Ms Tarte said.

"Despite the social and economic impacts of the flood event, research suggests minimal impacts so far to most environments, including offshore coral reefs. Flood plumes reached the outer reef within five days but dissipated five days later."

Seagrass meadows showed a decline in biomass following the floods; however, the overall area of meadows has remained above the long-term average. This was likely due to the good growing conditions from previous years, which provided some resilience within the seagrass ecosystem.

The series of small estuaries in the Ross and Black River basins all scored positively, with a B Grade (Good) for Water Quality and Habitat, while Cleveland and Halifax Bays both have room for improvement, each scoring a C (Moderate) for Water Quality and Habitat.

The offshore marine environment scored the only A (Very Good) in the Report Card, for Water Quality.

Townsville Mayor Jenny Hill said it's encouraging that the environment had bounced back well following the unprecedented monsoon.

"It is comforting to know that despite the amount of water that was discharged, the environment has largely looked after itself – but there are still areas we can look to improve," Cr Hill said.

"Council has been collaborating with Dry Tropics and other organisations to protect our waterways – this includes installing traps to stop litter making it to the ocean and the co-funding of studies that will help reduce pollutants in waters around Townsville.



“We will keep collaborating with other organisations in this space to ensure that our amazing natural environments and waterways can remain healthy.”

Port of Townsville General Manager of Infrastructure and Environment Marissa Wise said the Report Card is a wonderful collaboration that will help to improve the quality of the Townsville environment.

“The Port has been voluntarily monitoring water in Cleveland Bay for over 20 years, and sharing our data helps the whole community better understand our marine environment,” she said.

Launched last year, the Dry Tropics Partnership for Healthy Waters is a collaboration between community, industry, science and government in the Townsville region, to monitor waterway health and promote management actions. The Report Card assesses the condition of waterways against agreed management objectives and identifies gaps in monitoring data, all of which can be used to expand our knowledge on waterway health.

“We’re excited that the Report Card has expanded to include three new data sets around additional monitoring, which includes a new litter indicator, citizen science data on hard coral cover and 14 new monitoring sites in the Black Basin,” Ms Tarte said.

“The Report Card shows almost 150,000 pieces of litter were removed from the environment during community clean ups between July 2018 and June 2019. According to the Australian Marine Debris Initiative database, the top five items found were hard plastic pieces, broken glass, plastic bags and film remnants, cigarette butts and filters and plastic food packaging.

“Our Partners continue to monitor affected ecosystems and assist with ongoing restoration of affected areas and this is certainly something our community can assist with when it comes to litter reduction.”

In 2017, CISRO surveyed almost 1,200 Townsville residents about the perceptions and values of the Great Barrier Reef. Residents placed very high value on our waterways for wellbeing and economic reasons. However, they perceived the health and management of the reef to be poor. Stewardship across the region was also perceived to be poor.

The Townsville Dry Tropics Report Card is one of the five regional report cards in the Great Barrier Reef catchments that produce an annual snapshot of ecosystem health and water quality condition of local waterways.

Go to drytropicshealthywaters.org for more information.

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BACKGROUND

The Townsville region Dry Tropics Partnership for Healthy Waters Report Card is now in its second year, providing our community with an independent picture of the health of our waterways and Reef.

Healthy waterways are essential to our region and support life, tourism, agriculture, mining and recreation. The Report Card will help guide future planning and investment into waterway, marine catchment and reef health.

The catchment area includes the greater Townsville area and extends north to Crystal Creek and south to Alligator Creek. The sea area includes Cleveland Bay, Magnetic Island and Palm Island and extends to the edge of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park boundary.

Hosted by Townsville City Council, the Dry Tropics Partnership for Healthy Waters is funded by the Australian and Queensland Governments and collaborating partners.

More information on the Report Card, its scoring methodology and Frequently Asked Questions can be found at drytropicshealthywaters.org