



Dry Tropics Partnership for Healthy Waters
Waterways Report Card 2023

TECHNICAL REPORT

PART 1: Executive Summary

Reporting on data collected 2021 - 2022



1 General

1.1 Authorship Statement

This technical report presents the results of the Townsville Dry Tropics 2021–2022 Report Card (released in 2023) and was prepared by the Partnership’s Senior Technical Officer (STO), Dinny Taylor, and the Partnership’s Technical Officer (TO), Adam Shand. Significant support and review were received from the Regional Report Cards Technical Working Group (TWG) members, and the Wet Tropics and Mackay-Whitsunday-Isaac regional Report Cards. This report is endorsed by the Dry Tropics Partnership for Healthy Waters.

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1.2 Current Townsville Dry Tropics TWG Members and their Respective Organisations

Table 1. Current DTPHW TWG members and respective organizations.

Member	Organisation
Diane Tarte	TWG: Chair (Independent)
Dinny Taylor	DTPHW: STO
Adam Shand	DTPHW: TO
Richard Hunt	Wet Tropics Partnership
Brie Sherow	Mack-Whitsunday-Isaac Partnership
Lyndon Llewellyn	Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS)
Angus Thompson	AIMS
Glynis Orr	Department of Environment and Science (DES)
Carl Mitchell	DES
Jamie Corfield	DES
David Moffatt	DES
Andrew Moss	DES
Michael Newham	DES
Michael Rasheed	James Cook University (JCU)
Stephen Lewis	JCU
Paula Cartwright	JCU
Elaine Glen	Port of Townsville (POTL)
Adam King	Townsville City Council (TCC)

1.3 Acknowledgements

We thank partners who kindly contributed their data, members of the Townsville Dry Tropics Management Committee, and members of the Technical Working Group (TWG) who provided feedback on the document. Members include Townsville City Council (Townsville Water & Waste), Port of Townsville, Australian Institute of Marine Science, Department of Environment and Science, Queensland Herbarium (through the Department of Environment and Science), James Cook

University (TropWater), and Ornatas. Creative Commons (Receiving Environment Monitoring Program, Sewage Treatment Plant data) by Townsville City Council is licensed under CC BY 4.0/Adapted Material. Members of the Reef Independent Science Panel are also acknowledged for their advice and review of the document.

2 Executive Summary

This executive summary includes three summary sections covering:

- The Dry Tropics Partnership,
- Environmental Stressors in the Dry Tropics region during 2021–2022,
- The state and condition of the environment, including scores and grades for each index for each environment (Freshwater, Estuarine, Inshore Marine, and Offshore Marine), and site-specific scores and grades for litter.

2.1 The Dry Tropics Partnership

The Dry Tropics partnership for Healthy Waters (referred to as the Partnership) was formed in November 2018 and launched in January 2019. The current geographic scope of the Partnership covers the waterways and environment in the Dry Tropics region. On land, the Partnership region extends from the Crystal Creek catchment in the north, to the Ross River (upper) and Alligator Creek catchments in the south. In the water, the region extends from the coastline to the outer edge of the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) Marine Park. The reporting region for the partnership incorporates all islands within this area, including Magnetic Island and the Palm Island group.

The Dry Tropics reporting region is divided into seven unique zones based on the waterway type (freshwater, estuarine, inshore marine, and offshore marine), and riverine basin (Black and Ross) (Table 2, Figure 1). If required, zones are divided into sub-zones (or catchments) based on the prevailing sub-water type, and catchment. For further information on the methodology of constructing the Dry Tropics reporting region refer to “Methods for Townsville Dry Tropics 2021–2022 Report Card (released in 2023)”.

Table 2. The seven reporting zones in the Dry Tropics region.

Zone	Waterway
Ross Freshwater Basin	Freshwater
Black Freshwater Basin	Freshwater
Ross Estuarine Basin	Estuarine
Black Estuarine Basin	Estuarine
Cleveland Bay	Inshore Marine
Halifax Bay	Inshore Marine
Offshore Marine	Offshore Marine

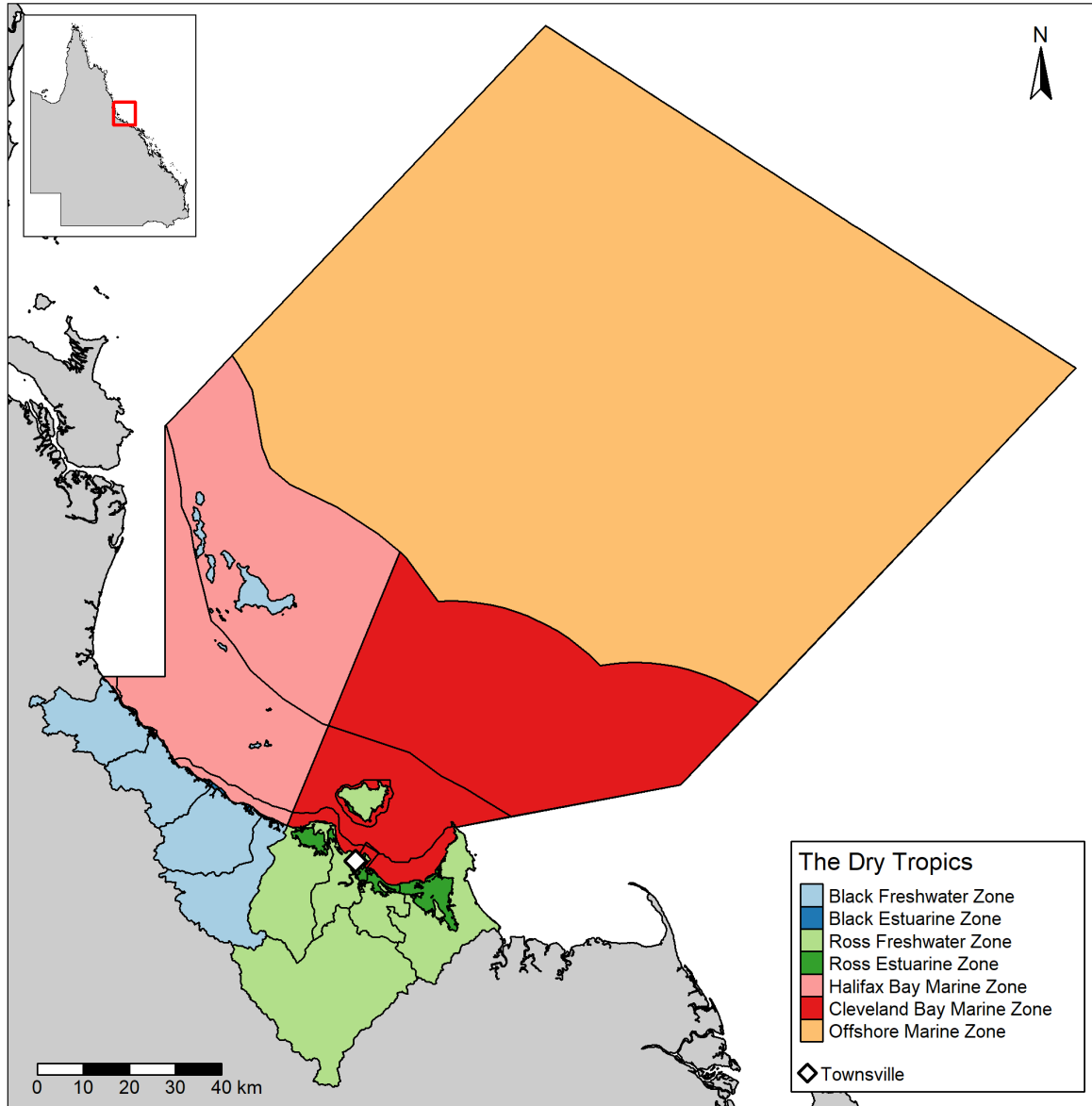


Figure 1. Geographic boundary of the DTPHW reporting region, divided into seven zones (Table 2).

In May 2019 the Partnership released its pilot annual Report Card, reporting and summarising data from the 2017–2018 financial year. In June 2020, the Partnership began releasing annual Report Cards for the proceeding financial year, and in June 2021, the Partnership also began releasing annual Management Response Reports, highlighting the management actions of partners (Table 3).

Table 3. Timeline of key DTPHW publications.

Released:	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
Reporting period:	2021–2022	2020–2021	2019–2020	2018–2019	2017–2018
Report Card	✓ (current)	✓	✓	✓	✓ (pilot)
Stewardship Report	✓ (current)	✓	✓		

This document is a detailed technical report that provides context and insight into the annual Report Card. It is intended to be read in conjunction with the “Townsville Dry Tropics Program Design” and “Methods for Townsville Dry Tropics 2021–2022 Report Card (released in 2023)”.

2.2 Climate and Land Use in the Dry Tropics Region

During 2021–2022, the Dry Tropics region recorded a wide range of weather events. There were no major flooding events, tropical cyclones, or changes to the prevailing La Niña conditions (Bureau of Meteorology 2022, Climate Council 2021). However, multiple heatwaves were experienced, both extremely high and low monthly rainfall figures were recorded, annual average seawater temperature was above average, and the risk of coral bleaching was above average (Bureau of Meteorology 2023, NOAA 2023). Key influences are summarised below.

- Total rainfall was 1166mm in the Ross Basin, and 1383mm in the Black Basin. Annual rainfall in both basins was classified as “average”, although slightly exceeding the long-term mean. Monthly rainfall ranged from “very much below average” to the “highest 1%” on record.
- Annual air temperature averaged 25.4°C in the Ross Basin, and 24.9°C in the Black Basin and exceeded the long-term annual mean in both basins. The monthly average air temperature across both basins was equal to or greater than average for every month of the year.
- The annual average sea surface temperature was 27.1°C and exceeded the long-term mean. Monthly average sea surface temperature was “very much above average” or the “highest 1%” on record for ten months of the year.
- The risk of coral bleaching ranged from “possible” to “highly likely”.
- From 2016–2021 intensive land use increased by 6.19km², conservation and natural environment land use increased by 4.85km², and production from natural environments land use decreased by 22.6km².

2.3 State and Condition of the Environment

The results presented in this document describe the state and condition of the waterways and environment in the seven reporting zones of the Dry Tropics region (Figure 1, Table 2). Within each zone standardised scores and grades are produced for environmental indicators, indicator categories, and indices. Results from multiple indicators are aggregated into results for indicator categories, which are aggregated into results for indices (see Page 3). Indicators, and thus the indices reported for each zone vary (Table 4). Confidence levels based on how the data were collected and analysed are also reported.

Table 4. Indices measured in each zone of the Dry Tropics region.

Zone	Water Quality (WQ)	Latest update	Habitat and Hydrology (HH)	Latest update	Fish (F)	Latest update
Black Freshwater	✓	21–22	✓	19–20	✓	19–20
Black Estuarine	✓	21–22	✓ (Only Habitat)	21–22		
Halifax Bay	✓	21–22	✓ (Only Habitat)	21–22		
Ross Freshwater	✓	21–22	✓	19–20	✓	19–20
Ross Estuarine	✓	21–22	✓ (Only Habitat)	21–22		
Cleveland Bay	✓	21–22	✓ (Only Habitat)	21–22		
Offshore Marine	✓	19–20	✓ (Only Habitat)	21–22		

The index and standardised scores of each zone for the 2021–2022 reporting period are presented below for quick reference. Selected key messages for results of particular interest are provided and refer to indicators which are presented in detail within the results sections.

2.3.1 Freshwater Environment

Table 5. Comparison of 2021–2022 weighted scores for Water Quality (WQ), Habitat and Hydrology (HH), and Fish (F) indices in the Ross Freshwater Basin and the Black Freshwater Basin against previous years.

Zone	2021–2022			2020–2021			2019–2020			2018–2019		
	WQ	HH ¹	F ²	WQ	HH	F	WQ	HH	F	WQ	HH	F
Ross	70 (B)	51 (C)	57 (C)	73 (B)	51 (C)	57 (C)	70 (B)	51 (C)	57 (C)	66 (B)	51 (C)	ND
Black	68 (B)	71 (B)	78 (B)	68 (B)	71 (B)	78 (B)	67 (B)	71 (B)	78 (B)	62 (B)	71 (B)	ND

■ Very Poor (E) = 0 to <21 | ■ Poor (D) = 21 to <41 | ■ Moderate (C) = 41 to <61 | ■ Good (B) = 61 to <81 | ■ Very Good (A) = 81 – 100. ND indicates no data available.

2.3.1.1 Key Messages

2.3.1.1.1 Water Quality

- The Ross Freshwater Basin saw a decrease in score from 73 to 70 within the same grade of ‘good’ with the decline associated with a decrease in the score for TP in Ross Lake and a decrease in the score for DIN in the Bohle River.
- The Black Freshwater Basin score and grade have remained stable across the reporting years.
- The Bohle River TP scores remain ‘very poor’ and the DIN scores have decreased with the grade decreased from ‘moderate’ to ‘poor’ compared with 2020–2021.
- There was an increase in the number of watercourses with ‘very poor’ or ‘poor’ scores associated with low dissolved oxygen % saturation in both the Ross and Black basins in the 2021–2022 year.

2.3.1.1.2 Habitat and Hydrology

- There have been no changes to the habitat and hydrology index scores for the 2021–2022 technical report.
 - The method of aggregation was updated for the 2021–2022 report. Historic scores have been back calculated (Appendix U).
 - The area assessed for the wetland extent indicator was updated for the 2021–2022 report. Historic scores have been back calculated (Appendix T).

2.3.1.1.3 Fish

- As no new data has been recorded there has been no change to the fish index scores for the 2021–2022 technical report.

¹ Habitat and Hydrology data is collected every four years. Latest update: 2022. Next update: 2026.

² Fish data is collected every three years. Latest update: 2020. Next update: 2023.

- Scores and grades are based on 2019–2020 data and may not be representative of 2021–2022 condition.

2.3.2 Estuarine Environment

Table 6. Comparison of 2021–2022 weighted scores for Water Quality and Habitat indices in the Ross Estuarine Basin and Black Estuarine Basin against previous years.

Basin	2021–2022		2020–2021		2019–2020		2018–2019	
	WQ	H ³	WQ	H	WQ	H	WQ	H
Ross	83 (A)	73 (B)	88 (A)	73 (B)	88 (A)	73 (B)	39 (D)	73 (B)
Black	64 (B)	71 (B)	66 (B)	71 (B)	47 (C)	71 (B)	52 (C)	71 (B)

■ Very Poor (E) = 0 to <21 | ■ Poor (D) = 21 to <41 | ■ Moderate (C) = 41 to <61 | ■ Good (B) = 61 to <81 | ■ Very Good (A) = 81 – 100. ND indicates no data available.

2.3.2.1 Key Messages

2.3.2.1.1 Water Quality

- There was no change to the water quality index grade (although the Ross Estuarine Basin score decreased from 88 to 83 and Black Estuarine Basin score decreased from 66 to 64).
 - 9 of 13 watercourses received a grade of “good” or “very good” for both nutrients and physical-chemical properties indicator categories.
 - The Camp Oven Creek and Crystal Creek watercourses exhibited unusually low Turbidity scores and should be closely monitored moving forward.
 - Althaus Creek shows ongoing issues with turbidity, and further investigation is required to isolate specific drivers.
 - Louisa Creek shows ongoing issues with Low DO and TP and further investigation is required to isolate specific drivers.

2.3.2.1.2 Habitat

- The grade and score for the habitat index did not change in either the Ross Estuarine Basin or Black Estuarine Basin.
 - Across both habitat indicator categories vegetation loss was minimal, with a maximum loss of 0.09%. This amount of loss is within the margin of error of the method.

³ Only Habitat data is collected. Data collected every four years. Latest update: 2022. Next update: 2026.

2.3.3 Inshore Marine Environment

Table 7. Comparison of 2021–2022 weighted scores for Water Quality and Habitat in Cleveland Bay and Halifax Bay against previous years.

Zone	2021–2022		2020–2021		2019–2020		2018–2019	
	WQ	H	WQ	H	WQ	H	WQ	H
Cleveland Bay	81 (A)	57 (C)	81 (A)	54 (C)	81 (A)	48 (C)	36 (D)	56 (C)
Halifax Bay	67 (B)	45 (C)	70 (B)	49 (C)	60 (C)	52 (C)	45 (C)	52 (C)

■ Very Poor (E) = 0 to <21 | ■ Poor (D) = 21 to <41 | ■ Moderate (C) = 41 to <61 | ■ Good (B) = 61 to <81 | ■ Very Good (A) = 81 – 100. ND indicates no data available.

2.3.3.1 Key Messages

2.3.3.1.1 Water Quality

- There has been no change in water quality grade since the previous report card (although the score for Halifax Bay decreased from 70 to 67).
 - All indicator categories have a grade of “good” or “very good”.
 - The inclusion of additional indicators (TP and FRP) would create a net gain in scores across both zones.
- Other than during the 2018–2019 reporting period that included a major flood event, the WQ scores for Cleveland Bay has consistently been 81 and Halifax Bay has improved to 67–70.

2.3.3.1.2 Habitat

- Habitat scores are improving from post flood (2019) conditions.
- Habitat in Cleveland Bay received its highest score in the past four years of 57 due to the recovery of seagrass.
- Habitat (coral) in Halifax Bay has received its lowest score in the past four years of 45.
 - Seagrass in Cleveland Bay has almost recovered to pre–2019 conditions.
 - Coral in Cleveland Bay has fluctuated between moderate and poor for the past four years.
 - There remains a significant amount of macroalgae recorded at four of six sites.

2.3.4 Offshore Marine Environment

Table 8. Comparison of 2021–2022 weighted scores for Habitat in the Offshore Marine Environment against previous years.

Zone	2021–2022		2020–2021		2019–2020		2018–2019	
	WQ	Habitat	WQ	Habitat	WQ	Habitat	WQ	Habitat
Offshore marine	NA	64 (B)	NA	62 (B)	100 (A)	56 (C)	97 (A)	59 (C)

■ Very Poor (E) = 0 to <21 | ■ Poor (D) = 21 to <41 | ■ Moderate (C) = 41 to <61 | ■ Good (B) = 61 to <81 | ■ Very Good (A) = 81 – 100. NA indicates no data available.

2.3.4.1 Key Messages

2.3.4.1.1 Water Quality

- No data was available for the 2021–2022 Dry Tropics Technical Report and water quality was not assessed.

2.3.4.1.2 Habitat

- The habitat index received its highest score in the past four years of 64.
 - Coral continues to recover from poor conditions in the previous reporting periods.
 - Juvenile density was graded as very good at 8 of 9 reefs surveyed.
 - All coral reefs had an overall grade of moderate or good.

2.3.5 Litter

Litter is a recently developed metric and was first included in the 2019–2020 report card. The methodology has been updated from the initial year of data collection, and data collected from new sites. Data from the previous years has been updated using the new method. Zone scores are not comparable as the Sites litter is collected from each year in each Zone varies, thus only site-specific scores and grades are presented (Table 9).

Table 9. Comparison of 2021–2022 standardised scores and grades for Litter in the Dry Tropics region against previous years.

Zone	Site	Scores and Grades		
		2019–2020	2020–2021	2021–2022
Halifax Bay	North West Beach, Pelorus Island	88 (VLP)	NA	NA
	West Beach, Pelorus Island	75 (LP)	NA	NA
	North Beach, Orpheus Island	5 (VHP)	NA	NA
	Big Rock Bay, Orpheus Island	24 (HP)	9 (VHP)	11 (VHP)
	Fig Tree Beach, Orpheus Island	NA	19 (VHP)	21 (HP)
	Picnic Bay, Orpheus Island	1 (VHP)	14 (VHP)	3 (VHP)
	Boulder Beach North, Orpheus Island	NA	NA	16 (VHP)
	Yanks Jetty, Orpheus Island	69 (LP)	80 (VLP)	NA
	Boulder Beach, Orpheus Island	NA	NA	2 (VHP)
	South Beach, Orpheus Island	42 (MP)	NA	11 (VHP)
	Fantome Island, Northern End	NA	14 (VHP)	36 (HP)
	Ollera Beach	40 (MP)	NA	NA
	Rollingstone Beach	50 (MP)	NA	NA
	Toomulla Beach	52 (MP)	NA	NA
	Toomulla main beach	NA	NA	78 (LP)
	Saunders Beach	66 (LP)	NA	NA
	Bushland Beach, Townsville	NA	65 (LP)	NA
	Cleveland Bay	Myrmidon Reef	NA	95 (VLP)
Horseshoe Bay, Magnetic Island		NA	NA	34 (HP)
Arthur Bay, Magnetic Island		NA	43 (MP)	NA
Alma Bay, Magnetic Island		46 (MP)	61 (LP)	68 (LP)
Alma Bay, Magnetic Island UW		93 (VLP)	96 (VLP)	NA
Geoffrey Bay, Magnetic Island		NA	77 (LP)	NA
Geoffrey Bay Reef, Magnetic Island UW		88 (VLP)	NA	NA
Nelly Bay Beach, Magnetic Island		52 (MP)	73 (LP)	69 (LP)
Nelly Bay, Magnetic Island UW		99 (VLP)	98 (VLP)	97 (VLP)
Shelly Beach, Pallarenda		61 (LP)	31 (HP)	NA
Shelly Cove, Cape Pallarenda Conservation Park		65 (LP)	68 (LP)	87 (VLP)
Pallarenda Beach		NA	NA	69 (LP)
Kissing Point, Townsville		NA	75 (LP)	NA
Rowes Bay		71 (LP)	72 (LP)	83 (VLP)
Strand Park, Townsville		60 (LP)	71 (LP)	NA
Strand Waterpark Beach	NA	81 (VLP)	NA	
Ross	Three Mile Creek, Pallarenda	NA	36 (HP)	NA
	Strand Rock Pool, Townsville	NA	46 (MP)	NA
	Queensland Country Bank Stadium	NA	25 (HP)	22 (HP)
	Ross Creek, Townsville	NA	NA	45 (MP)
	South Townsville Recreational Boat Park	NA	33 (HP)	NA
	Anderson Park, Townsville	NA	NA	87 (VLP)
	Sherriff Park Townsville	NA	NA	69 (LP)
	Aplins Weir Rotary Park	41 (MP)	35 (HP)	66 (LP)
	Apex Park, Condon	NA	NA	60 (LP)

■ Very High Pressure (VHP) = 0 to <20 | ■ High Pressure (HP) = 20 to <40 | ■ Moderate Pressure (MP) = 40 to <60 | ■ Low Pressure (LP) = 60 to <80 | ■ Slight Pressure (SP) = 80 to 100. ND indicates no data available.

2.3.5.1 *Key Messages*

- The east coast of Orpheus Island continues to have the highest litter pressure in the region.
- The northern beaches of Townsville have had low litter pressure on the occasion's collections have occurred there.
- Queensland Country Bank Stadium (high pressure) during events continues to have the highest litter pressure in the Ross litter zone, whilst Ross Creek has moderate pressure.
- Horseshoe Bay has the highest litter pressure on Magnetic Island.

3 Table of Contents

1	General.....	ii
1.1	Authorship Statement.....	ii
1.2	Current Townsville Dry Tropics TWG Members and their Respective Organisations.....	ii
1.3	Acknowledgements.....	ii
2	Executive Summary.....	iv
2.1	The Dry Tropics Partnership	iv
2.2	Climate and Land Use in the Dry Tropics Region	vi
2.3	State and Condition of the Environment	vi
4	Glossary of Terms.....	xv
5	Table of Tables.....	xx
6	Table of Figures	xxv
7	Introduction	1
7.1	Overview	1
7.2	Report Card Zones.....	1
7.3	Purpose of This Document.....	2
8	Methods.....	3
8.1	Terminology and Data Aggregation.....	3
8.2	Scoring.....	3
8.3	Presentation.....	4
8.4	Confidence Measure	4
8.5	Objectives/Measures/Baselines For Scoring Data	4
9	Climate and Land Use in The Townsville Dry Tropics Region	7
9.1	Urban Environment (Land Use).....	7
9.2	Climate	8
9.3	Climate and Land Use Summary	15
10	Freshwater Environment.....	18
10.1	Water Quality	19
10.2	Habitat and Hydrology	25
10.3	Fish	32
11	Estuarine Environment.....	36
11.1	Water Quality.....	36
11.2	Habitat.....	42

12	Inshore Marine Environment	48
12.1	Water Quality	48
12.2	Habitat.....	57
13	Offshore Marine Environment	67
13.1	Water Quality	67
13.2	Habitat.....	68
14	Litter	72
14.1	Monitoring Sites.....	73
14.2	Comparison with previous years.....	73
14.3	Key Messages	75
14.4	Results.....	75
	Confidence Scores	76
15	References.....	78
16	Appendices.....	83

4 Glossary of Terms

Table 10. Glossary of terms used in the DTPHW Technical Report.

AIMS	Australian Institute of Marine Science.
Alien species	Species that are not native to any part of Australia.
Artificial barriers	Any barrier that prevents or delays connectivity between key habitats. Potentially impacting migratory fish populations, reducing diversity of aquatic species and the condition of aquatic ecosystems (Moore 2016).
Basin	Area of land where surface water runs to smaller creeks or rivers discharging into a common point, may include many sub-basins or sub-catchments.
BOM	Bureau of Meteorology.
Catchment area	Area of land from which rainfall flows into a river, lake or reservoir and discharges into a common point.
Chlorophyll-<i>a</i>	An indicator of phytoplankton biomass, widely considered a useful proxy of nutrient availability and system productivity.
Climate	Refers to both natural climate variability and climate change.
CVA	Conservation Volunteers Australia.
DES	Department of Environment and Science of the Queensland Government.
DHW	An accumulated measurement of sea surface temperature (SST) that assesses the instantaneous bleaching heat stress during the prior 12-week period. (Significant coral bleaching usually occurs when the DHW value reaches 4 °C-weeks. By the time the DHW value reaches 8 °C-weeks, severe, widespread bleaching and significant mortality are likely).
DIN	Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen. Comprised of nitrate, nitrite, and ammonium.
DO	Dissolved Oxygen.
DTPHW	Dry Tropics Partnership for Healthy Waters.
Ecosystem	A dynamic complex of plant, animal and microorganism communities and their non-living environment interacting as a functional unit.
Ecosystem Health	An ecological system is healthy and free from 'distress syndrome' if it is stable and sustainable. That is, if it is active and maintains its organization and autonomy over time and is resilient to stress. Ecosystem health is thus closely linked to the idea of sustainability, which is seen to be a comprehensive, multiscale, dynamic measure of system resilience, organization, and vigour.

Enclosed Coastal (EC)	A partially smooth, semi protected water body including shallow, enclosed waters near an estuary mouth and generally considered the interface between coastal and inland waters. Its boundaries depend on the local or regional authorities.
Environmental values (EV)	Characteristics or qualities of a natural system that supports viable natural communities and human uses.
eReefs	Integrated modelling system to visualise, communicate and report reef information for the GBR.
Floor rounding	Rounding decimal places down to the nearest integer. (E.g., 60.9 = 60).
Flow (as an indicator)	The degree that the natural river currents or stream flows have been modified, influencing waterways and ecosystem health.
FRP	Filterable Reactive Phosphorus.
GBR	Great Barrier Reef.
GBR Report Card	GBR Report Card under the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan (2013).
GBRMPA	Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.
GBRMP	Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.
High DO	High Dissolved Oxygen. Can be a sign of algae growth and poor water quality.
Impoundment length	An indicator used in the 'in-stream habitat modification' indicator for freshwater basins in the region. The proportion (%) of the linear length of the main river channel when at the full capacity of artificial in-stream structures, such as dams and weirs.
Index	The aggregation of indicator categories. E.g., the water quality index is an aggregation of nutrient, phys-chem, and chl a indicator categories.
Indicator	A measure of one component of an environment. E.g., the total amount of phosphorous (TP) present in the water.
Indicator category	The aggregation of indicators. E.g., the nutrient indicator category is an aggregation of TP and DIN indicators.
Inshore Marine environment	Includes Enclosed Coastal (EC), Open Coastal (OC) and Midshelf (MS) waters, extending east to the boundary with the offshore waters (Department of Environment and Science 2018, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2009).
Inshore Marine Zone	Inshore Marine Zone is a reporting zone in the Townsville Dry Tropics Report Card that includes Inshore Marine environments.
ISP	Independent Science Panel.

Invasive species	Invasive species include both alien and translocated species.
JCU	James Cook University.
Low DO	Low Dissolved Oxygen. Can result in anoxic waterways (depletion of oxygen) and poor water quality.
LTMP	Long Term Monitoring Program of GBR Midshelf and offshore reef communities.
Macroalgae (cover)	Indicator used to assess coral health. Macroalgae includes seaweed and other visible benthic (attached to the bottom) marine algae.
MD	Moderate disturbed waters.
Midshelf Waters	Midshelf Waters are from 12 to 48 km offshore in the Burdekin region (waters south of approximately Pelorus Island) and 6 to 24 km offshore in the Wet Tropics region (waters north of Pelorus Island) (Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2009).
MMP	Marine Monitoring Program of the inshore reef communities along Wet Tropics, Burdekin, Mackay, Whitsunday, and Fitzroy regions of the GBR.
MSL	Mean Sea Level
Non-indigenous species	See Invasive species.
NOx	Generic term for nitrogen oxides such as mixtures of nitrites and nitrates.
NRM	Natural resource management.
NTU	Nephelometric Turbidity Unit. The units that turbidity is measured in.
OGBRWH	Office of the Great Barrier Reef and World Heritage, Queensland Government.
Offshore waters	Offshore waters extend 48 to 180 km in the Burdekin region (waters south of approximately Pelorus Island) and 24 to 170 km offshore in the Wet Tropics region (waters north of Pelorus Island) (Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2009).
Offshore Marine	Offshore is a reporting zone in the Townsville Dry Tropics Report Card that includes offshore waters.
Open Coastal (OC)	Open Coastal Waterbodies being at the seaward limit and extends 12 km offshore in the Burdekin region (waters south of approximately Pelorus Island) and 6 km offshore in the Wet Tropics region (waters north of Pelorus Island) (Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority 2009).

Palustrine wetlands	Vegetated, non-riverine or non-channel systems that include billabongs, swamps, bogs, springs, soaks etc and have more than 30% emergent vegetation.
Physical-chemical properties	(Phys-chem properties). Indicator category that includes dissolved oxygen and turbidity.
PN	Particulate Nitrogen.
POTL	Port of Townsville Limited.
PP	Particulate Phosphorus.
QA/QC	Quality Assurance / Quality Control.
QPSMP	Queensland Ports Seagrass Monitoring Program.
RE	Regional Ecosystem.
Reef 2050 Plan	The overarching framework of the Australian and Queensland governments for protecting and managing the reef until 2050.
REMP	Receiving Environment Monitoring Program. A REMP provides a basis for evaluating whether the discharge limits or other conditions imposed upon an activity have been successful in maintaining or protecting receiving environment values over time.
Resilience (seagrass)	A multivariate metric developed by the MMP to measure the capacity of seagrass to cope with disturbances (Collier et al., 2021). The resilience metric better accommodates differences in recovery strategies between species in comparison to previous indicators.
Riparian extent	Vegetation with a 50m buffer from a waterway.
RIMReP	Reef 2050 Integrated Monitoring and Reporting Program.
Secchi	Secchi depth. A measure used to gauge the transparency (clarity) of water.
TCC	Townsville City Council.
Translocated species	Species that are native to Australia but not native to the specific waterway.
TP	Total Phosphorus.
TSS	Total Suspended Solids.
Turbidity	A measure of how cloudy/opaque water is, recorded in NTU.
WQO	Water Quality Objectives. Defined for specific regions, these values act as a management target. They do not necessarily reflect 'natural' condition but

rather a state that is considered acceptable considering environmental, social, and economic factors.

WQGV

Water Quality Guideline Values. Defined for broad scale regions, these values act as an 'earliest baseline' and ideally reflect the natural state of the environment pre-European/pre-developed settlement (or pre-land clearing). They allow managers to assess how water quality has changed from 'natural' condition.

5 Table of Tables

Table 1. Current DTPHW TWG members and respective organizations.	ii
Table 2. The seven reporting zones in the Dry Tropics region.	iv
Table 3. Timeline of key DTPHW publications.	v
Table 4. Indices measured in each zone of the Dry Tropics region.	vi
Table 5. Comparison of 2021–2022 weighted scores for Water Quality (WQ), Habitat and Hydrology (HH), and Fish (F) indices in the Ross Freshwater Basin and the Black Freshwater Basin against previous years.	vii
Table 6. Comparison of 2021–2022 weighted scores for Water Quality and Habitat indices in the Ross Estuarine Basin and Black Estuarine Basin against previous years.	viii
Table 7. Comparison of 2021–2022 weighted scores for Water Quality and Habitat in Cleveland Bay and Halifax Bay against previous years.	ix
Table 8. Comparison of 2021–2022 weighted scores for Habitat in the Offshore Marine Environment against previous years.	ix
Table 9. Comparison of 2021–2022 standardised scores and grades for Litter in the Dry Tropics region against previous years.	xi
Table 10. Glossary of terms used in the DTPHW Technical Report.	xv
Table 11. The seven reporting zones in the Dry Tropics region.	2
Table 12. Levels of data aggregation used within the Technical Report and Report Card.	3
Table 13. Standardised scoring range and corresponding grades used in the Technical Report.	3
Table 14. The criteria, score and weighting used to generate indices confidence scores.	4
Table 15. Summary of baselines used for each indicator category.	5
Table 16. Total area and percentage of region for land use classes in the Dry Tropics region in 1999 and 2021 at the primary level.	7
Table 17. Monthly rainfall percentiles in the Ross Basin and Black Basin grouped into seven categories.	9
Table 18. Annual rainfall summary statistics for the Ross Basin and Black Basin.	9
Table 19. Monthly air temperature percentiles in the Ross Basin and Black Basin grouped into seven categories.	11
Table 20. Annual air temperature summary statistics for the Ross Basin and Black Basin.	11
Table 21. Monthly air temperature percentiles in the Ross Basin and Black Basin grouped into seven categories.	13
Table 22. Annual sea surface temperature summary statistics for the Dry Tropics marine region.	13
Table 23. Dry Tropics freshwater water quality site summary.	20
Table 24: Freshwater Quality Index Scores and Grades with comparison to previous years.	20

Table 25. Unweighted and weighted standardised scores and grades for the nutrient indicators and indicator category in the Dry Tropics Freshwater Basins.	22
Table 26. Unweighted and weighted standardised scores and grades for the physical-chemical properties indicators and indicator category in the Dry Tropics Freshwater Basins.....	24
Table 27. Confidence scores for the freshwater water quality indicator categories.....	25
Table 28. Standardised scores for the habitat and hydrology indicator categories and index in the Ross Freshwater Basin and Black Freshwater Basin.....	26
Table 29. Riparian Extent in the freshwater basin of the Dry Tropics.	27
Table 30. Riparian Extent loss and standardised score in the freshwater basin of the Dry Tropics.....	27
Table 31. Wetland Extent in the freshwater basin of the Dry Tropics.....	28
Table 32. Wetland Extent loss and standardised score in the freshwater basin of the Dry Tropics.	28
Table 33. Natural and Impounded stream length and standardised score in the freshwater basin of the Dry Tropics.	29
Table 34. Waterway characteristics and fish barriers in the Ross Freshwater Basin and Black Freshwater Basin.....	30
Table 35. Standardised scores for the components of the fish barrier's indicator.	30
Table 36. Standardised scores for the artificial barrier's indicator category in the Ross Freshwater Basin and Black Freshwater Basin.....	31
Table 37. Confidence scores for the mangrove and saltmarsh extent and riparian extent indicator categories.....	32
Table 38. The distinction between indigenous, translocated, and alien fish species.	32
Table 39. Raw scores for the Proportion of Indigenous Species Expected, and Proportion of Non-Indigenous Species Expected indicator categories in the Dry Tropics region.	33
Table 40. Standardised score and grade for the Proportion of Indigenous Species Expected, and Proportion of Non-Indigenous Species Expected indicator categories, and Fish Index in the Dry Tropics region.....	34
Table 41. Confidence scores for the fish index in the freshwater basin of the Dry Tropics.	34
Table 42. Dry Tropics estuarine water quality site summary.	37
Table 43. Current and previous water quality scores and grades for the Dry Tropics Estuarine Basins.	37
Table 44. Unweighted standardised scores and grades for the nutrient indicator category and indicators in the Dry Tropics Estuarine Environment.....	39
Table 45. Unweighted standardised scores and grades for the physical chemical indicator category and indicators in the Dry Tropics Estuarine Environment.....	41
Table 46. Confidence scores for the nutrients, and physical-chemical properties indicator categories.	42
Table 47. Standardised score for the estuarine habitat index.	43
Table 48. Mangrove and saltmarsh extent in the estuarine environment of the Dry Tropics.	44

Table 49. Mangrove and saltmarsh loss and standardised score in the estuarine environment of the Dry Tropics.	44
Table 50. Estuarine riparian extent in the estuarine environment of the Dry Tropics.....	45
Table 51. Estuarine riparian extent loss and standardised scores in the estuarine environment of the Dry Tropics.	45
Table 52. Confidence scores for the mangrove and saltmarsh extent and riparian extent indicator categories.....	46
Table 53. Dry Tropics Inshore Marine water quality site summary.....	49
Table 54. Current and previous water quality scores and grades for the Dry Tropics Inshore Marine Environment.....	49
Table 55. Standardised scores and grades for the nutrient indicator category and indicators comprising the nutrient indicator category in the Dry Tropics Inshore Marine Environment.....	51
Table 56. Standardised scores and grades for the physical-chemical properties indicator category and indicators comprising the physical-chemical properties indicator category in the Dry Tropics Inshore Marine Environment.	54
Table 57. Standardised scores and grades for the chlorophyll a indicator in the Dry Tropics Inshore Marine Environment.	56
Table 58. Confidence scores for the nutrients, physical-chemical properties, and chlorophyll a indicator categories.....	57
Table 59. Standardised score for the Inshore Marine Environment habitat index.	57
Table 60. Inshore Marine coral sampling locations and sampling programs.....	58
Table 61. Inshore Marine coral indicator and indicator category scores for all sites and zones.....	59
Table 62. Inshore Marine Environment coral indicator category scores for current and previous technical reports.	61
Table 63. Overview of the Long-term Seagrass Monitoring Program (LTSMP) meadows. Adapted from (Mckenna 2022).	62
Table 64. Seagrass indicator scores for all meadows in the Cleveland Bay Inshore Marine Environment.....	62
Table 65. Standardised score for the seagrass indicator category.	64
Table 66. Confidence scores for the coral and seagrass indicator categories.....	65
Table 67. Current and previous water quality scores and grades for the Dry Tropics Offshore Marine Zone.	68
Table 68. Standardised score for the Offshore Marine Zone habitat index.	68
Table 69. Coral indicator and indicator category scores for the Offshore Marine Zone.	69
Table 70. Confidence scores for the coral and seagrass indicator categories.....	70
Table 72: Comparison of Litter Index for 2021–2022 with previous years	73
Table 71: Litter Index Results for 2021–2022.....	76

Table 73: Confidence scores for the Litter Index.....	77
Table 74. All indicators, indicator categories, and indices used in the 2021–2022 Technical Report and Report Card.	83
Table 75. Total area and percentage of region for land use classes in the Dry Tropics region in 1999 and 2021 at the primary level.....	85
Table 76. Monthly rainfall percentiles in the Ross Basin and the Black Basin grouped into seven categories.....	87
Table 77. Annual rainfall summary statistics for the Ross Basin and Black Basin.	88
Table 78. Monthly air temperature percentiles in the Ross Basin and the Black Basin grouped into seven categories.....	89
Table 79. Annual air temperature summary statistics for the Ross Basin and the Black Basin.	90
Table 80. Monthly air temperature percentiles in the Ross Basin and the Black Basin grouped into seven categories.....	91
Table 81. Annual sea surface temperature summary statistics for the Dry Tropics marine region.	92
Table 82. Standardised scores for the habitat and hydrology index pre back calculation	118
Table 83. Standardised scores for the habitat and hydrology index and the three indicator categories that compose the index in the Ross Freshwater Basin and Black Freshwater Basin. Updated wetland extent and updated aggregation method.....	119
Table 84. Standardised scores for the habitat and hydrology index and the three indicator categories that compose the index in the Ross Freshwater Basin and Black Freshwater Basin. Old Wetland Extent and updated aggregation method.....	119
Table 85. Standardised scores for the habitat and hydrology index and the three indicator categories that compose the index in the Ross Freshwater Basin and Black Freshwater Basin. Updated wetland extent and old aggregation method.	119
Table 86. Standardised scores for the habitat and hydrology index and the three indicator categories that compose the index in the Ross Freshwater Basin and Black Freshwater Basin. Old wetland extent and old aggregation method.....	120
Table 87. Key of freshwater fish species found in the Dry Tropics region	122
Table 88. Fish species present within waterways across the Ross Freshwater Basin.	123
Table 89. Fish species present within waterways across the Black Freshwater Basin.	124
Table 90. Number of samples, number of months sampled, median, water quality objective values, and scaling factors for DIN in the Dry Tropics Estuarine Environments.....	128
Table 91. Number of samples, number of months sampled, median, water quality objective values, and scaling factors for TP in the Dry Tropics Estuarine Environment.	129
Table 92. Dry Tropics estuarine water quality historic nutrient indicator scores.....	130
Table 93. Number of samples, number of months sampled, median, water quality objective values, and scaling factors for Turbidity in the Dry Tropics Estuarine Environment.	131
Table 94. Number of samples, number of months sampled, median, water quality objective values, and scaling factors for High DO in the Dry Tropics Estuarine Environment.....	132

Table 95. Number of samples, number of months sampled, median, water quality objective values, and scaling factors for Low DO in the Dry Tropics Estuarine Environment.....	133
Table 96. Dry Tropics estuarine water quality historic physical chemical indicator scores.....	134
Table 97. Estuarine indicator category scores post back calculation.....	150
Table 98. Estuarine indicator category scores pre back calculation.....	150
Table 99. Number of samples, days sampled, mean, median and water quality objective values for nitrogen based nutrient indicators in the Dry Tropics Inshore Marine Environment.....	153
Table 100. Number of samples, number of days sampled, mean, median and water quality objective values for phosphorous based nutrient indicators in the Dry Tropics Inshore Marine Environment.	154
Table 101. Dry Tropics Inshore Marine Environment water quality objectives (Nutrients). PRE-ADJUSTMENT.....	155
Table 102. Dry Tropics Inshore Marine Environment water quality objectives (Nutrients). POST-ADJUSTMENT.....	156
Table 103. Dry Tropics Inshore Marine Environment water quality nutrient indicator and indicator category scores.	157
Table 104. Number of samples, mean, median, and water quality objective values for physical-chemical properties indicators in the Dry Tropics Inshore Marine Environment.	158
Table 105. Number of samples, mean and water quality objective values for the Chlorophyll a indicator in the Dry Tropics Inshore Marine Environment.....	159
Table 106. Dry Tropics Inshore Marine Environment water quality objectives (Physical-Chemical Properties and Chlorophyll a). PRE-ADJUSTMENT.	160
Table 107. Dry Tropics Inshore Marine Environment water quality objectives (Physical-Chemical Properties and Chlorophyll a). POST-ADJUSTMENT.	161
Table 108. Dry Tropics Inshore Marine Environment water quality physical-chemical properties indicator and indicator category scores.....	162
Table 109. Comparison of Dry Tropics and Wet Tropics site overlaps. Note that the difference occurs in the averaging of sub zones for the Wet Tropics technical report.	182
Table 110. Scores for the nutrient indicator category in the Dry Tropics Inshore Marine Environment. Including FRP and TP.	183
Table 111. Scores for the nutrient indicator category in the Dry Tropics Inshore Marine Environment. NOT including FRP and TP.	184
Table 112. Inshore Marine Environment coral indicator category scores for previous technical report. After back calculation.....	187
Table 113. Inshore Marine Environment coral indicator category scores for current and previous technical reports. Prior to back calculations.....	187
Table 114. Standardised score for the Offshore Marine Zone habitat index. After back calculation.	190
Table 115. Standardised score for the Offshore Marine Zone habitat index. Prior to back calculations	190

6 Table of Figures

Figure 1. Geographic boundary of the DTPHW reporting region, divided into seven zones (Table 3). .. v	
Figure 2. Geographic boundary of the DTPHW reporting region, divided into seven zones (Table 11). 2	
Figure 3. Coasters used within the Technical Report (A) and Report Card (B)..... 4	
Figure 4. Land use categories in the Dry Tropics region in 2021 shown at the primary level..... 8	
Figure 5. Total annual rainfall and rainfall anomaly in the Ross and Black Basin..... 10	
Figure 6. Total annual air temperature and air temperature anomaly in the Ross and Black Basin..... 12	
Figure 7. Total annual sea surface temperature and sea surface temperature anomaly in the Dry Tropic marine region. 14	
Figure 8. Total annual degree heating weeks (bleaching events) in the Dry Tropic marine region. 15	
Figure 9. Freshwater Basins and delineation of Sub Basins 18	
Figure 10. Dry Tropics Estuarine Basins. 36	
Figure 11. Dry Tropics inshore marine zones and sub zones. 48	
Figure 12. Dry Tropics offshore marine zone. 67	
Figure 13: Litter Collection Locations for 2021-2022 73	
Figure 14. Land use categories in the Dry Tropics region in 2021 shown at the primary level..... 86	
Figure 15. Total annual rainfall and rainfall anomaly in the Ross and Black Basin..... 88	
Figure 16. Total annual air temperature and air temperature anomaly in the Ross and Black Basin... 90	
Figure 17. Total annual sea surface temperature and sea surface temperature anomaly in the Dry Tropic marine region. 92	
Figure 18. Total annual degree heating weeks (bleaching events) in the Dry Tropic marine region. ... 93	
Figure 19. Ross Basin long-term annual rainfall trends..... 94	
Figure 20. Black Basin long-term annual rainfall trends. 95	
Figure 21. Ross Basin long-term annual air temperature trends. 96	
Figure 22. Black Basin long-term annual air temperature trends..... 97	
Figure 23. Black Basin long-term annual sea surface temperature trends..... 98	
Figure 24. Dry Tropics Marine Region 5-year Historic Degree Heating Week Map. 99	
Figure 25. Black Freshwater Basin water quality site locations. 100	
Figure 26. Ross Freshwater Basin water quality site locations. 101	
Figure 27: Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen (DIN) (mg/L) Boxplot: red triangles indicate the scaling factor, blue diamonds indicate the water quality objective..... 106	
Figure 28: Total Phosphorus (TP) (mg/l) boxplot: red triangles indicate the scaling factor, blue diamonds indicate the water quality objective..... 106	
Figure 29: Turbidity (NTU) boxplot: red triangles indicate the scaling factor, blue diamonds indicate the water quality objective 107	

Figure 30: Dissolved Oxygen (DO) (% Saturation) boxplot: red triangles indicate the high DO scaling factor, blue diamonds indicate the high DO water quality objective, purple diamonds indicate the low DO water quality objective, and brown triangles indicate the low DO scaling factor 107

Figure 31: Historical concentrations of dissolved inorganic nitrogen (DIN) in the freshwater sub basins 108

Figure 32: Historical data for total phosphorus in the freshwater sub basins 109

Figure 33: Historical concentrations of filterable reactive phosphorus (FRP) in the freshwater sub basins 110

Figure 34: Historical turbidity in the freshwater sub basins 111

Figure 35: Historical dissolved oxygen in the freshwater sub basins 112

Figure 36. Freshwater riparian extent assessed for vegetation in the Dry Tropics region..... 113

Figure 37. Freshwater wetlands assessed in the Ross freshwater zone of the Dry Tropics region..... 114

Figure 38. Freshwater wetlands assessed in the Black freshwater zone of the Dry Tropics region.... 115

Figure 39. Impounded and non-impounded waters in the Dry Tropics region..... 116

Figure 40. Fish barriers located on major and high importance waterways in the Dry Tropics region. 117

Figure 41. Fish monitoring locations in the Dry Tropics region..... 121

Figure 42. Proportion of Non-Indigenous Species Expected in waterways across the Dry Tropics region. 125

Figure 43. Proportion of Indigenous Species Expected (POISE) in waterways across the Dry Tropic region. 125

Figure 44. Ross Estuarine Basin water quality site locations. 126

Figure 45. Black Estuarine Basin water quality site locations. 127

Figure 46. Dry Tropics estuarine water quality boxplots: TP. Blue diamond's indicate water quality guidelines, red circles indicate outliers, and the black cross indicates the value compared to the guideline value (median)..... 135

Figure 47. Dry Tropics estuarine water quality boxplots: DIN. Blue diamond's indicate water quality guidelines, red circles indicate outliers, and the black cross indicates the value compared to the guideline value (median)..... 135

Figure 48. Dry Tropics estuarine water quality boxplots: Turbidity. Blue diamond's indicate water quality guidelines, red circles indicate outliers, and the black cross indicates the value compared to the guideline value (median). 136

Figure 49. Dry Tropics estuarine water quality boxplots: High DO. Blue diamond's indicate water quality guidelines, red circles indicate outliers, and the black cross indicates the value compared to the guideline value (median). 136

Figure 50. Dry Tropics estuarine water quality boxplots: Low DO. Blue diamond's indicate water quality guidelines, red circles indicate outliers, and the black cross indicates the value compared to the guideline value (median). 137

Figure 51. Dry Tropics estuarine water quality line plots: DIN. The dashed line indicates water quality guidelines.	138
Figure 52. Dry Tropics estuarine water quality line plots: TP. The dashed line indicates water quality guidelines.	139
Figure 53. Dry Tropics estuarine water quality line plots: NTU. The dashed line indicates water quality guidelines.	140
Figure 54. Dry Tropics estuarine water quality line plots: High DO. The dashed line indicates water quality guidelines.	141
Figure 55. Dry Tropics estuarine water quality line plots: Low DO. The dashed line indicates water quality guidelines.	142
Figure 56. Dry Tropics Estuarine water quality special analysis line plot of TP in the Ross Estuarine Basin for the 2021-2022 reporting year. Crosses mark specific times a sample was collected.	143
Figure 57. Total area of the Dry Tropics region that was assessed for changes in Mangrove and Saltmarsh extent.	144
Figure 58. The estuarine riparian buffer zone in the Dry Tropics region that was assessed for changes in total vegetation.	145
Figure 59. Ross Estuarine Area Mangrove and Saltmarsh Vegetation Change.	146
Figure 60. Black Estuarine Area Mangrove and Saltmarsh Vegetation Change.	147
Figure 61. Ross Estuarine Riparian Vegetation Change.	148
Figure 62. Black Estuarine Riparian Vegetation Change.	149
Figure 63. Cleveland Bay inshore marine zone water quality site locations.	151
Figure 64. Halifax Bay inshore marine zone water quality site locations.	152
Figure 65. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality boxplots: PN. Blue diamonds indicate water quality guidelines, red circles indicate outliers, and the black cross indicates the value compared to the guideline value (mean).	163
Figure 66. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality boxplots: NOx. Blue diamonds indicate water quality guidelines, red circles indicate outliers, and the black cross indicates the value compared to the guideline value (mean).	163
Figure 67. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality boxplots: PP. Blue diamonds indicate water quality guidelines, red circles indicate outliers, and the black cross indicates the value compared to the guideline value (mean).	164
Figure 68. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality boxplots: TP. Blue diamonds indicate water quality guidelines, red circles indicate outliers, and the black cross indicates the value compared to the guideline value (median).	164
Figure 69. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality boxplots: NTU. Blue diamonds indicate water quality guidelines, red circles indicate outliers, and the black cross indicates the value compared to the guideline value (median).	165
Figure 70. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality boxplots: FRP. Blue diamonds indicate water quality guidelines, red circles indicate outliers, and the black cross indicates the value compared to the guideline value (mean).	165

Figure 71. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality boxplots: Secchi. Blue diamonds indicate water quality guidelines, red circles indicate outliers, and the black cross indicates the value compared to the guideline value (mean). 166

Figure 72. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality boxplots: TSS. Blue diamonds indicate water quality guidelines, red circles indicate outliers, and the black cross indicates the value compared to the guideline value (mean). 166

Figure 73. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality boxplots: Chla. Blue diamonds indicate water quality guidelines, red circles indicate outliers, and the black cross indicates the value compared to the guideline value (mean). 167

Figure 74. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality line plots: NOx. The dashed line indicates water quality guidelines. 168

Figure 75. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality line plots: PN. The dashed line indicates water quality guidelines. 169

Figure 76. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality line plots: PP. The dashed line indicates water quality guidelines. 170

Figure 77. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality line plots: TN. The dashed line indicates water quality guidelines. 171

Figure 78. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality line plots: FRP. The dashed line indicates water quality guidelines. 172

Figure 79. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality line plots: NTU. The dashed line indicates water quality guidelines. 173

Figure 80. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality line plots: TSS. The dashed line indicates water quality guidelines. 174

Figure 81. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality line plots: Secchi. The dashed line indicates water quality guidelines. 175

Figure 82. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality line plots: Chla. The dashed line indicates water quality guidelines. 176

Figure 83. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality special analysis line plot of NOx in Cleveland Bay for the 2021-2022 reporting year. Crosses mark specific times a sample was collected. 177

Figure 84. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality special analysis line plot of NOx in Halifax Bay for the 2021-2022 reporting year. Crosses mark specific times a sample was collected. 178

Figure 85. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality special analysis line plot of Turbidity in Cleveland Bay for the 2021-2022 reporting year. Crosses mark specific times a sample was collected. 179

Figure 86. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality special analysis line plot of TSS in Cleveland Bay for the 2021-2022 reporting year. Crosses mark specific times a sample was collected. 180

Figure 87. Dry Tropics inshore marine water quality special analysis line plot of Secchi in Cleveland Bay for the 2021-2022 reporting year. Crosses mark specific times a sample was collected. 181

Figure 88. Coral reef sampling locations in the Cleveland Bay Inshore marine zone. 185

Figure 89. Coral reef sampling locations in the Halifax Bay Inshore marine zone. 186

Figure 90. Seagrass meadow sampled for the LTSMP assessment. 188

Figure 91. Offshore marine coral sampling locations in the Dry Tropics region. 189

7 Introduction

7.1 Overview

The Dry Tropics Partnership for Healthy Waters (referred to as the Partnership) was launched in January 2019, with a focus on producing an annual Report Card. The pilot annual Report Card was released in May 2019 and reports on data mainly from the 2017–2018 year. Each year an annual report card is produced, with the current Report Card reporting on data mainly from the 2021–2022 year. Where a seasonal monitoring program extends outside of the year period, such as inshore coral, data from the whole monitoring period are included. For monitoring programs that collect data less frequently than annually (e.g., wetland and riparian extent) then the most recent data set is included.

The key deliverable for the Report Card is an assessment of the state of the environment. The Report Card focuses on three indices that are directly dependent on waterway health: Water Quality, Habitat and Hydrology, and Fish. Indices are scored and graded for the freshwater, estuarine, Inshore Marine, and offshore marine environments within the Townsville Dry Tropics region. However, not all indices are scored and graded for each environment (for example, fish is only scored within the freshwater environment).

To assess trends over time, summary results from previous reports are presented alongside this year’s results. For some indicators, the methodology used has changed between years and therefore only data after the methodology change is compared to current results.

7.2 Report Card Zones

The results presented in the 2021–2022 Report Card cover all areas of the Townsville Dry Tropics reporting region. On land, the Partnership region extends from the Crystal Creek catchment in the north, to the Ross River (upper) and Alligator Creek catchments in the south. In the water the Partnership extends from the coastline to the outer edge of the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) Marine Park. The reporting region for the partnership incorporates all islands within this area, including Magnetic Island and the Palm Island group.

The Dry Tropics reporting region is divided into seven unique zones based on the waterway type (freshwater, estuarine, inshore marine, and offshore marine), and riverine basin (Black and Ross) (Table 11, Figure 2). If required, zones are divided into sub-zones (or catchments) based on the prevailing sub-water type, and catchment. For further information on the methodology of constructing the Dry Tropics reporting region refer to “Methods for Townsville Dry Tropics 2021–2022 Report Card (released in 2023)”.

Table 11. The seven reporting zones in the Dry Tropics region.

Zone	Waterway
Ross Freshwater Basin	Freshwater
Black Freshwater Basin	Freshwater
Ross Estuarine Basin	Estuarine
Black Estuarine Basin	Estuarine
Cleveland Bay	Inshore Marine
Halifax Bay	Inshore Marine
Offshore Marine	Offshore Marine

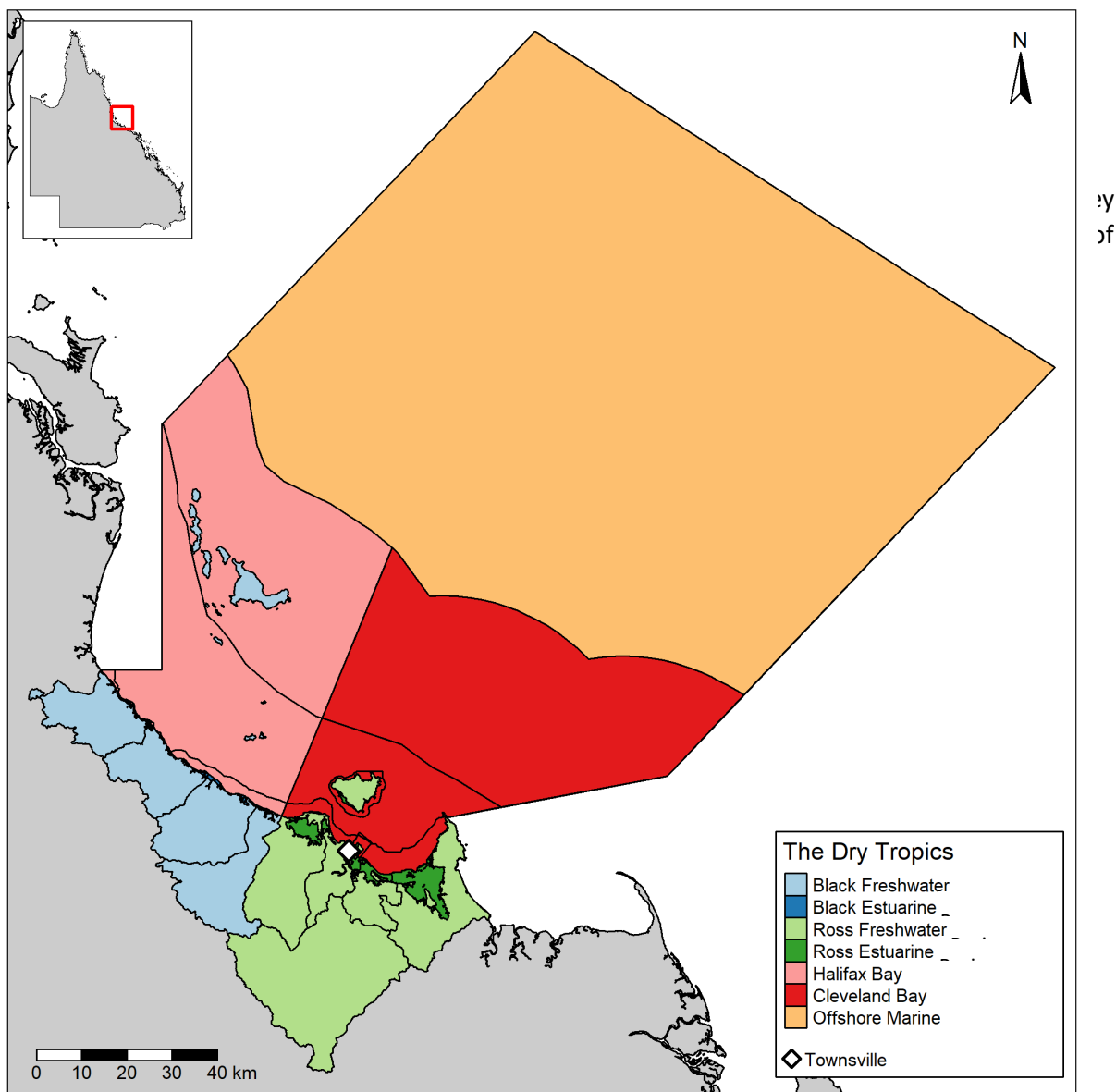


Figure 2. Geographic boundary of the DTPHW reporting region, divided into seven zones (Table 11).

8 Methods

Detailed methods can be found in “Methods for Townsville Dry Tropics 2021–2022 Report Card (released in 2023)”. Key components required to understand the Technical Report are presented below.

8.1 Terminology and Data Aggregation

Data is reported and aggregated at multiple levels within this document. These levels are indicator, indicator category, and index. Results from multiple indicators are aggregated into results for indicator categories, which are aggregated into results for indices (Table 12).

Table 12. Levels of data aggregation used within the Technical Report and Report Card.

Indicator	Indicator Category	Index/Indices
Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen	Nutrients	Water Quality
Total Phosphorus		
Turbidity	Physical-Chemical Properties	
Total Suspended Solids		

There are three indices in the report card: Water Quality, Habitat and Hydrology, and Fish. Some indices are only measured in certain zones, for example, the Habitat and Hydrology index is referred to as the Habitat index for the inshore and Offshore Marine Zones as hydrology indicators such as water flow are not included. A complete list of indicators can be found in Appendix A.

Scores for indicators and indicator categories can only be aggregated to the next level if they meet the “minimum information rules for aggregating data”. These rules are:

1. ≥50% of indicators are required to aggregate to an indicator category,
2. ≥60% of indicator categories are required to aggregate to an index.

8.2 Scoring

All indicators and their aggregations are graded using five ordinal values commonly used in Report Cards: “Very Good” (A) to “Very Poor” (E). Each indicator is scored on a scale appropriate for the variable being measured and thus some indicators have different scoring ranges. To ensure results for all indicators are comparable, all scores are converted (if required) into a standardised score between 0 and 100 (Table 13).

Table 13. Standardised scoring range and corresponding grades used in the Technical Report.

Scoring Range	Grade and Colour Code
81 to 100	Very Good (A)
61 to <81	Good (B)
41 to <61	Moderate (C)
21 to <41	Poor (D)
0 to <21	Very Poor (E)

8.3 Presentation

The information in this technical report is summarised and presented in an annual Report Card. The Report Card uses a stylized coaster to present the final grades for each index with their associated colours (Figure 3. B). This coaster is a slimmed down version of the aggregation used within the technical report (Figure 3. A). A coaster is created for each of the seven zones in the Dry Tropics region (Figure 2).

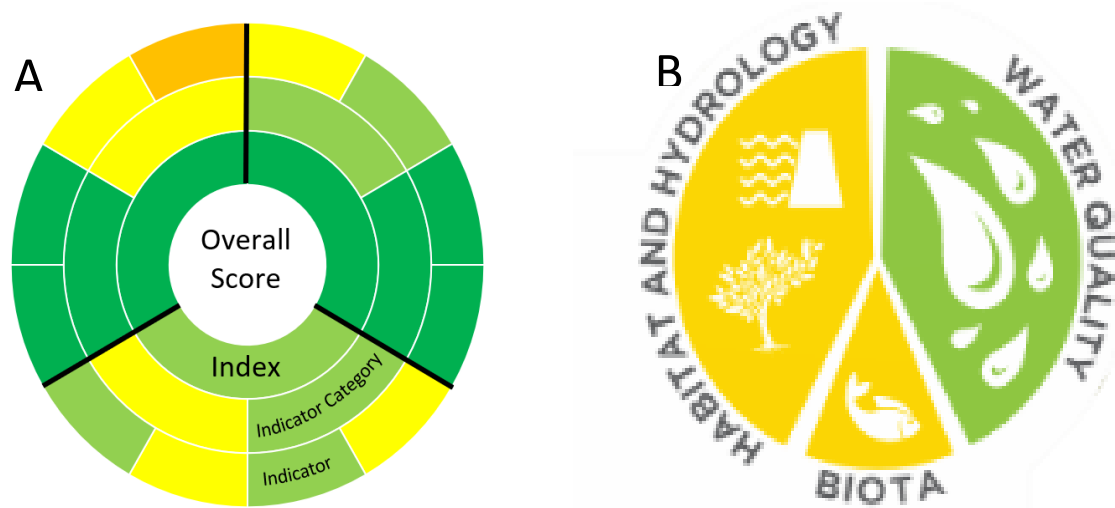


Figure 3. Coasters used within the Technical Report (A) and Report Card (B).

8.4 Confidence Measure

Results for each index are given a qualitative confidence score based on the accuracy and appropriateness of the data used in the analysis. Scores are calculated using five criteria which are weighted to reflect their importance (Table 14). Final confidence scores range from 4.5 (very low, with a rating of 1) to 13.5 (very high, with a rating of 5).

Table 14. The criteria, score and weighting used to generate indices confidence scores.

Criteria	Score	Weighting
Maturity of Methodology	New = 1; Developed = 2; Established = 3	0.36
Validation	Limited = 1; Not comprehensive = 2; Comprehensive = 3	0.71
Representativeness	Low = 1; Moderate = 2; High = 3	2
Directness	Conceptual = 1; Indirect = 2; Direct = 3	0.71
Measured error	>25% = 1; 10% – 25% = 2; <10% = 3	0.71

8.5 Objectives/Measures/Baselines For Scoring Data

Indicators are compared against either water quality objectives, ecosystem condition measures, or the earliest available data/baseline. Water quality objectives and ecosystem condition measures are used to assess whether actions positively or negatively influence the environment with respect to the objective or measure. The objective or measure may not reflect the ‘natural’ (pre-development) state of environment, but rather a state that is considered acceptable considering environmental, social, and economic factors. Earliest baselines ideally reflect the natural state of the environment pre-European/pre-developed settlement (or pre-land clearing). Comparing indicators against the

earliest baseline is important to show how the environment has changed from a ‘natural’ environment.

Although earliest baselines are ideal, for some indicator in this report card there is no known data available that accurately describes the state of the environment pre-development. The use of water quality objectives, ecosystem condition measures, or the earliest available data/baseline for each indicator are shown in Table 15. Note that all indicators within an indicator category use the same baseline, and indicator categories are presented instead.

Table 15. Summary of baselines used for each indicator category.

Index	Indicator Category	Objective/Measure/Baseline
Water Quality	Nutrients	Water Quality Objective
	Phys-Chem properties	
	Chlorophyll-a	
Habitat and Hydrology	Artificial Barriers	Earliest Baseline
	Coral condition (composition and cover change)	
	Seagrass Condition	Ecosystem condition measure
	Mangrove and Saltmarsh Extent	
	Riparian Extent	
	Wetland Extent	
	Coral Condition (Juvenile density and cover)	
Coral Condition (macroalgae)		
Fish	Indigenous species expected within waterways	Earliest Baseline
	The proportion of Indigenous (native) fish	