



Reef Councils' Rescue Plan Cleaner Water for the Reef



The Opportunity

We represent the Reef councils, the 32 local governments that are the elected representatives of their communities and guardians of the 2,300 kilometres of Queensland coastline bordering the Great Barrier Reef.

Together, we are appealing to our partners in the protection of the Reef – the Australian and Queensland Governments, the Great Barrier Reef Foundation and other natural allies – for support of an initiative to ensure that cleaner water flows sooner from our communities to the sea.

The need is urgent. The Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report 2019 has declared the Reef's overall outlook has deteriorated from poor to very poor, largely attributable to the impacts of climate change and land-based run-off.

The report states that the progress to improve water quality is too slow, a factor compounded by the lag between action and results. We need to tackle the whole problem – now – and our councils are a willing group, ready and able to act – now.

The Local Government Association of Queensland, on behalf of Reef councils and their communities, is seeking funding for the Reef Councils' Rescue Plan, a suite of practical initiatives that empowers our Reef councils to accelerate their efforts of cleaning up waters flowing to our Reef.

The Reef Councils' Rescue Plan initiatives have been developed with the support of the Queensland Government and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's Reef Guardians program.

The Initiatives

The Reef Councils' Rescue Plan is a two-phase plan that will overcome existing barriers to create a better 'business as usual' for our Reef councils and their communities, and deliver lasting benefits to the Reef through three initiatives. They are:

- **Cleaner Waste Water** – improving the outflows from our communities' sewerage treatment plants into the Reef
- **Cleaner Storm Water** – improving run-off into immediate and neighbouring fish and marine habitats and
- **Cleaner Road Run-off** – reducing sediment run-off from the unsealed roads that service our communities along the Reef.

These significant initiatives enable stronger community engagement in, and awareness of, their everyday impact on the Reef. These innovative approaches and improved practices in the management of community infrastructure and essential community services provide tangible, lasting solutions to water quality impacting the health of the Reef.

Reef councils are varied in terms of geography, population, development and industry. The greatest impact can be achieved through taking a collective approach, with investment focused on the right initiatives in the right locations. Across small and large urban settings, Reef councils contribute to a shared knowledge of on-the-ground implementation. The plan leverages this to provide practical learnings and outcomes that can deliver an ongoing return on investment.

Leading councils will develop, pilot and refine the initiatives. The new practices, proven to deliver better water quality, will then be established widely across remaining councils in the Reef catchment.

Ensuring the cleanest possible waters reach the Reef bolsters our magnificent corals' resilience against impacts like bleaching and crown of thorns attacks.

— **Mayor Bob Manning**
Cairns Regional Council

What we need

The Reef Councils' Rescue Plan is a \$74 million project. The LGAQ is seeking \$57 million over seven years, with a contribution of \$17 million from the Reef councils.

The \$57 million will be allocated as follows:

- \$13 million over three years for the innovation stage and
- \$44 million over four years to accelerate implementation of practice improvement across the entire Reef catchment.

The request acknowledges the \$331,000 grant from the Queensland Government for Phase 1 of the Cleaner Waste Water Initiative.

Our record

More than 1.2 million people live within the 32 Local Government areas along the coastal fringes of the Great Barrier Reef. A further two million tourists visit annually.

The urban infrastructure required to support these permanent and transient populations – the sewerage treatment plants, the storm water systems and the thousands of kilometres of unsealed roads – is responsible for at least 10 per cent of poor-quality water damaging the Greater Barrier Reef.

In managing these community assets, Reef councils are identified as significant partners in implementing the Reef 2050 Plan and the Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan.

At the time the Reef 2050 Plan was developed, councils – on behalf of their communities – were the single largest investor in actions that contributed to the conservation of the Reef. With recorded investment from less than half of the 32 councils conservatively estimated at more than \$228 million in activities that directly benefited the Reef, total catchment investment is likely to have been double that.

Our Reef councils do a good job. The opportunity is to be great.

Reef Councils' Rescue Plan

Cleaner Water for the Reef



Initiative 1:

Cleaner Waste Water

Over 120 council-owned sewerage treatment plants (STPs) operate across the Reef's 437,354 km² catchment. They provide essential services to more than 1.2 million people as well as protecting public and environmental health.

This initiative will:

- assess STP discharge from a local and whole-of-catchment perspective to prioritise sites and adopt innovative, pollutant mitigation approaches for cleaner waste water
- create a framework to assess and trial innovative, low cost, low impact and energy efficient approaches which offer improved outcomes compared to traditional options and
- provide a decision-making structure to balance costs and risks and facilitate the delivery of the right wastewater management solution for each site.

The benefits include:

- assurance that investment is directed to technologies that optimise water quality
- Reef councils can balance environmental (particularly greenhouse and nutrient) outcomes with local social and financial costs and benefits and
- adoption of innovative approaches that decrease or offset operating costs and energy usage and provide improved whole-of-life asset costs to local government.

We want our communities to prosper and grow – without impacting the quality of the Reef's environment.

— **Mayor Jenny Hill**
Townsville City Council





Initiative 2:

Cleaner Storm Water

Cleaner Storm Water is aimed at maintaining or restoring connectivity between catchment and coastal and marine ecosystems to deliver better social, environmental and economic outcomes. Framed through the lens of fish species' lifecycles and habitat needs, this initiative is creating 'fish friendly' councils, communities and environments.

Activities in this initiative include:

- a 'Fish Friendly' community campaign to increase awareness and encourage communities to adopt fish friendly practices at a household and individual level
- a 'Fish Friendly' industry campaign to increase awareness and encourage fish friendly practices at an industry level, and to improve compliance with erosion and sediment control requirements
- Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) that responds to local climate and topographic characteristics.

The benefits include creating:

- increased community and industry awareness of, support for and participation in protection and restoration of fish habitats in Reef catchments
- improved local government capacity to incorporate 'fish friendly' practices in maintenance of stormwater drainage systems
- a net increase in the health of urban and peri-urban fish habitats in participating Reef catchments.



Safeguarding the Reef catchment's waterways and wetlands will sustain prized fish stocks – and more than 200,000 recreational fishers agree.

— **Mayor Greg Williamson**
Mackay Regional Council

Initiative 3:

Cleaner Road Run-off

Using smarter unsealed road design and maintenance means our road crews are helping the Reef at the same time they're making travel safer.

— **Mayor Anne Baker**
Isaac Regional Council

The 32 Reef councils manage more than 56,000 kilometres of unsealed road, much of which is within the Reef's catchment. This represents a significant area of exposed earth that is prone to erosion, particularly over the wet season, contributing to gully erosion and increased sediment loads in waterways.

These roads do not carry the traffic to justify the high cost of sealing, and they will remain as significant areas of earth exposed to the harsh tropical wet season. On average, an unsealed road will lose its top 25mm every year, washed away or spread as dust over the landscape.

More frequent and intense extreme weather events increase the risk of significant damage to unsealed roads with environmental, economic and community connectivity impacts.

Activities in this initiative include:

- establishing a baseline and monitoring program
- developing a suite of best practice measures for on ground implementation and evaluation
- capacity building, training and information to enable transport engineers and road managers to improve the design and maintenance of unsealed roads

This initiative will also assess how water quality improvements can be considered in the cost benefit assessment of roads under consideration for sealing.



Reef Councils' Rescue Plan

A cleaner 'business as usual' — a more resilient Reef

Urgent funding is needed for the Reef Councils' Rescue Plan, to enable Reef councils to ramp up efforts to ensure that cleaner water flows sooner from their communities into the Great Barrier Reef.

The Reef is of immense value to all Australians and even farther afield. The Reef councils' communities cannot bear the cost alone: they need the support of natural allies and partners to make a real difference to the health of the Great Barrier Reef.

The Reef's overall outlook has deteriorated from poor to very poor, and we need to accelerate our investment to mitigate the impacts of all land-based run-off.

Local government is in the front line of looking after the Reef and it's a \$60 billion asset. If you had a \$60 billion house, you'd need to look after it – and it's no different with the Reef.

— **Mayor Andrew Willcox**
Whitsunday Regional Council

The Benefit

The Rescue Plan will create a cleaner 'business as usual' for Reef councils by delivering:

- **Cleaner Waste Water**
 - **Cleaner Storm Water**
 - **Cleaner Road Run-off**
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The Cost

\$57 million is needed:

- **\$13 million over three years for the innovation stage and**
- **\$44 million over four years to accelerate implementation of practice improvement across the entire reef.**

Reef councils will co-contribute a further \$17 million.

For further information contact:

Dorean Erhart *Lead – Climate change and the Great Barrier Reef
Program Manager – Queensland Climate Resilient Councils*

Telephone: +61 7 3000 2202
Mobile: +61 408 774 495
Email: dorean_erhart@lgaq.asn.au

Address: Local Government House 25 Evelyn Street, Newstead QLD 4006
PO Box 2230 Fortitude Valley BC QLD 4006

qcrc.lgaq.asn.au

