



REEF SAFE BEEF

Achieving sustainable grazing in Reef catchments

Queensland's beef industry, including the 4,000+ beef farms in the catchments flowing into the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) lagoon, generates billions in revenue for the Queensland and national economies¹. Over 30,000 people are directly employed in the beef industry in Queensland, with most activity concentrated on the eastern seaboard, adjacent to the GBR. Beef farms in Reef catchments are important for the national beef industry, accounting for about 20% of the national herd².

Beef producers are not only a pillar of regional communities and a mainstay of the rural economy, they are also important stewards of the land. As the user of 75% of land in Reef catchments³, the beef industry has a vital part to play in conserving our environment. This includes by managing natural habitat for wildlife, conserving carbon in soils and vegetation, and protecting water quality.

Unfortunately, environmentally sustainable grazing practices are yet to be widely adopted in Reef catchments.

Great Barrier Reef Report Card 2015⁴

The *Great Barrier Reef Report Card 2015* (which was released in 2016) prepared by the Australian and Queensland governments shows that outdated and polluting practices are still prevalent in the Great Barrier Reef grazing industry, with only 36% of land managed using best practice systems. At a finer level of detail, the report card shows that, by June 2015, approximately 28% of grazing land was managed under best management practice systems related to erosion from pastures (8.8 million hectares), 54% for practices relating to streambank erosion (60,000 kilometres of streambanks) and only 25% for practices relating to gully erosion (7.6 million hectares).⁵

The key actions required to achieve Reef Safe Beef are as follows:

¹ <http://www.gbr.qld.gov.au/stewardship/>





² <https://www.mla.com.au/globalassets/mla-corporate/prices--markets/documents/trends--analysis/fast-facts--maps/australian-cattle-numbers-map-2014-15.pdf>

³ <http://www.reefplan.qld.gov.au/about/assets/gbr.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.reefplan.qld.gov.au/measuring-success/report-cards/2015/>

Category ‘A’ Land Condition on all grazing properties

- The region’s significant grazing and cropping industries rely heavily on soil condition as the basis for productivity. Soil is a precious and vulnerable natural resource. It can be considered non-renewable, given that it can take hundreds to thousands of years to form from weathering processes. Yet despite the time taken to form soil, it can be lost forever through erosion and toxification caused by inappropriate land management.⁶
- The images below are reproduced from the Meat and Livestock Australia *Grazing Land Management land condition training module*.⁷ Land condition photo standards for *land types* other than the type shown can be found in this document: *Land Condition Photo Standards for the Burdekin Dry Tropics Rangelands: a guide for practitioners*.⁸

			
Land Condition ‘A’ (good condition)	Land Condition ‘B’ (fair condition)	Land Condition ‘C’ (poor condition)	Land Condition ‘D’ (very poor condition)

- Category A Land Condition provides good grass cover for livestock while minimising risks of erosion and polluted run-off. Land in Category A Condition can respond quickly to rainfall by producing new forage for stock. It is an excellent measure of sustainable grazing stocking rates.
- Properties currently in Category C or D Land Condition should develop management plans to move to Category B (and then A) as quickly as possible. Queensland Government should ensure that plans are in place and implemented, through the beef industry Best Management Practices (BMP) or regulations, to increase uptake of the BMP and accelerate continual improvement from D and C Land Condition to B and A.
- To facilitate this transition, the Queensland Government should restore agricultural ‘extension’ services to a ratio of at least one qualified officer for every 100 graziers in Reef catchments, to ensure that all producers have ready access to the knowledge and support needed to implement practice improvements.

Improved farm management systems

- The *Grazing Best Management Practice* is a voluntary beef industry program, supported by government, which assists graziers to benchmark and improve their practices to deliver both financial and environmental benefits.
- To ensure the effectiveness of the *Grazing Best Management Practice* program, including the adoption of ‘Reef Safe’ grazing practices, the beef industry should collect independently verified data and make it available to the Queensland Government, so that it can track progress towards the goals of the *Reef 2050 Plan*. If need be, the government can then work with industry to ensure that the *Grazing Best Management Practice* program is ‘Reef Safe’.

⁶ <http://nrm.nqdrytropics.com.au/land/land-management/>

⁷ <http://futurebeef.com.au/knowledge-centre/land-condition/>

⁸ https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2eYGb5_I-adMnpGRTNqOXhKRHM/view

Increased tree cover

A simple but reliable indicator of the quality of environmental stewardship on grazing and other land is native vegetation cover. Native vegetation helps create and conserve topsoil, protect water quality, limit soil erosion, prevent waterlogging and salt contamination, provides shelter for crops and livestock, ensures a benign rainfall and temperature regime⁹ and conserves wildlife. As a result, native vegetation cover is a good indicator of environmental health.

The Queensland Government should legislate to stop excessive tree-clearing. At the same time, the government should provide adequate financial incentives to graziers, farmers and other landholders to replant and rehabilitate vegetation on environmentally sensitive lands, including by facilitating access to carbon and other environmental offset markets.

Ensuring healthy riparian zones, and degraded or eroding gullies are rehabilitated

- The high cost of repairing gullies and degraded streambanks, some of which date from many years ago, forms the greater part of the \$7.8 billion estimate of the funds required to achieve the 2025 sediment reduction targets in the *Reef 2050 Plan* (see the 2016 report by Alluvium¹⁰).
- The national and state governments will need to provide most of this funding, not only because of the very high cost but also because most gullies started forming many years ago (usually before present-day ownership), and because gully remediation provides only limited benefits to the current land user.
- However, graziers can still make an important contribution to conserving the Reef, and prevent future degradation, by fencing off and not grazing gullies, not engaging in excessive tree-clearing and not clearing or grazing riparian zones.
- To achieve 75% of the 2025 sediment pollution reduction target by 2021 (i.e. to ensure that progress is on track), national and state governments should provide \$900 million per year, up to and including 2021 (\$3.6 billion in total). This is a reasonable price to pay to protect and maintain the precious environmental and economic asset that is the Great Barrier Reef.

Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce's Final Report

These recommendations are consistent with those of the *Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce's Final Report* (May 2016)¹:

- Catchment-specific sediment pollution reduction targets;
- Increased investment in agricultural 'extension' (professional support) services to help graziers reduce erosion and sediment pollution from their land in order to help meet the catchment sediment pollution reduction targets;
- Increased financial incentives and the use of market-based approaches to encourage graziers to reduce sediment pollution;
- Staged introduction of regulations to reduce sediment pollution.

The Queensland ALP Government and LNP Opposition have both endorsed the recommendations of the Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce.

⁹Rezaul, M. et al. 2014. Land cover changes and their biogeophysical effects on climate. *International Journal of Climatology* 34, 929-953.

¹⁰<http://www.gbr.qld.gov.au/documents/costings-report.pdf>

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Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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