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MEDIA RELEASE

DOUGLAS SHIRE SUSTAINABILITY GROUP FEARS FOR THE REEF

The latest two reports documenting the declining health of the Reef show Douglas Shire Council is on the right track with the Healthy Reef Project, Douglas Shire Sustainability Group (DSSG) President Didge Mc Donald has said.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) has released the GBR Outlook Report 2019. The five-yearly report provides an overview of the condition of the Reef's ecosystem and heritage values, use, influencing factors, management effectiveness, resilience, and risks to its future.

The report finds that the overall outlook for the Great Barrier Reef's ecosystem is very poor.

In addition, the Federal Minister for the Environment and Queensland's Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef released the Reef Water Quality Report Card 2017 and 2018.

That report shows only a 0.3% reduction in dissolved inorganic nitrogen and a 0.5% reduction in sediment in 2017-2018 across all regions – improvement that is too slow and too modest.

"We are deeply concerned at the declining health of the reef, and urge the public and industry to back Council on this important initiative," Mr McDonald said. "The scientific evidence is clear: initiatives that will halt and reverse the effects of climate change and effectively improve water quality at a regional scale are the most urgent.

"Our members remain optimistic that with local, national and global action, the greatest threats to the health of the Reef can be minimised. That's why we support the Douglas Shire Council Healthy Reef project and believe it will great for tourism, building the Shire's reputation as a genuine eco-destination. We hope others will follow.

As acknowledged in the GBR Outlook Report, DSSG believes that tourism is not only a key partner in enabling people to visit and understand the reef, but tourism is part of the solution with a high standard of operators, audited programs and regular monitoring of sites.

"The Healthy Reef Project will encourage people to come to Douglas Shire knowing they can help the Reef, rather than contribute to its demise with their Carbon emissions, and we hope visitors will be motivated to make changes in their lives that will support the long-term future of the Reef", said Mr McDonald.

"We are especially pleased that Council's decision to buy land and begin this journey was unanimously supported by all councillors and delivers what many residents wanted – the money spent locally, improving our own environment, where residents and tourists can visit it"

Any property that Council buys for this project will potentially deliver multiple benefits – it will sequester Carbon, help to restore habitat, wetland and rainforest, build our reputation as an eco-destination and create local employment.

It is important to remain vigilant, active and optimistic. Actions we take now will matter and make a difference to the Reef's long-term outlook.

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Background

Key findings of the new Reef Water Quality Report Card, as outlined in the Minister's [media statement](#) are:

- Overall marine condition was poor in 2017-2018.
- Overall progress towards the sugarcane target of 90% of land managed using best management practice systems was only 9.8% to June 2018.
- Water quality modelling showed only a 0.3% reduction in dissolved inorganic nitrogen and a 0.5% reduction in sediment in 2017-2018 across all regions.
- Shows many landholders have invested time and resources to reduce pollution flowing to the Reef but the results reflect the scale of change still needed to meet the targets.

Key findings of the 2019 Outlook Report, as outlined in the Minister's [media statement](#) are:

- The scientific evidence is clear: initiatives that will halt and reverse the effects of climate change at a global level and effectively improve water quality at a regional scale are the most urgent to improve the Region's long-term outlook.
- Without additional local, national and global action on the greatest threats, the overall outlook for the Great Barrier Reef's ecosystem will remain very poor.
- Strong and effective management actions are urgent at global, regional and local scales.
- The 10 threats identified in 2014 as presenting a very high risk to the Region's ecosystem and heritage values are again the highest ranked in 2019.
- Of the very high risk threats, most relate to climate change or land-based run-off (water quality) affecting values on a Region-wide scale. Given the current state of the Region's values, actions to reduce the highest risks have never been more time-critical.
- The rate of reduction of pollutant loads has been slow, reflecting modest improvements in agricultural land management practices.
- Future initiatives need to deliver timely, best practice agricultural land management over a wider area to improve water quality.
- Overall, habitats are assessed as being in poor condition.
- Habitat loss, degradation and alteration have occurred in a number of areas, substantially affecting populations of some dependent species.