



QUEENSLAND FARMERS' FEDERATION

QFF concerned Reef reports will lead to regulations

The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) has expressed concern that two Reef reports released last Friday misrepresent the agriculture sector's commitment to the Great Barrier Reef effort and would be used to justify the state government's proposed Reef regulations.

The 2019 Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report and the 2017-2018 Reef Water Quality Report Card found the overall outlook for the Great Barrier Reef's ecosystem was poor. Both reports recognise that climate change is escalating and remained the most significant threat to the Reef's long-term outlook, and that significant global action to address climate change is critical to slowing deterioration of the Reef's ecosystem, heritage values and supporting recovery. They also acknowledge that water quality is improving on a regional scale, but too slowly.

QFF CEO Travis Tobin said the focus on climate change in the reports is a strong indicator that regulating agricultural practices was a simplistic response to a complex problem that would see a greater burden placed on

Queensland's farmers while not guaranteeing any benefits for the Great Barrier Reef.

"QFF does not question that land-based run-off remains a problem and that efforts must be increased if we are going to meet the ambitious targets set by governments. But we do question how the state government is proposing to go about achieving this," Mr Tobin said.

"We are dealing with one of the most spectacular and complex natural systems on earth that is really struggling with the changing climate. Similarly, where agriculture's impact on water quality is concerned, we are also dealing with climate change and with complex farming systems. That means the solutions for improving water quality need to be equally sophisticated and properly resourced."

"As pointed out numerous times before, due to the nature of agricultural systems, the data capture lag and the design of some voluntary programs, much of the water quality improvement information is a long way behind the numbers published in these reports."

"For example, the QFF-managed Reef Alliance project is often mentioned because of its value and scale but most results will not be reflected until the 2019 or 2020 Report Cards even though the project began in June 2016."

"While the reports acknowledge that the water quality results are a conservative estimate of progress as not all land management activities undertaken during the reporting period is included, they do not provide an estimate of where we are actually at today and do not factor in the impact of chronic and unavoidable stressors such as cyclones and droughts."

"Similarly, using the quantum of total government investment as a justification for regulation is misleading, as funding to date is grossly inadequate and only

about 7.5 per cent of that required to achieve the water quality targets.”

“Agriculture has been and remains committed to doing its bit for the Reef, and over the past few years there has been an exponential increase of farmer participation in Best Management Practice and other voluntary practice improvement programs.”

“Just this morning we again launched the 2019 Reef Champion awards, which recognise and celebrate agriculture’s efforts to improve the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef under these programs.”

“It is unfortunate that the government appears to view regulation as a cheap and effective option for such a complex problem. QFF does not consider a high cost, blunt instrument supporting minimum standards of compliance at the expense of true practice change will realise the best environmental, social and economic outcomes for the Reef, farmers or Reef catchment communities.”

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ONLINE QFF STATEMENT

