

Corals thriving in muddy, oily, dirty



Corals are not the “canary in the coal mine”, delicate creatures that warn us of environmental damage. They can grow in very unfavourable conditions – like on the rocks of the Mackay Harbour breakwater. The enclosed water is murky and muddy which also reduces sunlight reaching the coral. There is sometimes a light oily film on the water from all the boats and ships. But corals have colonised parts of the breakwater built for the harbour.

Thanks to Stephen Andrew, MP for Mirani for taking these pictures

<https://www.facebook.com/StephenAndrewMP/videos/481466462987246>

If ANY coral can live in Mackay Harbour, surely one of the harshest places on the coast for corals, it raises questions about claims that there is some sort of impact from farming and industry on reefs so far away from the coast.

The harbour corals are nothing like the quality of the Great Barrier Reef which is 100 km over the horizon. But they are healthy and typical of inshore reefs.

I have worked on inshore coral reefs since 1992. We took the first long-term measurements of water turbidity with instruments we invented. It was evident that inshore reefs such as Roundtop Island, just offshore from Mackay Harbour, often live in very dirty water. In some cases, all light can be extinguished for days, or even weeks – totally naturally. But inshore reefs are adapted to these conditions.

If one has to compare corals to other organisms, rather than a canary, I would suggest a cockroach is more appropriate – except cockroaches are not beautiful. But corals, like cockroaches, are tough and resilient. You can kill the odd one but they will keep coming back. They have survived hundreds of millions of years through times of massive upheaval. Just because corals are tough and resilient is not a reason to not take care of the Reef. But we must also not allow science institutions to make false claims about the impact of farms and industry on the Reef.