

# Follow-up of Managing water quality in Great Barrier Reef catchments

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(Report 16: 2017–18).  
Tabled 26 June 2018.

## Slide 1: Welcome

This presentation summarises our performance audit report Follow-up of *Managing water quality in Great Barrier Reef catchments*.

Please note that this is a summary. The full report can be read on our website.

## Slide 2: Context

In 2015, we tabled *Managing water quality in Great Barrier Reef catchments* in the Queensland Parliament. This first report examined the Queensland Government's contributions to improving the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef from adjacent catchments.

We concluded that Queensland's response lacked urgency and purpose. It was characterised by disparate projects with no central authority. The fragmented program response and unclear governance arrangements meant there was no strong accountability for program expenditures.

We made five recommendations—all of which the departments accepted.

## Slide 3: Audit objective

In this follow-up audit, we examined whether departments effectively implemented the recommendations we made in our original audit and whether their actions addressed the underlying issues that led to our recommendations.

## Slide 4: Our conclusions

The Queensland Government now has an overarching program to coordinate and monitor reef strategies and its programs aimed at improving the reef's health.

The Office of the Great Barrier Reef provides a single point of accountability for the effective and efficient delivery of the Queensland Reef Water Quality Program. This has resulted in stronger governance, coordination, and oversight, providing greater assurance that public funds are spent and monitored in a way that maximises Queensland's ability to reduce the harm to the reef.

## Slide 5: Our conclusions

The government commits \$35 million annually for reef water quality action. In 2015, it provided an additional \$90 million over five years and a further \$13.8 million over four years in the 2018–19 budget, to support the cane, grazing and banana industries in Great Barrier Reef catchments to improve water quality.

However, the Queensland Reef Water Quality Program's actual expenditure was about \$12.8 million short of the planned investment over 2015–16 and 2016–17. Underspent funds are rolled over from the previous year to subsequent years.

## Slide 6: Our conclusions

While government has made some progress within the program, progress towards the *Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan* targets has been slow. The present trajectory will not meet the targets. Scientific experts report that accelerated change is needed.

Despite significant efforts, the rate at which producers are voluntarily adopting best management practices is not yet sufficient. Proposals underway to change existing reef protection regulations mean that adopting minimum practice standards will no longer rely solely on voluntary participation.

Industry groups are not providing information on site-specific land management practices or changes to the departments, despite government funding these programs. Without this data government has no indication of what, if any, progress has been made. It cannot measure the degree of practice change or assess the value achieved from its investment of public funds.

From 2018, the Reef Report Card will report on revised water quality and land management targets. While most are relevant and informative, three of the proposed targets are ill-defined.

The government's significant work in the last three years to build a more effective reef program is a positive step towards change, but it will take time to establish results. Water quality outcomes will take even longer to determine, and the reef remains vulnerable to threats—including water quality from broadscale land use.

## Slide 7: What we recommend

We made three recommendations in this follow-up audit, which the Department of Environment and Science accepted. These are that it:

1. acquits actual expenditure against planned investment for Queensland's Reef Water Quality Program
2. obtains reliable, timely, and adequate practice change information from relevant industry groups
3. works with the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Energy, to refine over time the land management targets in the *Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan 2017–2022*.

## Slide 8: For more information

For more information on the issues, opportunities and recommendations highlighted in this summary presentation, please see the full report on our website.

Thank you.