

Fitzroy Basin waterways grade increases to a 'B' for 2018-19

The overall health of Fitzroy Basin waterways has slightly improved, from a high C the previous year, to a low B grade for 2018-19, in the latest report card released today by Fitzroy Partnership for River Health.

Fitzroy Partnership for River Health Executive Officer Dr Leigh Stitz said the region's ninth annual Fitzroy Partnership for River Health Report Card presents the findings of 12 months of water monitoring data collected by our partners from across the basin.

"This slight improvement can be partly attributed to low rainfall conditions in the majority of the catchments, which results in sediment and nutrients remaining on ground, and not flowing into our waterways and impacting water quality," Dr Stitz said.

"In 2018-19 the condition scores of Callide, Connors, Lower Dawson, Upper Dawson, Nogoia, Theresa and the Estuary increased, and the Comet, Fitzroy, Mackenzie, Lower Isaac and Upper Isaac slightly decreased.

"The largest improvement was seen in the Connors catchment which moved from a score of 58, a 'C', to a score of 67, a 'B'.

"Over the past nine years, the aquatic ecosystem health of the basin has remained relatively consistent, showcasing that despite it being a busy, working catchment, the Fitzroy Basin is quite resilient," she said.

The Independent Science Panel have once again guided report card development and scrutinised results to ensure methods used for assessment are locally relevant and based on best available science.

Fitzroy Partnership for River Health Independent Science Panel Chair, Dr. Eva Abal said overall, the region had lower than average rainfall and many catchments remain in drought conditions.

"Maintaining high groundcover should be a priority for all land users, to ensure the catchments are not as impacted by high rainfall events in future. The amount, duration and intensity of rainfall, impacts directly on water quality and ecology as rainfall is a natural climatic driver," Dr Abal said.

"This year two new icons, confidence and trend, have been added to the reporting for 2018-2019.

"Due to concerns with an absence of data in some areas, the Independent Science Panel has developed a rating system to provide an indication of how confident we are that the Report Card grades reflect the complete picture of ecosystem health for that particular year.

"This assessment is based on the specific ecosystem health indicators that were measured, the methods of analysis that were used, and the number, frequency and flow conditions of sites that were sampled in each sub-catchment during that reporting year.

"The trend icon provides a simple way of indicating the change in the grade to that of the previous year. This quick reference illustrates whether the catchment, estuary or overall Fitzroy Basin score has improved, declined or stayed the same compared to the previous year," she said.

Fitzroy Partnership for River Health has developed a new website, riverhealth.org.au, a user-friendly and appealing site to view the latest report card and lots of other information on our local waterways.

"We also celebrate our valued partners - 23 organisations from different backgrounds working together and providing funding and data to enable the Partnership to produce report cards each year," Dr. Stitz said.

"Our partners share water monitoring data, valued at over one million dollars, that is taken from numerous sites across the 11 freshwater catchments of the Fitzroy Basin and the Fitzroy River estuary which feeds into Keppel Bay to be collectively assessed and analysed," she said.

Print copies of the latest report card are available for use at events, for school resources and to display at businesses throughout the Fitzroy Basin by emailing info@riverhealth.org.au.

Fitzroy Partnership for River health was formed in 2012 and includes organisations from government, agriculture, resources, industry, research and community, working together to provide a more complete picture of river health in the Fitzroy Basin.

To find out more about the report card visit riverhealth.org.au

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