

Fitzroy Basin waterway partnership recognised as State leader

Fitzroy Partnership for River Health has recently been recognised as the leader of five reef regional waterway partnerships in Queensland, scoring a B+ by an independent evaluator, at the same time as it finalised and released its latest data, Drinking Water and Agricultural Use grades for 2018-19.

Established in 2012, Fitzroy Partnership for River Health was the first reef regional partnership to independently report on the health of waterways in its region, and due to the maturity of the partnership, sits ahead of other reporting reef partnerships in Queensland, as graded by Darwinian Consulting.

Executive Officer Dr Leigh Stitz said the Fitzroy Partnership was heartened by the grade received in external evaluation of all regional reef report cards by independent firm Darwinian Consulting.

"The 'What's our Grade?' report indicated that we continue to have credible independent science reviews and provide relevance to our stakeholders" Dr Stitz said.

"We are the longest serving reef regional report card and are proud of our achievements; we have a strong and committed group of organisations behind us; we have nine years of reporting to learn from and we continue to work with our stakeholders to promote the importance of independent reporting in this critical region," she said.

"Recent meetings with our local government partner, Rockhampton Regional Council, reinforced the value of the Partnership as an independent reporting body amassing a significant water dataset for the Fitzroy Basin, with the Council and many of our partners referencing our reporting within their day-to-day work," Dr Stitz said.

"The Fitzroy Basin is one of Queensland's most significant natural resources; the largest seaward draining Basin on the east coast of Australia draining to the Great Barrier Reef lagoon, with 80 per cent of the land managed by farmers and graziers, 74 per cent of Queensland's active coal mines and a significant regional population," Dr Stitz said.

"In late July, we released our ninth report card on the ecosystem health of 11 catchments in the Fitzroy Basin and we have just added to that data, finalising Drinking Water and Agricultural Use grades for the same reporting year," she said.

"Even with a range of industry activities, even with flooding and drought conditions, even with growing regional populations, our trend data shows that the Fitzroy Basin is remarkably resilient demonstrating a fair to good grade for ecosystem health and showing that both raw water prior to treatment for human consumption, and treated water, is in great condition."

While the overall Fitzroy Basin ecosystem health scored a low B in 2018-19, Drinking Water in Rockhampton and Central Highlands Regional Council areas achieved A results for both Health and Aesthetic for treated water."

"As has always been the case, Rockhampton Regional Council, and indeed all Councils, must adhere to the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines."

“Our reporting evidences the high quality of the treated water in our region, with no health guideline values exceeded.”

“The community can certainly be buoyed by the grading received for Drinking Water in both Rockhampton and Central Highlands areas and be assured that for both health and aesthetic purposes their drinking waters meet national standards,” Dr Stitz said.

For water for agricultural use, A and B grades were awarded for cropping and stock use across the Basin for 2018-19.

For water for stock use, Lower Isaac, Fitzroy, Theresa, Upper Dawson, Lower Dawson and Nogoa received A grades and Callide, Comet, Connors, Mackenzie and Upper Isaac received B grades. For water for cropping use, Lower Isaac, Fitzroy, Theresa, Upper Dawson, Lower Dawson and Nogoa received A grades and Callide, Comet, Connors, Mackenzie and Upper Isaac received B grades.

“Stock and cropping use and the overall ecosystem health scores can partly be attributed to weather conditions with low rainfall conditions in the majority of the catchments, resulting in sediment and nutrients remaining on ground, and not flowing into our waterways and impacting water quality,” Dr Stitz said.

“Over the past nine years, the aquatic ecosystem health of the basin as well as the quality of water for stock and cropping use has remained relatively consistent, showcasing that despite it being a busy, working catchment, the Fitzroy Basin is quite resilient providing quality water suitable for many uses,” she said.

The Independent Science Panel have scrutinised results to ensure methods used for assessment are locally relevant and based on best available science.

Interested community members can drill down to further detail for each report and region and find a significant amount of data and information on our local waterways, on Fitzroy Partnership’s new website, www.riverhealth.org.au

“We celebrate the valued contribution of our partners – 22 organisations from different industries and with different overall objectives working together and providing funding and data to enable the Partnership to produce report cards and information for the community each year,” Dr. Stitz said.

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.

Pictured: Dr Leigh Stitz with Rockhampton Regional Council’s Cr Donna Kirkland and Manager Fitzroy River Water, Dr Jason Plumb.

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