

Partnership provides vital role for Fitzroy's economic vs environment pressures

The Fitzroy Basin is recognised as a large agriculture and resource rich region with significant natural assets, and it is for these reasons that monitoring of water quality and ecology of the aquatic system by the Fitzroy Partnership for River Health continues to be critical 10 years on from its establishment.

The latest Fitzroy Basin Report Card released today is graded a C overall, with the majority of waterways in Central Queensland in *Fair* condition.

Chair of Fitzroy Partnership for River Health, Ms Katy Steele, said the result was good news as the overall C grade for 2020-21 continued a 10-year data trend where the overall catchment condition remained relatively stable with some years attaining a low B grade in years without high rainfall, and other years, a high C grade.

"There have been small changes from year to year, but the overall trend supported by our Independent Science Panel is that it is climatic impacts, such as large rainfall and drought events which ultimately impact the overall grade," Said Ms Steele.

"Given the Fitzroy is a working Basin incorporating strong resources, industry, agriculture and urban presence, it is good news to note ecosystem health has largely been maintained throughout the Basin."

"It can be implied that current management practices being implemented across resources, agriculture and urban activities have been effective in maintaining ecosystem health grades both across indicators and catchments."

In 2020-21 Fitzroy Partnership for River Health re-introduced the condition of the inshore marine zone since the assessment has been reinstated by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. The Fitzroy inshore marine scores were a 'B' for water quality and a 'D' for both seagrass and coral.

This low grade for seagrass and coral can be partly attributed to water quality and climate change pressures.

"Fitzroy Partnership for River Health was created in 2012 bringing together a motivated group of organisations committed to a better water future for the Fitzroy Basin and this group has remained largely unchanged, with some significant water management outcomes benefitting the Fitzroy region since that time.

“While waterway health might not be top of mind all the time, the reporting we do each year brings together significant data from across the Basin so that if there is community concern, there are independent, verified results and grades demonstrating the condition of waterways in this region.”

“We are particularly looking forward to 2023, where in a significant accomplishment for the Partnership, a new Basin-wide monitoring program will enhance the data received for the Report Card and address the number of data gaps that have been experienced over the past ten years,” Ms Steele said.

Member for Rockhampton Barry O’Rourke acknowledged the efforts of everyone involved in producing this year’s report card.

“This year’s grades are the collaborative result of governments, industry and community groups working together to improve the health of our local waterways,” Mr O’Rourke said.

“It is encouraging to see the condition of the Fitzroy Basin has remained in a largely consistent condition over the last decade.”

More than 483,400 results were collated and assessed across 215 sites this year, with the majority of the catchment grades remaining unchanged, although the Nogoia catchment grade improved and the Lower Isaac declined this year.

Interested community members can drill down to the detail of how each catchment score was assessed this year compared to previous years on our website www.riverhealth.org.au.

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 leigh.stitz@riverhealth.org.au

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 the best available science. The Partnership continues to invest in finding a pathway to bridge waterway health monitoring gaps, to ensure Annual Report Cards are as robust as possible.

The ongoing support of our Major Partners and Partners is acknowledged as critical to our ongoing success - <https://riverhealth.org.au/our-partners/> .

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