




Speech By
Julieanne Gilbert

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

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AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to take Note

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (12.52 pm): I rise to speak on the Auditor-General's Report 20: 2014-15 *Managing water quality in Great Barrier Reef catchments*. Improving water quality in reef catchments is crucial to ensure the future health and survival of the iconic Great Barrier Reef and protect those coastal communities and industries which depend on it. The Auditor-General made five recommendations to the government, and all five have been implemented or are the subject of substantial ongoing work. The committee also notes a substantial increase in funding by the government for programs to improve water quality.

There is a lot of work to be done by all sectors to keep improving the quality of water run-off into the Great Barrier Reef. There has been progress made by agricultural industries. Over 240,000 hectares—or 50 per cent—of the cane growing area in the reef catchment is covered by Smart Cane Best Practice Management. In relation to recommendation 2 of the audit, the report of the Great Barrier Reef Water Science Taskforce has provided further frank advice to the government towards achieving its ambitious 2025 water quality improvement targets. The committee welcomes the findings of the task force, particularly its call to all industries for a more collaborative approach and its recommendation for enhanced communication, increased levels of agriculture extension and innovation, expanded water quality monitoring, greater financial and other incentives and staged, targeted regulations.

There is a need for every sector to collaborate and contribute to water quality improvements including farmers, graziers, developers, the resource sector, community members and tourism. I would like to congratulate the sugar industry in the wider Mackay region. They are committed to best practice. I would like to share with the House an example of the sugar industry's best practice. Mr Paul Schrembri, a canefarmer for 41 years, is an example of a progressive farmer who is working towards improving farm practice to improve water quality on the reef together with local farmers. He and his brother operate three farms, and they are working towards best practice management accreditation. Mr Schrembri is a leader in the sugar industry, a director of Canegrowers Mackay and a member of the Canegrowers Queensland policy council. Mr Schrembri knows that best practice increases productivity while at the same time deriving sustainable benefits that protect the Great Barrier Reef. Smartcane BMP helps canegrowers with modules specifically tailored to improve soil health, nutrient management, irrigation and drainage management and weed, pest and disease management. Meeting the practices in the modules helps canefarmers enhance their profitability and productivity and meet legislative requirements. Mr Schrembri uses printed maps of his farm on top of which he records fertiliser and chemical applications. After harvesting he can compare the harvest results from each block with fertilisers and chemical application rates. This helps determine the most cost-effective application of fertilisers and chemicals for their farm while minimising run-off.

Mr Schrembri, like a lot of other farmers in my region, is working hard to improve the water quality of the Great Barrier Reef. They also know that it is improving the productivity of their farms. The state government has allocated \$5.85 million for Smartcane BMP for 2014-17. I would like to thank my fellow committee members for their work in putting this report together. I commend the report to the House.