

QUESTION ON NOTICE

No. 895

asked on Thursday, 17 September 2015

MR CRAWFORD ASKED THE MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE PROTECTION AND MINISTER FOR NATIONAL PARKS AND THE GREAT BARRIER REEF (HON DR S MILES)—

QUESTION:

How will efforts to improve water quality in the Great Barrier Reef affect our sugar cane industry?

ANSWER:

Strong scientific evidence confirms that significant quantities of fertiliser and pesticides from sugarcane farms are entering the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) lagoon. The reduction in water quality increases the risk of serious long-term effects on the reef health and decreases its resilience to pressures such as climate change and ocean acidification.

The Department of Environment and Heritage Protection's (EHP) Reef Water Quality program works with cane growers and across government, industry and researchers to promote practices that will improve profitability and productivity and reduce the loss of pollutants from cane farms within the Wet Tropics, Burdekin and Mackay-Whitsundays catchments.

EHP supports and funds the cane best management practice (BMP) program. The Smartcane BMP program is a voluntary industry-led system that is about improving productivity, profitability and sustainability of farm enterprises. \$3.345 million has been allocated to the program by the Queensland Government so far, and another \$5.855 million has been committed through to 2017.

In 2015, the Palaszczuk Government established a high-level GBR Water Science Taskforce (Taskforce) to help guide future actions needed to achieve targets set out in the *Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan* (to reduce nitrogen and suspended sediment run-off from key reef catchments by up to 80% and up to 50% respectively).

While the Government awaits the Taskforce's recommendations, and to accelerate progress towards these targets, EHP is putting additional resources in the Wet Tropics, Burdekin and Mackay-Whitsundays regions, to drive faster uptake of regulated standards through awareness, extension and compliance activities.

Additional departmental officers will encourage increased adoption of high priority reef regulations (fertilising and record keeping requirements) for cane farms in priority sub-catchments in the Wet Tropics and Burdekin. Specifically, all cane growers in the Wet Tropics, Burdekin and Mackay-Whitsundays catchments are required to:

1. Undertake soil tests

2. Use the results of soil tests to calculate and apply no more than the optimum amount of fertiliser (nitrogen and phosphorus).
3. Follow label conditions when using any agricultural chemical
4. Follow specific additional controls when using the herbicides atrazine, ametryn, hexazinone and diuron.
5. Keep records on the use of fertilisers and pesticides

Modern cane farm management practices lead to increased farm productivity and profitability, at the same time as delivering better environmental outcomes.

The Palaszczuk Government is committed to continuing to work collaboratively with the sugar cane industry to support increased uptake of improved farm management practices across the industry.