

# Stories

OF NRM PARTNERS

## Farmer-centric project is a lesson in collaboration



“We’ve seen unprecedented engagement thanks to a farmer-centric approach, a much faster turnaround of water quality data, and we have buyers lined up to invest in Reef Credits, paid for preventing nutrients and sediment from entering the Great Barrier Reef catchment.”

Fiona George, Terrain NRM

Hundreds of ideas from 40 organisations and 300 people helped to inform the Wet Tropics Major Integrated Project to stop runoff from reaching the Great Barrier Reef, but in the end much of its success came down to ‘walking’ the local landscape with landholders in the Tully and Johnstone catchments south of Cairns.

The project’s main goal of improving water quality has also included the creation of an innovative Reef Credits scheme that’s making waves globally, with financier HSBC the first to buy in.

“We broke the two basins down into 13–15 areas and ran ‘Walking the Landscape’ sessions with local farmers to ask about the history of the land — where it flooded, who owned it, how it had been managed and what hadn’t worked to date,” says Fiona George, Project Leader from Terrain NRM.

Denitrification bioreactors that turn nitrates to gas, removing them from water flows, are one of the treatment systems being trialled in the project.



“They looked at our maps and said, ‘Oh no, the creek doesn’t do that, it runs this way’ or ‘Don’t put a monitoring station there because when it floods, the water bypasses that’. So it was crucial, not only for project planning but because it showed farmers that we wanted to walk with them on the journey.”

### QUICK TURNAROUND OF WATER QUALITY DATA IS KEY

The farmer-centric approach and a much faster turnaround in water quality data to show how their practices impact the end of the catchments attracted 450 ‘amazingly engaged’ farmers, Fiona says, with 37 demonstration sites set up and 1,850 workshop participants.

An integral part of the Major Integrated Project (MIP) was the development of Reef Credits, a new scheme generating a tradeable unit or ‘credit’ for preventing nutrients and sediment from entering the Great Barrier Reef catchment. The scheme already has more buyers lining up than sellers.

The Wet Tropics MIP has been distilled down to five key actions — local monitoring of ‘my creek’; end of train treatment systems/ catchment repair, to build wetlands, enhance

bogs and use high-efficiency sediment basins and bioreactors to strip out nitrates; engaging with landholders to help them understand the data; innovative financing through Reef Credits; and telling positive stories of farm practice change.

“For the first time we’re translating the science into something relevant and meaningful and farmers are telling us ‘I thought I was doing a really good job but I can see from the data that I need to change’,” Fiona says.

Tight collaborative partnerships between Terrain NRM, CANEGROWERS and the Australian Banana Growers’ Council have boosted the project’s credibility with industry.

Terrain NRM is proud of what the Wet Tropics MIP has achieved through a farmer-centric focus and collaborations with industry in reducing runoff to the Great Barrier Reef.

Funded by: The Wet Tropics Major Integrated Project is funded through the Queensland Government’s Reef Water Quality Program.

### LEARN MORE

➔ <https://terrain.org.au/major-integrated-project/>