Reef Rescue

Reef Rescue is a five year, $200 million investment by the Australian Government forming a key part of the Caring for Our Country initiative. This initiative takes a coordinated approach to restoring the health of Australia’s environment and building on improved land management practices.

The objective of Reef Rescue is to improve the water quality of the Great Barrier Reef lagoon by reducing the run-off of nutrients, pesticides and sediments from agricultural land.

Reef Rescue has five integrated components:
1) Water Quality Grants,
2) Reef Partnerships,
3) Land and Sea Country Indigenous Partnerships,
4) Reef Water Quality Research and Development,
5) and Water Quality Monitoring and Reporting.

The major allocation of these funds is to Water Quality Grants ($146M to 5 NRM groups) to support voluntary action by farmers and land managers to improve land management practices. Reef Rescue funding is managed by Queensland’s coastal natural resource management organisations and peak agricultural industry groups. The first year of funding was delivered in 2008 and will continue to roll out over the next four years.

Terrain’s role

Terrain’s Sustainable Industries Unit works in partnership with agricultural industry groups to coordinate and deliver Reef Rescue funding in the Wet Tropics.

The unit aims to promote the uptake of improved land management practices thereby increasing the sustainability of farming, while reducing nutrient, pesticide and sediment losses from paddocks.

Reef Rescue funded projects in the Terrain NRM, Wet Tropics region

The first round of funding released in 2008/09, funded 110 projects in the Wet Tropics. These projects were to upgrade a variety of management practices in the sugarcane, horticulture, grazing, and dairy industries.

Funds were also allocated to improve catchment resilience through wetland and riparian rehabilitation projects, and to provide training. Courses entitled ‘Dairying Better ‘n’ Better for the Future”, ‘Grazing Land Management Plus’, ‘Six Easy Steps for Soil Specific Nutrient Application’, and ‘Integrated Weed Management’ were provided to producers.

There was a tremendous interest from the farming community in applying for the first round of funds. This interest has continued into the second round of funding, with many farmers seeing positive results in the improved efficiency of neighbouring farms, with associated benefits to the environment.
Reef Rescue process

Applicants must show that their project aims to improve current practices according to the industry practice change tables. Extension Officers are employed in the sugar cane, banana, papaw grazing, dairy and multi-cropping industries to assist producers with determining priority projects for Reef Rescue funding.

Project proposals are assessed by a panel of five from each of the industries to ensure that the top projects are funded. Projects are assessed on the positive impact they will have on reducing the nutrient, sediment and pesticide loads leaving the farm.

Partial funds are delivered for projects, and final payment made upon an evaluation of the completed project. These projects may be used to showcase best management practices and for training.

Reef Rescue funding

Wet Tropics region, 2009

Funds were available through the second round of funding for 2009/2010 to individual farmers for projects ranging from $2,000 to $40,000, and up to $150,000 for multi-farm projects. Farmers must make a contribution of 50% of total project costs as cash plus in-kind to the funded project.

The achievement of improved agricultural practices through Reef Rescue incentives will enhance the economic and environmental sustainability of the farms, and will also benefit the health of the Great Barrier Reef.

Examples of funded projects

Nutrient management

- Precision fertiliser application equipment (GPS guidance, variable rate and sub surface application)
- Fertilisation equipment
- Precision mill mud, compost, lime and manure application equipment
- Direct drill legume planting equipment
- Intensive soil sampling to determine soil variations and develop nutrient management plans
- Computing software for monitoring nutrient applications and calculating requirements
- Nutrient management courses - Six Easy Steps (cane farmers)
- Technology to develop accurate irrigation scheduling

Pesticide management

- Hooded or shielded sprayers for non-residual herbicide application to crops
- Rate control equipment linked to GPS
- Modification of spraying equipment for wide rows
- Integrated weed management courses

Sediment management

- Sediment and silt traps
- Grassed inter-rows, headlands
- Contouring paddocks to control water flow (Tablelands)
- Modifications to control and reduce traffic
- Changing from deep eroding drains to grassed spoon drains
- Zonal tillage equipment
- Water management (increasing efficiency)
- Off stream water points and fencing to control cattle access to stream banks and sensitive areas
- Subdivision of blocks to allow pasture spelling and reduce overgrazing
- Riparian and wetlands management.

For further information on Reef Rescue contact your local industry Extension Officer, or John Reghenzani at Terrain NRM.

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