



WWF *for a living planet*[®]

WWF-Australia
Level 1, 1 Smail Street
Ultimo, NSW 2007
Australia

T: +61 2 8228 6800
F: +61 2 9281 0369
www.wwf.org.au

Media Release

Queensland farmers provide solutions for a stressed planet

Brisbane, Australia: A global report that shows dramatic declines in biodiversity around the planet has highlighted the positive work being done by many Queensland farmers to reduce pollution on the Great Barrier Reef.

The farmers on the Great Barrier Reef coast are working in partnership with government, scientists and NGOs to demonstrate how reducing farm run-off can boost farm productivity and be good for business, jobs and the marine environment.

The work is showcased in a global report launched by WWF at the United Nations in Geneva today that measures changes to the world's biodiversity and habitats over the past 40 years, and ranks the Ecological Footprint of 152 countries.

While Australia scores poorly in the report, which ranks us as having the 13th largest ecological footprint per capita in the world, the Queensland farmers provide a positive example of how to tackle one of the world's biggest threats to marine life.

"The 2014 Living Planet Report identifies catchment run-off as one of the biggest threats to marine environments around the world and nowhere is this more apparent than the Great Barrier Reef," said WWF-Australia CEO Dermot O'Gorman.

"Water running off farms flushes fertilisers, pesticides and soil into rivers and onto the Reef, with dire consequences not only for corals, sea grasses and marine wildlife but also for almost 69,000 full-time jobs in tourism, fishing and other industries that depend on a healthy reef."

A recent study found that reef coral cover has halved since 1985¹. More than 40 per cent of this loss was due to outbreaks of the coral-eating crown of thorns starfish, which are fuelled by fertilizer run-off from farms.

With the decline in the Reef's health – exacerbated by outdated fishing practices, and threats such as port expansion, the dumping of dredge spoil and climate change – the World Heritage Committee is considering adding the Great Barrier Reef to its "In Danger" list.

While the Reef faces significant threats, the Living Planet Report credits innovative farming practices for achieving a 15 per cent reduction of pesticide pollution and a 13 per cent reduction of fertilizer pollution onto the Reef over the past five years.

The governments' latest Reef Plan Report Card, published since the Living Planet Report went to print, shows an even better result, with pesticide pollution reduced by 28 per cent and fertilizer pollution down by 16 per cent, thanks to changed farming practices and investment by the Australian and Queensland governments.

¹ De'ath et al., 2012

“These initial results are very encouraging but to ensure the Great Barrier Reef’s survival, we now need to scale up this good work across all farmers and all of the catchments that run into the Reef,” Mr O’Gorman said.

“Australian governments are currently consulting on the draft Reef 2050 Plan which aims to set out the actions and investments needed to secure the Great Barrier Reef’s future.

“Restoring the Reef to its former glory will require a significant boost in both public and private investment, from millions of dollars currently allocated to billions of dollars.”

The tenth edition of the Living Planet Report shows that representative populations of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and fish have declined by 52 per cent around the world since 1970. In the Indo-Pacific region, there has been a 67 per cent decline over the same period.

“Of the populations of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish tracked since 1970, we’ve lost more than half in just two generations,” said WWF-Australia CEO Dermot O’Gorman.

“The planet is clearly under stress but with better production, smarter consumption, and better choices to protect our natural assets and reduce our footprint we can turn the tide and start to live within our means.”

The report also ranks the ecological footprints of 152 countries, with Australia having the 13th biggest ecological footprint per capita on the planet, at 6.25 global hectares² per person each year.

It measures Australia’s footprint as being made up mostly of carbon pollution, followed by the amount of land required for crops and grazing, and shows that if everyone lived like we do in Australia in 2014, we would need 3.6 planets to produce the natural resources consumed over the year.

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The complete report can be found at www.wwf.org.au/lpr2014

Photos and video are available on request.

For more information:

Charlie Stevens, Senior Communications Specialist, WWF-Australia, cstevens@wwf.org.au, 0424649689

For media enquiries contact:

Janine Bavin (Momentum2) (T) 02 9252 4800 (M) 0417 291 583 / JBavin@momentum2.com.au
Erin Frick (Momentum2) (T) 02 9252 4800 (M) 0487 444 201 / Eflick@momentum2.com.au

² A global hectare is a common unit that averages out what the world’s productive land and ocean can generate over the course of a year. This includes cropland, forests and fishing grounds but does not include unproductive environments like deserts, glaciers and the open ocean.