

MEDIA RELEASE 26/02/2015

## Leading sugar growers gather in Townsville for Project Catalyst

### Sugar farmers showcase serious action state-wide to reduce the impact of agriculture the Great Barrier Reef.

Forward thinking cane farmers will gather in Townsville this week, **March 1st – 3rd** to share ideas, outcomes and celebrate major steps being taken to improve the environmental and economic outcomes of Queensland sugar production.

The Project Catalyst Growers Forum 2015 will highlight outcomes of growers working as part of Project Catalyst to reduce the impact of pollution on the Great Barrier Reef. Under the program, cane farmers in catchment areas adjacent to the reef are supported to make changes to reduce nutrient, fertiliser and pollutant runoff.

To date, 78 cane farmers involved in Project Catalyst farm trials have helped improve runoff and drainage water quality of an estimated 102,000 megalitres – an amount equivalent to the water it would take to fill 40,000 Olympic sized swimming pools.

Trials have been implemented across 20,345 ha of land during the six years the program has been running.

Critically, work being done by Queensland cane farmers is now estimated to cut pollutant loads to the reef by about 183 tonnes each year.

This includes the following annual load reductions to the Great Barrier Reef Lagoon for the 2013/14 cane growing season:

- Decrease of 72 tonne/year for particulate nitrogen
- Decrease of 34 tonne/year for particulate phosphorus
- Decrease of 64 tonne/year for dissolved inorganic nitrogen
- Decrease of 13 tonne/year for filterable reactive phosphorus
- Decrease of 551 kg/year for pesticide.

Reef Catchments CEO Robert Cocco said, “The primary purpose of Project Catalyst is to reduce the environmental footprint that sugarcane has on freshwater and the Great Barrier Reef. We do this by supporting a network of innovative farmers that are speeding the adoption of cutting edge management practices.”

Tony Bugeja, Project Catalyst cane farmer from Mackay, said he was a firm believer in combining environmental responsibility and good sense.

“As the saying goes, there is no point being green if you’re in the red. But we have found in our experience that it comes down to just doing things more efficiently – when there is a dollar value and an improved environmental outcome, why wouldn’t you try something different? To me, everybody should be worried about things like soil erosion and water quality. I want to leave this farm and land for my son in a better condition than when it was given to me.”

Now in its sixth year, Project Catalyst is a pioneering partnership between cane farmers, The Coca Cola Foundation, WWF-Australia, Catchment Solutions, NQ Dry Tropics and Terrain NRM. Farmers are involved from major areas of sugar production and corresponding NRM catchments in Mackay and the Whitsundays, the Burdekin and the Wet Tropics.

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Major partner, The Coca-Cola Foundation, last week announced a further \$500,000 grant to Project Catalyst Australia, which brings its total investment into the Project to \$3.25 million over the past six years.

Michelle Allen from Coca-Cola South Pacific said The Coca-Cola Foundation was proud to be working alongside Project Catalyst farmers.

“Australian sugarcane growers involved in the Project are leading the industry through innovation. Project Catalyst is one of many water projects supported globally by The Coca-Cola Foundation; and we are really proud of what local farmers have achieved.

“Project Catalyst marked the first extension of The Coca-Cola Foundation’s global partnership with WWF into the South-Pacific, and is an example of the Foundation displaying leadership through innovation in the key environmental impact area of sustainable agriculture.”

WWF-Australia CEO Dermot O’Gorman said, “Containing more than 10 per cent of the world’s total fish species, over 600 species of hard and soft corals, and attracting over 2 million visitors per year, the Reef is an Australian and global treasure which needs to be protected.

“What we are seeing with Project Catalyst is cutting edge innovation. It is a model for working together that we hope to scale up in Queensland and replicate in other places and with other commodities. Project Catalyst is having an impact not only in Australia, but around the world.”

***With thanks to partners, supporters and sponsors of the Project Catalyst Forum 2015: The Coca Cola Foundation, WWF-Australia, Bayer CropScience, Syngenta, Case IH, Netafim, Wilmar, Suncorp, Inkerman Lime & Gypsum, Farmacist, Catchment Solutions, QDAFF, Reef Catchments, NQ Dry Tropics and Terrain NRM, with support from the Australian Government.***

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**EVENT:** Project Catalyst Growers Forum 2015

**DATE:** March 1<sup>st</sup> – March 3<sup>rd</sup>

**LOCATION:** Townsville | Jupiters Townsville Hotel and Casino

