

Urban Water Stewardship Framework 2022–2023 round summary findings

About the Urban Water Stewardship Framework

The Urban Water Stewardship Framework (framework) is supporting councils and the development and construction industry in the Reef catchment to evaluate their urban water management practices and identify opportunities for improvement.

The framework provides an evidence basis for identifying and prioritising aspects to invest in to help bring them up to current best practice standards. It also helps generate greater dialogue between councils and urban developers in terms of how they can act collectively to generate better water quality outcomes.

The framework assessed water management practices and activities related to three main areas:



erosion and sediment control, along with stormwater treatment design and construction, during the construction phase of urban development (Developing Urban component)



stormwater treatment asset management and the protection of riparian zones and natural wetlands in established urban areas (Established Urban component)



operation and maintenance of sewage treatment plants (STP) and associated sewer networks (Point Source component)

The framework assessment process was applied for the first time in 2020-2021 to 13 local government areas, spread across four report card partnership regions within the Great Barrier Reef catchment:

- » [Wet Tropics Waterways](#)
- » [Dry Tropics Partnership for Healthy Waters](#)
- » [Mackay Whitsunday Isaac Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership](#)
- » [Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership](#)

The framework was applied again in 2022-2023 as part of a biennial assessment process, covering 12 of the 13 local government areas covered in 2020-2021.

The 2022-2023 results for most report card partnership regions are available in the report cards and management response reports, as outlined below:

- » [Wet Tropics Waterways—Urban Stewardship](#)
- » [Dry Tropics Partnership for Healthy Waters 2023](#)
- » [Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership Stewardship—Healthy Harbour, Healthy Future 2021](#) (page 4)

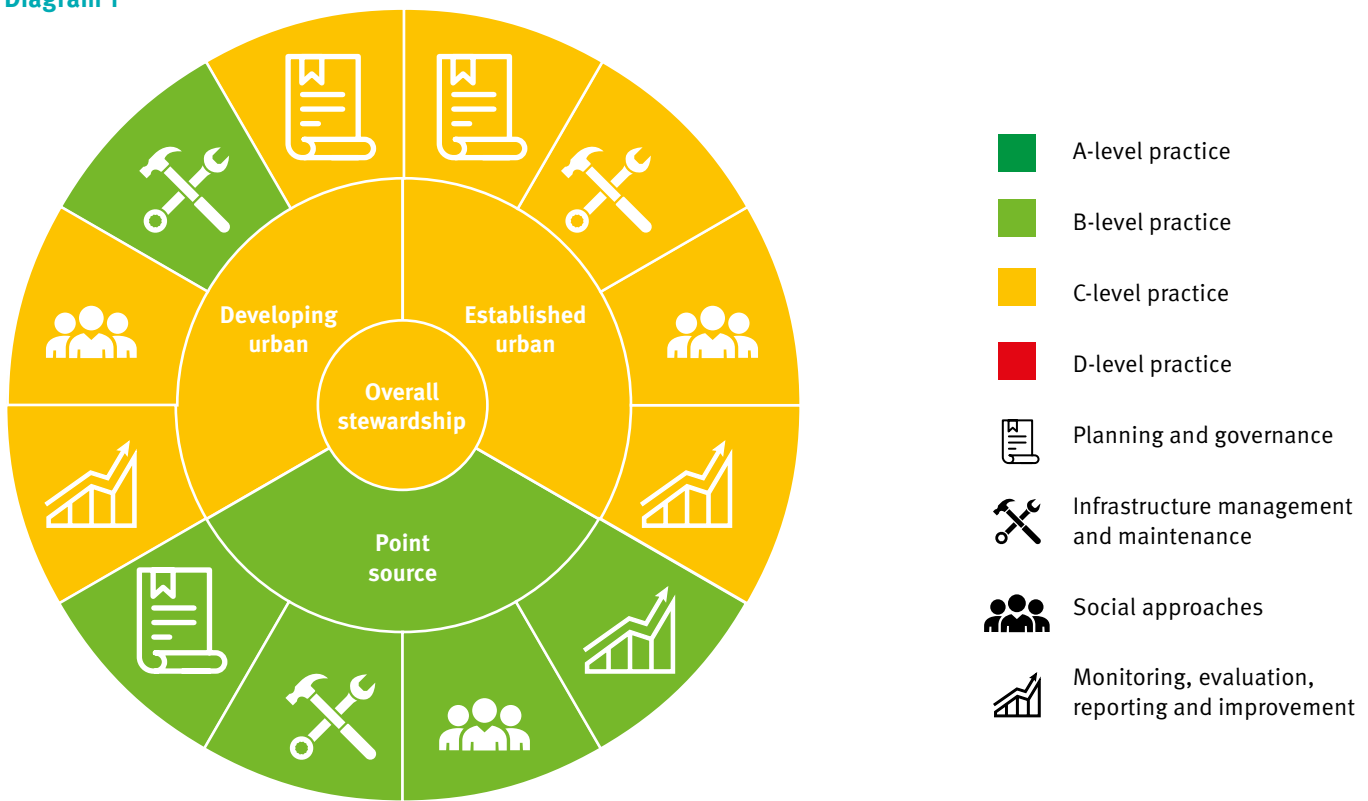
Participating councils have received detailed information on practice levels ratings recorded for their own local government areas.

Combined 2022-2023 results and key findings for the four participating Reef report card partnership regions are presented in Diagram 1, including changes since 2020-2021.

Main results

- » Across all local government areas within the four regions, the average level of practice across all management aspects in 2022-2023 was C-level, as it was 2020-21. This indicates that urban water management is below best practice level at this broad spatial scale. This represents a moderate to high level of risk to the quality of water discharged from urban areas to the Reef.
- » This outcome was once again driven by the on-average C-level result for the Developing Urban and Established Urban components. This indicates that the biggest areas for improvement relate to diffuse source pollution management (i.e. managing erosion and stormwater run-off).
- » The average level of practice for the Point Source component, which relates to the operation and maintenance of sewage treatment plants and associated sewer networks, was once again B-level (current best practice).
- » Of the 12 councils that participated in both assessment rounds, all but two improved their framework scores for overall urban water management from 2020-2021. This led to a rating improvement from C-level to B-level practice in two cases. Hence, urban water management in the Reef catchment is trending in the right direction.

Diagram 1



Key findings

Even though the level of practice for Developing and Established Urban could be better, some aspects linked to these components are being done well.

For the Developing component, councils are good at ensuring the Erosion and Sediment Controls are prepared and assessed by those suitably qualified as part of development approval conditions and that measures in these plans are specific to the nature of the development site. They also inspect development sites at appropriate times during the construction phase.

- » For the Established Urban component, councils are good at: incorporating stormwater management service standards into strategic infrastructure planning requirements; managing erosion during maintenance on stormwater treatment assets; community education and capacity building programs related to catchment management; and delivering on Reef Guardian Council annual reporting obligations for stormwater management.
- » Management practice level improvement for Developing Urban could be achieved through the incorporation of greater site-specificity into Site Based Stormwater Management Plans and adaptive risk management strategies for these plans and Erosion and Sediment Control Plans.
- » Management practice level improvement for Established Urban could be achieved through greater adoption of formal Stormwater Quality Management Plans outlining the stormwater infrastructure and catchment protection needs for the local government area and resources required to meet these needs.
- » Some aspects of Point Source management were done at current best practice level or above by most or all participating councils. This included: diverting as much treated wastewater from release as practical through application to nearby land or beneficial

reuse; having appropriate sewer network asset management systems in place; training and capacity building strategies to maintain staff competencies; and having early detection systems in place to minimise leaks from the sewer network.

- » Further improvement in Point Source management could potentially be achieved through utilising existing stakeholder networks to develop catchment restoration or stormwater treatment-based offset solutions to address expected increases in sewage treatment plant nutrient load emission with population increase.

Where to next?

- » A third round of Urban Water Stewardship Framework assessment will commence in 2024-2025 and will be expanded to a fifth Reef report card partnership region ([Fitzroy Partnership for River Health](#)).
- » The Queensland Government will also investigate how the framework can be rolled out to Reef catchment councils outside the report card partnership regions. The framework is also being piloted in south east Queensland in 2024.
- » The Queensland Government is using assessment data from the Urban Water Stewardship Framework to understand how existing support programs can be better targeted and what other support measures could be introduced.
- » The Urban Water Stewardship Framework will undergo a formal review process after the 2024-2025 assessment round.

For further information on the Queensland Government's actions, visit [protecting the Great Barrier Reef](#).