



# Participating in the Urban Water Stewardship Framework

## Information for councils

### Background

The Queensland and local governments have key responsibilities for managing urban water pollution and maintaining and protecting the health of local waterways for the benefit of their communities, and to protect the Great Barrier Reef.

Local governments are at the forefront of urban water pollution management and the challenges they face in dealing with the multifaceted nature of this task with the resources available are recognised.

The agricultural land management sector has a well-developed, comprehensive support program to help improve farm management practices to meet Reef water quality targets. This was made possible partly through the analysis of data collected on the level of practice being applied on the ground to manage nutrient, fine sediment and pesticide run-off.

In order to develop a comprehensive, targeted support program to help local government manage urban pollution in the Reef catchment, an equivalent data collection and analysis process is needed in regard to urban water management practice levels. This is summarised in the Theory of Change diagram below.

A management practice benchmarking and reporting framework, the Urban Water Stewardship Framework (the framework) was developed through industry sector consultation, including input from Reef Guardian Councils, the Local Government Association of Queensland and several Queensland local governments. The Queensland Government has funded the implementation of the framework to date, however, the Australian Government committed to coinvesting in the implementation of the third assessment round (2024–2025).

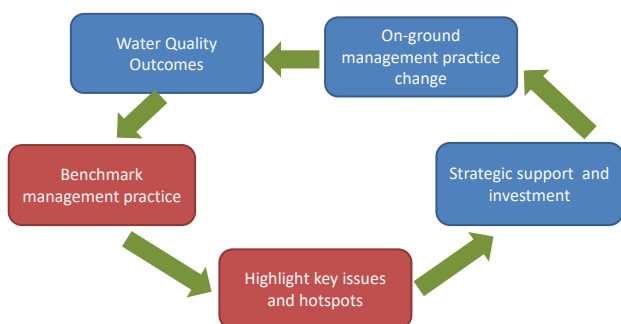
The framework applies to management activities relating to:

- erosion and sediment control and stormwater treatment system design during the construction phase
- stormwater treatment and natural catchment asset maintenance during the post-construction phase
- sewage treatment plant and sewer network operation and maintenance.

The framework was successfully piloted in three local government areas in 2019, and subsequently implemented in 13 local government areas as a Reef Independent Science Panel-endorsed method in 2020–2021 and 2022–2023. A further three local governments in South East Queensland implemented the framework in 2024.

Framework assessment results have been published by regional report card partnerships (for region-level results) and by the Queensland Government (for cross-regional results). Links to these results are provided in the Urban Water Stewardship Framework Fact Sheet. Participating local governments have each received reports with detailed level results and targeted recommendations. These are not released publicly.

### Theory of Change



## What is the benefit to councils in participating?

### Gaining information that can help shape or increase the efficiency and effectiveness of Councils' urban water management strategy

- By participating in a framework assessment workshop, which takes less than a day, Council can obtain valuable information to help identify and prioritise urban water management aspects for improvement. This can assist with strategic planning and budgeting and improve the integration and coordination of management actions.
- The workshop process represents a unique opportunity to break down some of the traditional management silos within Council, promoting better working relationships and knowledge sharing, ultimately leading to greater work efficiencies and better outcomes.
- The data collected will be used to help the Queensland and Australian governments develop and fund support programs to assist local governments improve urban water management. Having Council data contribute to this will increase the likelihood that those support programs address Council's needs.

### Demonstrating Council's commitment to water pollution management to the community

- Participation in framework assessment process is an activity that can be promoted to the community. It demonstrates that Council is willing to reflect on and take steps to improve its urban water management practices, where appropriate.
  - Examples of how Council demonstrates best urban water management practices will almost certainly be identified as part of the assessment process. These can be promoted to the community.

### Supporting partnerships and programs that Council is involved in

- If a Council is a partner of a regional report card partnership, participation in the framework assessment process is a way to support the

inclusion of a report card metric that relates to Council's core environmental management responsibilities as a partner organisation.

- If Council is a Reef Guardian Council member, participation in the framework assessment process is a land-based management activity that can be listed as an action in Council's Reef Guardian Councils annual report.
- If Council is participating in the Queensland Government's Erosion and Sediment Control and Urban Stormwater Capacity Building program, the framework assessment process can be used to track the management practice outcomes from the training provided.

### Supporting future grant funding applications

- Framework assessment results highlighting aspects requiring improvement can potentially be used as supporting evidence to justify grant funding for schemes that have a catchment management or urban water pollution focus.

## Testimonial

### Mayor Matt Burnett, Gladstone Regional Council

*"The Urban Water Stewardship Framework was great for a broad range of Council employees to review areas for improvement and acknowledging the great work that is happening to improve urban impacts on the water quality in our region and the Great Barrier Reef.*

*It provides an opportunity for Council to monitor progress relating to our activities and services in planning and development, erosion and sediment control, stormwater asset management and sewage asset management and operation and compare where we were to where we are now and what changed, for better or worse.*

*The UWSF provides us the opportunity to prioritise and focus on areas where we may need to improve the quality and outcomes through our planning and practices."*

Source: Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership Above and Below Stewardship Report – 2023 edition, page 8).

## How can the data Council provides be protected?

Workshops are not open to members of the public and any discussions held as part of the workshop process will be kept confidential.

Results for individual local councils are not published, except where a council is the only one within a report card partnership region (or the only assessed on a natural resource management region).

All data supplied to the Queensland Government for quality assurance and quality control or presented in technical reports accompanying report cards are de-identified for individual local governments.

Restrictions are placed on the use of the framework assessment data collected. Data cannot be used for compliance or distributed to third parties, other than for use by the Australian and Queensland governments in preparing the Reef Water Quality Report Card, or for developing support programs to assist councils improve urban water management and/or review and refine policy and legislation.

In the past, the detailed level framework assessment data provided to the Queensland Government for analysis to assist with developing support programs has been collated and de-identified by the Local Government Association of Queensland beforehand. This process can be maintained if it is the preferred approach, but it would limit the ability to use the data to provide targeted support to each council.

Councils interested in participating in the framework process in 2024–2025 will be invited to nominate whether or not they agree to have their data made identifiable for the purpose of assisting the Queensland and Australian governments develop a targeted support program for urban water management in the Reef catchment.

## When is the next opportunity to participate in the framework assessment process?

The framework is currently implemented every two years, with the next one scheduled for 2024–2025. **Councils in the Reef catchment are invited to participate in this third round of assessment.**

The Australian Government has invested funds to expand the program currently funded by the Queensland Government to councils beyond the Reef regional report card partnership regions. This

will help deliver a more representative data set on urban water management practice level in the Reef catchment. This will help the Queensland and Australian governments develop a more targeted and integrated joint support program to help councils achieve best management practice.

## What is required to participate?

Participating in the framework assessment process involves a small number of council staff with roles and responsibilities related to urban water management aspects covered by the framework, providing their perspectives at a one-day workshop, facilitated by an independent team with direct subject matter knowledge and experience. Guidance on the types of roles and responsibilities that should be represented at these workshops is provided by the workshop facilitator to Council's nominated point of contact to ensure appropriate staff attend.

With framework ratings based mainly on subject matter expert opinion discussed during the workshop, there is no significant preparation required. However, there is sometimes benefit in participants reviewing existing information beforehand to assist them with the management practice level rating process.

## Who do I talk to about participating?

If you are interested in participating in the framework assessment process and your council is a partner organisation in a Reef Regional Report Card Partnership, please contact your relevant Regional Report Card Partnership:

Wet Tropics Waterways  
[info@wettropicswaterways.org.au](mailto:info@wettropicswaterways.org.au)

Dry Tropics Partnership for Healthy Waters  
[info@drytropicshealthywaters.org](mailto:info@drytropicshealthywaters.org)

Mackay-Whitsunday-Isaac Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership  
[info@healthyriverstoreef.org.au](mailto:info@healthyriverstoreef.org.au)

Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership  
[info@ghhp.org.au](mailto:info@ghhp.org.au)

Fitzroy Partnership for River Health  
[admin@riverhealth.org.au](mailto:admin@riverhealth.org.au)

For local governments not within a Reef Report Card Partnership region, please email [officeoftheqbr@des.qld.gov.au](mailto:officeoftheqbr@des.qld.gov.au)