



Urban Water Stewardship Framework Factsheet

What is the Urban Water Stewardship Framework?

The Urban Water Stewardship Framework (the framework) is a tool for assessing and reporting on the level of practice applied to key aspects of urban land use management relative to water quality risk.

What are the drivers for the framework?

The Great Barrier Reef (the Reef) is under increasing pressure. Improving water quality is important to build the resilience of the Reef and its ecosystems to climate change impacts.

[The Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan \(Reef 2050 WQIP\)](#) – the guiding strategy for water quality improvement in the Reef catchment – seeks to reduce pollution from land-based activities, including urban land use.

While the amount of nutrient and sediment pollution generated from urban areas and released to the Reef is small compared to that from agricultural land use (due to the relative size of the area associated with each of these land uses), it can still have a locally significant impact if not managed effectively. The framework was developed to assess the effectiveness of urban land use management relative to water quality risk and identify the aspects of most in need of support to achieve practice level improvement.

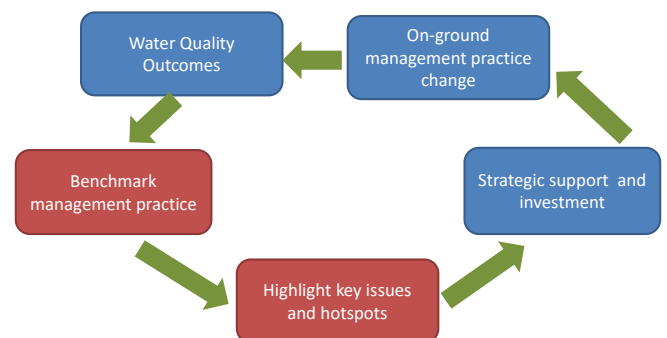
What is the purpose of the framework?

The main purpose of the framework is to provide a consistent means of evaluating and reporting on the level of practice applied to urban water management-related activities. This provides an evidence basis for the development of targeted support programs by various levels of government to improve urban water

management and reduce pollutant loads to local waterways and the Reef.

The Theory of Change diagram below reflects how framework assessment results are expected to result in improvements in water quality for the Reef and connected local waterways.

Theory of Change



Who does the framework assessment process apply to?

The framework assessment applies primarily to local governments but has aspects that apply to the development and construction sector, and water service providers (where this service is separate from council).

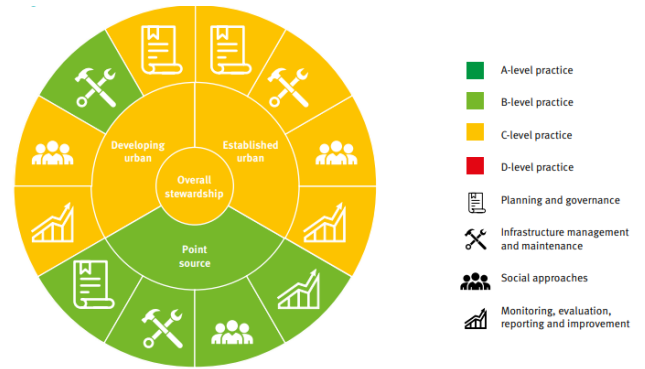
What management activities does the framework cover?

- The framework covers 66 management activities in total, linked to three components: 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.



For each of these components, it covers planning cycle and on-ground implementation aspects relating to:

- policy, planning and governance
- infrastructure management and maintenance
- capacity building, training, research and development (referred to as ‘Social Approaches’)
- monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI).



How was the framework developed?

The Queensland Government developed the framework with input from a range of stakeholder organisations, including the Local Government Association Queensland, Queensland Water Directorate, Reef Guardian Councils, Health Land and Water - Water by Design and a range of local governments over a three-year period. It was piloted successfully in three local government areas in late 2019 prior to being implemented in full for the first time in 2020–2021.

It has now been applied to 16 local government areas spread across five report card partnership regions ([Wet Tropics Waterways](#); [Healthy Waters Partnership for the Dry Tropics](#), [Mackay-Whitsunday-Isaac Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership](#) and [Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership](#) in the Reef catchment and the South East Queensland natural resource management (NRM) region, which the [Ecosystem Health Monitoring Program report card](#) covers). This includes a second round of assessment in the Reef catchment in 2022–2023, which covered 12 of the 13 councils that took part in the 2020–2021 assessment.

The Australian Government has invested in the expanded roll out of the framework in 2024–2025.

How are framework results generated?

Management practices for each activity are assigned by participating subject matter experts from a given local government in a facilitated workshop setting. Practice level is rated on a four-point (ABCD) scale for each activity using bespoke evaluation criteria.

Based on a nested scoring system, practice level grades are generated for various activity groupings. These range from those linked to council level performance objectives to framework components, to the combined, overall urban water management practice.

Scores are averaged across participating local government areas to generate region and Reef catchment-level results. An example of a typical published framework results format is shown.

How often is the framework applied?

To date, the framework has been applied biennially, which provides momentum for the review and improvement of urban water management. It also gathers baseline data for the Australian and Queensland governments to support program design. The framework has a scheduled review following the completion of the third assessment round in 2024–2025. Assessment frequency will be considered as part of the review process.

How are framework results reported?

Participating local governments receive a report outlining the detailed and summary level results, along with key findings and recommendations. In 2024–2025, this information will also be presented to the Executive Leadership Teams of each participating local government. Unless there is only one local government in a report card partnership region, results for individual local government areas are not published.

To date, regional-level results have been reported by Reef regional report card partnerships either in report cards or in stewardship reports (for example: [Wet Tropics Waterways Urban Stewardship](#); [Healthy Waterways Partnership Dry Tropics Urban Stewardship](#); [Gladstone Healthy Harbour Partnership Stewardship Report – page 3](#); [Healthy Rivers to Reef Partnership Urban Stewardship](#)).

In 2024–2025, the intent is to have local governments outside the Reef report card partnership regions implement the framework as well. For those local governments, regional-level reporting will be attributed to the relevant NRM region and published by the Queensland Government as part of its reporting of framework results at the Reef catchment scale.

After being collated and de-identified by the Local Government Association Queensland, the framework data from participating local governments are supplied to the Queensland Government for cross-regional data analysis. This process has been carried out for the two assessment rounds completed in the

Reef catchment to date, with results and findings published on the Queensland Reef Water Quality Program website ([2020–2021 UWSF assessment round](#); [2022–2023 UWSF assessment round](#)). If the spatial coverage of the framework assessment process in the Reef catchment is sufficient in 2024–2025, consideration will be given to publishing results in the [Reef Water Quality Report Card](#).

How reliable are framework results?

The framework management practice level ratings are predominantly subjective, based on the available knowledge of subject matter expert workshop participants. Going forward, the aim is to increase the proportion of management activities that are rated based on primary data or information sources to increase confidence in the results.

Confidence in framework results at the region or Reef scale is partly a function of the proportion of available local governments that participate and the degree to which those of different population sizes, population distributions and geographic locations are represented in the assessment process. To date, region-scale framework assessments in the Reef catchment have featured local government participation rates of at or close to 100%. The aim for the 2024–2025 assessment round is to increase the representativeness of framework results through the participation of local governments in all six NRM regions in the Reef catchment, including all major urban centres.

Confidence in framework results will also increase through repeating the assessment over time, allowing temporal trends to be evaluated. The 2024–2025 assessment round will be the third full implementation of the framework and will highlight the degree to which poor practice levels for certain aspects of urban water management are persistent, potentially systemic, issues.

What Urban Water Stewardship Framework information is used to develop support programs?

The framework data (including activity practice level rating metadata) provides insights into which management activities and urban water management components are not in need of improvement and why. Region-level framework data can be used to identify hotspots where support for management practice improvement is needed most. Local government-identified framework data would allow hotspot identification and Queensland and Australian government support programs to be more nuanced. Accordingly, local governments are invited to nominate whether they would like their framework data identifiable for cross-local government area data analysis.

How will we know if urban water management improvements are leading to water quality improvement?

Urban nutrient and sediment load estimates based on the Paddock to Reef Integrated Monitoring, Modelling and Reporting Program (P2R) catchment loads model (or whole-of-urban footprint Models for Urban Stormwater Improvement Conceptualisation [MUSIC] where available) will be tracked over time and compared with corresponding trends in urban water management practice rating level to determine if there is a correlation.

How else can framework results be used?

Framework results can be used to highlight examples of good urban water management practice to the community through the media and other communication channels.

To date, individual government area framework results highlighting aspects of urban water management in need of improvement have been used to support grant funding applications (e.g. as part of the latest Reef Guardian Councils and Reef Assist grant scheme application process). There is potential to use region-level framework results to support funding applications for NRM regional plan implementation, where urban water management aspects have been included.

For more information:

Web: [‘Managing urban and non-agricultural run-off’](#)

Email: officeofthegbr@des.qld.gov.au