

Update of the Russell River Catchment Sustainability Plan 2020-2035

The Russell River Catchment Sustainability Plan 2020-2035 (RSP) is being updated to ensure that it continues to support good decision making at a catchment and project level, protecting the intrinsic values and ecosystem services of the catchment. The project includes the integration of new scientific information and identification of opportunities for maintenance and/or restoration of catchment function. The update will use Queensland's [Whole-of-System, Values-Based Framework](#) (WoS, VBF) and engage key government stakeholders, scientific institutions, Traditional Owners and the local community to co-design a robust process for implementing the Framework and meet goals of the Reef 2050 Plan and the Reef 2050 Wetlands Strategy.

About the Russell River Sustainability Plan update

The RSP is an innovative plan for the sustainable management of the Russell River Drainage sub-basin in the Wet Tropics area of Queensland.

Led by Jaragun EcoServices, this process and the resulting plan will be guided by the WoS, VBF.

Using this framework will ensure the process draws out explicit connections between the biophysical environment, the beneficiaries of the services provided by those ecosystems and the values people place on these services.

Project objectives

- Collate and synthesise research information and data undertaken for the Russell River catchment and other areas of the Great Barrier Reef.
- Undertake a review of catchment stakeholders to identify the beneficiaries from implementation of the RSP.
- Hold a Walking the Landscape workshop to confirm system components and processes and to identify the ecosystem services and threats for the Russell River catchment.
- Inform interventions and targets based on the consolidated information and data.
- Assist with the design of a robust process for scaling up implementation of the WoS, VBF to effectively meet the integrated catchment-to-Reef planning goal of the Reef 2050 Plan.
- Contribute to a suite of documents that communicate priorities from implementation of the WoS, VBF, including a Strategic Monitoring Framework to monitor the cumulative benefits to catchment systems and Reef health long-term.

Anticipated project outcomes

The project will develop:

- Synthesised information on components and processes critical to catchment function and provision of ecosystem services.
- A list of threats and the level and type of ecosystem rehabilitation and/or maintenance needed to maintain Russell River catchment function.
- An update of the RSP which will inform management interventions, monitoring, knowledge gaps, communication and cost-effective delivery.
- Input to the process for scaling up implementation of the WoS, VBF to meet Reef 2050 Plan goals, including an exemplar plan and suite of document templates to effectively communicate sustainability outcomes that will be achieved from implementation.

The updated RSP will clearly recognise the human and biophysical parts of the catchment and the processes that occur between them that lead to the ecosystem services the community benefits from. It will identify priorities for strategic, on-ground management interventions for agronomy, water quality, and natural capital, and targets to measure improvement in water quality and other co-benefits from the application of a system-based approach. The RSP will consider governance and funding arrangements for cost-effective delivery and the social capital elements that are essential for on-ground water quality and natural resource management outcomes.

Background

Jaragun EcoServices is a Wanjuru-Yidinji (Indigenous) owned and operated organisation that manages traditional country in the Russell River catchment.

In collaboration with the Department of Environment and Science, Jaragun applied the WoS, VBF to develop the initial RSP in 2020. The purpose was to provide a sustainable approach to the identification and prioritisation of interventions that benefit the community, the environment, and the Reef. The WoS, VBF integrates catchment-to-Reef management by incorporating knowledge about how catchments function, including how water flows throughout the catchment. It recognises the connections between land and sea and the approaches that can be used to better manage the cumulative water quality impacts from human activities across the landscape, at multiple scales.

Development of the original RSP was informed by synthesising scientific information and community knowledge and the identification of critical knowledge gaps. Since drafting the RSP, further research has been undertaken in the Russell catchment and elsewhere in the catchment of the GBR to fill several of these gaps.

The RSP recognises the potential for large reductions in target pollutants for water quality improvement from multiple interlinked interventions. It identifies threats to Reef and catchment health and demonstrates the suite of co-benefits that accrue from application of the WoS, VB



Russell River catchment

Photograph: Gary Cranitch © Queensland Museum

approach, including improvements to biodiversity outcomes, resilience to climate change, disaster mitigation and other environmental outcomes.

Project participants, governance and links

The Department of Environment and Science will lead the project in partnership with Jaragun EcoServices.

The RSP identifies the governance arrangements required to implement a holistic, collaborative planning framework that is inclusive of a range of industry, Traditional Owner, community, scientific, government and other stakeholder interests. This governance approach recognises the role of stewardship in land management to create the necessary momentum required to meet Reef 2050 Plan objectives. Governance sits alongside an integrated funding approach that supports investment in Nature-based Solutions and cost-effective implementation.

A Governance Committee of primary stakeholders will provide input from across the Queensland and Commonwealth Government, local government, NRM organisations, community groups and others.

In addition to the Reef 2050 Plan, the project supports many other government priorities including advancing climate science action under the Queensland Climate Adaptation Strategy (Q-CAS) and is aligned with the Biodiversity and Ecosystems Climate Adaptation Plan for Queensland.

The Queensland Wetlands Program supports projects and activities that result in long-term benefits to the sustainable management, wise use, and protection of wetlands in Queensland. The tools developed by the Program help wetlands landholders, managers and decisionmakers in government industry. The Queensland Wetlands Program is currently funded by the Queensland Government.

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