

GREAT BARRIER REEF PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL 2009

- The Great Barrier Reef is Queensland's most treasured ecosystem and is worth \$6 billion to the economy, supporting 63,000 jobs.
 - But the Reef is suffering from a range of factors, including farming activities in the catchments that flow into the Reef's waters.
 - Scientific evidence is telling us that there are damaging levels of fertiliser, sediment and pesticide in Reef waters.
 - The vast majority of these pollutants are from cattle and cane production.
 - The Premier of Queensland has set a target of reducing the levels of dangerous pesticides and fertilisers found in Reef waters by 50 per cent in four years.
 - To help achieve this objective, the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability introduced the Great Barrier Reef Protection Amendment Bill 2009 to State Parliament on 4 June 2009.
 - The new regime is a mix of strict controls on dangerous farm chemicals and measures that will improve farming practices at the least cost to taxpayers.
 - Under the new regime to take effect from 1 January, 2010:
 - ▶ Sugar cane farmers and graziers in Mackay-Whitsunday, the Burdekin Dry Tropics and the Far North's Wet Tropics must apply no more than the optimum amount of fertiliser to their soil. They must also keep annual records on soil testing results and their use of chemicals and fertilisers;
 - ▶ These farmers must follow a range of new controls and restrictions for the pesticides Atrazine, Diuron, Ametryn, Hexazinone or Tebuthiuron, such as banning their use along drainage lines, certification and training before use, and secure storage; and
 - ▶ Farms considered high risk to the Reef will be required to keep tailored Environmental Risk Management Plans showing how they are improving their practices to achieve a standard compatible with good Reef health. The plans will include the size of their land, which and how much pesticides and fertilisers used, soil testing undertaken on the land, and stocking rates.
 - The Bill will affect around 4,500 property owners in Mackay-Whitsunday, the Burdekin Dry Tropics, and the Wet Tropics because the highest levels of water pollution have been found in closest to these catchment regions.
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- Around 1,000 farmers considered high risk to the Reef in the Wet Tropics and Burdekin Dry Tropics will be required to prepare an Environmental Risk Management Plan to entrench the adoption of best practices and continuous improvement, leading to better Reef health.
 - The costs and benefits for farmers will vary.
 - Many farmers are already doing the right thing by keeping a management plan, applying correct levels of fertiliser, using pesticides responsibly and taking measures to minimise Reef run-off – these farmers will not be greatly affected.
 - Those farmers who are not carrying out best farming practice will need to change how they do things to comply with the new laws and regulations.
 - However, the State Government will be providing the tools and advice needed for farmers to adjust and adapt to the new requirements.
 - Although the new regime is designed to improve the health of the Reef, farmers also will ultimately benefit from improved productivity and efficiency on their land at reduced fertiliser costs.
 - The State Government will ensure the new regime is being followed by investing \$50 million to inspect farming practices and providing assistance to farmers to improve their farming practices.
 - The State Government will work with farmer organisations, such as Canegrowers and Agforce, to enforce the new requirements gradually and allow farmers to adjust.
 - Both the Queensland and Australian Governments have made improving Reef water quality a top priority through the 10-year Queensland-Commonwealth Reef Water Quality Protection Plan and the \$200 million Commonwealth Reef Rescue Plan.
 - In addition to the \$50 million allocated to enforce the new legislation, the State Government has spent approximately \$125 million on measures to improve Reef water quality.
 - Earlier this year, State Parliament passed greater protection of riparian vegetation and wetlands in Reef catchments to further improve the water quality.
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