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Press release: Premier Bligh inspects Great Barrier Reef water quality

The Queensland Premier, The Hon. Anna Bligh, visited the Great Barrier Reef today to see first-hand the negative effects of poor water quality on Queensland's corals.

Guided by staff from the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC), the Premier used a glass-bottomed boat to inspect healthy and unhealthy inshore reefs.

Sheriden Morris, Managing Director of the RRRC, thanked the Premier and her staff for taking the time to visit and witness the problem in the field.

"Sediments and other pollutants – like pesticides and fertilisers – are flowing out of our rivers and causing problems for the inshore areas of the Great Barrier Reef," said Sheriden. "The science is definitive: there is no doubt that human activities on land are degrading water quality and damaging our Reef."

Researchers from the Australian Institute of Marine Science have recently shown that improvements in water quality will improve reef health, and will also enable the reefs to be more resilient to climate change.

"Obviously a big reduction in global carbon emissions would be the best thing for the Reef," Sheriden explained. "While we can't directly control what happens globally, improving water quality is the single most important thing we can do locally to help the Reef survive climate change."

"Specifically, recent research has shown that improvements in water quality would mean that our inshore coral reefs would be able to tolerate water temperatures up to two degrees warmer than they can now without bleaching," she added.

"This means that we could effectively 'buy' these important inshore reefs another 65-70 years of life, before catastrophic bleaching becomes a regular event as a result of climate change."

The Premier was also shown some of the underwater monitoring equipment that is part of the federally-funded Great Barrier Reef Water Quality Monitoring Program that detects and measures the levels of pollutants year-round. Monitoring of water quality from the rivers out to the reefs for most Queensland catchments is achieved through cooperative and collaborative work by the Australian Institute of Marine Science, James Cook University, University of Queensland, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, CSIRO, DPI&F, as well as researchers working with the regional NRM bodies.

"This was a great opportunity for the consortium that RRRC represents," said Sheriden. "While guiding the Premier, we were able to really highlight the useful contributions being made by all of our research partners working on water quality issues."

"RRRC's ability to deliver timely, comprehensive, relevant information directly to the people who need to know – in this case, through personal briefings to the Premier and her staff – is highly appreciated by all consortium members," she said.

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