



Local data gives the full picture on water quality

GROWERS IN THE PROSERPINE REGION ARE EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FARMING PRACTICES AND WATER QUALITY.

"I've worked hard over the years to be environmentally friendly and try to improve practices more than I have to."

GARY SIMPSON



Proserpine grower Gary Simpson is keen to continue learning about farming practices and water quality.

In recent years, he has made a number of changes and improvements to his farm, including reducing the use of residual herbicides, starting to use products such as dunder and mill-mud, and being strategic and careful with grub control.

He has also been involved locally in the push for Smartcane BMP adoption through his role as the Deputy Chairman of the local CANEGROWERS until 2016.

With that experience, but also eager to learn more about his farming practices and water quality, he is part of a project that is looking at water quality in Myrtle Creek.

Funded by the Department of Environment and Science and delivered by SRA in partnership with Sugar Services Proserpine, the project works with several growers across the catchment to look at how specific farming practices influence water quality, and then share these lessons across the region.

"I've worked hard over the years to be environmentally friendly and try to improve practices more than I have to," explained Gary.

"This project is a chance to see what that means for water coming off the farm, and also talk to the other growers about what is happening on their place."

Gary said with his experience and willingness to learn more about his farming practices and water quality,

the project was a perfect fit and that he looked forward to assessing the water quality in Myrtle Creek.

The Myrtle Creek sub-catchment feeds into the Proserpine River and covers significant cane country around Proserpine.

Gary is a keen angler and loves putting the boat in at the nearby Whitsunday islands.

"It is a beautiful part of the world and we want to look after it. If we are doing anything wrong, we want to know about it, and I am sure we would change our practices immediately," he said.

"This project will give us results that we can learn from."

On Gary's 230 hectares, monitoring stations have been looking at two different farming practices: surface applications of both dunder and of mill mud. Sites across the Myrtle Creek catchment are also assessing other farm practices in relation to chemicals and nutrients.

The project is led on the ground by SRA Adoption Officer, Natalie Baker, who said the project is focussed on getting the facts.

The project began late last year, with some significant rainfall events in December 2018 and early 2019 generating plenty of water samples to be analysed. These will form part of a range of discussions and activities for the growers involved and across the district.

"We are already getting strong interest from growers outside of the monitoring sites," Natalie said.

"We even have one grower collecting his own water quality samples and he is very keen to see from a catchment scale what – if any – herbicides or nitrogen is in the water.

"He's very close to achieving Smartcane BMP accreditation, so he's finding it helpful to learn more about his run-off."

Through the project, growers will be engaged in a range of groups to discuss ideas and learn from each other. There will also be on-farm demonstrations of innovative practices to continue to compare water quality impacts in relation to conventional practice compared to innovative practice.

"The project has a strong focus on getting growers more involved and getting the facts around all our different treatments and water quality," she said. ■

**To learn more about the project contact Natalie Baker on
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(Over page) Proserpine grower Gary Simpson said the project is an opportunity to learn more about farm practices and water quality. (Top left) Water quality monitoring equipment in the field as part of the project. (Top right) Gary Simpson and SRA Adoption Officer Natalie Baker with monitoring equipment installed at Gary's property as part of the project.