

FOREWORD

Wetlands along the Queensland coast adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area have declined significantly since the 1950s. For example, on the Burdekin River floodplain, approximately 80% of ephemeral wetlands have been lost. Along the coast from Cairns to Ingham, 70% of the *Melaleuca* wetlands and a significant area of sedgeland have been lost. Riparian areas in coastal lowland zones are in poor or very poor condition.

Preservation of our remaining wetlands and reinstatement of degraded wetlands is one of the most important environment priorities we have today. Wetlands are vital for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef as they ameliorate the impacts of run-off from catchment uplands. Coastal wetlands disperse and slow the velocity of run-off and this allows entrained sediments, nutrients and toxicants to settle out before they enter the Great Barrier Reef lagoon. Wetlands are also intrinsically valuable in their own right. They are vitally important habitat areas for a diversity of wildlife which includes a number of endangered species as well as commercially important species of fish and invertebrates.

Protection of wetlands is regulated by the *Water Resources (Watercourse Protection) Amendment Regulation 1995* which is administered by the Queensland Department of Natural Resources. Other legislation associated with wetland protection includes the *Fisheries Act 1994* (Queensland Department of Primary Industries); *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (Queensland Department of Environment); *Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995* (Queensland Department of Environment); and the *Local Government (Planning and Environment) Act 1990* (Department of Local Government and Planning).

Legislation in itself is not sufficient to protect substantial portions of Queensland's coastal wetlands. It is time that a new cooperative relationship between the three tiers of Government, land holders and other interest groups and stakeholders was forged, aimed at protecting and preserving the remaining wetlands and rehabilitating and re-establishing wetlands where possible.

The Babinda workshop was the first of its kind in north Queensland. It was designed to bring interest groups, stakeholders, landowners, the scientific community and government agencies together to discuss perspectives and possibilities for cooperation to enter into a new, enlightened era of wetland management and preservation. It is hoped that the Babinda workshop may be a catalyst for establishing a cooperative cross-sectoral approach to the important issue of wetlands protection, and ultimately ensure the future of the Great Barrier Reef.



Ian McPhail
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