

Question on Notice

No. 1260

Asked on Tuesday, 3 September 2019

MR D LAST ASKED THE MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND THE GREAT BARRIER REEF, MINISTER FOR SCIENCE AND MINISTER FOR THE ARTS (HON L ENOCH)—

QUESTION:

With reference to reports that the Minister has said that not enough sugar cane farmers are participating in Best Management Practices (BMP)—

Will the Minister advise why you are lamenting participation by sugar cane farmers when your department's SOS says that the target for participation has been exceeded and the evidence suggests that farmers are working cooperatively with your department and meeting the BMP targets set by the department?

ANSWER:

I thank the Honourable Member for the question.

Protecting the Great Barrier Reef is one of the Palaszczuk Government's Advancing Queensland Priorities. The Reef supports over 60,000 jobs and contributes over \$6 billion to the economy.

The 2017 Scientific Consensus Statement, and the recently released Reef Water Quality Report Card 2017 and 2018 and Outlook Report 2019, all confirm that in spite of the efforts of some, poor water quality continues to threaten the health of the Great Barrier Reef.

The Department of Environment and Science (the department) has a Service Delivery Statement target of 50% of cane businesses participating in the Smartcane Best Management Practice (BMP) program by 30 June 2019 and 15% of cane businesses becoming accredited. These targets relate to the funding for the program that the Queensland Government has provided.

The target of '90% of land in priority areas under agricultural activities are managed under best practice for water quality by 2025' – is a Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan 2017-22 target which is intended to be achieved by a combination of Australian and Queensland Government policies and programs, as well as the voluntary efforts of farmers.

Participation in the BMP occurs initially with "benchmarking". This is where a grower voluntarily self-assesses their own farm and business practices against the industry practice standards and receives a summary report identifying options for further improvement. Benchmarking is available to all growers and growers do not have to be at a certain standard to participate and self-assess their practices.

As at 30 June 2019, 51% of cane production businesses have benchmarked their practices in BMP since the program commenced in December 2012. While program participation targets have been met, 51% participation means that close to half of cane farmers have not engaged with the program.

“Accreditation” is the important step in which cane growers have their practices verified through an independent audit and they are then recognised as being equal to or exceeding the industry’s acceptable practice standards. Accreditation demonstrates best practice in environmental sustainability and in the management of soil health, nutrients, irrigation and drainage, weeds, pests and diseases. As at 30 June 2019, only 11% of businesses, or 23% of cane production area in reef catchments, are BMP accredited. The rate of accreditation of businesses is low and below the modest accreditation target in the Service Delivery Statement of 15%.

I acknowledge the voluntary efforts of those farmers who have participated in the BMP process to-date and those who have achieved, or are working towards, accreditation. However, much more work remains to be done.