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ACTIVISTS USE REEF HYSTERIA RATHER THAN REEF AND LAND CLEARING FACTS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Once again, conservation activists are using land clearing in Reef catchments as an emotive ploy, rather than delving into new Reef science that shows gullies are highest risk for sediment runoff. Land managers do not clear gullies. “Conservationists continually try to link Reef health to woody vegetation cover and cherry pick land clearing data and quote it out of context”, said Property Rights Australia Chair Jim Willmott.

Currently, the Reef and catchments are all in good condition, mainly due to above average rainfall, minimal cyclones and floods and average sea temperatures. The real Reef facts are:

- a) Hard coral cover is the highest ever recorded across northern and central Reefs, according to 37 years of surveys published by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority <https://www2.gbrmpa.gov.au/our-work/reef-snapshot>.
- b) Published scientific papers from CSIRO confirm gully erosion is the dominant source of fine sediment affecting water quality, not land clearing. <https://www.csiro.au/en/news/all/articles/2018/october/land-management-and-reef>
- c) Research from the National Environmental Science Program shows that only a small portion of fine sediment reaches coral reefs and seagrass meadows, with most sediment flocculating out of suspension in the river deltas <https://nesptropical.edu.au/index.php/reducing-sediment-runoff-to-the-reef/>
- d) Conservation activists use the annual Statewide Landcover and Trees Study SLATS data out of context. Clearing woody vegetation is like gardening. It is a landscape necessity to maintain a tree-grass ground cover balance and control woody weeds, in response to variable seasons. Woody vegetation occupies approximately 28 million hectares or 66 per cent of the Great Barrier Reef catchments total area of 42million ha.

The SLATS report from 2020-21 confirmed 82 per cent of clearing (288,165 ha) across Queensland is sparse regrowth across Category X land, which is not regulated clearing under the Vegetation Management Act 1999 <https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/land/management/mapping/statewide-monitoring/slats/slats-reports/2020-21-slats-report>. Category X land is not remnant forests as purported by conservationist statements. Clearing only occurred across 164,766ha of Reef catchments in 2020-21, which is less than 0.4 per cent of the total Reef catchment area of 38million ha.

Clearing was mainly for pasture, tracks, fencelines and fire breaks which are required for good land management. SLATS satellite data cannot distinguish between clearing native woody vegetation and invasive woody weeds such as rubber vine, lantana, chinee apple and bellyache bush occurring amongst native vegetation.

PRA Chair, Jim Willmott said, “The SLATS data confirms land clearing rates are at an all-time low and current regulations are sufficient. The Reef should not be used as an emotional trigger to strengthen

clearing laws. Farmers rely on federal and state governments to base their policies on true facts behind Reef health and land clearing and not be swayed by unsubstantiated claims by activists.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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Background Information

Response to The Australian media article “Great Barrier Reef catchment trees still falling despite crackdown” – [article link](#)

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority – Reef Snapshot 2022-2023
<https://www2.gbrmpa.gov.au/our-work/reef-snapshot>