

REEF WATER QUALITY

Program



Reef protection regulations in the Great Barrier Reef regions Sugarcane requirements

The Reef protection regulations address land-based sources of water pollution flowing to the Great Barrier Reef. This includes agricultural and [industrial sources](#) of nutrient and sediment pollution from all six [Reef regions](#) – Cape York, Wet Tropics, Burdekin, Mackay Whitsunday, Fitzroy and Burnett Mary.

Why are regulations required?

Rainfall, leaching and irrigation run-off can wash nutrients and sediment into waterways and coastal wetlands which flow to the Great Barrier Reef. The requirements for sugarcane focus on retaining nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment on-farm to minimise run-off and improve water quality.

What are the requirements for sugarcane cultivation?

Sugarcane growers in the Reef regions need to:

- comply with the standard conditions in the [Agricultural Environmentally Relevant Activity standard for sugarcane cultivation*](#), including to follow the [Prescribed methodology for sugarcane cultivation](#).
- obtain an environmental authority (permit) before [starting or expanding sugarcane growing](#).

*In the Cape York region, the Agricultural Environmentally Relevant Activity standard for sugarcane cultivation only applies to land where a grower has an environmental authority (permit) for commercial cropping and horticulture activities.

The standard conditions in the Agricultural Environmentally Relevant Activity standard are often referred to as 'minimum practice standards', including as an action under the [Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan](#).

There are requirements for agricultural advisers, such as agronomists and fertiliser sellers, when providing tailored advice about matters covered by the Agricultural Environmentally Relevant Activity standards.

For more information, please refer to the [Record keeping requirements for agricultural advisers factsheet](#).

Where can I find more information?

The standard, methodology, guides and other factsheets are available online or by registering to receive an information pack:

Web: www.qld.gov.au/ReefRegulations

Email: ESReef@des.qld.gov.au

Telephone: 13 QGOV (13 74 68)

What do I need to do to comply with the Agricultural Environmentally Relevant Activity standard?

To comply with the standard, sugarcane growers need to:

- have a farm nitrogen and phosphorus budget for the property
- ensure ground-based broadcast application of fertiliser containing nitrogen is not used
- have appropriate erosion and sediment control measures and ensure fallow blocks have surface cover
- make and keep records.

For full details of the requirements, please refer to the [Agricultural Environmentally Relevant Activity standard for sugarcane cultivation](#) and the [Prescribed methodology for sugarcane cultivation](#).

For more guidance on how to comply, please refer to the:

- [Sediment and erosion control guide](#)
- [Fertiliser placement guide](#)
- [Farm nitrogen and phosphorus budget guide](#).

Farm nitrogen and phosphorus budget

To comply with the standard, sugarcane growers must have a farm nitrogen and phosphorus budget for the property that calculates the amount of fertiliser they can apply. This includes:

- using the [prescribed methodology](#) to carry out soil tests and to calculate the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus requirements for each block each year
- adding all plant and ratoon blocks together to work out the whole of farm amount of nitrogen and phosphorus
- identifying relevant management zones and if any constraints to yield exist
- varying nitrogen and phosphorus rates across plant and ratoon blocks as long as the whole of farm amount is not exceeded for the season.

The budget must be developed *prior* to applying fertiliser at the start of each season.

The first farm nitrogen and phosphorus budget must be developed and verified, and then reviewed every five years, by either an appropriate person or the person carrying out sugarcane cultivation if that person is accredited under the [Smartcane Best Management Practice \(BMP\) Program](#).

An appropriate person can be:

- an agronomist that has the relevant professional qualifications, training, skills or experience including the ability to assess and provide advice and analysis relevant to the farm, block and/or management zone based on protocols, standards, methods or literature
- advisers or growers who are certified under the [Fertcare Accredited Advisor Program](#)
- growers who have obtained the appropriate skills, qualifications or experience through a training program recognised by the Department of Environment and Science.

Recognised grower training programs for farm nutrient management are:

- [Better Soils Management Course](#) (delivered by Back Paddock)
- [Six Easy Steps® online nutrient management training](#) (delivered by Sugar Research Australia)
- Other training or education which is mapped to the following Units of Competency from the Rural Training Package:
 - [AHCWRK301](#) – Collect samples for a rural production or horticulture monitoring program
 - [AHCPCM406](#) – Develop a soil health and plant nutrition program
 - [AHCPCM513](#) – Conduct environment and food safety risk assessment of plant nutrition and soil fertility programs.

For practical information to help growers comply with the requirements, including who is an appropriate person, please refer to the [Farm nitrogen and phosphorus budget guide](#) and the [online video](#), which outlines the process to develop a sugarcane nitrogen and phosphorus budget and answers some commonly asked questions.

Records

Sugarcane growers must make and keep records to demonstrate activities being undertaken on the property are in accordance with the standard conditions.

For full details of these requirements, see the [Agricultural Environmentally Relevant Activity standard for sugarcane cultivation](#).

Records can be in any format but must be made within three business days of an activity and kept for at least six years.

Records need to be made available for inspection when requested by an authorised person such as a compliance officer from the Department of Environment and Science. These records will be assessed to determine compliance with the standard conditions.

Information collected by the Queensland Government can only be collected, stored and used in accordance with the [Information Privacy Act 2009](#).

What do I need to do if I'm starting or expanding sugarcane growing?

Growers may need to obtain an environmental authority (permit) before starting or expanding sugarcane growing in a Reef region if the activity will be on five hectares or more of land that does not have a cropping history.

A cropping history is when the land has been used for cropping or horticultural activities in at least three out of the last 10 years. There are transitional provisions that allow some extra time to develop a cropping history for any cropping that has only started in the three years prior to 1 June 2021.

There is a handy [checklist](#) to work out if you need a permit and more detailed information available in the [Application Guide](#) and [frequently asked questions](#).

Once you have a permit, you must comply with all the conditions on the permit. The conditions will require you to design and establish measures that minimise fine sediment and dissolved inorganic nitrogen from the new areas entering waterways.

You must also comply with the [Agricultural Environmentally Relevant Activity standard for sugarcane cultivation](#).

How does compliance work?

The Department of Environment and Science assesses compliance with the Reef protection regulations.

For more information, please refer to the [Compliance factsheet](#).

Recognised accreditation programs and acknowledged practice change projects

The Queensland Department of Environment and Science can recognise producers who participate in programs and projects that align to, or achieve more than, the requirements in the Agricultural Environmentally Relevant Activity standard. These producers can be identified as a lower priority for compliance inspections under the Reef protection regulations.

For information on the benefits of being involved, please refer to the [Recognised accreditation programs and acknowledged practice change projects factsheet](#).

What other support is available?

Other programs and support tools are provided by the Australian and Queensland governments and industry organisations to help sugarcane growers identify opportunities to improve farming practices.

For more information, visit the Queensland Government's Business Queensland website at www.business.qld.gov.au and search 'Land management for sugarcane farms'.