



MEDIA RELEASE



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Looking after the Burdekin

Volunteers Monitor the 'Big Wet'

During February's 'Big Wet' highly trained volunteers collected water samples from the major waterways of the Burdekin Dry Tropics Region, including the Burdekin River and its tributaries, as well as the coastal catchments between Giru and Bowen.

As the majority of sediment and nutrients are transported during major flood events, volunteers collect samples from the rising, peak and falling stages of river flow.

The data collected will identify sub-catchments within the region that contribute the highest concentrations and loads of sediment and nutrients.

This will assist Burdekin Dry Tropics Natural Resource Management (BDTNRM) to prioritise funding to address the loss of vital soils within the catchment. Data will also assist the development of BDTNRM's Water Quality Improvement Plan.

The recent rains have caused the largest river flows in the region since the commencement of the project, with major flooding causing roads to be cut throughout the catchment.

"The volunteer network consisting of over 30 sites throughout the sizable Burdekin catchment, from Greenvale in the north to Alpha in the south, successfully sampled this catchment-wide rainfall event, with many volunteers remarking that the resulting river flows are the largest seen in over a decade," said Zoe Bainbridge, Project Co-ordinator.

Volunteer Keith Atkinson said Camel Creek, located near Greenvale, had its largest flow since the major floods in 1991.

While fellow volunteer Kath Bettridge reported that two walls of water thundered down the Kirk River, in the Mingela region.

"Despite rough conditions, flood plume monitoring was also conducted where fresh waters from the mouth of the Burdekin River mix with marine waters," she said.

Samples were taken from as far as Magnetic Island.

The Australian Centre for Tropical Freshwater Research's (ACTFR) Dr Stephen Lewis said that a series of samples were collected to investigate the biological, physical and chemical make up of the Burdekin River flood plume.

“From this data we can understand the extent of terrestrial materials being transported from the Burdekin River into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon,” he said.

“Satellite imagery of this recent flood plume shows it extending as far north as Hinchinbrook Island. In the 80-year historical record for the Burdekin River this year’s flow event was of moderate size, with larger events in the past known to have caused flood plumes reaching as far north as Cairns,” Dr Lewis said.

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