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Reef Credits must reward sustainability **AND** productivity

2020

CANEGROWERS Mackay today expressed support for industry programs which recognise and reward Australian farmers for their environmental stewardship including the sustainable management of soil and protection of waterways.

Chairman Kevin Borg said that the sugar industry's own Smartcane BMP program which is based on Sugar Research Australia (SRA) guidelines for environmental sustainability and productivity, was a case in point.

He said that the rising number of BMP accredited farmers in the local industry was testimony to the successful adoption of the program where most farmers are doing the right thing by their soil and waterways.

"The program is based on SRA's Six Easy Steps which focuses on fertiliser use efficiency, working to maximise incorporation of the fertiliser into the soil; maximise its uptake by the plant, and maximise its retention on farm.

"In this way we achieve and maintain both environmental and economic sustainability," said Mr Borg. "This is important not only for the farming business and the industry but the wider community which is dependent on the industry for jobs and income."

Mr Borg warned that new schemes, such as the GreenCollar Reef Credits program, needed to work in tangent with the industry's own established standards.

This would ensure that investment by corporate sponsors would recognise and reward the right farming practices, incentivising environmental sustainability without damaging productivity and returns.

"The sustainable future of our sugar industry relies upon the success of the 4000 farming businesses throughout the state that produce the cane, working with the supply chain," said Mr Borg.

"For the cane farming businesses to be successful continued incremental increases in productivity and efficiency are needed so that growers can keep ahead of the ever-increasing cost of production.

"The sugar industry is structured in a way that all parts of the value chain are reliant on each other to be able to survive. The recent closure of two mills in the south are sobering examples of what can happen if volumes fall to the point where a mill is no longer viable. The profitability of our farms and mills relies heavily on productivity and volume. Any scheme rewarding the reduction of the rate of fertiliser reaching the end of our catchments must be governed by a methodology which also ensures the farming business remains productive.

"That's not to say that modern farming techniques for fertiliser placement and other methods such as varietal selection, green trash fallow management; fallow crops; attention to regular soil testing and soil nutrient and pH amelioration methods, cannot assist in this – given sufficient time and money.

"However, investing in Reef Credits is meant to portray the corporate sponsor as being environmentally responsible, placing them in a good light for their customers and offsetting their own environmental problems in their businesses. But the sponsor's environmental harm must not be offset at the expense of another industry," Mr Borg said.

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