



**Wet Tropics
Waterways**

MEDIA RELEASE

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Entsch opens inaugural forum on emerging waterway issues

Special Envoy for the Great Barrier Reef, The Honourable Warren Entsch MP, is opening the inaugural 'Emerging Issues in Waterway Health Forum' at CQU Cairns today. Scientists and environmental managers will hear from experts on emerging human-induced problems and discuss management strategies for mitigating their future impact on local waterways.

The forum will focus on microplastics, PFAS, aquatic biosecurity and climate change.

Mr Entsch said Wet Tropics communities depend on healthy waterways and commended Wet Tropics Waterways for raising awareness of new and emerging issues.

"I'm looking forward to hearing from microplastic expert Dr Michelle Blewitt from the Australian Microplastic Assessment Project (AUSMAP). The issue of plastic debris that breaks down into microplastics and finds its way into human food sources is particularly concerning," he said.

"As a tourist destination with the Great Barrier Reef on our doorstep, we should be leading the way in reducing and removing plastic litter and by working together, we are taking a step in the right direction," he said.

Other guest speakers include Dr Karl Bowles on the impacts of PFAS, synthetic chemicals from industrial and household products, and Dr Brendan Ebner on the impacts of exotic fish species in waterways. Dr Lynne Powell from Cairns Regional Council will discuss how councils can lead the way in containing contaminants coming from urbanised catchments.

Professor Steve Turton, Chair of Wet Tropics Waterways, said there was no coordinated monitoring of these issues and their potential impacts on waterways and the Great Barrier Reef, despite concerns and increasing media attention.

"The Wet Tropics Report Card, which we release each year, assesses the runoff of nutrients, pesticides and sediments but these emerging issues don't get picked up yet and may need to be monitored as part of future report cards."

He said concerns had been raised about PFAS since the early 2000s when research revealed their potential to bioaccumulate in animals and humans. However, the ecological effects were not yet known, although they do move around after floods, which poses a threat to the Reef.

“We must be vigilant about emerging issues that could affect our waterways flowing into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon. These are global issues and we are only just realising their potential threats to our ecosystems. We don’t yet know how these things will affect our rivers, estuaries and coral reefs,” he said.

“This forum will start examining how these issues might affect our biodiversity. The Wet Tropics is a good place to start doing this because we are a global biodiversity hotspot, with significant natural assets that are the backbone of our regional economy. Any threats to our biodiversity and natural environment are a problem that we need to manage.”

The Emerging Issues on Waterway Health Forum is sponsored by LSC Recycling and Rehab, Cairns Regional Council, Canegrowers, CQUniversity and RPS Group.

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For further information please contact:

Elaine Seager, Communications Manager, elaine.seager@terrain.org.au, Ph: 0418 710 701

About the Wet Tropics Healthy Waterways Partnership

The Wet Tropics Healthy Waterways Partnership involves over 50 partner organisations including industry, science, community groups, farmers and fishers, Traditional Owners and all levels of government. For more information go to www.wettropicswaterways.org.au