



Region to host growers forum

CANE growers from across the region will join leading experts in innovation and sustainability for the 2014 Project Catalyst Growers Forum, to be held on Hamilton Island from February 24-26.

The event, which will follow on from a farm tour in the Proserpine region, is set to attract more than 150 participants, including farmers from the Whitsundays, Mackay, the wet tropics and across the Burdekin as well as leading global and Australian researchers, industry partners, economists and sustainability experts.

The purpose of the forum is to discuss a future for sugarcane production that continues to significantly reduce the environmental impact of agriculture on the Great Barrier Reef.

Now in its fifth year, Project Catalyst is a pioneering partnership between cane farmers, natural resource management groups (Reef Catchments, Terrain Natural Resource Management and NQ Dry Tropics), the Coca Cola Foundation, WWF and the Australian Government.

The three-day forum is being co-ordinated locally by Reef Catchments.

Participants will have the

opportunity to hear from keynote guests including WWF vice president of agriculture (United States) Dave McLaughlin and University of South Australia associate professor (Engineering Innovation) Dr David Cropley, who was also scientific consultant for the ABC TV documentary, Redesign My Brain.

Reef Catchments CEO Robert Cocco said Project Catalyst recognised the significant efforts of sugar producers who were taking responsibility for their own environmental footprint.

"The actions to date of the farmers involved in Project Catalyst have directly improved water quality to the Great Barrier Reef, while also helping increase farm productivity and profitability," he said.

WWF sustainable agriculture program manager, Rob Cairns, said Project Catalyst brought a diverse group of people and organisations together to trial and validate practices that were good for farmers, good for the community and good for the reef.

"This collaboration and outcomes to date are something we should all be very proud of," he said.