

## THE CATALYST TO SAVING ICONIC GREAT BARRIER REEF



■ FORUM: Farmer Lou Raiteri, Coca-Cola's Michelle Allen, Reef Catchment's Will Higham and WWF's Dave McLaughlin at the Project Catalyst growers forum.

PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

FARMERS and the Great Barrier Reef might seem to have little in common – but for 70 cane producers along Queensland's coast, taking care of one of Australia's iconic natural assets has become a top priority.

Cane farmers joined leading experts in innovation and sustainability for the three-day Project Catalyst Growers Forum 2014, which wrapped up today. The future of sugarcane production was a key topic, as the industry continues to reduce its environmental footprint on the Great Barrier Reef. Farmers from Mackay and the Whitsundays, the wet tropics and across the Burdekin, as well as leading global and Australian researchers, industry partners, economists and sustainability experts attended the meeting

### Project Catalyst

- Project Catalyst farmers have collectively reduced the amount of pesticides and nutrient run-off from farms to the reef by more than 60 tonnes a year.
- The Coca-Cola Foundation has contributed \$2.75 million to Project Catalyst over five years, to help preserve the Great Barrier Reef.

at Hamilton Island, after a tour of the Proserpine region.

In its milestone fifth year, Project Catalyst is a pioneering partnership between cane farmers, the Coca-Cola Foundation, World Wildlife Fund, the Australian Government and natural resource management groups: reef catchments, Terrain Natural Resource Management and NQ Dry Tropics.

The forum is co-ordinated locally in Mackay and the Whitsundays by Reef Catchments.

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

"This major event celebrates the work of forward-thinking Australian cane farmers, who are at the fore of truly innovative practice that also protects our region's natural assets, including the iconic Great Barrier Reef," Mr Cocco said.

"These farmers are leading the way in the adoption of cutting-edge farm

management that promotes better business and a better environment – essentially, learning to do more with less.

"We are proud to be involved in this unique partnership that connects our sugar producers with a leading think-tank of organisations nationally and globally to break new ground in sustainable agriculture."

Michelle Allen, from Coca-Cola South Pacific, said the Coca-Cola Foundation funded Project Catalyst because it provided the holistic resources farmers needed to pioneer new and promising sustainable agriculture.

"Integral to the project's success, it is the growers who are the ones generating the ideas – they are the ones leading Project Catalyst's success," she said.