



An automatic water sampling set up on a cane farm in the Herbert.



Michael Waring

Terrain NRM

Project Catalyst Partner

Carole Sweatman, CEO

Michael Waring, Precision Planning Coordinator (PC)

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Why are you interested in innovation in agriculture & how important do you believe innovation is for the future of this sector?

Agriculture in the Wet Tropics is an essential part of our economy and lifestyle. However, there are many challenges facing agriculture in the far north, including rising input and transport costs, pervasive tropical pests and weeds and for some industries diminishing return on investment. In addition, science shows that many agricultural practices are having detrimental effects on our soil and stream health, as well as the condition and resilience of the Great Barrier Reef. Farmers are increasingly called upon to minimise these impacts.

These challenges to both our food and fibre production as well as the health and resilience of our natural systems will be further compounded with the impacts of climate change. Things are not going to get easier.

Mainstream industry is constantly improving current practices to increase efficiency and productivity, as well as reduce impacts on our natural resource base. Alongside this, some farmers are trying new, innovative approaches, that may offer radical solutions to increasingly thorny problems. The immense challenges that farmers will face in the coming decades may require some fundamental changes in the way we go about the business of managing land for the production of food and fibre as well as the wellbeing of our ecosystems. Supporting real innovation in agriculture is therefore essential to ensure a resilient and healthy future landscape in this region.

Why have you chosen to be involved in Project Catalyst and what benefits do you perceive?

Terrain recognises the important role that regional NRM bodies should play in supporting farmer-led innovation. Our current 5-year Strategic Plan highlights the emphasis Terrain will place on supporting innovation aimed at decreasing the impact of agriculture on the water, soil and biodiversity assets of our region, while maintaining, and where possible enhancing, productivity. Our broad Innovation Program focuses on working with a wide range of industries in the region to help progress a promising idea through the key stages of the innovation cycle – from invention, through testing, verifying, extending to early adopters and finally integration of successful innovations into mainstream practice.

Terrain has a range of mechanisms for supporting innovation in the region, including through regional base level funding from the Australian Government and the Australian Government Reef Water Quality Project (formerly Reef Rescue).

Project Catalyst aligns extremely well with Terrain's broader innovation program, value adding to our other innovation efforts. Importantly, it enables us to provide agronomic, technical and scientific support to a selection of inspiring cane farmers in the region who are trialing truly innovative practices that have the potential to result in improved reef water quality outcomes. The project also provides a fantastic foundation for inter- and cross-regional partnerships and information exchange. Farmers, families, communities and the Great Barrier Reef all stand to benefit from these initiatives.