



# Smartcane BMP Newsletter

JANUARY 2014, ISSUE 3

Welcome to the third edition of the CANEGROWERS Smartcane BMP newsletter. This quarterly newsletter is your guide to the latest news and information on the Queensland Cane Growers Organisation Smartcane Best Management Practice (BMP) program across Queensland.

The aim of the newsletter is to provide growers with regular updates on the progress of the Smartcane BMP program, case studies, useful web-links and a calendar of events.

## Smartcane Program Update

The Smartcane BMP Program has achieved a number of significant outcomes over the past three months since our last update.

Since the BMP facilitator training in Mackay on 4-8 November, district facilitators have been busy conducting pilots of the Smartcane BMP self-assessment and refining the online content to ensure that it is user friendly prior to rolling out to the wider cane growing community.

Some 34 growers across nine districts have registered and undertaken the self-assessment of one or more of the core modules and provided support for the project as well as suggestions for improvement.

With this initial positive feedback and energetic promotional campaigning including presentations at AGMs, information sessions and shed meetings, newsletter and social media articles, poster and invitation letters, district facilitators are anticipating an influx of participants to engage in the workshops they have scheduled early in 2014. Keep a look out for a full timetable of workshop dates in your local district or contact your district facilitator for more information.



But why wait, register today by simply visiting [www.smartcane.com.au](http://www.smartcane.com.au) and following the prompts. By participating in the Smartcane BMP program you are supporting your industry in taking control of how we farm.

Malcolm Petrie, BMP Project Director, CANEGROWERS



### At a glance

#### Smartcane BMP Farms and Areas

148	Farms in the system	+
6546.92	Area Under Dryland (ha)	+
3610.09	Area Under Irrigated Cane (ha)	+
13480.91	Farm Area Total	+

## Industry unites at Smartcane BMP launch

It's not often that you will see all the stakeholder groups across an industry unite in support of a program, but that's exactly what happened when the new best practices system, Smartcane BMP, was launched at the end of last year.

Not only did two government Ministers share the stage at the launch, but CANEGROWERS and the Australian Cane Farmers Association teamed up to unveil what they describe as a critical program for the Australian sugarcane industry.

CANEGROWERS said it was important that the launch was held in one of State's 14 major sugarcane growing hubs as the program is a grassroots one whose success hinges on grower participation. And attract grower interest it did, as around 50 local Mackay and Proserpine cane growers flocked to the event held on the Deguara cane farm at Farleigh, to learn about the next big stage in the cane industry's future.

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This project has received funding support from the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.



## Industry unites at Smartcane BMP launch

(Continued from front page)

The official start of Smartcane BMP was marked by congratulatory speeches by Environment and Heritage Protection Minister **Andrew Powell** and Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister **John McVeigh**, who were quick to pat the industry on the back for its willingness and commitment to promote and adopt best management practices.

"By adopting Smartcane BMP, growers will reduce green tape, strengthen long-term farm productivity and help improve water quality for the Great Barrier Reef," Minister Powell told the crowd.

It's been described as a new era for sugarcane farming in Australia. Growers are being urged to sign up and work through a series of online modules, eventually leading to accreditation showing that they work to the highest standards on their farm.

And as the number of cane farmers working through Smartcane BMP increases, the government has committed to winding back some of the regulations placed on the industry by the previous Labor state government.

Agriculture Minister John McVeigh said best management programs had already worked successfully in other



L-R Member for Whitsunday Jason Costigan MP; Agriculture Minister John McVeigh MP; Environment Minister Andrew Powell MP; CANEGROWERS Chairman Paul Schembri; ACFA Chairman Don Murday; CANEGROWERS Mackay Chairman Kevin Borg; Grower Michael Deguara.

industries, such as cotton and grain. He said it was now the sugar industry's turn to take up that challenge.

CANEGROWERS Chairman **Paul Schembri** said growers should welcome the program with open arms because it was the much needed vehicle the sugarcane industry needed to show it can engage in self-management of its environmental affairs. "What's more, it's a better approach than regulation because it inspires people to get the best possible outcome," he said.

"The key outcomes will be improved profitability and improved productivity - but let's be under no illusion; one of the key objectives here is to demonstrate to the community that this industry has got the environmental wherewithal to convince everybody that we are an environmentally sustainable industry."

Knowing farmers are looking after the land and their environs is something that the world is starting to care increasingly about and Mr Schembri says that by growers signing on and completing modules, the Australian industry would be able to prove its current reputation amongst its international peers as leading the world in sustainable cane farming. "This is an opportunity for us to tell our story and our story is an impressive one," he says.

Local grower **Michael Deguara**, who hosted the event at his Farleigh property and CANEGROWERS Mackay Chairman **Kevin Borg**, both completed one of the seven Smartcane BMP modules before the launch. Michael Deguara admitted to the gathering that it was challenging. "By not being easy it will give it strength and credibility," he said.

He and Kevin Borg publically joined the growing list of industry stakeholders who are urging growers to sign up. ■



Also at the launch, supporting the release of sugarcane's own best management practices (BMP) program were representatives from, Queensland Sugar Limited, Australian Sugar Milling Council, Sugar Research Australia, Queensland Farmers' Federation and local members. Natural resource management groups NQ Dry Tropics and Reef Catchments and the local Mackay Area Productivity Services team were also at the launch.



CANEGROWERS Chairman Paul Schembri explains Smartcane BMP to ABC Rural Reporter Suzannah Baker.





L-R Mick Mackenzie of Mackay Area Productivity Services; Grower Lee Blackburn; Graham Blines of Rabobank; Grower Tony Bugeja.



Rita Scotton of CANEGROWERS Mackay and Wayne Berginey of Ravensdown on breakfast BBQ duties at the launch



## Smartcane BMP: The opportunity for continuous improvement

The Smartcane BMP program is not a detailed recipe on how to farm. It is not something you can follow blindly and guarantee a better result. It is a set of principles which, if achieved, will optimise your position in terms of profit, production and environmental stewardship. These principles have been established over time (some have been around for a long time) and have changed with research and innovation. Smartcane BMP is just pulling these principles together into one place for the first time.

It is up to the grower to decide how (the recipe) to achieve these principles. This is where the grower's skill, knowledge of his circumstance (eg. soil type and cashflow) and will to keep improving come to the fore.

Can every grower immediately change from below industry standard principle to above industry standard? No – the change may take time, money and learning new ways of doing things (ie. skills/knowledge/ understanding). It is a continuous improvement process.

Are there cases where a grower cannot implement the principle? Yes – for example if you do not have sufficient access to resources or the time to make changes or it just doesn't suit your current situation.

Is this bad? Maybe maybe not – provided you do it with your eyes open (a conscious decision) and are fully aware of the consequences. If the consequence is that you endanger the environment and threaten your (and the industry's) social

licence to farm, then you may want to reconsider. But if you are forgoing future income and are happy with this, then maybe it is not problem. Everyone has different risk preferences and are at different stages of life.

Does it mean the principle is wrong? Unlikely – the principles used in the Smartcane BMP are based on good science and have been implemented successfully in practice by a number of growers (even the above industry standard).

So if the principle is right but it has not worked for me what do I do? Maybe you need to go back to the drawing board and understand why your recipe did not achieve what you wanted. Did you give it a fair chance, were the seasonal effects just wrong, did you have enough knowledge and understanding and have you talked with the right people? Nobody said farming was easy.

If you are striving for continuous improvement then make sure you are challenging yourself to achieve above industry standard and if you are not there make sure you fully understand (not looking for excuses) why (eyes open). ■

Burn Ashburner,  
Senior Manager  
- Industry  
CANEGROWERS



A BBQ cooked under a mango tree and a large industry gathering in a farm shed, heralded in the official start of the Smartcane BMP.



A large media scrum came to document the occasion, interviewing, politicians, industry representatives and stakeholders about the program



Mackay grower Michael Deguara hosted the launch on his Farleigh property. Pictured here with local Mackay Member, Tim Mulherin, and CANEGROWERS CEO, Brendan Stewart.

## Some of our BMP people on the ground

A full list of BMP facilitators is available on [www.canegrowers.com.au/page/bmp](http://www.canegrowers.com.au/page/bmp)

### Tablelands



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## Nitrogen forum: 12 & 13 February 2014 in Townsville

By Matt Kealley, CANEGROWERS Senior Manager – Environment and Natural Resources

It would be fair to say there is a lot of pressure to further reduce nitrogen (N) fertiliser rates across the Queensland sugarcane industry, particularly in the Wet Tropics.

Reef Plan 2013 has an aspirational target of reducing nutrient runoff, primarily dissolved inorganic nitrogen by 50%. The priority areas are the Wet Tropics and Burdekin catchments. This pressure is due to the link being made between poor water quality, specifically nutrients, and Crown-of-Thorns Starfish (COTS) outbreaks.

The Six Easy Steps program, recognised as industry best practice in the Smartcane BMP program, is the product of extensive development, rigorous testing in the field, glasshouse and laboratory for more than a decade. The N guidelines with the Six Easy Steps program are based on a combination of DYP and a soil N mineralisation index.

The Six Easy Steps program and its N rates based on district yield potential (DYP) is coming under pressure to move to N input based on block yield for specific

crop stages. The reasoning considers the N being applied to the cane is too high for the cane yield produced, and the excess is thought to be impacting on the Great Barrier Reef.

It is important that any proposed changes to best practice be put through rigours by industry researchers and growers. CANEGROWERS supports further research on N use efficiency through collaboration with the sugar industry R&D body SRA which focuses on productivity, profitability and stewardship.

CANEGROWERS, with support from the Australian Government's Department of the Environment and Department of Agriculture, through the Reef Rescue program and the cane industry have endorsed a forum on nitrogen to look at the issues, understand the complexity, gather ideas and develop a list of research questions to incorporate into a collaborative, targeted and prioritised R&D program.

#### More information on the forum

For further information please contact event co-ordinator Tracey Turner on 07 3864 6444 or via email at [tracey\\_turner@canegrowers.com.au](mailto:tracey_turner@canegrowers.com.au)

## Recognition of prior learning a boon for Smartcane BMP

By Janice Nelson, Smartcane BMP Training Coordinator

Many of you would already be aware of the successful Recognition of Prior Learning program which CANEGROWERS Mackay has been conducting over the last five year which has seen the awarding of Diploma in Agriculture qualification to 35 Mackay cane farmers.

This program has now been imbedded in the Smartcane BMP program to provide growers with the opportunity to not only achieve industry best practice accreditation but also a nationally recognised qualification.

As you complete your farming practice self-assessment in each of the modules you will be automatically populating a document that maps your practices to relevant units of competency which make up a Diploma in Agriculture qualification.

The evidence that you provide to achieve your Smartcane BMP accreditation can also be used as evidence to complete your Diploma qualification.

This is a wonderful opportunity to gain maximum benefit from this industry initiative. Not only will your practices be recognised by industry standards but a Diploma qualification will give you personally, national recognition that your practices are at Diploma or Business Managerial standard.

If you would like to be considered for a funded place to acquire the Diploma in Agriculture let your local Smartcane BMP facilitator know as places are limited.

