

# **We must be vigilant about emerging issues affecting waterways flowing into Great Barrier Reef lagoon**

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We must be vigilant about emerging issues that could affect our waterways flowing into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon.

That's according to CQUniversity Professor Steve Turton, who spoke at this week's inaugural "Emerging Issues in Waterway Health Forum," hosted by CQUni Cairns (on 7 November).

The forum focused on [microplastics](#), PFAS chemicals, aquatic biosecurity and climate change.

Professor Turton, who is 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.

Professor Turton 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 the chemicals did move around after floods, which posed 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 realizing 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 Forum was opened by Special Envoy for the Great Barrier Reef, Federal Member for Leichhardt Warren Entsch.

Scientists and environmental managers heard from experts on emerging human-induced problems and discussed management strategies for mitigating their future impact on local waterways.

Presenters included microplastic expert Dr. Michelle Blewitt from the Australian Microplastic Assessment Project (AUSMAP), PFAS speaker Dr. Karl Bowles, and exotic fish speaker Dr. Brendan Ebner. Dr. Lynne Powell from Cairns Regional Council discussed how councils can lead the way in containing contaminants coming from urbanized catchments.

**More information:** For more information go to [wettropicswaterways.org.au/](http://wettropicswaterways.org.au/) .

Provided by CQUniversity Australia

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