

Moreton Bay - A Robust System?

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Months of rain and floods across south-east Queensland have washed a range of pollutants into the waterways that drain to Moreton Bay. We all saw the footage of the flood-plumes spreading into the Bay, carrying with them seen and unseen pollutants.

Concerns were raised about the impact on our health, and the health of the Bay's aquatic life. Recently, independent studies were released showing one of the Bay's main freshwater sources contained alarming levels of faecal coliforms. As a precaution, beaches were closed and the Bay's fishing industry voluntarily avoided the area.

With each tide the pollutants are diluted.

Some southern areas of the Bay have already been cleared of contamination, suggesting that tidal flushing is effectively, if slowly, diluting polluted waters with clean oceanic water. Suspended sediments are also slowly settling to the bottom, bringing back the clear blue water. Seagrass meadows will return, whilst newly created artificial reefs will provide additional habitat for reef-associated species. Full recovery will take time, but we are already starting to see significant signs of recovery.

While the recent events have shown our rivers and Moreton Bay to be relatively robust systems, it's important to remember that pollution doesn't have to be intentionally or directly released into a river system to affect the health of aquatic ecosystems downstream. When we recognise this in the everyday management of our natural resources, and also have in place contingency plans to minimise the impacts of extreme weather events, we will be able to reduce the risk of long-term damage to natural assets like Moreton Bay.

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