

BANANA BMP TURNS 10

From shed meetings to spearheading change, Banana Best Management Practice is a reflection of an industry passionate about improving sustainability, and farming for both profit and the environment. Backed by growers every step of the way, it is now in its third iteration and continuing to go from strength to strength.

THE STORY SO FAR

Banana-growing communities are located in many regions that are ecologically significant. Many farms are multi-generational family businesses, and their continuing sustainable production is of high importance. Consumers of bananas are demanding more sustainable farming practices and so best practice and sustainability is an essential aspect of the industry's culture and image. In fact, it supports our social license to farm and sell bananas in Australia.

The Banana BMP is a resource that has been widely used by our industry since it was first released at the 2013 Banana Congress in Cooloom.

In 2023, the BMP is now in its third phase, led by the ABGC's BMP Coordinator Amelia Foster.

"The Banana BMP is a credit to this industry and its commitment to environmental stewardship," she said.

"While many growers had a focus on sustainability well before 2013, the past 10 years have resulted in greater awareness, education and deserved recognition for those doing it well.

"The Banana BMP has put us on the front foot when it comes to quality assurance and regulations, but more than anything, it showcases a community of growers who take their responsibility of caring for the land and farming this hugely popular crop very seriously."

Ms Foster also paid tribute to the Banana BMP team of extension officers, past and present, and to all those who gave up their time and effort more than 10 years ago to ensure it became a reality.



Naomi Abbott (then Naomi King) launching the Banana BMP at Congress 2013.

GETTING IT RIGHT



From the beginning

The banana industry collaborated with the Qld Government's Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) for resources to develop a Banana Best Management Practice (BMP) guideline owned by industry. This was a proactive move by the industry to demonstrate environmental stewardship.



Perfectly timed to drive adoption

With consensus from the grower group and project reference panel, Freshcare Limited was approached for guidance. Freshcare had the template and DAF had the information, and work has continued to ensure alignment between the banana industry BMP and Freshcare Environmental since.



An industry-driven priority

The BMP project purpose was to work with growers to increase farm productivity and profitability and improve water quality in the Great Barrier Reef. It was led by DAF, and co-funded by the Queensland Government, Australian Government, and Hort Innovation using the banana industry levy.



Check, launch, and deliver

An additional 20 growers and 30 technical experts with skills in nutrition, soil conservation, and integrated pest and disease management assisted with the review of the draft BMP. The BMP was launched in 2013 with an online version of the checklist (hosted by ABGC) published to allow growers to gain a visual summary of their results around key areas such as sediment, nutrient, and pesticide management.



By growers, for growers

A group of 13 experienced growers from around Australia was established to provide oversight and direction.

"There is a noticeable difference in how farms look when driving around the region, especially the increased ground cover." Dean Sinton, grower



What better way to celebrate a 10th birthday than with cake? The BMP team and the banana industry marked the occasion at Banana Congress 2023.

DRIVING CHANGE OVER TIME

2013 | **BMP Launched**

- \$180,000 Queensland Government investment over 2 years
- Freshcare Limited onboard
- Coles starts to encourage their suppliers to participate in Freshcare Environmental training

2015-2018 | **BMP Phase I**

- \$600,000 investment from QRWQP
- ABGC supports growers to improve practices on-farm and through record keeping

2018-2022 | **BMP Phase II**

- \$2.9m through QRWQP allows the Banana BMP Program to assist and support growers to improve practices
- \$1.2m grant program for on-farm practice change. and water quality outcomes
- Freshcare Environmental Program - Reef Assured certification aligned to the regulations

2022-2026 | **BMP Phase III**

- QRWQP \$2.2m investment for Banana BMP extension continues
- \$1.5m Best Practice Fund to support on-farm practice change and improve water quality



Where all good ideas begin: with a few beers and food on a Friday afternoon. The BMP was created for growers, by growers.

PROOF IS IN THE Paddock

Thousands of hectares of improved practices

Growers have adopted improved practice change across a vast area in the Reef catchment. Funding has supported almost 100 on-farm projects (with more under way) and resulted in visible improvements in the management of inter-rows and installation of sediment run-off prevention structures. Adoption of improved fertiliser management is also evident based on grower advice over time.

Many growers with improved knowledge & awareness

Growers have attended workshops (nutrient and sediment management), and received on-farm support along with specialist technical advice. This has supported a culture-shift with a focus on environmental stewardship, allowing the industry to genuinely promote the good things growers are doing to foster a social license to grow and sell bananas. These workshops will continue to be available to growers throughout the life of the project.

>90% of the industry have done their BMP checklist

More than half of growers have undertaken one or more BMP self-assessment checklists which has been linked closely with the funding program. Most of these BMPs were done by the largest growers, representing over 90% of the land area under bananas in the reef catchment.

Regulation & Freshcare alignment

Third party verification of practices was required against the reef water quality regulations. BMP certification has been streamlined with the existing Freshcare Environmental Accreditation process. The BMP is also a tool that the industry continues to utilise in negotiations with Government, particularly relating to the development of programs and regulations.

WALKING THE TALK

MARK GALLAGHER, GROWER

"How we do something is equally as important as what we do. The motivation to improve and excel comes from within. Forty years ago, I wasn't thinking BMP, but just simply doing what I believed was right and would support the business of growing bananas as well as safeguarding the environment. We farm in a unique part of the world and the effect of our actions do not always stop at our boundaries. Wadda Farms has evolved with this philosophy."



Hort Innovation
Strategic levy investment



Australian Banana Growers

#BananaBestPracticePaysOff