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Mackay fish face serious transit challenges

If our waterways were a road system, our local fish would have a lot to complain about.

A newly released report has found fish in the Mackay Whitsunday area face up to 4000 potential barriers as they attempt to migrate across our region, leaving no aquatic 'highway' to move on.

Catchment Solutions project officer, Matt Moore, said serious action needed to be taken now to help smooth the waters and ensure the health and survival of key fish species.

"This is the first comprehensive fish barrier prioritisation study conducted locally and we found fish in the Mackay Whitsunday region face serious challenges. In total, 3973 potential barriers were identified across the region that prevent, delay or obstruct fish migration," Mr Moore said.

If fish movement continues to be blocked, it could lead to a serious decline in the native fish population long-term.

"What a lot of people don't realise is that almost 48 per cent of all fish species in the Mackay Whitsunday region are diadromous – meaning they are a truly migratory species and need to transit between freshwaters and the sea at various stages of their life cycle, including to breed.

"We are talking about some very important species including barramundi, jungle perch and mangrove jack.

"Barriers that prevent fish connectivity also have an adverse impact on our local fisheries' productivity and create environmental conditions favourable for invasive fish species – for example, tilapia."

Mr Moore said it was critical works were now undertaken to improve conditions for local fish.

From nearly 4000 fish barriers the report (funded by the Australian Government and conducted by Catchment Solutions) has identified the Mackay Whitsundays 'Top 40' most important fish barriers.

"We have distilled barriers down to a 'Top 40' list of the highest priority sites that show the most potential for effective outcomes, as well as value for money. These sites are where we now need to focus our attention and investment dollars to build appropriately designed fishways, remove barriers and really start to improve life for our local fish."

Highest priority waterways recommended for immediate fish passage works include: the O'Connell River, Flaggy Rock Creek, Cedar Creek, Marion Creek, Sandy Creek, Constant Creek, St Helens Creek, Jolimont Creek and Blackrock Creek.

"By rebuilding fish passage at these sites, extensive areas of fish habitat will be opened up to migratory fish species. This is an important first step to ensure we keep genetic diversity and maintain healthy fish populations in Mackay Whitsunday waterways moving forward," Mr Moore said.

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Report Details

Title: Mackay Whitsunday Fish Barrier Prioritisation [\(to view the full report, CLICK HERE\)](#)

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This report has been commissioned by the Australian Government, through the Sustainable Environment Stream Target Area Grants 2013-14.

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