Scientist questions science underpinning new regs

By Kevin Borg, Chairman, CANEGROWERS Mackay

In recent weeks we have witnessed a public debate on the accuracy of reef science and the real condition of the Great Barrier Reef. Increased regulation of agriculture is seen by activists and government to be the panacea for threats to the Reef – but is it?

In this democratic debate it is profoundly irritating that an organisation such as World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has attempted to denigrate the integrity of our organisation. WWF’s accusation that CANEGROWERS has used public monies to sponsor Prof. Peter Ridd’s speaking tour is insulting. CANEGROWERS Mackay used its own resources to promote the event via our members’ newsletter (as we do for many visitors to Mackay of interest to growers), nothing more. Increased regulation will affect CANEGROWERS’ 4000 members’ viability and profitability at a time of low sugar prices. Growers need to feel confident it will be effective.

Prof. Ridd has been vocal in his views on the need for the science underpinning the new regulations to be accurate. He says he is not a climate change denier and may well be wrong in his views but calls for an independent science panel to remove any ambiguity in published science.

We as growers don’t have the degrees to assess the science but we can say that we are professional in what we do. We have worked closely with the State Government and Reef organisations to achieve a great result for water quality and the Great Barrier Reef under existing regulations. We have embraced change with a steady but sure increase in the numbers of growers either accredited or working towards completing the industry’s Best Management Practice program, Smartcane.

Only this week I had the opportunity to congratulate four local growers on achieving their Smartcane accreditation. Much of what they had been doing – green cane trash blanketing, controlled traffic, GPS guided machinery - already ticked the boxes. It is the comprehensive record keeping of all aspects of farming, including the work of contractors and consultants, that takes the most time to set up and implement.

It has been unfortunate that growers have needed someone with alternative views on the accuracy of science to bring to the fore their frustrations with what is planned for them by a government not prepared to give them a fair hearing. An independent science panel would give growers comfort that the science underpinning more regulation is accurate and credible.