

Pact to protect reef from run-off

THE federal and Queensland governments have joined forces to protect the Great Barrier Reef from land-based pollution.

A memorandum of understanding signed in Cairns yesterday aims to develop and implement codes of practice, identify areas of greatest erosion hazard and create a water quality action plan.

"Both governments share the objective of stabilising and reversing the decline in the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef," Prime Minister John Howard said.

The two governments will develop a Reef Water Quality Protec-

tion Plan by the end of this year.

The plan will be funded through the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality and the Natural Heritage Trust.

The reef has been a battleground for farmers and conservationists over the effect of run-off into the world heritage area.

There has been concern that run-off, especially from the sugar industry, has harmed the coral reefs, mangrove forests, sponge gardens and sea grass beds.

Worldwide Fund For Nature spokeswoman Imogen Zethoven said the agreement was a landmark achievement.