

Bay's shelter too 'polluted'

By JOANNA MATHER

THE Cleveland Bay dugong sanctuary off Townsville is the most polluted of all dugong sanctuaries along the Queensland coastline, a World Wide Fund For Nature report has found.

The water quality report by WWF finds inshore waters in the Townsville region are in a "poor" condition and Cleveland Bay is the dugong sanctuary least likely to support a healthy population of the species.

According to the report, the Burdekin River spews the equivalent of 1230 dump trucks of soil a day into Cleveland and Bowling Green bays, both of which are dugong sanctuaries.

Land clearing, overgrazing, intensive cropping and the destruction of wetlands are blamed

for unnaturally high nitrate and sediment loading in the bays.

Cane farming alone was responsible for emptying the equivalent of 10,000 bags of nitrogen into the waters adjacent to the Burdekin-Haughton catchment each year.

"If we want our children to grow up knowing that dugong still inhabit Cleveland Bay right next to a major regional city then we need to urgently improve catchment management of the Burdekin now," the report said.

Compiled by WWF's Great Barrier Reef Campaign, the report delivered a generally grim verdict on the quality of reef waters along the coastline on World Environment Day yesterday. "From Port Douglas south, most of the inshore reefs and seagrass meadows are choking

under plumes of enriched mud and pesticides," it said.

The inshore waters off Cairns were also rated as poor, with high levels of the herbicide diuron – toxic to seagrass and corals – detected. The inshore waters around the Whitsundays and Keppel island group were very poor.

Only the inshore waters of Cape York and Daintree-Mossman received moderate to good condition reports.

"Farming practices need to change, land clearing must stop and urban and industrial pollution must be brought under control if the Reef is to recover," WWF Great Barrier Reef Campaign manager Imogen Zethoven said.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority welcomed the report.