

DON'T LET YOUR ACCREDITATION WASH OUT TO SEA !



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Confused about nitrogen and phosphorus (N&P) budgets and what new regulations could mean for your Smartcane BMP accreditation?

Here's a list of frequently asked questions to help explain what's required.

Q Can I use a N&P budget if I am Smartcane BMP accredited?

A Yes. As of the 1 December 2021, all growers in the Wet Tropics, Burdekin and Mackay Whitsunday catchments are required to have a N&P budget. Since 1 December 2019, growers in these catchments have had the option to utilise N&P budgets on a voluntary basis, during this transition phase. Southern catchments will be required to follow suit in 2023. A regulated N&P budget simply puts the focus of government compliance on the total amounts of nitrogen and phosphorous applied to the farm relative to the totals recommended. It allows some blocks to be under and some to be above the recommended rate, as long as the totals applied do not exceed the farm caps.

Growers accredited in the Smartcane BMP program, or those seeking to become accredited, can utilise a N&P budget as part of their evidence for nutrient management; where the budget meets all regulatory requirements and shows sound agronomic justifications for any variances away from SIX EASY STEPS (6ES), for example, by using the new 6ES Toolbox. A N&P budget that does not demonstrate sound agronomic practices may result in the grower being ineligible for Smartcane BMP accreditation. If using an advisor, ensure they know the requirements of Smartcane BMP for nutrient management.

Q Do N&P budgets allow for more flexibility for nutrient applications than Smartcane BMP?

A No. Smartcane BMP has always allowed for flexibility (within reason and where agronomic justification is demonstrated).

The Smartcane BMP program continues to operate at or above industry standard, as determined by a team of technical experts, based on best science and the best practices for the time. While Smartcane BMP standards will always meet government regulations as a minimum, the program's requirements may also exceed regulations. Smartcane BMP accreditation remains an alternative pathway to compliance under the Queensland Government's reef regulations.

A N&P budget should not be seen as an avenue to over-apply nutrients. It is simply a farm cap that provides a degree of flexibility, compared to the previous regulations which had no flexibility. Be aware that there is no regulatory requirement for the consideration of other nutrients when utilising a N&P budget.

As always, growers should seek advice and engage external services with care. If you are engaging someone to assist with your nutrient management, ensure the service provider meets the 'appropriate person' definition as stipulated in the regulations, they know the requirements of Smartcane BMP, and that they provide all necessary information required for both BMP and a compliant N&P budget including maps, management zones, crop status, soil types, soil tests and their justification for any deviation away from 6ES. If you are unsure about anything in your N&P budget, you should seek immediate clarification from your service provider before applying nutrients. There are many service providers that are offering to prepare N&P budgets for growers. Shop around, do your homework and if necessary, get a second opinion.

Q I am a Smartcane BMP accredited grower and have a N&P budget prepared by a service provider that recommends I apply an extra 30kg of N on my plant cane blocks but keeps me under the whole of farm cap for N by making deductions on my 4th ratoons. The service provider assures me that the N&P budget meets regulations. Will this satisfy my Smartcane BMP requirements?

A No. Smartcane BMP adheres to best science, 6ES. The evidence shows that there is no response in plant cane to N rates above 6ES guidelines. Moreover, there is additional risk to DIN loss from the surplus N. This situation will not meet requirements for Smartcane BMP.

Q I am a Smartcane BMP accredited grower. What do the new regulations mean for me?

A In all instances, the requirements for Smartcane BMP are superior to the new requirements under the regulations and there will be no requirement to change practices. Smartcane BMP accredited growers will need to include management zones on their farm map, if defined, calculate the recommended farm total for N&P before application, as well as calculate the total N&P actually applied across the farm after application.



COMPARISON OF REQUIREMENTS FOR NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT

A comparison of requirements between the new regulations and Smartcane BMP accreditation is outlined below.

COMPONENT	NEW REGULATIONS (INCLUDING N&P BUDGET)	SMARTCANE BMP REQUIREMENTS	ADDITIONAL ACTIONS REQUIRED FOR ACCREDITED GROWERS TO MEET NEW REGULATIONS
Farm map +/- other documents	Mill map (and/or other docs) with soils, blocks that were soil sampled, management zones (if defined)	Mill map (and/or other docs) with soils, blocks that were soil sampled Blocks with similar nutrient requirements typically used as 'management zones'	Include Management Zones, if defined, on your farm map
Identify soil constraints	Yes (if present)	Yes Required	No action required
Address soil constraints where feasible	No Not required	Yes Required	No action required
Soil samples and testing	Reduced set	Full set as per 6ES	No action required
Recommended N rate	6ES method; mud/ash deduction > 100 t/ha	6ES method; deductions for any other significant sources of N	No action required
Recommended P rate	6ES, account for mill/ash where >100 t/ha	6ES, account for mill/ash where >100 t/ha	No action required
Recommended rates of other essential nutrients	No Not required	Yes Required	No action required
Keep records for each block of the nutrients recommended and applied	N and P	All recommended nutrients	No action required
Calculation of total kg of N and P recommended for the farm, before applications commence	Yes Required	Not required	Calculation of total kg of N and P recommended for the farm, before applications commence
Calculation of total kg of N and P applied for the farm, after applications completed	Yes Required	No	Calculation of total kg of N and P applied for the farm, after applications completed
Other information required for the annual records of N and P	N and P applied previous year Crop yield from previous year	No	Have records of N and P applied in previous year and crop yield from previous year.

WHERE CAN I GO TO ACCESS FURTHER INFORMATION OR ASSISTANCE?

Visit the Smartcane BMP website www.smartcane.com.au and click on the resources, FAQs or facilitators tab for more information. ■