

ABC NEWS REPORT

No quick fix for water quality concerns in the Richmond River

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PHOTO: [What lies beneath the surface? The Richmond River meets the Pacific Ocean.](#) (Bruce MacKenzie - ABC News.)

MAP: [Ballina 2478](#)

The co-author of a report that raises renewed concerns about water quality in the Richmond River says there is no quick fix for the problem.

The catchment was awarded a grading of D-plus.

That was the worst of the seven north coast waterways assessed so far.

Associate Professor Darren Ryder said elevated levels of nitrogen and phosphorous were detected during 12 months of testing at 48 sites.

"It means the river is in poor condition consistently across water quality and riparian zones and fish habitat," he said.

"All the things that people value in the river."

Associate Professor Ryder said repairing the damage done by decades of neglect will take time.

"It's taken a very long time to degrade the system, so it's hundreds of years, so I suspect the solution is not a quick fix," he said.

"It's the riparian zones and the bank erosion.

"If we can reduce livestock access to rivers, remove environmental weeds, better filter the water before it gets to the river and stop the dirt falling into the river and smothering habitat for fish, that's the place to start."

The Ballina Mayor, David Wright, has welcomed the findings.

"It just gives us somewhere to start," he said.

"We know you can't leverage funding from a government unless there's a problem.

"It's one of the best rivers for navigation... as long as they can get in, but the water quality needs to be improved.

"The health of the river itself is really important for the local fishermen.

"We think it might have something to do, the quality of the water, with the sharks around the mouth [of the river].

"Southern Cross University researchers think that might be a part of the cause, but that's only supposition at the moment and that's being investigated."

There have been two serious attacks on beaches close to the rivermouth this year.

In February a 41-year-old surfer was fatally attacked by a great white shark at Shelly Beach.

Earlier this month a 32-year-old body boarder was severely mauled, also by a great white, at the adjacent Lighthouse Beach.

Other catchments assessed by the University of New England's Ecohealth team received slightly better grades.

Waterways around Coffs Harbour received a 'C', while the Clarence and Camden Haven catchments were rated as C-plus.

The Hastings was classified as B-minus, while the Bellinger was graded as 'B'.