

the **basin** **BULLET**

the voice of desert channels queensland

MAY 2009



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QUEENSLAND

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EDITORIAL

How the west was one...

We may not like change, but it's a fact of life. And it's not often you get a chance to have a say in what direction that change may take particularly when it involves Government legislation. The people of western Queensland are now presented with an opportunity to get the facts straight and present a clear, united voice to influence decisions made about the rivers of the Channel Country.

We're all wild about rivers in Australia. They're part of our national identity, intoned in verse and song; they're the lifeblood of our land. It's easy to let emotion and sentiment drive our decisions when it's something we're so passionate about. But while passion can carry your argument it's also important to stand back and work out what it's all about. Now is the time to get all the information, sort fact from fiction, and weigh up options to make the best decision for the future.

This edition of the Bullet features the story of Wild Rivers in this part of the world and hopefully brings some clarity to the murky waters of the Wild Rivers debate.

Editor

'We're all wild about rivers in Australia. They're part of our national identity, intoned in verse and song; they're the lifeblood of our land'

For more on the work of Desert Channels Queensland, visit www.dcq.org.au, email info@dcq.org.au or call 4658 0600.

WILD ABOUT RIVERS

WILD RIVERS IS BACK ON THE AGENDA FOLLOWING A LABOR PARTY WIN IN THE RECENT STATE ELECTION. IS THIS A POWER GRAB BY ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS AND BUREACRATS OR DOES LEGISLATIVE PROTECTION OFFER SOMETHING WE ALL NEED AND DEEP DOWN WANT?

Bruce Honeywill reports ...

When Anna Bligh announced her intention to make the Cooper, Diamantina and Georgina river systems wild rivers ten days out from the 2009 Queensland state election she surprised many people, not least the newly-formed Rivers Protection Alliance, an coalition of Flood Plain graziers, the Cooper's Creek Protection Group and green groups.

The Premier made the announcement as a secondary appendix to the electioneering of the day, and ABC TV News picked it up that evening. Phones ran hot throughout western Queensland. The state's Liberal National Party, running its first election campaign under the new flag, picked it up but failed to fully realise the campaign potential of this political hot potato.

The surprise to the pro-protection camp was that Bligh had used the older terminology of Wild Rivers while the Alliance had carefully asked for 'long-term legislative protection' for the rivers of western Queensland and were careful not to use the term 'Wild Rivers', words heavily laden with baggage from the adversarial debates of the Gulf and Cape.

Bligh's trumpet call brought out the old war horses wearing the creaking, rusty armour of tired clichés to bash around the notion of Wild Rivers. The debate rose to fever pitch with Labor's easy win in the state election. The polarisation of opinion was immediate and the old adversarial approach reared its ugly head with many community leaders speaking out, perhaps a little punch drunk from the recent campaign, speaking strongly against Wild Rivers even before attempting to understand what it might mean.

WILD RIVERS MK II – HOW DID IT HAPPEN?

A quasi-protest-announcement outside Parliament House in Brisbane at the beginning of the election campaign saw the birth of the Rivers Protection Alliance made up of the Australian Floodplain Association represented by Angus Emmott, the Cooper's Creek Protection Group represented by Bob Morrish, the international philanthropic group Pew Environment Group and the Wilderness Society. The multitudes – and hungry media representatives – were fed chemical-free grass-fed beef cooked over a roadside barbie. The Alliance announced it was working toward the goal of long-term legislative protection for the Cooper, Diamantina and Georgina systems.

The banners and free steak sandwiches and the media exposure that followed reached Anna Bligh's inner sanctum. The Premier consulted senior natural resource bureaucrats who told her they already had the framework process called Wild Rivers. In the middle of



... 'long-term legislative protection of the rivers' ...



Pictured top: Angus Emmott fronts up to the media outside Parliament House

Above: Director of the Wild Australia Program of the Pew Environmental Group Barry Trill

Left: The Rivers Protection Alliance's 'roadside barbie' outside Parliament House

Continued...

What information is available?...

- For more information on Wild Rivers legislation visit the Queensland Department of Environment and Natural Resource Management website at www.nrw.qld.gov.au/wildrivers/
- A Field Guide for Graziers is also available online: at http://www.nrw.qld.gov.au/wildrivers/pdf/guide_grazing_oct_07.pdf
- DCQ Newsflashes - Rivers Protection Alliance Formed <http://www.dcq.org.au/rivers-protection-alliance-formed>
Wild Rivers Debate <http://www.dcq.org.au/wild-rivers-debate>
- Pew Charitable Trusts: <http://www.pewtrusts.org>
- The Nature Conservancy: <http://www.nature.org>

her first election campaign as leader, Bligh was chasing the greenish swinging urban vote particularly with former Labor MP Ronan Lee jumping ship and defected to the Greens. Thus Wild River status pledge for the rivers came about.

The first post election debate from within the catchments came at the Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee (CCCC) meeting at Torrens Creek. Dr Barry Traill, director of the Wild Australia Program of the Pew Environment Group discussed what the proposals might mean and how the Alliance fits within the environmental landscape of western Queensland. Landholders Mike Price and Bill Bode spoke strongly against Wild Rivers (the traditional opinion of many landholders in the northern catchments) while Angus Emmott spoke for the increased protection.

"It's going to lead to the biggest shit fight we've ever had," said Bill Bode.

"We're over regulated now, this is just going to bring more regulations," said Mike Price.

Leonie Nunn, the Chair of the CCCC, made it clear that the committee did not have a position on Wild Rivers, rather, it offered a forum for informed debate so the issue can be fleshed out over time.

And this, according to senior management, will be the role of DCQ into the future. That is, to offer resources and a forum for informed debate on Wild Rivers so that the best outcomes for a sustainable economic future can be wedded to sustainable environmental values. The people of western Queensland can then go with one voice to government. The time for an ill-informed adversarial approach that we have already seen coming from some political leaders, representative associations and individuals, is gone.

Bruce Honeywill

Informing to help informed debate...

PHILANTHROPY

Get used to it!

NEW NAMES ARE CROPPING UP THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA, EVEN IN THE DESERT CHANNELS REGION. STRANGE NAMES EVOKING DISTANT INTEREST GROUPS. NAMES TO BE SUSPICIOUS OF. THIS IS THE REVERSE SIDE OF GLOBALISATION AND IT'S ENOUGH TO MAKE A XENOPHOBE SHOVE HIS HEAD UNDER A GIDYEA LOG.

Names like the Pew Environment Group sticking its collective beak into the rivers debate. What on earth is going on? Who on earth is Pew?

A quick google reveals that is all about earth – the Earth – the planet on which we all reside. The shrinking nature of the planet through globalisation and technology means we have neighbours looking over the back fence at what we're doing. Powerful neighbours.

The Pew Environment Group is part of the philanthropic parent Pew Charitable Trusts, a US based organisation formed by a series of investments made by family members of the Pew dynasty, founders and owners of the Sun Oil Company, sons and daughters of original Sun Oil billionaire Joseph N Pew. The funding trusts were set up between 1948 and 1979.

The Pew trusts started by supporting a cancer research institute, a museum, higher education, the Red Cross and a pioneering project in the US to assist historically black colleges.

Over time, the Pew organisations spread their horizons and entered issues pertaining to the environment. Today campaigns focus on issues such as Climate Change, Marine Conservation, Wilderness and public lands.

In Australia, in partnership with the global environment group the Nature Conservancy, Pew has established the Wild Australia Campaign under the direction of Dr Barry Traill. Wild Australia is looking at issues across Australia, both on land and marine. Traill and the Wild Australia Campaign is seeking ways to support protection of the

inland rivers and so became an active participant in the formation of the Rivers Protection Alliance (see lead story, this issue of the Bullet).

Philanthropic organisations, many from the US, are becoming more prevalent on the international scene. Funding flows support such ventures as the purchase of cattle stations by Bush Heritage and may well, in the future, become significant funding sources for groups like Desert Channels Queensland.

One thing is for sure, the world of remote Australia is changing and the changes will remain forever. The notion of land ownership in the old sense is changing, partly due to outdated or failed practices, and to the new paradigm. The more accurate term today, as we wrestle with increasing regulation and interference and observation by outside groups, is land custodianship and, in the future, poor land managers cannot expect, as a matter of course, to continue detrimental practices on the land that they have been given the wonderfully privileged position of managing.

So Pew is here today playing a role in the future of the rivers of the Desert Channels region. We can expect more philanthropic interest in the environmental issues facing us each day. We have to get used to it, these changes are coming and are part of the rapidly changing world in which we live.

Bruce Honeywill

Pew: the smell of foreign money

US money is funding at least one position in western Queensland as The Pew Foundation seeks to help secure the long-term protection of that iconic inland waterway, the Cooper.

This philanthropic funding, through the newly-formed Rivers Protection Alliance, has employed a community liaison officer to help dispel some of the myths floating around, and to work with the people of the catchment to get the best possible result from the proposed Wild Rivers declaration.

On her second day in the job as the Western Rivers Carer Karen Tully, and other Alliance representatives, dropped into the DCQ office to bring DCQ up to speed on Alliance objectives.

Healthy natural systems support healthy social systems and vice versa; therefore, DCQ supports and facilitates informed discussion to ensure that the community has a voice, so ... watch this space for further developments.

Pictured below are representatives from the Rivers Alliance and DCQ CEO Leanne Kohler.



"No subversive forces can ever conquer a nation that has not first been conquered by 'subversive inactivity' on the part of the citizenry, who have failed in their civic duty and in service to their country." – J. Howard Pew, 1953

People, passion and profit



desert
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GROUP

DESERT CHANNELS QUEENSLAND (DCQ) IS BUILT ON PEOPLE AND THE PASSION THEY HAVE FOR THE JOB WE DO, THE COMMUNITIES OF THE WEST, AND THE UNIQUE LANDSCAPES THAT WE ALL MANAGE.

Our landscapes remain unique, although under greater threat as large-scale mining lumbers inexorably toward our watershed; our communities continue to show their tenacity and resilience in the face of population drift and economic downturn; and the people, and their fierce passion, remain.

But DCQ, like any organisation, can't run on fumes; we can't get serious horsepower without sufficient fuel. And, with the recession decimating government coffers, DCQ has had to weigh its options on how to maintain and expand future works across its one-third of Queensland.

Enter two new entities to generate funds for this purpose: DC Solutions, the not-for-profit commercial arm of DCQ; and the Desert Channels Foundation, DCQ's philanthropic trust.

In early April, eighty-three enthusiastic guests helped celebrate this significant milestone in the life of DCQ. Guests came from as far afield as Boulia, Prairie, Charleville and Brisbane to join staff and board members on the beginning of this exciting new journey.

DC Solutions is offering services to the region, and beyond, in the fields of pest management, property planning, cultural surveys, event management, design and publishing, editing, filming and video production, creative communication, recruitment and retention, personality profiling and team-building, carbon audits, information management, mapping services and much more. For more information, see <http://www.dcsolutions.org.au>

The Desert Channels Foundation, while not yet officially constituted, has already received pledges for more than \$10 000 from those keen to support the ongoing works of Desert Channels Queensland. Donations can be tied to a specific outcome (e.g. preservation of night parrot habitat; combating the spread of cane toads) or can be untied which will see it go into the pool to fund priorities as identified by DCQ. For further information, or to make your pledge, go to <http://www.dcfoundation.org.au>

The commitment and enthusiasm of those at the launch is a great sign for the future of the Desert Channels Group, and show that the passion for this country that binds us together is greater than those differences we have that set us apart.



Harvesting the Heavens

USING LESS WATER IN OUR GARDENS IS BECOMING A COMMON PRACTICE ACROSS AUSTRALIA AS WE COPE WITH DROUGHT AND THE CREEPING EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE.

STORY AND IMAGES – SUE GARDINER

There are many ways to be waterwise in your garden, including using mulches to slow down evaporation, micro-irrigation systems to deliver water directly where the plant needs it, and the selection of plants adapted to drier conditions.

There's another aspect to waterwise gardening that is not so often thought about – water harvesting. We know how much water runs off roofs and hard surfaces every time a storm passes by. Some of this is caught in rainwater tanks, but much goes to waste when it could be used to water those plants.

Here's an idea for water harvesting which catches the rain from half the roof of a suburban home in Longreach.

Picture 1 shows how the front yard used to look – with the downpipe pouring water onto the front lawn, much of which was wasted as very rapid runoff.

Picture 2 shows a waterwise garden designed to harvest the water from the downpipe and hold it in a dish-shaped garden bed.

To build this garden, some well draining garden soil was heaped around the outlet to the downpipe in a large dish shape several metres across with the downpipe outlet at the bottom of the dish. The mounds of dirt around the pipe outlet act like a very leaky dam, which slows the runoff from the pipe and gives it time to sink into the whole garden bed. The soil mounds and the end of the downpipe were covered with weed matting, hardy native shrubs planted, a drip irrigation system installed for use in dry times, and a mulch of gibber rock applied to the whole site.



PICTURE 1



PICTURE 2

Fifteen months later the new garden is thriving, especially the trees that had been struggling for a few years. The garden gets a really deep watering every time it rains, and the drip irrigation system is used for top up watering when necessary.

As an added bonus, as well as being waterwise and looking good, this garden has now become almost maintenance free.

Sue Gardiner

WATERWISE GARDEN EXPO

Building on the success of our Growing Great Gardens workshops Desert Channels Queensland is hosting its first Waterwise Garden Expo in Longreach from 22 to 23 May.

The expo will bring together industry specialists and community to look at how to better manage our gardens and home environment in a more sustainable way. The diverse products will range from plants to pots, solar energy to seeds, grey water to growing vegetables. The two day event will be a mixture of displays and presentations.

There will be a range of speakers including renowned Landscape architect Lawrie Smith. Lawrie has a string of accolades including World Expo 88, the Australian Gardens at Liverpool International Garden Festival 1984 and International Garden and Greenery Exposition Osaka 1990 as well as the regional botanic gardens in Gladstone, Bundaberg, Darwin, Mt Isa, Longreach, Gold Coast, Barcaldine, Townsville, Tweed Heads, Dubbo and Mackay.

Lawrie was also the instigator of our very own Linear Botanic Garden here in Longreach and will be here for the celebratory unveiling of the interpretive signage on 27 May.

Industrious start to the year

DCQ's Industry Liaison Officer, Colleen James has started the year at a cracking pace. In collaboration with local partners, she's been rolling out some impressive information days for land managers across the region. These information days are made possible through the Landholder Support Service Project funded by the Queensland Government's Blueprint for the Bush Program. Here are some updates on what's been happening and what's coming up across the region...



Above: Keeping track of the figures - Colleen James lends a hand to Peter Berger during the rain simulator demonstrations at the recent soil information days.

Clearing the myths of the 3 Cs

Carbon and Climate Change are words we hear every day, and now landholders in the Desert Channels region will get an opportunity to see how it affects them and their business at Three 3Cs information days being held this month.

"There seems to be a lot of miss-information in relation to carbon and climate change and we wanted to give land managers a chance to hear from experts in these fields," Colleen said. "The calibre and knowledge of the presenters was a great benefit graziers in our region."

- Grant Stone, a senior scientist from the Queensland Climate Change Centre of Excellence will be speaking on the climate change impacts on livestock carrying capacity.

- Dr Chris Stokes is a Systems Ecologist with the CSIRO and will provide an overview of the carbon cycle in the rangelands to show some of the ways in which carbon storage may change the future.

- Senior scientist Dr Steven Bray from DPI will discuss some of the challenges to developing a whole-property greenhouse gas budget using a hypothetical case-study property.

"The days were a great opportunity for landholders to be able to learn more about how these issues will affect them and get their questions answered by climate change experts," Colleen said.

3 Cs information days were held in Prairie, Winton and Barcaldine.

These information days are an initiative of DCQ in partnership with the Dalrymple Landcare Committee and are funded by the Queensland Government's Blueprint for the Bush Program.

Boulia ladies to benefit from Naturally Resourceful Women's Workshop

For the first time in Boulia, Naturally Resourceful Women's Workshops will be offered to help local women build on their resourceful nature, enhance their involvement in communities and build their skills, knowledge and understanding about natural resource management and property planning.

The course provides a pathway for women to take leadership responsibilities within the natural resource management field, as well as within social, producer and political groups and committees.

The course is designed to encourage participants to take responsibility and action for improved management of the environment, improve understanding about the links between good natural resource management practices and social and economic viability, and develop self-confidence and to be more vocal advocates for continued learning within their communities.

Day 1 of this two day workshop covers grant writing, biodiversity, financial and succession planning, while day 2 deals with planning for positive change, arts, health and wellbeing.

If you'd like more information on the events in this section contact Colleen James on 4652 7826 or mobile 0428 580 998 or email colleen.james@dcq.org.au.

soil days a first for the west

For the first time in the west, over 70 local landholders had the chance to get expert advice on the issues, limitations and benefits associated with particular soil types at three soil information days hosted by Desert Channels Queensland.

The soil days came about after receiving feedback from landholders who participated in the Modular Integrated Landholder Learning Information Experience (MILLIE) project run last year.

"After speaking to landholders, DCQ recognised that there was a knowledge gap in relation to soil and pastoral production," Colleen said. "By bringing experts out to our region we aimed to provide the most up-to-date information possible on how soil type and health can affect production."

These information days were an initiative of DCQ in partnership with the Department of Natural Resources and Water and were funded by the Queensland Government's Blueprint for the Bush Program.

great turnout for Blackall Innovation Forum

The inaugural Blackall Innovations Forum held on 21 April at the Blackall Cultural Centre was hailed a success by the more than 90 people who turned up on the day. There was a broad mix of sheep and cattle producers who travelled from far and wide to hear from other landholders about the innovations that have worked for them.

The day featured talks from local producers including grazier Simon Campbell from Norwood Station, Blackall. He shared how he uses a combination of satellite maps and photo points for planning his annual feed budget.

Jericho-based graziers Glen and Natalie Williams spoke about their success with a combination of water infrastructure, fencing upgrades and management practices to increase their carrying capacity at Granville Station by 700%.

Rick Keogh from the Terrick Merino stud 100 kilometres south of Blackall explained what a group of graziers in his area is doing to combat their wild dog problem. He attributes teamwork, research information and an expert dog trapper for the successes that they have had.

Peter Schmidt, from Alwoona Station, Wyandra told fellow graziers about the OBE Beef Pty Ltd company, started back in 1995 by a group of channel country beef producers, that has since grown into a world-wide export business.

Below: Natalie Williams, 'Granville' Jericho; John Schutt, 'Tralee Tambo; Trish Arden, Arden Partners Tambo; and Peter Schmidt, OBE Beef .



Left: Maree King, Silverwood Organics and Desiree Jackson, DPI.

Right: Bill Cripps, 'Melrose' Blackall and Peter Clark, 'Leander' Longreach.



A demonstration of the Blackall Bestprac group's E-sheep equipment allowed graziers to see how it works and hear about the benefits. The technology was designed to minimise the labour requirements when handling sheep in the yards.

Displays included breech-strike management and Nutridose water medicators with David Counsell, and GPS and property mapping with DCQ. There was also Grazing Bestprac, Harrington Systems Electronics, TrueTest, Telstra Countrywide, North West Primary Health Care and E-sheep.

People were able to taste the success with an OBE Beef sponsored barbecue dinner and drinks sponsored by Allflex and TrueTest at the close of the forum.

The day was initiative of the Blackall BestPrac Group in partnership with Desert Channels Queensland and Grazing BestPrac, and was made possible by a Woolworths Landcare Grant and Queensland Government's Blueprint for the Bush Program. Sponsors of the day were OBE Beef Pty Ltd, TrueTest, Allflex, and Landmark.

For the full story on the Blackall Innovations Forum and all the presenters visit the Desert Channels Queensland website at <http://www.dcq.org.au/news/regionalstories>.

IT WAS A CASE OF A GOLD MEDAL PRESENTER FOR GOLD MEDAL-WORTHY ACHIEVEMENTS AS ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERS AND INNOVATORS IN THE REGION WERE RECOGNISED AT THE NISSAN CENTRAL WEST INDUSTRY EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2009.

Desert Channels Queensland (DCQ) was the proud sponsor of the Environment Awards category, in association with Isa Skills Job Futures and the Georgina Pastoral Company. The three awards were presented by Winter Olympic gold medallist Steven Bradbury and DCQ Chair Peter Douglas in the categories of 'Education and Training', 'Innovative Environmental Management Award' and 'Outstanding Individual Achievement'.

"It's great to see such a wide representation from across the region receive awards, from the council in Boulia, to a museum in Winton, to a family in Longreach," Mr Douglas said. "It just goes to show what the people of the west are capable of, from all walks of life."

"At DCQ we know that our greatest asset is the community. By sponsoring the Industry Excellence Awards we not only want to reward people but also share with the community the achievements of individuals and organisations that have done outstanding work in managing our region's natural assets," Mr Douglas said.

THE JOB FUTURES 'EDUCATION AND TRAINING AWARD' went to The Australian Age of Dinosaurs in Winton, with President David Elliot and his wife Judy at the ceremony to collect their award.

The award was presented in recognition of their work in encouraging, promoting and facilitating the discovery, preservation and display of fossil material from the age of dinosaurs within Australia.

"Given its remote location, the Age of Dinosaurs has made impressive inroads since it started six years ago," Peter Douglas said. "It has developed partnerships, involved universities and schools, and produced some great publications of an international standard as well."

Reaping the rewards of hard work



Left: DCQ CEO Leanne Kohler and DCQ Chair Peter Douglas with the award winners (from left to right) Anna Hetherington, Peter Douglas, David & Judy Elliot, Rick Britton, Leanne Kohler and George Hetherington.

"ANOTHER GREAT EXAMPLE of people doing great things in remote areas is Boulia Shire Council with its Parkinsonia Control Project," Mr Douglas said. "The shire is a very worthy recipient of the Georgina Pastoral Company 'Innovative Environmental Management Award'."

Boulia Shire's project aims to co-ordinate a control project of Parkinsonia outside the National Parkinsonia Containment Line. Judges in this category highlighted the shire's innovation in carrying out a project outside the containment area, and its co-operative approach in treating a large area for optimal success.

Mayor Rick Britton was there on the night to receive the award.

THE 'OUTSTANDING INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT' AWARD went to Longreach family-run business, Mitchell Grass Meats. DCQ was pleased to present this award to George and Anna Hetherington who have created a niche market with their enterprise Mitchell Grass Meats by producing 100% chemical free, grass-fed meats direct to consumers.

"The success of Mitchell Grass Meats is an example of what's possible from a family business that's taken an innovative idea and run with it," Mr Douglas said.



Catching up across the catchments

COOPER'S CREEK CATCHMENT COMMITTEE

The Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee held their first meeting for the year at Torren's Creek on the 25 and 26 March with six members and five visitors in attendance.

The proposed Wild Rivers legislation was debated robustly and members made their views felt. Angus Emmott addressed the group from the Channel Country Rivers Protection Alliance perspective and spoke about their proposal for longer term protection of the river systems in our catchment area. Barry Traill from the Pew Foundation which is associated with the newly formed River's Alliance addressed the meeting on what the foundation's role is in Australia.

With changes to funding under the new federal arrangements Peter Klem has been busy preparing a Caring for our Country joint project funding application on behalf of our catchment committee and Georgina Diamantina. This application, if successful, will provide a degree of certainty for the future of both committees.

The meeting was also an opportunity for the group to discuss ideas for field days. A decision was made to hold the first on the topic of gidgee encroachment around June or July on a property south of Longreach. Project ideas for our committee, the Cooper Creek Water Resource Plan and the Lady Annie mine spill were other topics of discussion.

A date for the next meeting has not yet been decided, but at this stage should be around June or July and could be in line with the field day.

Leonie Nunn, Chair

DESERT UPLANDS BUILD-UP AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY COMMITTEE

In the earlier months this year the catchment's north east red inter-range country had good, to too much, rain. As the floods in the north subside so does the memory of the long dry that has preceded it as pastures then cattle respond. May we all have strong late rains for an easier winter and some decent dry feed to carry us through.

Desert Uplands Committee (DUC), in collaboration with Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA), hosted Beef Up Forums in Blackall and Aramac on 25 and 26 March respectively. Both days were very successful for all parties with great attendance and an air of optimism and positivity due to the recent rains. The meat seaming demonstrations were probably the biggest hit, followed by the meat being barbecued correctly and enhanced by good red wine and cool amber. A quick calculation from figures presented showed that in excess of \$400 000 was spent by producers on marketing and promotion through the Blackall saleyards alone, which would extend to millions of dollars within the Desert Uplands region. It's great that the MLA took the opportunity to give local beef producers an understanding of where their marketing dollars are going.

On the business front, with just over three months to the end of June and the end of current funding arrangements, the DUC is in a precarious situation. Having a recent history of devolved funding through regional bodies to facilitate the exceptional on-ground activities, the DUC now awaits clarity on funding allocations under the federal Caring for our Country.

The staff and committee continue to work towards a solution for survival and regardless of funding the DUC is optimistic that it will continue to deliver the services it has for the past 15 years to the Desert Uplands bioregion.

Robyn Adams, Chair

GEORGINA DIAMANTINA CATCHMENT COMMITTEE

In early April the GDCC was very happy to report an end to drought conditions throughout much of the catchment area. The pasture response to the rain in most areas has been tremendous due to the large amount of rain received, the way it fell, and very low stock numbers. Some damage has resulted but most people would agree that more good has been done than harm.

Some of the important issues discussed at the first GDCC meeting of 2009 were the Caring for our Country joint funding application with Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee (mentioned in the Cooper's report), future field day opportunities and progressing GDCC's move to become incorporated.

GDCC is also pleased to announce that it will be producing its own newsletter entitled *G'day from the Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee* which it hopes will keep people in the catchment informed and up-to-date on important issues within the catchment.

Errol Entriken, Chair



Updates and upcoming events ...

WATERWISE GARDEN EXPO

Desert Channels Queensland is hosting its first Waterwise Garden Expo in Longreach from Friday 22 until Saturday 23 May. The expo will include trade displays, talks from garden gurus and prizes. The event is open to the community with support from local gardening groups. Admission is free.

For more information on the expo contact Jeff Poole on 4658 0600 or email jeff.poole@dcq.org.au.

GROWING GREAT GARDENS WORKSHOPS

Following on from the success of our Waterwise Garden Workshops in 2008, DCQ will be hosting two workshops in Tambo on 25 May and Aramac on 26 May. Renowned garden designer Lawrie Smith will look at design, irrigation and plant selection, and there will also be prizes and giveaways. There is no cover charge to attend, so please call DCQ to reserve a place.

DC SOLUTIONS ASSISTANCE

Desert Channels Queensland's commercial arm, DC Solutions has kicked off with a variety of contracts that have showcased its versatility. Among these have been mapping, desktop research, filming and production of an on-line tourism promotion, a promotional photo-shoot, garden design, sustainable business workshops, audio-visual presentations, display material and mesquite control work.

WEEDING OUT THE BAD STUFF IN THE REGION

From 27 March until 29 May, DCQ is conducting Weed Spotters Workshops around the region at Winton, Kynuna, Boulia, Isisford, Tambo, Alpha, Barcaldine, Longreach, Muttaborra, Jundah and Eromanga. The one day Weed Spotters Workshops are led by botanist Wayne Harris from the Queensland Herbarium, with the cost of registration, smoko and lunch covered by DCQ.

This is a great opportunity for you, your staff and your friends to learn more about weeds in your area. For more information please contact Ron Beezley on 0428 580 629 or ron.beezley@dcq.org.au.

GET CAUGHT UP WITH DCQ ON THE WEB

Jump online and check out regular updates on our home page on what DCQ is up to at www.dcq.org.au.

RABBIT SCAN CHALLENGE

RabbitScan is a new initiative that RMAG (the national Rabbit Management Advisory Group) developed to coincide with the 150 year anniversary of the wild rabbit being introduced.

The challenge is to record data about rabbits from at least 5000 sites across Australia that have rabbits. RMAG would like your help, to find and record the data. They will provide the tools you need to capture and record survey data for May, 'RabbitScan Month'. Register now at the RabbitScan website.

BLACKALL HONOURS ITS HERO

On the evening of Friday 24 April, a bronze statue of local hero Edgar Towner VC was unveiled at a twilight ceremony in Memorial Park, Blackall. The following day opened with a dawn service in Memorial Park, followed by breakfast, ANZAC Day march and rededication of the cenotaph.

Desert Channels Queensland is proud to have been a major sponsor of the Edgar Towner Memorial Dinner held last year to raise funds for the statue, and supported elements of the recent ANZAC Day weekend program.

You can read more about Edgar Towner in the March 2009 edition of the Basin Bullet available at our website www.dcq.org.au/basin-bullet-2009-03.

DID YOU KNOW?

Shinglebacks or Sleepy Lizards (*Tiliqua rugosa*)

Creature feature

Did you know these big skinks mate for life; they spend most of year alone, but come together in spring to mate and breed. The females produce two to three large young that are born looking like miniatures of their parents. The bond between pairs is strong; partners with mates that have been killed by vehicles or by natural causes, stay near the body for many weeks, even months, before finally departing to seek a new mate.

In the Desert Channels region these sleepy lizards are by no means common. Hotspots to see them are around Ilfracombe, Isisford, Emmet and Yaraka and around the lower mulga land regions. They grow to around 40 cm, have large distinctive scales, and are typically black to grey with occasional light blotches and a pale yellow to

orange belly. The distinctive short tail is rounded and varies in size depending on the amount of fat stored within.

Shinglebacks are terrestrial and shelter under fallen timber, debris, in burrows, or under thick vegetation. They feed on fruits, berries, herbaceous vegetation, flowers, fungi, occasional carrion and insects. When disturbed they open their mouth and display a bright blue, fleshy tongue. Their jaws are strong and they will hang on when given the chance. So when you are out travelling, keep a sharp eye out for these sleepy fellas who have the unfortunate habit of snoozing on roads.

Steve & Wilson



Image: Steve G Wilson

The Nose Bag: Pineapple Lattice Slice

Love thy neighbour has never rung more true...

Since moving to Longreach I have come to appreciate the value of good neighbours, with Mabel and Harry George on one side lending their mower and some amazing neighbourhood watch skills, and on the other Kathy Mitchell with an assortment of baked goods including this too-easy (both to make and eat) pineapple lattice slice.



Ingredients

- 250g butter or margarine
- 250g cream cheese
- 250g caster sugar
- 1 tsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp vanilla essence
- 4 tbsp hot water (you may need a little more)
- 3 heaped tsp gelatine
- 1 can of drained, crushed pineapple
- 2 packs of Arnott's Lattice biscuits

Method

- Beat together butter and cream cheese until smooth. Then add sugar and beat well. Add lemon juice and vanilla and mix in.
- Pour hot water into a heatproof bowl, add the gelatine quickly and stir briskly until dissolved. Leave to one side to cool slightly.
- Add dissolved gelatine to cream cheese mixture. Beat again. Stir in drained pineapple.
- Line a square baking tin (approx. 20cm x 20cm) with foil and make a base using half the lattice biscuits.
- Spread the mixture then cover with a layer of the remaining lattice biscuits.
- Place in the fridge to set. Chop into small slices to serve. Slice is best if made the day before required.

Snakes stop traffic in Longreach

THE MAIN STREET OF LONGREACH CAME TO A STANDSTILL recently as pythons stopped shoppers in their tracks. The launch of the DCQ publication, Snakes of Western Queensland brought the slithery duo out with authors Angus Emmott and Steve Wilson when they set up outside Barkers Newsagency to talk to customers and sign copies of their recently released book.

Students in town for interschool sports took the opportunity to prove that they were braver than adults as they took to patting and even cuddling the reptiles. Cars crawled past the shop as drivers did a double take not quite sure if they were seeing right.

Some took the opportunity to get a photograph or two with the olive and black headed pythons owned by Longreach Regional Council Law Officer, Matt Werner. "Every kid should have a snake for a pet," Matt enthused as he showed the crowd of onlookers his much loved pets.

Far right: co-authors Steve Wilson & Angus Emmott.

Right & below: some of Daffodil's new friends.

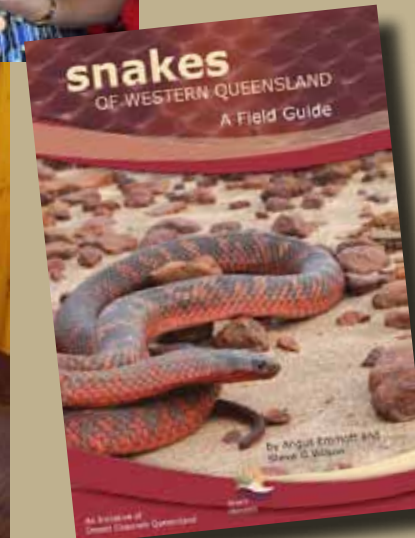


The days were a great success with around 50 copies sold over the two days. For some people it was the chance to overcome a lifelong fear of snakes, even if for just a minute and from twenty paces away.

DCQ hopes that this book will not only be used as a reference guide to help identify snakes in the region but also help raise awareness about the important role snakes play in our environment.

DCQ extends a special thanks to Barkers Newsagency for hosting the slithery signing. The Snakes of Western Queensland is an easy to use reference book for travellers, naturalists and locals alike. The technically correct and simply presented information in this handbook is a great way for either expert or lay-person to get better acquainted with the snakes of the region. It's an excellent addition to the glove-box, bookshelf or library and includes over 100 vibrant, coloured photographs.

Below: Steve Wilson works the Saturday morning crowd outside Barkers Newsagency (not sure whether he's won over the lady in the green top).



To get your hands on a copy or two at \$19.95 each plus postage, contact DCQ on 4658 0600 or email admin@dcq.org.au.

The Wild Western Rivers

Lyons, Honeywill, & Kleinschmidt



The wild western rivers through the channel country flow,
From drought to flood in sunshine the Lake Eyre Basin grows,
When it rains up in the northland the western stockman knows
The wild western rivers flowing free.

Sparked by a Dana Lyons concert in Stonehenge, and a late night (very early morning) discussion around a remote, channel country cattle station kitchen table, the following song lyrics were drawn together in a Longreach backyard well before wild rivers listing was even a twinkle in Anna Bligh's eye.

Listen to a very rough version by Grant Millar and Mark Kleinschmidt on the DCQ website or read on ...

For a thousand generations the old people walked this land,
Then came the days of stockman who grew to understand
The cycles of the river, flood and drought go hand in hand,
The wild western rivers flowing free.

In '96 they came with plans to suck the Cooper dry,
Those cashed-up cotton cockies thought the locals they could buy,
But the people sent them packing before they could defile
The wild western rivers flowing free.

This sunburnt country lives and breathes beneath the western sky,
No plough will cut this fragile earth, no dam will ever rise,
It's time for us to link our arms across the Great Divide,
The wild western rivers flowing free.

The wild western rivers through the channel country flow,
From drought to flood in sunshine the Lake Eyre Basin grows,
When it rains up in the northland the western stockman knows
The wild western rivers flowing free.

Image: Steve G Wilson

The wild western rivers flowing free... The wild western rivers flowing free... The wild western rivers flowing free...

Savannah celebration

Helen Avery went back to school in Winton for the latest Savannah Guides School and pays tribute to this unique network of professional tour guides as it celebrates reaching the very 'adult' milestone of twenty-one years ...

The Savannah Guides is a network of tourism operators across the tropical savannahs of northern Australia determined to provide a professional level of presentation and information to their clients. What began in the Gulf Savannah of North Queensland has expanded each year and now includes operators and guides from Cairns to the Kimberley, from Kakadu to Capricorn.

Professional in word and deed, all members must complete an extended training program, meet strict standards of operation assessed by peer assessment, and agree to a professional code of conduct.

Two training schools are held each year in varying locations across the savannah. The schools provide professional presentations by specialists in a range of subjects relevant to knowledge of the natural and cultural environment of the north. They also provide an opportunity for likeminded people to share experiences, information, and ideas.

The first school for 2009 was recently held over four days at Winton with the theme 'Interpreting the Past; Managing the Future' – Presenting Prehistory, Natural Heritage and Cultural Heritage in Geotourism. It was hosted by the Australian Age of Dinosaurs, on the site of their proposed centre, and the quality of expertise presented was impressive to say the least.

The passion of our hosts was inspiring; the beauty of the site for their project, magnificent. It was wonderful to be able to see the place before any major development. One and a half thousand hectares of top-rock country overlooking the Mitchell grass downs country surrounding Winton have been donated to the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Society by Mt Landsborough Station. The view from the top of the jump-up was spectacular.

The Australian Age of Dinosaurs Society has a hardcore of passionate devotees, but in typical Winton

fashion, the whole community is behind the project. Power has been connected, a formed road constructed up the jump-up and an enormous shed to house 'stage 1', storage and preparation space for the bones already excavated, is almost completed.

Over the four days, participants in the Savannah Guides school were fed volumes of information on prehistory, geology, palaeontology, natural science, archaeology, plant and animal identification and recent history. All presenters were professionals who were not only entertaining but presented information that was easily digestible as well as fascinating. The presentations were very much hands-on and included a trip to 'Belmont Station' where the Elliot family shared their home and their enthusiasm for dinosaurs. The trip had everyone looking at every hunk of rock with a much greater degree of interest.

The shift from the massive – millions of years time span and creatures, huge beyond belief – to the tiny – this living instant, and the micro bacteria living in a thin crust of dry soil – had minds and imaginations working overtime. It was wonderful.

The social side of the school was not neglected. A formal dinner under the stars at the jump-up was glorious. The dinner was held in the garden of the Winton Hotel in conjunction with a panel discussion recorded by ABC Radio for the program Café Scientific. Diversity was obviously part of the plan. I don't think the invasion by mega millions of gidyeba bugs was!

Savannah Guides, an organisation made up of people reflecting a passion for northern Australia and establishing a structure for sharing that passion with visitors in a professional manner, is to be congratulated.



"View from the top" - looking out from the mesa at Winton
- Steve G Wilson

Savannah Guides School

www.savannah-guides.com.au

Australian Age of Dinosaurs

www.australianageofdinosaurs.com

Desert Channels Queensland is funded by



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