

the **basin** **BULLET**

the voice of desert channels queensland



DCQ makes a splash at Westech



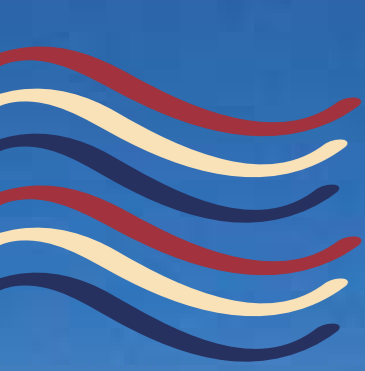
September 2008

The battle for survival continues for floodplain graziers

The rebirth of the Cooper Creek Water Resource Plan

Garden escapees can cost millions in the battle against weeds





The DCQ site at Westech 2008 –
waiting for the crowds



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DCQ makes a splash!

DCQ invested heavily in supporting Westech 2008 and its broadacre exhibition space under the giant DCQ balloon sent two strong messages to the community:

'We're here and we're here to stay' and

'How can we help you reach your land management goals?'

Even the Beijing Olympics faded in importance in the week running up to Barcaldine's Westech showcase. Show goers and tyre kickers from across Queensland came through the gates on the Tuesday and Wednesday of the field days, seeking information and always on the lookout for a good deal.

Nowhere else in Western Queensland can the public enjoy such a combination of the latest technological advances and equipment development; areas of interest from broadband internet to gift purchases, to which boarding school to send the heirs to the family fortune – all in a few acres of the Barcaldine showground. Shining metal real estate from road trains to motorbikes seduce the producer; camel rides amuse the kids; outback services and the flying doctor are all on display. They were all there. The Westech 'talk tent' was a forum to discuss and demonstrate just about everything from cooking to butchery to scientific developments to fashion parades and country music. Easy to see how these three-yearly field days are replacing to a large extent, the traditional agricultural shows.

DCQ Chief Executive, Leanne Kohler said the prime motivation in investing in Westech was to raise public awareness of what DCQ does.

"To show the diversity and spread of the Desert Channel region," Ms Kohler said, "and to display the broad scope of work and support carried out by DCQ that is available to land managers now."

DCQ Business Manager, Mark Kleinschmidt said the effort put into the DCQ display met all expectations and exceeded many.

"We had a big vision for our involvement with Westech and the vision became reality. Nice!"

"The highlight of the field days for me had to be the numbers of people coming through the DCQ site," he said, "Dozens upon dozens upon dozens of people and the feedback throughout was very positive."

Westech 2008 was the 25th anniversary of the field days, held once every three years. Westech has grown to be the main technical / primary production field day of Western Queensland. It grew from grass roots beginnings, driven by then DPI staffer Ken Wilson.

Today it is a showcase for many millions of dollars of equipment, vehicles and technological advances but still relies on volunteer support. As Westech President Andrew Cowper said, "The continuing success of the field days is a direct result of selfless volunteers who give so much of their time."

Meanwhile at the DCQ site under the DCQ balloon, activities rolled on - raffles, retail, sausage sizzles, competition, information.

"Our Weeds and Pest Management tent created a lot of interest," said Mark Kleinschmidt. "People were particularly interested in looking at the dingo traps and the weed spraying outfit supplied and demonstrated by Michelle O'Loughlin of Quick Corp."

Westech ... over for another three years. The thousands of people who walked the kilometres of sites and stalls and pavilions have gone home with a bargain or have been stimulated to work towards their personal vision of the future. Westech gave Western Queenslanders a chance to get their hands on to the latest in technological advances and perhaps be inspired to dream.



Happy with the outcomes – DCQ Business Manager Mark Kleinschmidt (left) at Westech with interested onlookers.

Sheep, hay and cattle handling equipment – all the latest developments in technology and livestock on display at Westech



Wings of mercy – the Royal Flying Doctor Service, part of the outback community.



Doing business in the DCQ tent. Lisa Winter on the retail table.

Pictured left: DCQ's Britney Wakefield makes friends with the local wildlife on the DCQ stand – something for everybody!

Flood Plain Graziers – the battle continues

The purchase this month of Toorale Station at a cost of nearly \$24 million from the public purse will return 20 gigalitres of water to environmental flow in the Murray Darling system, a small step in the right direction for environmentalists and flood plain graziers. But the future for floodplain graziers is still grim and much more water needs to be liberated to return to the days of floods that ensure the viability of these graziers.

The purchase of Toorale, a cotton property owned by British corporation Clyde Agriculture, is the first significant purchase under the Federal Government's \$3 billion National Water Plan. News of the purchase follows the national spotlight on the possible illegal extraction of water from the Paroo River in recent weeks and the fact that the financial circumstances of many of Australian floodplain graziers are declining even further.

The Paroo extraction scare from the last wild river of the Murray Darling system was exposed in a report coming from an academic study of satellite imagery that also highlighted numerous off-stream storages in the Murray Darling system not registered with government records. Illegal extractions add grief on top of disaster for those cattle and sheep producers who rely on floods for commercial viability. Their future is threatened with continuing government support for high water allocations to meet the demands of irrigators.

The Australian Floodplain Graziers Association (AFA) held its second national conference earlier this year at Windorah in the heart of the Desert Channels region. Attendees say there was overall elation to see river systems of the Channel Country in an almost pristine condition and the conference made a total commitment to keep the inland desert rivers that way.

Angus Emmott is on the executive of the AFA and says one of the outcomes of the conference was to take the longer-term approach to securing the condition of Australia's arid zone rivers.

"These rivers must not be compromised. They currently hold a delicate balance between a viable business model for floodplain graziers and the demands of growing communities. With a changing climate we are already at a limit."

"We can get through a year without rain if we receive a flood from Northern rain," Angus Emmott says, "and we rely on floods in good years for enough profitability to get through ensuing dry years. If the flood level flows are jeopardised, so are we."

The AFA was established during its inaugural conference in Dubbo in 2006. Around 80 people attended this year's Windorah conference hosted by the Barcoo Shire Council. The theme of the conference was "Healthy Rivers – Healthy Communities".

The two-day conference was a patchwork quilt of stories, anecdotes and scientific papers. Heartbreaking stories emerged from families battling on properties that were once profitable enterprises and now, with increased allocations and extractions, are facing economic failure. Scientists have found answers. Australia now needs the political will to stand against giant cotton and irrigation lobbies to give the rivers a fair go.

Pictured below: DCQ Independent Chair, Peter Douglas, gets serious during his presentation at the Australian Floodplain Graziers Association conference held at Windorah in May. Photo by Angus Emmott.



A typical story is that of Pop Petersen, one of the conference presenters. Her family property, Brenda Station, has a 50 km frontage to the Culgoa River, just downstream from the infamous Cubbie Station. Pop Petersen explained to the conference that the diversion channel from the Culgoa to Cubbie is three times the width of the Culgoa itself. Brenda has not had a flood for a decade and carrying capacity for cattle has been reduced by 45 per cent, for sheep by 35 per cent.

The AFA is still a small voice in a world of huge irrigation lobbies, but Federal Minister for Water, Penny Wong, is showing the gumption to start water buy-backs in the Murray Darling beginning with the decision this week to purchase Toorale.

The Minister was reported on ABC Radio as saying, "The reality is that we do have to reduce the amount of water we are taking out of the Murray Darling basin. We have to do more with less and we have to return water to the rivers to improve their health." (AM, ABC Radio 12 Sep 2008).

The Windorah conference found strong accord in that the arid rivers of inland Australia must not be compromised – healthy rivers give healthy communities.



Pictured above: More than 80 people attended the AFA conference from throughout the inland river systems. Attendees from the Murray Darling were impressed with the near-pristine quality of rivers in the Desert Channels region. Photo by Angus Emmott.

Cooper's Creek science rep gets a major science award



Richard Kingsford is probably the best-known scientist on Cooper's Creek. He has been working on bird population studies for more than 25 years. Richard Kingsford has played an active role in the Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee, the Lake Eyre Basin process and with the Australian Floodplain Graziers Association (AFA).

Last month Richard's work was recognised with the presentation of the prestigious *Eureka Prize for Promoting Understanding of Science* in a ceremony at Randwick Racecourse in Sydney. The

awards evening has been described as the Australian science equivalent of the Oscars!

Richard is an internationally respected scientist and academic who has become a friend to many in the Lake Eyre Basin. He is a passionate and dedicated supporter of Australian wetlands and inland rivers and floodplains.

Born in Africa (in what was then Kenya) Richard's interest in wildlife was inspired by his grandmother. His family moved to Australia when he was 12 years old and after a bumpy ride through academia, Richard became one of Australia's best-known environmental scientists.

For many years he was principal research scientist with New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife, becoming recognised across the world as an expert on migratory birds and the unique ecology of the rivers and wetlands of arid and semi arid regions of Australia. He has done extensive research particularly in the Murray Darling Basin, Cooper Creek and the Macquarie Marshes.

He has more recently been appointed Professor of Environmental Science at the University of New South Wales. While his research, teaching and publications are well known, he is also a quietly persistent lobbyist for the practical protection of inland river systems and supremely generous with the time he gives to education of the general public through conference presentations and events.

Pictured left: Richard Kingsford – with the birds on Cooper's Creek during a break in the May conference. Photo by Angus Emmott

Planning the next decade

To some of us it seems like only yesterday, but it is now ten years since the first Cooper Creek water resource plan was promulgated with much robust and fiery debate throughout the Cooper Catchment. Ten years have passed and now it's time to do it all again ...

Within the past few weeks, public meetings have been held along the length of the Queensland section of the Cooper Catchment.

The first Cooper Creek water resource plan was implemented in 2000 following public consultation commencing in 1998. This plan had a shelf life of only a decade. Public consultation has begun on the second draft plan that, in its final form, will be implemented to replace the first plan on the 1st September, 2010.

Issues that created passionate debate ten years ago remain, but the fire of debate seems to have died a little. The debate of course, was and is, all about water, an issue that over the passing decade has roared to the top of the list of national priorities. Lines were drawn in the sand very clearly ten years ago, in the debate between northern landholders in comparatively high rainfall areas demanding use and access to rain that fell on their land to develop irrigation and water conservation projects and graziers in the more southern sections of the catchment who claimed every cupful taken upstream was a cupful less for down-stream graziers and the environment.

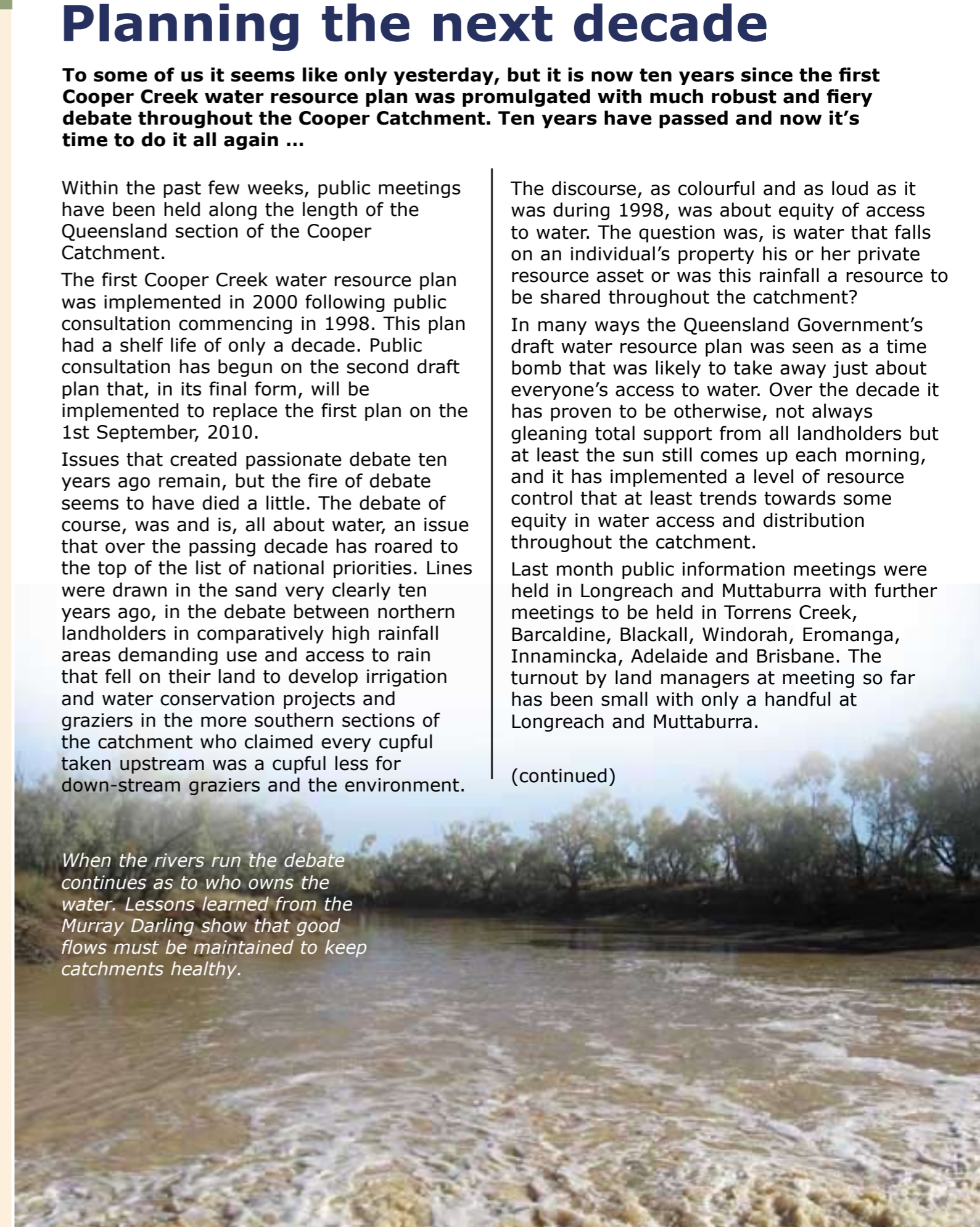
The discourse, as colourful and as loud as it was during 1998, was about equity of access to water. The question was, is water that falls on an individual's property his or her private resource asset or was this rainfall a resource to be shared throughout the catchment?

In many ways the Queensland Government's draft water resource plan was seen as a time bomb that was likely to take away just about everyone's access to water. Over the decade it has proven to be otherwise, not always gleaning total support from all landholders but at least the sun still comes up each morning, and it has implemented a level of resource control that at least trends towards some equity in water access and distribution throughout the catchment.

Last month public information meetings were held in Longreach and Murrumbidgee with further meetings to be held in Torrens Creek, Barcardine, Blackall, Windorah, Eromanga, Innamincka, Adelaide and Brisbane. The turnout by land managers at meeting so far has been small with only a handful at Longreach and Murrumbidgee.

(continued)

When the rivers run the debate continues as to who owns the water. Lessons learned from the Murray Darling show that good flows must be maintained to keep catchments healthy.



Not knocking nostalgia - but..!

Karen Emmott takes a whimsical look at the challenges of a young bride moving into a multigenerational dynasty on an outback property.

Planning the next decade (continued)

What is the Cooper Creek draft water resource plan?

The water resource plan is a government document prepared by the Department of Natural Resources and Water that prescribes the allocation and use of water from the river catchment. Simply it outlines who can use water and how much – landholders, townships, communities, industry, irrigation developments. The plan covers surface water and sub-artesian groundwater in the Cooper Creek catchment area including Torrens Creek, Upper Thomson, Lower Thomson, Alice River, Upper Barcoo River, Lower Barcoo River and Cooper's Creek.

The completed plan will define how much water can be taken from the system, allowing for township and industry growth along with needs of landholders whose largest use is for stock and domestic purposes. The need for floods as the engine driving the rich cattle fattening industry is a major issue to maintain limited extraction allocation. Free flowing floods also maintain the environmental requirements that make the inland river systems near-pristine compared to the collapse of other systems such as the Murray Darling.

What can you do?

Most of the public information days have concluded at the time of writing. To assist in identifying issues of community interest to be covered in the replacement plan, submissions from landholders, interested individuals and groups must be tendered to the Department of Natural Resources and Water by the third of October, 2008. More details are available through the government 'information report' available at DNR & W offices or on www.nrw.qld.gov.au/wrp/cooper.html.

I'm not kicking tradition in the shins, truly I'm not!

But it's tricky inheriting the customs and labels that accompany a fourth generation home. A lot of things have been done a certain way, just because they have always been done that way. Asking "Why?" is greeted by an incredulous look. Doing something rash, like say, changing the cupboards the cups go in, can create vast consternation. You have to have a jolly good reason to change something when it has been okay for nearly 100 years the other way!

Every cupboard, room and paddock has its use and its name. And the name, ah, there's the rub! We have a large room just outside the laundry door called the engine room, which unsurprisingly, used to house the engine which provided the property with electricity until 1979 when they were connected to mains power. Thirty years later it is still called the "engine room" without one piece of machinery in sight. The main use of this room is now to store empty cardboard boxes, so, over the last ten years, I have taken to frivolously calling it "the box room". This has been met with great opposition at my impetuous quashing of tradition.

It is challenging to remember the names of rooms which used to store or house things or activities which have not been in existence in the last 20 years or so since I have been around. More evidence – the paint room (no paint there), school of the air room (last on air about 30 years ago) staff quarters (no staff, sadly!)

The paddocks are even more confusing – our little mob of milking cows live in the horse paddock. We haven't told the poor old girls – might confuse them!

I am a person who likes things in the right place and to match if possible. I even have my spice rack organized vaguely alphabetically. Well, okay, not vaguely at all ... alphabetically! I like my plates to match the table cloth and OF COURSE each other. I even get a small bolt of pleasure when the two clothes pegs I pick up to put a garment on the clothesline with, match!

Anyway, you get the picture! It causes me unease to have names just not representing what they are. Most of it, I just live with, but I am working on converting my "storeroom" to a "pantry". To me, a store room is a dark dusty place out the back of a shop where stuff is stored.

Although I concede groceries are known as "stores" out here, so "storeroom" does translate as grocery room. My large walk in room which houses all my dry and canned food stuffs, plus bulbs, batteries, kitchen appliances, canisters, and recipe books is more like a shop than a pantry I suppose. But "pantry" has a nice anticipatory, welcoming feel-insinuating that nice things will eventuate from that little cave of culinary basics.

Like an archeological dig over the years, these ancient labels continue to emerge. I discovered only last week that the funny space under the outside steps which lead up to our bedroom is actually not "where all the boots are under the stairs" and "the shelf above where all the boots are under the stairs" but the wood box and the potato and onion rack.

Apart from reducing a long rambling description to two simple words, it also reminds us of generations whose lives were not quite as easy as ours, who HAD to cook over wood stoves in 40+ degree summer days, and did not have the convenience of a twice weekly mail truck to replenish veges if needed. Maybe a nod to days past is not such a bad thing...

I also realised with a jolt that I am contributing to the "long ago labeling" practice. My twelve years of helping my kids learn through school of the air saw an old room in the corner of our house turned into a schoolroom. My last child triumphantly exited from there last year and headed off to boarding school. I have now claimed it as my craft/sewing creative room. But last school holidays I caught myself referring to it as "the schoolroom". How can I ignore twelve years of the triumphs, heartaches and highs that took place in there, and lose that label? I want everyone to know and honour what a significant part of our lives that was. So.... maybe this nostalgic names caper isn't such a bore after all?

Tradition, I dips me lid!

A Garden Escapee costs big bucks!

An excerpt from the DCQ documentary *Pigs and Prickles* currently in production.



ROSS MCPHERSON RUNS BEXLEY STATION, LONGREACH.



THIS CACTUS WAS THROWN OUT OF THE GARDEN YEARS AGO. IT DIDN'T DO MUCH FOR A WHILE ... THEN TOOK OFF.



IT WAS AN INNOCENT THING TO START WITH AND WE WERE JUST NOT VIGILANT ENOUGH



IT'S VERY HARD TO KILL. EVERY ONE OF THESE SEGMENTS HAS TO BE SPRAYED



WE WEREN'T AWARE OF IT UNTIL IT GOT OUT OF HAND

DCQ'S WEED CONTROL OFFICER BRETT CARLSSON HAS ASSISTED IN CONTROLLING THE BEXLEY OUTBREAK WITH THE SUPPLY OF A SPRAY UNIT AND SUPPORT IN CHEMICAL PURCHASE.



WE'RE DOING 60 LITRES OF DIESEL WITH A LITRE OF CHEMICAL AND THE CHEMICAL'S WORTH 500 BUCKS A DRUM.



CACTUS SPECIES SPREAD EASILY BY 'HITCH HIKING' ON TYRES OR BOOTS.



YOU GOT A GOOD KILL, BUT THERE'S STILL YOUNG ONES COMING ON.



I WOULDN'T MIND A NAPALM BOMB, BUT I DON'T THINK WE'LL GET AWAY WITH THAT!

Writing from the heart

DCQ Board member and busy outback woman, Kelsey Neilson has published two books of 'bush stories by a bush person'. What drives her to tell her stories from her heart? Helen Avery has the story.



Kelsey Neilson lives on Two Rivers Station, 70km north-east of Boulia. Kelsey could be labelled one of those *Iron Women of the West* - one of hundreds whose resilience, dedication, perseverance, loyalty and sheer hard work, keep isolated families, businesses and communities functioning.

Point to any one of the sparse dots on the map of the Lake Eyre Basin and you'll find women whose credentials echo those of Kelsey ... She grew up in Charleville when life for a kid was in ultimate freedom and security - the only rule... be home before dark. Year 12, the big decision - university and a career teaching or stick with the bush. So you test the water, a year working in as diverse fields as bank Johnny to stock work from Mt Isa to Boulia and the dream of university fades and the reality of outback life takes over.

Marry the bushman and you marry the life and the community. Get involved - Boulia Rodeo Committee, Back to Boulia Committee, School of the Air, Mt. Isa Distance Education, ICPA, Boulia Shire Council, wife, mother, teacher, grazier. If there's a need, a space, then you step in and fill it ... and as Kelsey said "*I'm a dreadful organiser ...I just love it!*"!

Pictured above: Kelsey Neilson, bush woman and author of two collections of bush stories.

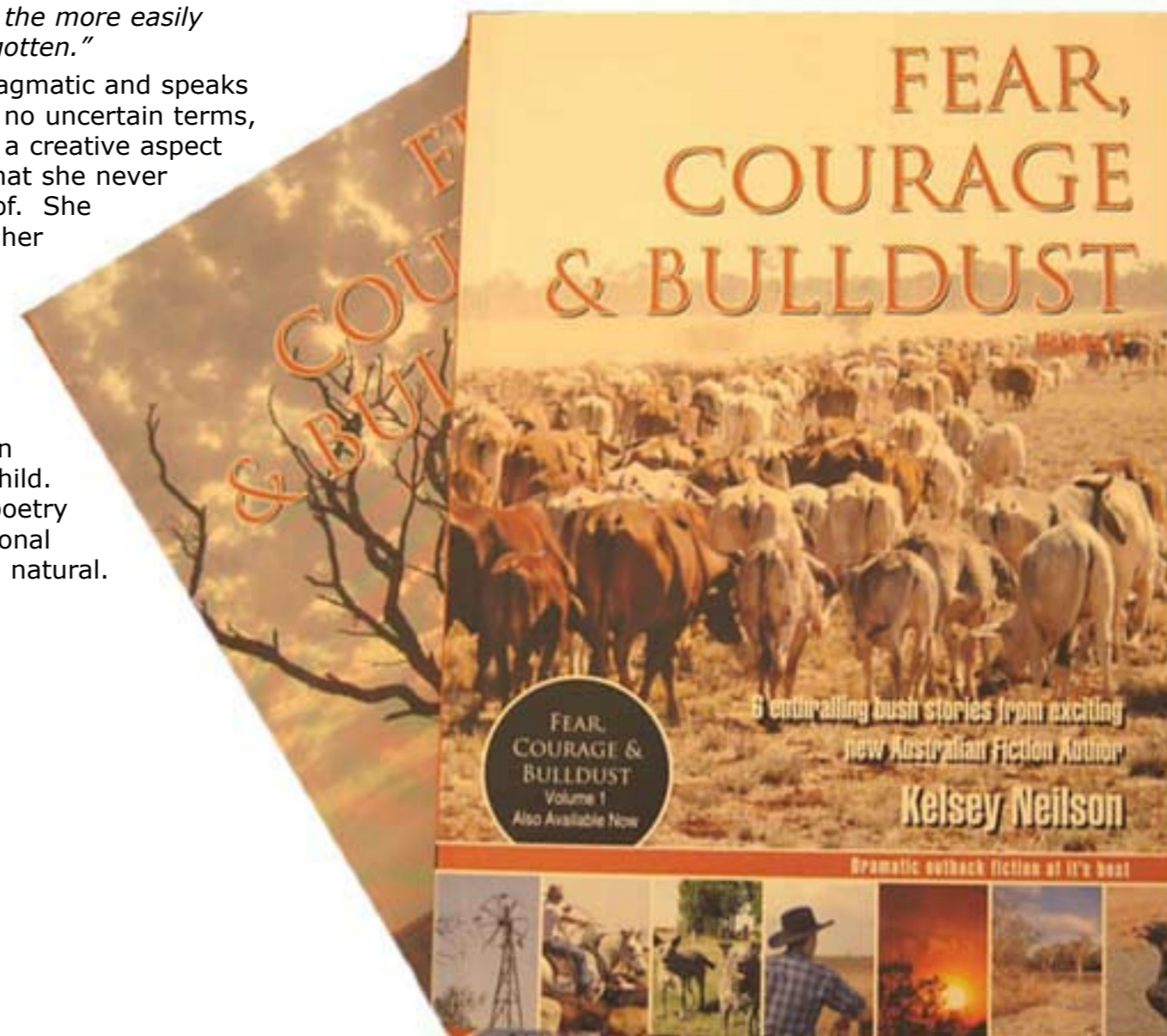
It was inevitable that Kelsey became involved in the Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee and from there step forward to fill a gap on the DCQ Board. Her commitment to community is blatantly obvious and a significant reason for her involvement is because DCQ is an organisation working from community up and out rather than from government agency down. "*I'm big on representation ... the further out you are the more easily you get forgotten.*"

Kelsey is pragmatic and speaks her mind in no uncertain terms, but there is a creative aspect to her life that she never loses sight of. She remembers her grandfather writing poetry and reciting the classic Australian ballads when she was a child. She wrote poetry as an emotional release as a natural.

When she started teaching her children the art of story writing, she decided she might as well teach by doing rather than telling and began getting down stories, putting together plays for parents at mini school, sending stories off to competitions.

Kelsey has recently published two collections of short stories and has a novel 'in the bag'.

She sees her stories as providing the stream of urban travellers who annually pass through the area, with an entertaining insight into how bush people think' live, feel - bush stories written by a bush person. One more way of expressing Kelsey's absolute devotion to the place she comes from.



"My feet knew a place that was a part of my blood, part of my breathing"....



POST cards

Helen Avery files another postcard, this time a postcard of transition as the Tasman makes her realise that home really is in the Outback.

I've been away and I've returned. It's been a more meaningful homecoming than the usual "back from holidays." I've been on a search I suppose, nothing defined – new pastures, the grass on the other side of the fence, peace, escape, mid-life crisis ... all those things!

Fate tossed me up in New Zealand – not much further in flying time than from Longreach to Brisbane, but far enough and different enough to reassess things from a new perspective. New Zealand is a small jewel of a country, a place of extraordinary beauty, gentle climate, warm people. A neat and compact package of attractions readily marketable to the world, it is teeming with tourists and migrants.

We were very happy living in Rotorua, a provincial city not unlike Rockhampton in our perception – down to earth, comfortable with itself, without pretension. So many people that we met seemed to be escaping, searching, looking for a place, questioning their roots. They came from all over – Europe, the Pacific, Asia, the Americas, Africa – driven by politics, economics, environment, oppression. We were also privileged enough to come to know people who were proudly confident in the knowledge of their genealogy, their geography, their stories – of who they were and where they came from. Nothing is simple and nothing is perfect. New Zealand has the same major issues as every other post colonial nation, but it was the strength and depth of their indigenous culture that made me realise that my feet knew a place that was a part of my blood, part of my breathing, and that I didn't need to be wandering the world to find it.

Pictured left: A long way from home – Helen Avery experiences a rare snow fall in Rotorua – incredible beauty in New Zealand but it is good to come home.

If you fly home it's there in that feeling you get when the coastal ranges are left behind and the country flattens and unrolls like a piece of rumpled brown paper, that sense of relief in your chest that is tangible. Last week I drove to Rockhampton and back. 1400kms. In New Zealand I would have travelled from top to bottom of the entire country. I would have seen wild coastline, farmlands picketed into neat, unbelievably green squares, forests, glaciers, mountains, cities like one of those miniature worlds created by model train enthusiasts. Here it was a routine trip to collect Bruce from hospital after an emergency trip with the Flying Doctor ... and it was an opportunity to reconnect. Lean forests, plains of pale grass, dry river beds, stock grazing wide, coal trains grinding towards Gladstone, the road a thin shimmering strip of bitumen running almost due east. It felt familiar, comfortable on my skin, like being wrapped in the arms of someone you love and know intimately.

We are privileged. The subtleties of our landscape are so fine, the sense of space so generous, the history so ancient. This is home. It's good to be back.

Desert Channels Queensland is funded by

