

# the **basin** **BULLET**

the voice of desert channels queensland



Out with  
the **Old**

*In with the  
**New!**  
DCQ walks the walk...*

# Not... As I See It

It's been quite a while since the last issue of the Bullet. This hiatus was unintended and due to the importance DCQ places on its people: some have been on leave; some have been out and about amongst the community; but most have been snowed under with project management, getting a new round of National Landcare Program funds out to the community, and reporting to funders (Government).

Meanwhile, their erstwhile independent editor, Bruce Honeywill, has been off being independent.

Bruce's cup overfloweths.

As well as lecturing journalism at the Central Queensland University, he has been acting in and directing short films, making promotional DVDs, winning literary awards for both short stories and poetry, and spending more time with his very special person.

To DCQ, people are the most important asset they have. They are more important than last month's or the month-before's Bullet. People only have so much capacity, and they do have a life away from work.

But process is also important, especially the process of DCQ's funders (government). It is important that reports are in on time, and DCQ makes every attempt to do this. However, choices have to be made: process or people; people or process. Depends on your point of view.

All I can say is that job satisfaction at DCQ is phenomenal and it has, by far, the lowest staff turnover of any regional body. There has to be some reason.

*Not...Bruce Honeywill*



## IN THIS ISSUE

**DCQ's new premises:** how can they afford it?

**Recognition for landcarers:** Winton puts on awards for locals who are showing their commitment through deeds.

**Pagan rite:** or a simple bush chore turned into an opportunity for fellowship and reflection, and a great feed - a taste of the real bush

**Secret society:** the hidden life of the spinifex lands through the eyes of DCQ staffer and naturalist, Steve Wilson.



**DCQ news:** what are they doing out there across one-third of Queensland?

**Catchment Roundup:** News from the catchments of two of the world's unique rivers.

**From the Landcare Desk:** the first of our new feature, 'From the Desk...'

**The Black Dog:** a look at a taboo subject that stalks all parts of society.

# Walk the Walk

*(Out with the old)*

With all the individuals and organisations that 'talk the talk' about the wise use of the resources that nature has bestowed, it is indeed refreshing, in these cynical days, to witness those who also 'walk the walk'.

Not only does Desert Channels Queensland espouse the wise use of resources - and assist community members to do the same through the provision of funding, information, networks and expertise - it practices what it preaches.

After three years of squatting like an orphaned child on the outskirts of Longreach in the 'Government precinct' - and being confused by the community as a government department - Desert Channels Queensland is now forging its own unambiguous identity.

Since its formation, the community group has leased a wing of a Government building; but with it hosting more and more externally-funded positions to assist land-

managers across the Queensland section of the Lake Eyre Basin to better manage for the future, Desert Channels Queensland was outgrowing that arrangement.

There was no suitable office space in Longreach so the group approached local businessman, Parry Smith with a plan to convert an old tin shed into offices.

The community can rest assured that the costs associated with the new building were paid out of business interest, and not from the Government's investment in the region. The lease of the new building is actually less than what DCQ was paying for a smaller area in a Government building.

Not only is having its own shop-front slightly cash-flow positive for the group, it has the added value of establishing a higher profile in the community.

And in keeping with the philosophy of wise management of resources, the 'new' building is a refitted mechanical garage complete with hydraulic hoist - somewhere beneath the carpet - and a louvre- studded, offset roofline. If you close your eyes you can almost smell the oil and hear the busy clink of spanners over the top of crackling synapses and clacking keyboards.

As can be seen from the photos, it is quite a change for the shed that has also seen life as a church and the ambulance headquarters. With some vision and imagination, and a firm belief in the philosophy of re-using resources, it's amazing what can be achieved.

Situated at 92 Galah Street, the 'new' building sports the DCQ corporate colours, a conference room (available for hire), library, kitchen, shed, out-door toilets and shower, entertainment area, shady tree, display arid area garden...oh, of course...and offices. In short, it is the: Desert Channels Queensland - Regional Resource Centre. What a good name!

## Winton Shire Council

### *Inaugural Innovative Weed Control Awards*

A modified Orchard mister, Camels and Goats used to control Prickly Acacia and a Field Day were the winners of the inaugural Winton Shire Council Innovative Weed Control Awards.

Mark Tanks from Corella and David and Maree Jones from The Grove received \$2000 each for their efforts in innovative woody weed control.

Winton Shire Council, while producing their Local Government Shire Pest Management Plan, decided to reward landholders who were trialling different methods of woody weed control in their shire. Nominations were called for and judged on their merits.

Mark Tanks modified a machine that had started out in an orange orchard. This was prompted by the results of treating the Prickly Acacia infestation at the house dam on Corella and the seedlings that germinated after the mature trees were removed. Tackling the problem with a hand held spray bottle, Mark was aware that he may not be able to control the seedlings due to the limited time he would be able to spend on weed control. He needed a mechanical advantage. After extensive trials and modifications to the nozzles and spray rate patterns and trials of various wetting agents the mister machine has proved highly efficient in terms of time and labour. Juvenile trees up to 2 metres have been treated with this machine. Mark said that this machine has enabled him to treat large areas of mature trees with his 110hp 4wd end loader, and be able to control any amount of seedling germination. This has allowed the Prickly Acacia eradication on Corella to be years ahead of Corella's initial Pest Management Plan. Mark has also had funding assistance from DCQ to purchase chemical for his trials and eradication program.

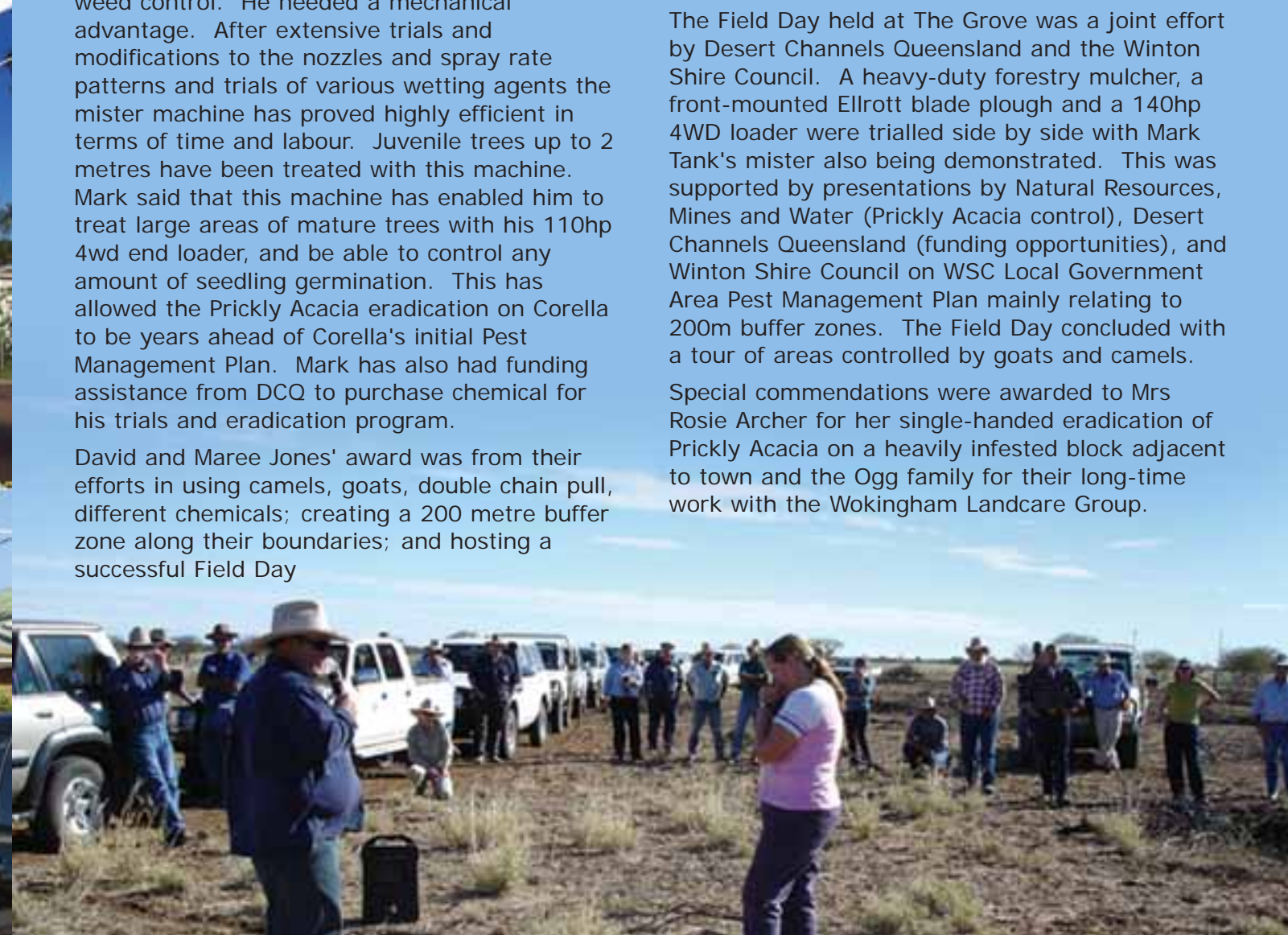
David and Maree Jones' award was from their efforts in using camels, goats, double chain pull, different chemicals; creating a 200 metre buffer zone along their boundaries; and hosting a successful Field Day

in mid 2005 to trial different machines and to showcase the results of Prickly Acacia control made by camels and goats. The stocking of The Grove ram paddock with goats and then camels and with the pushing of large trees with a skidder, has reduced the Prickly Acacia in this paddock by 75%. This has been achieved without the use of any chemical. A combination of basal bark spraying with Starane and diesel, Access and diesel, Starane and water and a wetting agent, Velpar and Grasslans, and pushing with a 140hp loader has been used to create the buffer zone around the boundary of The Grove.

As part of the Desert Channels Queensland Project the double chain pull method, using two D8 dozers and a scrub pulling chain, was used to devastating effect on Prickly Acacia in the Mail Box Paddock. The regeneration of native grasses, including Mitchell, Flinders and Button Grass with herbage and very little Prickly Acacia regrowth has been a feature of this treatment. Initial fears of the damage that appeared to be happening while using the double chain method were unfounded.

The Field Day held at The Grove was a joint effort by Desert Channels Queensland and the Winton Shire Council. A heavy-duty forestry mulcher, a front-mounted Ellrott blade plough and a 140hp 4WD loader were trialled side by side with Mark Tank's mister also being demonstrated. This was supported by presentations by Natural Resources, Mines and Water (Prickly Acacia control), Desert Channels Queensland (funding opportunities), and Winton Shire Council on WSC Local Government Area Pest Management Plan mainly relating to 200m buffer zones. The Field Day concluded with a tour of areas controlled by goats and camels.

Special commendations were awarded to Mrs Rosie Archer for her single-handed eradication of Prickly Acacia on a heavily infested block adjacent to town and the Ogg family for their long-time work with the Wokingham Landcare Group.



# Aunty Rhondda's KILL NIGHT RECIPE

## INGREDIENTS:

- 1 dry night (no humidity)
  - A liberal quantity of bright stars
  - 1 ripe, red moon, romantic and intimate
  - A lightly scented, caressing breeze that whispers over the Mitchell grass plains and through the gidyea trees
  - A few well-aged coolabahs with gnarly grey trunks and dancing leaves
  - A herd of softly lowing cows and calves in the distance
  - 1 or 2 melancholic dingos if available
  - 1 well-stoked fire of gidyea coals
  - 1 wire grill or plate
  - 1 blackened billy
  - 1 sharp pocket knife
  - 1 female bovine (preferably a British breed - shorthorn or Hereford) either red or a soft curly-haired roan, feminine face and soft eyes, must be in a contented mood.
  - 1 accurate rifle
  - 1 set of good, sharp knives
  - Tea leaves
  - Sugar
  - Mugs and plates
  - Salt and Pepper
  - Bread (if available)
  - A few swags, saddles or logs for seating
- (N.B. Avoid the addition of alcohol as it overpowers the delicate flavours)

## METHOD:

Stoke fire well.

Shoot bovine through the forehead, avoiding brains. As soon as she bends her knees, leap out of the vehicle with a sharp knife, ready to bleed. It is important to bleed the beast well to ensure meat is tender and will keep well. When the bleed has finished, skin beast and cut the meat into the required pieces. Store the meat but set aside the following:

- chuck
- liver
- sweetbread
- milkgut
- brains
- kidneys
- rib bones cut to size

At this stage do not use the fillet or rump as they will be tough.

By this time the fire should have burnt down to good coals and the plate should be hot. Slice the chuck, liver, and kidneys, clean the brains and sweetbread of membranes and slice. Lightly clean the milkgut and cut into 6 inch pieces. Rib bones are best cut into 6 to 8 inch pieces, do not remove fat. Check the sky for stars and when there are more than you can count it is the time to start cooking.

Do not use vegetable oil on the plate. Use the kidney fat as this will enrich the flavours of the final dish. When the plate is sizzling, put the rib bones, steak, and other meats on. This will create the most intoxicating aroma and cause heavy salivating which can be wiped with your shirt sleeve.

Prepare your plate and bread if necessary, then find your seat. Be sure the seats are around a red and orange dancing fire that is moving with the night spirits. Take your plate to the food. Eat rib bones with bare hands, allowing rich juices to flow over and between your fingers and down your chin: this is a part of the ritual. When finished, wipe your hands on your jeans. This is essential. Then collect your next choice of meat.

Stoke the fire and put the billy on. While this is coming to the boil, repeat the above process until you are contented or there is no meat left. Next make the tea, allow it to draw for a couple of minutes then pour into a mug and sweeten to taste. Sit quietly and feel the whispering breeze moving over the plains and through the grasses and trees, the murmur of the night and the silky darkness. Listen to the fire as it gently talks to you of many secrets and enjoy your mates as they sit quietly beside you, also listening.

One by one, roll out your swags, crawl in, taking the smell of the Kill Night with you, and gently close your eyes, knowing that the silky night with the red moon and the bright stars are looking over you and the murmuring breeze is a lullaby you will never find in a book.

This is the recipe of mateship, the receiving and giving of the spiritual kinship of the land.

## Introduction

Spinifex, genus *Triodia*, thrives on some of the poorest soils in Australia. It is one of the most extensive vegetation types, occurring across 22% of the continent. Only Victoria and Tasmania miss out on any of the 64 species, 20 of which are distributed widely.

Spinifex plants are perennial, endemic to Australia, and grow to a metre or more, typically in an expanding dome or dense hummock, with green leaves on the outer surface. More than any other ecosystem, spinifex or hummock grasslands characterise the arid Australian inland.

Grasslands around the world are often dominated by large hoofed grazing animals, not so in Australia. While kangaroos are travelling grazers of Australia's grasslands, it is termites who are the significant users of our spinifex grasslands in arid and semi-arid areas. Following these 'miniature' grazers are the lizards, which occupy the 'carnivore' niche as the hunters of spinifex grasslands. This odd food chain of spinifex, termites and lizards is unique: spinifex grasslands support one of the richest and most diverse lizard faunas in the world. Spinifex *Triodia* species should not be confused with grasses in the genus *Spinifex*, which are found only in sandy areas along coastal beaches.

## Ecology of Spinifex

Spinifex (*Triodia* sp) thrives on poor soils in low rocky ranges and sandy plains in the arid inland, but also occurs on rocky outcrops along the coasts. The distinctive domed growth is supported with a deep and evenly distributed root system growing down several metres. In most cases the roots develop from the same node as the shoots so each stem is self-sufficient in water and nutrient supply. This is a big advantage in arid environments.

Sometimes referred to as 'soft' spinifex, the widespread *Triodia pungens* is often utilised as fodder for stock while the 'hard' *T. basedowii* is tough and drought resistant, and generally unpalatable to stock.

Spinifex is well adapted to dry climates. Its leaves start out flat; but once the plant is stressed they fold to become hard, sharp and folded into tight cylinders. This reduces the surface area, slowing down the rate of heating and water loss.

Unlike other grasses, which decompose after each growth cycle, spinifex growth accumulates over time and plants provide

ground cover in areas where little else grows. Fires caused by lightning strikes and Aboriginal people often assist with the regeneration of spinifex communities which are well adapted to fire. Following a fire, plants regenerate either by sprouting from the base of burnt tussocks, or from seed, with many species able to use both strategies. High flammability due to its dryness, accumulated plant material, and volatile resin in the cells is a feature of spinifex.

## Spinifex: the ideal habitat!

Being prickly and dense, and often the only ground cover available, spinifex is a vital habitat to many arid zone species. Termites take full advantage of the unpalatability of spinifex, using it to support and develop their colonies to great effect. Their mounds are linked to available spinifex clumps by a foraging tunnel that opens beneath the centre of each plant.

Reptiles are great exploiters of spinifex habitat. Skinks, dragons, geckoes, legless lizards, snakes and goannas burrow in, under and survive amongst the prickly clumps.

Many of these reptiles have evolved to occupy the same habitat, but use it in different ways. For example, different species of lizard feed at different levels of the plant: some feed at ground level, others mid-level, and also at different times of the day. In spinifex grassland south-west of Alice Springs, up to 42 species have been found living together in surprisingly small areas. This coexistence of lizards, unparalleled anywhere else in the world is constant cycle of activity, each species utilising different spaces of habitat and food resources.

Spinifex also supports a rich tapestry of birdlife. Ever active Grasswrens (*Amytornis* spp.) forage for insects in small family parties. Conspicuous Painted Finches (*Emblema pictum*), collect seeds and nest low to the ground in spinifex clumps, using the prickly leaves as protection from predators. Spinifex pigeons (*Geophaps plumifera*) strut around in small parties picking up seeds and, when nesting, hollow out a simple scrap in the ground often under the protection of the prickly clumps.

Small insectivorous mammals are well represented in spinifex habitat. The Spinifex Hopping Mouse (*Notomys alexis*) does not need to drink. It thrives on a dry seed diet and has the distinction of having the most concentrated urine ever recorded in mammals. This adaptation comes at a price: to survive without surface water means this amazing creature has to be nocturnally active and live underground during the day, a method used by many arid zone species ranging from mammals to insects. Fat-Tailed Dunnart (*Sminthopsis crassicaudata*), another common spinifex dweller, survives hard times by storing fat in its tail.

## Threats

Feral animals, weed invasion, overgrazing, vegetation damage by stock, and poor fire management regimes are the major threats to spinifex. Foxes and feral cats in particular thrive in arid zones and impact greatly on small animal populations. Weed species competes for space and can dominate and alter habitats. Fire is one of the great regenerators of spinifex habitats, however, the length and frequency can retard and degrade growth. Fire from natural causes (lightning strike) may only occur every five years for many spinifex communities.

This is only a brief snapshot of the diversity of life that spinifex ecosystems support. If you are ever fortunate enough to travel through spinifex country be aware there is a much more going on beneath that prickly canopy than what meets the eye.



'Spinifex  
more than  
just a prickly  
plant'

Story by Steve Wilson

The 'silly season' is apparently over at DCQ as we have wound up yet another financial year, but it still feels like we are running to stand still. Our administrative staff members have been busy assisting with the annual audit; they have only recently completed the dreaded financial and performance reporting (hard on the heels of our Regional Investment Strategy review); they have pumped out another round of National Landcare Program project contracts (see below); and have finally got everything in its place after our big office move in the second week of July.

Having said that, we are now back to 'business as usual' in our strikingly renovated Regional Resource Centre at 92 Galah Street. Not only is our new premises near the centre of Longreach, it's right next door to the Motor Inn, and across the road from Edkins Park; an ideal location for us. We also have our own conference room (5 events to date) and, best of all, the whole thing is cost neutral to the organisation.

There is plenty of parking, so please drop in and say g'day and have a cuppa. We have already had more community people through the doors in a couple of months in our new place than we had in 3 years housed in a government building. It's amazing how strong perceptions can be, even if they're incorrect.

Our on-ground team has been flat-out as usual, getting out and about, and finalizing another round of project applications. Under the guidance of our Landcare Facilitator, Cameron O'Neil, we've completed the assessment process for our latest round of National Landcare



Program devolved grants which sees another \$300,000 go out into the region to assist land-managers in caring for their country.

Our process of using an independent Technical Assessment Network to assess projects and provide expert comments has again worked well. The process not only ensures that projects most likely to give the greatest benefit to the region's natural resources are funded, it also ensures that applicants can have full confidence in a fair and equitable system.

Brett Carlsson, our Weeds and Ferals Project Officer, has been working with the local Land Protection Officer on the experimental use of water-based chemicals for the control of cactus. They have tried a variety of chemicals and mixing ratios to try to identify a viable alternative to diesel and sump-oil.

These experiments are very timely given the wide geographic spread of cactus outbreaks and the numerous varieties identified. Cactus plants, well-adapted to arid and semi-arid environments have the potential to be an economic and environmental disaster for the west. Brett is working with landholders to develop strategic control projects aimed at nipping the problem in the bud.

With the Grazing Land Management workshops gearing up, James Shaddick, our mapping guru, has been pumping out property maps to support landholders with their training. While DPI&F is delivering these workshops, Desert Channels Queensland manages the project and contributes funding; funding that heavily subsidises the cost of the workshops to landholders.



Workshops have already been held for the Mitchell Grass Downs; the pilot for the Desert Uplands was recently completed in Charters Towers; and the pilot for the Channel Country is imminent. James also spent some of last month running around with AgForward assisting in the delivery of computerised property mapping workshops. These workshops train landholders in a basic Geographic Information Systems (GIS), allowing them to produce a property map, complete with satellite imagery, paddock areas and infrastructure. For more information on further courses, go to [www.agforward.org.au](http://www.agforward.org.au).

Several schools in the region have benefited from some DCQ funding for water-wise arid gardens. Regional Coordinator, Steve Wilson has been assisting students, teachers and parents in the planning and development of low-maintenance gardens planted up with suitable local native species. These projects have educated the students on responsible water use, generated wider community interest and understanding, and while contributing to a pleasant school-yard environment.

Finally, it was great to see the Australian Landcare Council out in our region with their recent meeting in Longreach. DCQ was invited to address the meeting and came away with the very positive message that Council Chair, Bobbie Brazil will be talking to Ministers about the issues faced by land-carers in regional areas.



# catchment round up

We recently held a combined meeting of both catchment committees and the DCQ Board. It was a huge success with 50 people attending and all providing very positive feedback.

Presentations ranged from an update on the Grazing Land Management project and its biodiversity component, to the Farmkeeper Program, the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative and the Great Artesian Basin Water Resource Plan

The committees' response to the Great Artesian Basin Resource Operation Plan (ROP) will be submitted shortly. We are grateful to the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Water for granting an extension for us to formulate a more considered response.

Apart from strong concerns over town supply allocations, the ROP has generally been well received.

Each year Desert Channels sponsors community members from across the region to attend the State Landcare conference and to be involved with the broader Landcare movement. Rhondda Alexander from the Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee was the only one able to find the time in a busy schedule for this year's conference. Rhondda enjoyed the opportunity to see what issues other regions were facing and how they were tackling them. She particularly the biodiversity forum and the weed control field trip.

Rhondda was also nominated for a Landcare award for all the blood, sweat and tears - not to mention passion - that she put into her wonderful book, *Plants of the Channel Country*. This must-have book is available from DCQ at the special price of \$20 to enable as many people as possible to have one on the shelf.

Desert Channels' Landcare Facilitator, Cameron O'Neil and Regional Facilitator, Steve Wilson, also attended the conference.

South Australian Government representation has changed on the committees with John Gavin and another staff member from South Australian Arid Lands filling the gaps left by Phil Murray and Michael Good. Welcome to the new members and sincere thanks to Phil and Michael for their valuable input.

The Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee will next meet at Bedourie on the 25th October. This will include a field trip to Ethabuka to view a number of projects on the property.

The next Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee meeting will be on the 8th and 9th of November at Innamincka. All are welcome, so if you can get a way from your busy schedule, take a break and check out your respective catchment meeting.



## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING NOTICE

Friday 29th September 2006  
2.00 PM

Preceded by a General Meeting at  
9.00am

Bill Ritchie Room  
Town Hall  
BARCALDINE

All land managers and interested parties are welcome to attend.

Anyone interested in becoming a Committee member please contact

Rob Cameron at the Desert Uplands Office before 5.00pm 25th September.

RSVP: 25th September, to the Desert Uplands office, 4651 1002

basin BULLET

## from the landcare desk

G'day and welcome to the first of our 'From the desk series'. In the coming months you will read what has been happening from the Executive Officer's desk, Chair's Desk, Regional Coordinator's Desk, WaterSmart™ Desk and more...

A lot has been happening at the Landcare desk recently. Late last month Steve and I attended the pilot of the Grazing Land Management (GLM) Package for the Desert Uplands region in Charters Towers. The Desert Uplands, Mulga Lands, Channel Country, Southern Gulf and Mitchell Grass Downs GLM packages are funded by Desert Channels Queensland and the Natural Heritage Trust, and developed and delivered by DPI&F. Desert Channels Queensland manages the GLM project on behalf of its other 3 rangelands regional body partners: Northern Gulf NRM Group; Southern Gulf Catchments; and South West NRM. DCQ's financial involvement in GLM means that workshop costs to landholders are subsidised.

I was very impressed with the standard of work that has gone into the development of this bioregion-specific package. Coming from a family of graziers, I found this workshop to be extremely informative and with the use of group activities we were able to put into practice what the presenters were preaching, so to speak!

Feedback from workshop participants has been nothing but positive. Some graziers have been very wary of what GLM is at the start, but by the end of the workshop they can't wait to start implementing their new found knowledge in their own production enterprises.

I have no hesitation in recommending the GLM packages and if you would like to learn more about Grazing Land Management contact DPI&F on when the next GLM workshop is running in your area.

In other news we have recently closed our latest devolved grant round of \$300,000 of National Landcare Program funds. The 45 applications received (total value of over \$900,000) were of a very high standard and our independent Technical Assessment Network did a great job in assessing all 45 over a two day meeting. Twenty-four applications were ultimately recommended to the DCQ Board with all being endorsed...great outcome for landholders.

Since starting in this position in early February, I have already done quite a few kilometres and am planning to do many more in the near future.

See you on the road!  
Cheers,  
Cameron

# The Black Dog

by Tom E. Dodd

**Note:** Sir Winston Churchill suffered from depression and referred to it as 'the black dog'.

I have lost my love -  
 though she's here today -  
 Drifted apart on the wings of drought  
 Thirty years since love's first kiss;  
 Now it has come down to this:  
 No grass, no stock, no self-esteem;  
 And add to this, no love, it seems;  
 Perhaps, all we really have is  
 dreams.



**Natural Heritage Trust**

Helping Communities Help the Country  
An Australian Government Initiative

Desert Channels Queensland is funded  
by the Australian Government's  
Natural Heritage Trust



## BOOK REVIEW

Tough Times, is a sensitive look at a serious issue through ten, very personal, but very different stories.

Written in the words of the men themselves, this little book takes you inside their heads and explores the issues and responses that can take people to the brink of despair.

Ten very different men with very different but similar stories: they have all travelled the same tortuous road of adversity and were able to come out the other side, stronger, wiser and more resilient.

These are their stories of how they did it, what worked, what didn't, and how they were able to get their lives back on track. Short, raw, first-person narratives that won't win a Pulitzer, but will make you think about your own life, assess your priorities, and give you a greater appreciation of those around you.

Tough Times is edited by Dr Cath Rogers-Clark and Susanne Pearce and published by the Centre for Rural and Remote Area Health, University of Southern Queensland. It is 57 pages of easy reading and available for \$5 from selected CRT (Combined Rural Traders) outlets.