

the **basin**

BULLET

the voice of desert channels queensland

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November 2005 Issue

A large flock of sheep is gathered in a metal pen, likely at a wool mill. The sheep are densely packed, and their wool is a mix of grey and white. In the background, a green and white truck is visible, and the scene is set in a rural, open landscape under a clear sky.

MULESING AND THE POLITICS OF WOOL

As I See It

Welcome to this third edition of the Basin Bullet. The many emails in support of the ezine have been both heart-warming and welcome. But where are the emails taking us to task over some of our articles that perhaps push the boundary of accepted thought?

As the editions roll out over the cyber highways, feedback tells us that the publication is being monitored by politicians and industry groups. This means letters to the Bullet will be read in the halls of government – well on computers at any rate. So say your thing, about anything within or concerning the Desert Channels Region.

There have been some problems with delivery of the magazine. DCQ staff are attempting to overcome this by using an automated subscription transmission list. If you are interested in reading further issues of the Bullet and you are not on the prime distribution list (direct from DCQ) please take the effort to subscribe via email (see inside this issue).

The feature story this month is on mulesing, the husbandry process used by Australian sheep producers that has come under global scrutiny over the past year. The idea to write the story was easy – a subject that will create debate. Writing the story was a different matter. This is a hugely emotive issue with all sides extremely sensitive to their own points of view. As my background is with cattle (in a life before journalism) I had never seen lambs being mulesed, which in a way, actually made that observational part of developing the story a little easier.

As I dug deeper, it became obvious that the damage done to our wool industry was not caused by animal rights people, it was caused by political ineptitude within the Australian wool industry. We've been told the animal rights people gave wool industry leaders 12 months notice of their intention to start a campaign. Industry leaders did not at any stage share this information with the industry at large. And the animal rights people asked for nothing more than what was already being planned within the industry.

A little negotiation two years ago and an explanation of what was already happening here could have stopped the boycott before it began. This political hard headedness has cost the Australian wool industry dearly.

Bruce Honeywill

IN THIS ISSUE

Mulesing – adapting to change:

An animal liberation group has shaken the foundation of Australia's wool industry by targeting global retailers of products made from the nation's merino wool. The battleground for wool's survival has been a case-study of perceptions in the market place of an industry's ability – or inability – to adapt to change.

Vision Splendid - Extended:

Australian Bush Heritage purchased another large property in the Georgina Catchment. Desert Channels Queensland was represented at the signing of settlement papers amongst the sand hills.

A Helping Hand:

Another round of funding has made possible an array of projects within the Region to support sustainability and biodiversity. And DCQ is looking for stakeholders with a need.

Opinion:

Letters to the Editor, Subscribe to the Basin Bullet

DCQ Roundup:

All the latest from within Desert Channels Queensland

Catchment Chatter:

What's happening in Desert Uplands, the Cooper Catchment, the Georgina / Diamantina Catchment and with Indigenous issues.

Cane Toads on the Outback Track:

The cane toad invasion is slowly working its way down the Cooper system.

Recipe of the Month:

A mouth watering fruit cake recipe from DCQ staff member Lisa Winter.

Voice of the Region:

In the first of a series, Helen Avery explores arts and crafts in the Desert Channels region. This month we look at Bush Harvest, a Longreach based retail outlet for the crafts and art of people in the Region.

I'd Love to Stay:

A meaningful poem by award winning poet and DCQ staffer Mark Kleinschmidt.

The Basin Bullet is the official publication of Desert Channels Queensland. Editorial content is supplied by the independent editor, Bruce Honeywill. Editorial views expressed in this ezine are not necessarily the views of DCQ and its Board. Correspondence should be directed to the editor at bhoneywill@bigpond.com

MULESING

ADAPTING TO CHANGE

AN ANIMAL LIBERATION GROUP HAS SHAKEN THE FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA'S WOOL INDUSTRY BY TARGETING GLOBAL RETAILERS OF WHAT WAS FORMERLY PERCEIVED AS THE NATURAL FIBRE. THE BATTLE GROUND FOR WOOL'S SURVIVAL HAS BEEN A CASE STUDY OF AN INDUSTRY'S ABILITY – OR INABILITY - TO ADAPT TO CHANGE.

I walk into the Galah Street home of Bruce Emmott. This Elder of the outback is taking his midday peace in a squatters' chair in the dense shade of a bougainvillea bower. It's hot, better than 40 degrees. He agrees to have a yarn. We walk into his living room where Mary Emmott offers the traditional cup of tea.

"Mulesing?" he says, "if these people could see the agony of a sheep when it's flyblown, they'd be horrified." My tongue forms words along the lines of 'the lesser of two evils will not appease the animal liberationists', but experience tells me it's better to hold my peace than get in the way of Bruce Emmott as he, florid faced, builds into full oratory.

"I've seen sheep kicked by horses, attacked by dogs, hurt in all sorts of ways: they are resilient to pain. But a fly-struck sheep will stagger, lean against a tree and groan for days in pain – until it dies. This is the worst death you could imagine.

"And mulesing saves a lot of that pain, that death. A lamb, when it's mulesed, gets two thin strips of skin cut off its breech. I've seen them mulesed quickly and released from the cradle and they immediately start to feed; you can't tell me the operation causes that much stress."

Octogenarian, Bruce Emmott has more than 60 years as a successful wool producer to back up his claims. The wool industry's argument is in line with, if not always articulated as passionately as, this old sheep man.



All forms of livestock handling are coming under scrutiny with changes in public perception.

Over the past decades, animal husbandry has seen myriad changes wrought by changing public perceptions and opinions, often brought about by the increased access of all Australians to information. In retrospect, many of these changes have improved the way primary producers do business, such as livestock transport systems that are better, safer, and more efficient, with a significant reduction in bruising.

The common-place practice of mulesing lambs has been one of those jobs taken for granted during the course of a year's management of a sheep flock. The reason for the operation is simple: to reduce the likelihood of flystrike.

Ask the question, 'what is mulesing?' and immediately, vested interest subjectivity colours and emotes the debate, showing the vastly different public perceptions.

The industry describes the operation as: *'simply cutting thin strips of skin from the back haunches and legs of a sheep, a superficial skin deep 'snipping' that does not create an excess of stress in the young sheep'*.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) describes the process: *'The Australian ranchers perform a barbaric operation - called 'mulesing' - where they force live sheep onto their backs, restrain their legs between metal bars, and, without any painkillers whatsoever, slice dinner-plate-sized chunks of flesh from around their tail area. This is done to cause smooth, scarred skin that can't harbor fly eggs. Ironically, the exposed, bloody wounds themselves often get flystrike before they heal'*. (Extract from the PETA website)

So what's this mulesing all about? I walk towards the sheep yards with some trepidation, having never seen mulesing, a technique developed by one John Mules back in the 1930s. I feel a little queasy as I walk through freshly mulesed lambs, their backsides bloody. Surprisingly their main concern seems to be finding their mums for a drink of milk. Beside the row of cradles, a pile of freshly cut lambs' tails and a smaller pile of wool tufts from mulesing lies on the ground. A stock worker catches the lambs, putting them on their backs in the cradles, flip-out steel stirrups hold the lambs firmly by the hocks. The operator moves quietly along the rack of four lambs, castrating males then starting the process of mulesing.

His razor-sharp steel shears move quickly and decisively, slicing first through soft lambswool then thin skin, taking a small piece from either side of the breech. The tail is taken off and the bleeding areas sprayed with disinfectant, then, tipped from its cradle, the lamb walks away with a little bleat, looking for maternal comfort.

I try for an honest, unemotional observation: it's difficult to determine the stress level of an animal. It's probably a mistake to overlay human feelings and pain thresholds.

It's very subjective, even a scientific evaluation would still be based on subjectivity. Even though different animals react differently to pain, I guess we can make comparisons. A calf, for example, being pulled horizontal in a calf cradle, marked and branded, exhibits far more stress than the lambs I saw getting mulesed. Regardless, it's not a pleasant operation, no wool producers I have spoken to enjoy the process and would give it up today if an equally viable way to combat fly strike was available.

The Mulesing debate is very much a debate between different worlds. One is the grass roots world of wool producers in an established industry that was seen, only fifty years ago, as the economic foundation of the nation of Australia (*'We ride on the sheep's back'*). The other is the world of urban people, often compassionate, often out of touch with the industries that supply them with food and fibre. But this out-of-touchness of urban people does not make their caring irrelevant, particularly when considering the fact these people make up much of the global market for high quality food and fibre.

So how did the latest international debate over practices within the Australian wool industry begin?

PETA – People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals – has a 20 year history of hard hitting campaigns against major corporations on the basis of animal rights. Started by British born American, Ingrid Newkirk, the group has built from a backyard show two decades ago to an international organisation attracting \$25 million of donations each year.

“a stigma was implanted that will hang around the neck of the Australian industry for a long time”

Many of the campaigns have tackled trans-national corporations with far bigger annual turnovers than the entire Australian wool industry. Corporations with which PETA campaigns have caused policy and production changes include McDonalds, Burger King, Wendy's, Mercedes Benz, Gillette and GAP Inc.

In October, 2004, PETA started a campaign targeting the corporate users of Australian wool. This concerted attack on an industry already struggling had an immediate impact and caused a further loss of confidence. PETA's campaign centred on two areas – mulesing and the live export of sheep. The campaign had immediate impact with American and European corporations refusing to use Australian

merino wool in products.

The campaign took on many faces. An example is the series of giant billboards erected in New York showing graphic images of a mulesed sheep with the words 'Did your sweater cause a bloody butt? – Boycott Australian wool.' The billboards caused such shock to New Yorkers they were taken down ... after the damage was done!



Sheep veteran Bruce Emmott: “If these people could see the agony of a sheep when it’s flyblown!”

Leaders of the wool industry in Australia, already badly battered and on the ropes with infighting and an industry in economic trouble with drought and low prices, took a 'backs against the wall' stance to protect what was left of Australia's once biggest industry. Australian Wool Innovation, Woolmark and WoolProducers refused outright to negotiate with the drivers of the campaign.

The campaign in the large urban regions of the Northern Hemisphere was turning consumers away from the Australian product

while the mainstream industry leaders in Australia pulled up the drawbridge. Through this period a stigma was implanted that will hang around the neck of the Australian industry for a long time.

AWI and WoolProducers refused to negotiate through the first half of 2005, instead starting a claim for damages with PETA in the Australian Federal Court under the Trade Practices Act. Chair of AWI, Ian McLachlan said, “Well it might cost some millions of dollars: I have no doubt it will be very expensive.” PETA answered with a strengthening campaign in North America and Europe.

FRUSTRATED WITH THE LACK OF NEGOTIATION AND THE BUILDING BOYCOTT

The Australian Wool Growers Association (AWGA) became frustrated with the lack of negotiation, the building boycott against Australian wool and the fact that AWI was spending millions of dollars of wool levy money in a continuing court battle – money wool producers could ill afford. So AWGA made an approach to PETA and negotiated a deal that saw the dismantling of the boycott.

Peter Laird from Hillston, NSW, is a long time director of AWGA and has been involved in the politics of wool for decades. He says while AWGA members certainly didn't welcome PETA's attention at the outset, the group quickly saw that the campaign was bringing wool back on the world's radar. “The PETA campaign was raising the public awareness of wool,” Peter Laird tells me, “we quickly saw that if we could sit down at the table with these people we could negotiate through it and end up with a good result – it could be a good marketing ploy.

“And we did sit down with them seven months or so ago, and they listened to us and began to understand the complexity of our situation with mulesing. That's how the agreement came about.”

The PETA / AWGA agreement underwrote an *'achievable and gradual phasing out of mulesing and to a review of the current state of live exports to ensure that the trade is complying with Australian welfare standards'*. In return PETA agreed to end its campaign against the Australian wool industry and *promised not to start any campaign against it for at least 10 years.*

Australian Wool Growers Association (AWGA) in August reaffirmed its commitment to introduce a new and innovative marketing brand of un-mulesed or 'ethical' merino

wool, following the historic agreement with PETA that ended the wool boycott.

However while the AWGA negotiators were suitably pleased with their agreement, decade-old intra-industry adversity rose to the surface yet again. AWI, WoolProducers and an assortment of subgroups refused to accept the AWGA agreement. AWI claimed PETA could not be trusted and rode a wave of false, disinformation promoted through the nation's conservative rural press.

AWGA pointed out that PETA had a long history of honouring agreements – something that AWI, with its slippery politics and postponed promises, could not match. In 2002, AWI had already undertaken a promise to phase out mulesing by 2007, a time frame it had no way of meeting. In 2004 AWI extended the phase-out period to 2010 without any solid basis for the promises, already badly bent.

NAKED PROTESTORS WITH THE AUSSIE FLAG PAINTED ACROSS BLOODIED BODIES

So on the 27th September this year the international boycott was once more launched in the face of the rejection by AWI and WoolProducers of the AWGA agreement. Nude PETA members with the Australian flag painted across bloodied bodies protested at the Australian Embassy in Washington and at other places throughout the Northern Hemisphere. The perceptions of cruelty and Australian wool were once again on TVs in living rooms of the most affluent and highest consuming countries in the world.

At the end of September, AWGA Chair, Chick Olsson, pleaded with wool industry leaders to sit down together and work out a strategy for solving animal rights and marketing issues once and for all. AWI and WoolProducers

refused to come to the table. The industry infighting continued with AWGA CEO, Sam Stephens, publicly describing the leadership of AWI as having a 'stone age mentality'.

Around this time it was revealed that PETA had approached AWI 12 months before the implementation of the boycott campaign and declared the group's intention. AWGA members were incensed that AWI had not shared this intelligence with the industry.

But then, in October this year, AWI launched a \$2 million, five year research project 'to determine if selective breeding programs can produce breech blowfly-strike resistance sheep'. The project will be carried out by CSIRO and the WA Department of Agriculture. AWI Wool Production General Manager, Ian Rogan says 'the project was part of the company's comprehensive push to find alternatives to mulesing, in line with the sheep industry's commitment to phase out mulesing by 2010'.

BY MID OCTOBER THE PETA CAMPAIGN WAS DONE AND WON

By mid October, Ingrid Newkirk and PETA saw their campaign on Australian wool as done. The second boycott dwindled. PETA lawyers wrote to Australian Wool Innovation's legal team offering to surrender her right to claim legal costs if, following the AWI election on the 9th of November, the new board secures an end to the lawsuit against PETA.

A couple of weeks before the AWI annual general meeting, Ian McLachlan and AWI announced a 'declaration' with major US retailers to accept Australian wool. The foundation of this declaration was the phasing out of mulesing, and the introduction of more humane handling methods. AWI claimed it had beaten PETA with this declaration, but the foundation of the declaration did no more than echo the demands of PETA. PETA had already won, and many in the industry saw the 'declaration' as a capitulation by AWI.

On November 9, Ian McLachlan was once more voted in as head honcho of AWI, thoroughly routing an AWGA challenger. In his acceptance speech, he confirmed that AWI would be continuing the court case against Ingrid Newkirk and PETA, which will mean PETA's withdrawal of the offer to pay its share of legal costs should the AWI case fail and the potential of a high cost burden on Australian wool producers through the levy.

WE HAVE STOPPED THE ENEMY AT THE GATES!

His speech echoed the adversarial position of the body he runs, the conservatism of the floundering wool industry once more putting this war horse in charge. "We have repelled the enemy," McLachlan said. "We have stopped the enemy at the gates. But we must remain ever vigilant."

Many see his speech as a refusal to accept the fact that the wool market is wider than this group of Australian wool growers. Many wool growers see the continuing expenditure of large amounts of their money on the PETA court case as a waste.

The furore over mulesing is only part of the world's changing perceptions on how things should be done. Many see the broader population, as consumers, being valid stakeholders in an industry's direction. The future can now be seen as being owned by those who can adapt to change. The inertia of industry groups who resist change will condemn them to extinction like the dinosaurs that once walked this land.



THE VISION SPLENDID - EXTENDED

IN ITS 15 YEAR HISTORY, AUSTRALIAN BUSH HERITAGE HAS EXPANDED ITS HOLDINGS TO A SIZEABLE CHUNK OF AUSTRALIA. EARLY THIS MONTH ANOTHER GEORGINA CATCHMENT PROPERTY BECAME PART OF THE GROWING PORTFOLIO OF CONSERVATION RESERVES OWNED BY THIS NON-GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION.

They invest for profit. Not for dollar profit of the bottom line, but rather for the ongoing profit of Australia's environment and for all who shall sail in her.

The November 9 sale of the 2,330 sq km cattle station, Craven's Peak was settled amongst the red sandhills of the Simpson Desert. Vendor Gordon McDonald sold out after 30 years on the property, accepting an undisclosed figure, although Bush Heritage has been reported as having \$3.7 million in the kitty to cover the purchase and ongoing management.

Australian Bush Heritage is a not-for-profit group started in 1990. From small beginnings, Bush Heritage now has assets of \$14 million. Income and running costs for the association comes from private donations, bequests and some Federal Government funding under NHT 2.

Craven's Peak, adjoining Ethabuka Station pur-



From left, Doug Humann (CEO, Australian Bush Heritage), Guy Fitzhardinge (A.B.H. Board Member) and Angus Emmott (DCQ Board Member) at Craven's Peak on the day of the sale finalisation. (pic by Alexandra de Blas)

chased by Bush Heritage in 2004, will be looked after by Ethabuka management team Karen Harriand and Alistair Dermer until a new management team takes over Craven's Peak in 2006. This combined reserve, west of Boulia on the NT border, now covers nearly 4,500 square kilometres.

Bush Heritage CEO Doug Humann officiated the signing attended by Bush Heritage board member Guy Fitzhardinge and Bruce Boyd from the Nature Conservancy in the US. An-

gus Emmott represented Desert Channels Queensland at the event.

Communications Strategist with Australian Bush Heritage, Alexandra de Blas says Craven's Peak was chosen by Bush Heritage because it has the richest desert assemblage of reptiles and small vertebrates in the world. "There are 30 species of mammals," she told the Bulletin, "nearly 70 species of reptiles and 120 species of birds. It is this high vertebrate diversity that makes the place so important."

Australian Bush Heritage owns properties throughout Australia, in a broad variety of bioregions, reflecting important conservation values. This movement has attracted broad community support from both urban and rural areas with the patronage of personalities such as singer / songwriter John Williamson.



Meetucka Waterhole, part of the Mulligan River system in the Georgina Catchment. (pic by Alexandra de Blas)



The ABC Helicopter flew a journalist and crew from Sydney to Craven's Peak to cover the signing.

A HELPING HAND



IT MIGHT NOT BE THE POT AT THE END OF THE RAINBOW, BUT THE LATEST RELEASE OF \$300,000 TO DCQ UNDER THE 'PROTECTING OUR FUTURE' PROGRAM WILL HELP LANDHOLDERS IN THE DESERT CHANNELS REGION TAKE ANOTHER STEP TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT

Desert Channels Queensland has allocated an additional \$300,000 for groups and landholders within the region to assist in meeting the sustainability goals within DCQ's Protecting Our Future program.

The funding will flow to projects within the four main categories identified for the Desert Channels region – Land, Water, Biodiversity and Community.

Chief Executive of DCQ, Leanne Kohler, says the new round of funding opens many opportunities for individuals and groups to develop specific projects within the region and to build the capacity and understanding of the importance of sustainability.

"This \$300,000 will be available for a broad variety of

projects," says Ms Kohler. "These could range from Landcare Groups, schools or local government running specialised workshops, to targeted projects aimed at improving the condition of land, water, and biodiversity, and community projects that don't fall under our other programs."

The concept of the Protecting Our Future program was the brainchild of DCQ's then planner, Mike Chuk. It encourages integrated projects that provide benefits across all the region's assets: land, water, biodiversity and community.

It is funded from the Federal Government's Natural Heritage Trust through DCQ's Regional Investment Strategy.

Applications can be made for projects up to the value of \$50,000 and those projects must be completed within 12 months.

Individuals who are GST registered with an ABN can apply, as can incorporated groups (Landcare, schools, progress associations). Shire councils can also apply for projects that are of high public benefit.

"This is a great opportunity for land managers and groups who have natural resource management project ideas," Ms Kohler says. "We can help them to develop their application whether it be under the Protecting Our Future program, or one of several other funding flows we have available."

If you're interested in applying for funding, contact Desert Channels Queensland for a Protecting Our Future information kit which includes an application form, guidelines for filling it out, eligibility criteria, and background information.

Eligible activities

Activities that are eligible through this funding source include, but are not limited to:

- Investigations, trials and demonstrations to enable community and industry groups to compare, determine or identify appropriate sustainable techniques to address priority NRM issues;
- Training for groups of resource managers and users where this will significantly increase the uptake of sustainable resource management practices within a catchment or region;
- Awareness raising activities linked to on-ground actions to help group members and others in the region learn new ideas or build skills in the sustainable management of natural resources;
- On-ground restoration, rehabilitation and/or revegetation activities that prevent or reverse degradation and/or improve productivity and biodiversity;
- Activities contributing to or promoting improved water quality;
- Specific measures that are linked to broader NRM activities, such as Environmental Management Systems;
- Research to fill critical gaps that will help support the adoption of sustainable NRM practices;
- Technical and other project support where this is essential for project delivery. Wherever possible, the skills of the existing network of facilitators and coordinators should be utilised;
- Employment costs (other than yours) will be met only to the extent they contribute to a wider program of on-ground action (these should be less than 50% of total funds sought).

OPINION OPINION OPINION

Dear Basin Bullet

I think it would be very advantageous to put a column about Google Earth in the next edition of the ezine. It could mention how satellite imagery is a marvellous tool for land managers to use in demonstrating their good management practices and recording/monitoring improvements/deterioration in land condition.

There is a deep seated fear of "big brother in the sky" amongst many landholders and if they get the message that it is a tool which they can use as well as become aware of the level of imagery already available for use by government they may decide to pick up on it more in order to "keep pace". Some tips on how to use it and maybe a contact number of someone who is very familiar with it would be good.

Another idea, you could invite a jokes column. A way of getting the communication channels open both ways. A column called "I saw the strangest thing..." and encourage readers to finish the story, for example:

"I saw a bandy bandy snake. It was about a metre long and it's body was patterned with the most brilliant white and shiny black stripes running around it's rope-like length. The most peculiar thing about it was when it formed itself into two loops and proceeded to roll across the ground like a hoola hoop. I have read that this is the snake's defensive display. The Bandy Bandy I saw was an adult one as they don't grow much bigger than a metre. They are found all over Qld and NSW, in eastern parts of the Territory and SA and in a thin band through to the WA coast. They feed almost exclusively on "blind snakes" and, although venomous, are not considered dangerous."

or...

"I saw branches 20 to 30 cm thick stripped from big coolibahs and beefwood trees on a Burke River flat. The strange thing about

the branches being stripped from the trees was that they were lying directly around the base of the trees, not blown away from the trunks. The force of the wind must have been incredible as it ripped the big boughs from the trunks and smashed them into the ground beneath. It is apparently called a "down draught" and the phenomenon cut a swathe through the timber about 50 metres wide and travelled for a couple of kilometres. Wouldn't have liked to have been in it!"

Also a kid's corner would be a good idea: asking kids for their ideas on how we can be better land managers. Get them thinking on it earlier, also it's probably the kids in many cases that will get Google Earth going on the computer and get the ezine.

Just some ideas

cheers

Kelsey Neilson



Detail from Google Earth - a land management tool available as a free download (www.google.com.au and search Google Earth)

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Regional Process Review

We recently met with Australian and Queensland government representatives conducting a review of the regional process under which we operate. They asked us for our thoughts on the positives and challenges of the process and we were very forthright in presenting DCQ's perspective. The positives are the obvious things like the integrated approach to natural resource management, engagement of our stakeholders, community ownership of the regional plan, the investment in capacity and local knowledge base, as well as the ability to invest across more than 200 properties. Among the challenges were: the high cost of operating in a remote area; the difficulty in attracting and retaining suitably skilled staff; the complexity of the reporting process; the difficulty in delivering on-ground activities from within the investment package; and the palpable lack of 'cashed-up' industries with the capacity to invest. While they may not have liked what they heard at times, they listened to our issues so, perhaps, when it comes time for the third round of Natural Heritage Trust, it will be more user-friendly and regional bodies like DCQ can spend their energy and sparse resources out on the ground helping their community to manage for the future.

Annual General Meeting

DCQ's Annual General Meeting was held on the 27th October at the Jumbuck Motel in Longreach. Mr Peter Douglas was returned, unopposed, as Chair and the entire Management Committee was reappointed unchanged. It remains as: Peter Douglas (Chair), Bob Young (Deputy Chair), Lesley Marshall (Secretary), and Maree Morton (Treasurer). The final member of the Management Committee is the Executive Officer, Leanne Kohler.



Desert Channels Queensland AGM and Board Meeting - from right, Chief Executive Leanne Kohler, Chair Peter Douglas and staffers Alun Hoggett and Mark Kleinschmidt

Positions

We have completed interviews for a Project Officer for the Cross-Catchments Weeds and Feral Animals Initiative, a Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Officer, and an Administrative Trainee. Hopefully our new people will be settling in soon. They will be joined by the Project Officer for Watersmart, Cameron O'Neil. Watersmart is a

joint project on water conservation technologies for pastoralists between DCQ, Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre and South Australian Arid Lands natural Resource Management Group.

We're currently looking for an Information Systems Officer and a Landcare Facilitator to round off our team and help us to better deliver to our community.

Funding

During October we released \$300,000 for devolved grants under our 'Protecting our Future' program (see 'Helping Hand' story). This round is open until the 28th November so if you want to throw your hat into the ring, give us a call on 4658 0600 for advice and an application kit.

Our \$150,000 round for Indigenous projects will be advertised early in the new year; stay tuned for that one.

Protecting our Future is a fully integrated initiative aimed at getting the projects we fund delivering benefits across all our assets (Land, Water, Biodiversity and Community). In addition, we have funding opportunities for weed and feral animal control and wetland management.

Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee

The Committee is holding a joint meeting in Birdsville with its sister committee from the Georgina Diamantina. The highlight of this gathering will undoubtedly be the Catchment Cup Cricket match between the two at 3.00pm Friday 18th.

There will also be an update from the DPI's David Phelps on the current Grazing Land Management project that DCQ has contracted DPI to deliver. This project covers 70% of Queensland across the regional body areas of: Desert Channels Queensland; Southern Gulf; Northern Gulf; South-West NRM; and the Desert Uplands part of Burdekin Dry Tropics. Mitchell Grass Study update (DPI David Phelps); Two other updates of note will be the Georgina Diamantina Resource Operations Plan/Overland Flow and Australian Plague Locust Commission on the effects of pesticide on native fauna.

Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee

The committee will be meeting in Birdsville this month in a combined meeting with the Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee. We'll be discussing the proposed weed deck and tourism signage projects from each of the working groups. The committee will be also discussing the Georgina Diamantina Water Resource Operations Plan and a submission to the Queensland Government's proposals.

Membership of the committee is now being sought

so if you're in the GD catchment and interested in attending the next meeting please contact the Desert Channels Queensland office on 4658 0600.

Indigenous Program

Desert Channels Queensland and the Fitzroy Basin Elders Committee are hosting a Great Artesian Basin – Water Resource Plan (WRP) workshop this month. Traditional Owners from both regions along with other regions associated with the GAB will be attending the workshop in Barcaldine. This workshop has been arranged in partnership with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. The workshop is aimed at gathering the thoughts of the Traditional People in the GAB regarding the WRP. Matters for discussion will be the WRP's impacts on traditional areas and if the plan, in its present form, meets the aspirations and cultural obligations of Traditional Owners.

The DCQ Board has made available \$150,000 for Indigenous-specific on-ground projects. This funding program will be advertised in early 2006 and is aimed at the protection, renovation and management of Aboriginal sacred areas within the DCQ region. For more information and assistance please call David Thompson, Indigenous Facilitator on 4651 6033.

Desert Uplands

The Desert Uplands crew are looking forward to an exciting month with the staging of the Desert Uplands 'Discovery Days', the initiation of some new projects and the continuation of existing projects.

We recently held project management group meetings where

attendees provided input and direction for the roll-out of projects which include: Desert Steps Ahead; Landscape Linkages; and the Desert Native Timbers project.

The Desert Steps Ahead, an innovative project set to roll out in coming months, aims to link land managers and their questions, issues and obstacles to current management tools, information packages, latest research, and technology. It will use the one-on-one, across the kitchen table approach, and over the life of the project, a 'toolkit' will be developed for participants. Desert Steps Ahead project manager, Jeremy Hayden will be out and about visiting land managers of the Desert Uplands to begin trial runs of the project information and interview process.

Landscape Linkages builds on a 2004-2005 research project that developed a conceptual design for a market-based incentives bidding process to deliver landscape connection of good biodiversity habitat across the southern Desert Uplands. Further funding allows this project to roll out over the next six months.

The Desert Native Timbers project is at the desktop study stage: investigating current information. Our ultimate goal is to be able to provide land managers with all the information and knowledge they need to establish possible timber uses that could be developed into a viable industry in the region.

Further information about these new projects, plus many more, will be presented to the community when we travel around the region this week during the Desert Uplands 'Discovery Days'. We're getting out and about to let the people of the Desert Uplands know about the opportunities available through the Desert Uplands Committee.

CANE TOADS ON THE OUTBACK TRACK



Pics by A Emmott & B Honeywill. Compilation by B Honeywill

CANE TOADS HAVE BEEN IN THE MEDIA LATELY AS THEY INVADE ONE OF OUR NATION'S ENVIRONMENTAL ICONS – KAKADU, AND ARE, THIS WET SEASON, INFESTING THE SUBURBS OF DARWIN. BUT THE LITTLE BEASTIES ARE ON THE MARCH IN OTHER DIRECTIONS TOO, CURRENTLY PUSHING DOWN THE THOMSON. STEVE WILSON, REGIONAL COORDINATOR WITH DCQ, REPORTS ...

Yes they are here! Not only are these animals rapidly moving across northern Australia, they have also set up shop out west. The toads have been living and thriving in the Longreach area for at least three years. These tough and adaptable creatures have been able to travel and colonise a range of habitat types including the Channel Country landscapes around Longreach. I recently lifted a sheet of iron out on downs country near Bowen

Downs Station, Aramac and found a large toad camped under it: the nearest water was at least 10km away and the day was above 35 degrees Celsius, which is testament to the toughness of these animals.

Introduced into Australia at Cairns in 1935 to control cane beetles, the toads showed little interest in the cane beetles. However quickly established themselves in their new country. Growing up to 150mm, these grey, olive or brown toads are

rough and warty in appearance and have a distinctive 'purring' call which males emit from near water during summer. Cane toads readily make camp around human habitation, feeding on insects attracted to outside lights; and will even utilise urban fish ponds for breeding. Every stage of their development is poisonous, even the thread like egg masses, tadpoles and young toads themselves, which is why they impact so broadly on native predators. For example, in Longreach, sightings of large goannas are now rare and I have personally found three dead goannas with the obvious remains of toads inside. It is probable that toads also compete with some native species for resources.

Damp areas along creeks, channels and waterways are favoured hiding places. However, areas such as compost heaps, leaky pipes, drains and the cool moist areas around homes are also favoured. The toads wait for rain events to breed and travel. When conditions are wet they will venture out into open country, usually travelling by night and will refuge underground or in debris until conditions allow travel to continue. I don't believe toads will ever be found in the huge numbers we see up north, however, around Longreach they have proven capable of making a decent living and have impacted on the local native food chains. Any toads we can dispatch will benefit local wildlife.

Handle the cane toad with care: the milky fluid from its neck glands is quite dangerous. You should wash your hands after handling any frog or toad, but especially cane toads. Domestic pets such as dogs and cats can get sick and even die from playing with toads. The best and most humane way of dispatching a toad is to catch it, pop it in a plastic bag and put it in the freezer for a couple of hours. If this doesn't suit, use your imagination. Since moving to Longreach three years ago my kids and I have sent 173 toads to heaven. We had to be creative because my wife refused to have frozen toads in the fridge!

LISA'S FRUIT CAKE

At times some might suggest there are a few too many fruit cakes around DCQ, while others believe a nice moist fruit cake makes the very best smoko. This recipe comes from Admin Officer Lisa Winter who assures the Bullet that the mix is steeped in ancient family rites and at times has been noticed to have a certain magical quality tracing its way back to ancestral barbarian hordes. Any similarity to a CWA recipe book's version is purely coincidental.

So let's get to it: From the forest and your local alchemist select the ingredients:

First mix:

- 470 g Crushed Pineapple**
- 500 g Mixed Fruit**
- 125 g Margarine**
- 1 cup sugar**
- 1 teaspoon Bicarb of Soda**
- 1 teaspoon Mixed Spice**
- 3 Tablespoons of water**

Then add:

- Two eggs**
- 1 cup SR Flour**
- 1 cup Plain flour**

Bring all ingredients to boil and simmer for 10 minutes. Let cool!

When cool add eggs and flour. Stir and cook for 1 1/2 to 2 hours in moderate oven (150 degrees or 130 degrees fan forced). Cool and enjoy!

For that genuine bush taste, stick the cooked cake in the freezer and leave for at least three months!!!



Bush Harvest

THIS MONTH HELEN AVERY COMMENCES A COLUMN EXPLORING THE VARIOUS WAYS THE PEOPLE OF OUTBACK QUEENSLAND FIND A VOICE TO EXPRESS WHAT THEIR LIFESTYLE AND LANDSCAPE MEAN TO THEM. HERE HELEN TAKES A LOOK AT A COMMUNITY VENTURE IN LONGREACH – AN OUTLET FOR THE ART AND CRAFT OF PEOPLE IN THE REGION – BUSH HARVEST.

I sometimes think the most honest voice for a community is the usually unobtrusive one of its artists and crafts people – the folk whose creative minds need nourishment and expression every bit as much as their bodies need fluid and fibre for efficient functioning. These are people who are intensely sensitive to our world and our place in it, people who have the skills and talents to express this sensitivity or awareness in a hundred different ways from creating a garden to creating a work of art on canvas – something that the rest of us can see and say ...yes, that's it ... that's somehow captured how I feel, something I understand, something I know... We have scientists and economists, politicians and bureaucrats bombarding us with statistics; we have our artists interpreting the truth within us. This column will recognise some of these artists and crafts people as a significant part of the voice of this region.

Eleven years ago, with the economic downturn in the pastoral industry, a small group of young rural women in the Longreach area decided they would turn their artistic skills into profit. They could do something they



Pic by Melanie Avery

loved and were good at, and earn some income independent of the harsh vagaries of life dependent on the land. Not only were there numerous talented people around them creating an enormous variety of products, there was a ready market for quality, handcrafted, locally produced goods.

Today Bush Harvest is a cooperative of 76 members from across Queensland. Their operational philosophy reflects strongly the self reliance, dedication to community and generosity of spirit that have been stalwarts of women in isolated communities for generations. At the same time, to walk into the main street outlet in Longreach is to be instantly struck by the vitality of youth and modernity. The shop is vibrant with colour and variety: a rainbow tumble of beaded jewellery in one corner, a heap of multi coloured fabric in another; fragrant soaps and creams; wool, silk, cotton, timber, tin, iron, silver; photography, books, painting; recycled stuff from Dad's workshop; and fresh scones from Gwen each Friday if you're quick enough – traditional and modern. Almost every item has been created by hands that know this Basin community from the inside out rather than the outside in.

Bush Harvest operates under a commission system that generates sufficient income to cover rent, electricity and other basic operational costs. Some members put in hours of labour for a reduced commission so that there are no costs incurred as wages but



Pic by Melanie Avery

It's hard work for those members who contribute so much more than items for sale. Di MacClymont drives two hours each way to contribute her hours as a retail manager as well as maintaining the 'books' on the computer at home. Ann Cooper is a busy working mother in the town while Jude Gowing's diplomatic and organisational skills are manifest in the ongoing challenge of the roster. Helen Marsh comes down from Muttaborra... the list goes on... As well, there's a dedicated group of retired women like Elizabeth Hoolihan who do more than their share (as they always have) filling in when the roster falls short or someone has to pull out because one of the kids is sick or they have to help with lamb-marking.

And all maintain their own supply of 'made' goods. That's work and dedication ... and a wonderfully expressive, financially satisfying outlet, and bright display of the strength of spirit within our community.

Pic by Melanie Avery



maintaining the roster is a constant problem for the organisers. The whole idea is that profits are returned to the contributors. It is obvious that supply and quality have never been compromised. There's a sense of enthusiasm and pride in the products available from Bush Harvest that can never be replicated by mass production, no matter how hard they try.

FERAL NEWS



An embarrassing moment for a local film maker recently when the subject of his lens decided to take control of the process. A rather large and aggressive Mulga Snake entwined itself around the camera and stayed there for about 20 minutes, the camera rolling all the time. "I got 20 minutes of out of focus scales rolling past the lens," says the film maker (OK, fess up - it was the editor of this Bulletin, "one way to slow down journalistic intrusion I suppose." (Angus Emmott pic).

More intrusion below as scientists study a marsupial mouse (*Sminthopsis sp*) at Ethabuka (see Craven's Peak story, pic by Alexandra de Blas)



I'd Love to Stay

Mark Kleinschmidt

Twenty years; the heat's the same,
As is the deepening dry.
Survival is still the primary aim
When the seasons won't comply
With the puny toil and wishes of men
Who seek to rule this land,
And I had sworn I'd never again
Return, yet here I stand.

Two decades past I left this vale
Of battered dreams and tears,
Of big ambition doomed to fail
In this graveyard of ideas.
I tried my luck in city lights
With suburbs ever green,
Without the everlasting fights
Against a foe unseen.

Yet here in your verandah shade
We yarn of times well past,
Comparing different lives we made,
A black and white contrast:
"Engineering's good," I state,
"The money's always there."
You nod your head and say, "That's
great."
Deep in your squatter's chair.

"Things are not too bad out here,"
You add to our discourse,
"Though cattle prices aren't too dear,

There's still the sheep of course.
And it'll rain some day again -
It always has you know -
The question isn't if, but when,
No matter where you go.

"And down along the Stockyard Creek
The budgies flocked last year
In clouds that shadowed Piker's Peak
And thrilled the heart to hear.
The Mitchell grass about that time
Was waving rich and green,
With all the cattle rolling prime -
A soul refreshing scene."

"What became of Dad's old mare?"
I ask at memory's call.
You squint against the evening glare
And say, as you recall,
She mothered fifteen cracker foals,
A purler, every one.
Each of them as black as coal
And each of them could run.

A purler every one, you say,
With running in their blood,
And memories of yesterday
Wash o'er me in a flood:
Of cattle scents upon the breeze,

The mustering begun,
Lithe horsemen racing through the trees
And scrubbers on the run.

Darkness falls and still we talk
In warmth of early days,
Then on our family earth we walk
While stars above us blaze.
A horse is calling from the dark,
Another snorts reply,
The house dog lifts his head to bark
At far off curlew's cry.

Scents and sounds transport me back
Before our father passed,
When each one chose a different track,
And separate dies were cast.
The power of our yarn has drawn
Us to familiar range
That in the rosy glow of dawn
Appears without a change.

My mobile phone: its urgent voice
Is calling me to town,
I really don't have any choice,
The boss is coming down.
You shake my hand out by the gate,
"I'll see you 'round," you say.
I nod, "I have to go, old mate,
But gee, I'd love to stay."