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the voice of desert channels Queensland

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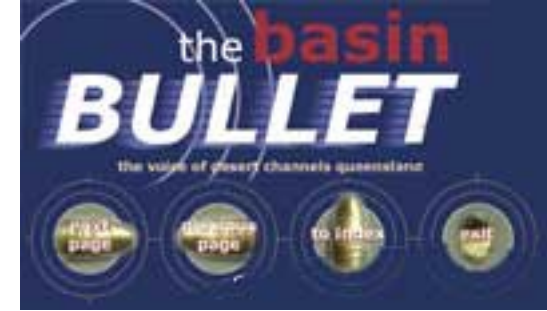
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FUTURE CHALLENGE



Tourism in Desert Channels Queensland

TOURISM HAS BEEN THE CINDERELLA INDUSTRY IN OUTBACK AUSTRALIA, ALWAYS PROMISING RICHES BUT OFTEN NOT QUITE MAKING IT. BUT WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOR TOURISM IN THE OUTBACK? WILL IT OFFER A RETURN ON THE INVESTMENT NEEDED TO MAKE IT RIGHT?



“This is the Outback I had always dreamed of visiting”
“These Rivers are so important, somehow we have to keep them this way”
“The Australia we grew up with still exists out here, people willing to have a go in the toughest of circumstances”
“We just want to have a glimpse of life as it really is in the Outback, meet a few of the people who still work and live here. This is what we came to see.”

These are just a few comments from tourists on a Longreach based tour that collects travellers off-rail at Charleville and drives through Cunnamulla, Thargomindah, Innamincka, Birdsville and back to meet the train

Tourists at Artesian Bore and bore-pressure turbine at Thargomindah in Longreach. These people were all happy with their Outback experience, but sadly this is not always the case. The economic importance of these visitors is easy to see. This small coach and fifteen people over a period of five days distributed tens of thousands of dollars into the regional economy in accommodation, travel, meals and purchases. Multiply this many times through a large number of tours, add large coach tours, fly-in tours and road trade and there is a tourism economic base in Desert Channels Queensland of many millions of dollars – and it's all goes-around-comes-around money, it doesn't get sucked into the profit bunkers of large corporations as it may in other industries. The Outback Queensland Tourism Authority estimates approximately

290,000 tourists now visit the Channel Country and Central West each year accounting for gross incoming revenue of about \$88 million.

“Access is the Burning issue.”

“The burning issue across the Lake Eyre Basin is access,” says Joc Schmeichen, the author of a report into Lake Eyre Basin Heritage Tourism, “access to cultural heritage, natural heritage and Indigenous sites.” Joc completed an in-depth report on “Future Directions” for tourism which was subsequently distributed throughout the region by DCQ. He has just completed a series of workshops at Mt Isa, Boulia and Longreach looking at uniformity of management of tourism issues across shire and State borders. “South Australia is probably handling the access issue a little better than Queensland at the moment with the Public Access Routes (PARs). These routes allow access by four wheel drive tourists and tourist operators to remote bush tracks by removing liability from landholders to the Government. Access on the PARs goes with legal camping within a couple of hundred metres of the track.”

One PAR that is currently successful is the Walkers Crossing Public Access Route running from Innamincka to the Birdsville Track and into Birdsville. Joc Schmeichen says his report identified the main issues facing tourism to be access, environmental management, better interpretation and direction



Birdsville Pub, an iconic tourism destination within the DCQ region.

South Australia is ahead of Queensland when it comes to facing the issue of access!



The vast vistas of the Walkers Crossing Track, adventure tourism tailored for retirees.

rather than regulation, and under-resourced National Parks. “In Queensland and the Desert Channels Region,” says Joc, “uniformity of approach to issues such as public use of town commons and waste management needs addressing. Currently different shires have different rules and this leads to confusion with visitors.”

“National Parks so under-resourced it’s ridiculous!”

He says National Parks have become under-resourced, “Parks are so under-managed it’s ridiculous. Visitors need access to the State-owned land and without management this brings its own conservation issues.” Joc says the town based management squad that has replaced rangers living on the Parks is totally inadequate, “They are no longer capable of holding the line, the balance between visitation and conservation, and this can only damage both access and tourism.”

Joc says the problems of access to wetlands, river banks, historical sites and Indigenous sites with public values needs to be improved uniformly across the region. He says access and management need to be addressed so they are uniform across property and shire boundaries, even state borders.

Desert Channels Queensland sees its role in supporting tourism ventures

within the region as important even though the group is not in the business of promoting tourism.

“DCQ can bring groups together for uniformity.”

“Whether we like it or not, increasing numbers of people are visiting our region for its outback heritage, natural beauty and wide open spaces and they’re spending a lot of money while they’re here,” says DCQ Executive Officer Leanne Kohler, “While we’re seeing the impact of such large numbers of visitors around popular camping spots and waterholes with every dead tree and bit of fallen timber burnt, accumulation of rubbish and toilet waste, increased erosion, and the potential for weed seed spread, it’s more than just the environment.”

With the pressure being put on the infrastructure of small towns, DCQ considers some form of region-wide management strategy is needed or the very thing that people are coming out here to experience will be ruined or destroyed.

“That’s where DCQ comes in,” says Leanne, “We’re about working with people to ensure the future of this region. If we manage our natural resources in a sustainable way, then we can have an ongoing strong community and economy.”

She sees tourism is an essential and growing industry and DCQ having a role in bringing the various interest groups together to work out a coordinated region-wide approach to the issue.

“DCQ is happy to assist further in whatever way we can to achieve our vision of a region valued for its unique and healthy inland river systems, landscapes, cultural heritage, sustainable communities and production.”

“Handicapped by being small operators.”

Veteran Longreach tour operator Alan Smith says the challenge for the future of Outback tourism is positioning the Outback as a marketable, iconic destination and getting the marketing dollars to promote the region.

“We are handicapped by being small operators, we don’t have multinational hotel chains or airline companies to support us in Outback Queensland, we have to do it ourselves.”

Alan says training is needed as well as improved communication between operators, “We’re all small operators, we have to realise we’re all on the same side and need to get together to attract people to the region then offer our own specialized attractions or skills.”

With 20 years in the tourism industry, Alan Smith says retirees will continue as

“Is tourism for you?”



a large component of visitors to the Region, although he says expectations of visitors can be expected to change. “As the baby boomers start to retire, their needs are going to be different to current retirees. And we need to market to the ‘empty nesters’, the double income urban couples whose children have left home.”

Alan sees retirees as a large component of visitors to the region for the near future.

Many rural properties have entered tourism either as a major enterprise or to subsidise or diversify income. Successful operators have emerged who meet a common range of criteria. First the operators must be ‘people’ people - outgoing, friendly and enjoy meeting new people.

Accommodation can be simple but must be clean and have easy access. En suite facilities are important if retirees are the target market.

And the experience is all important. It may be simple to those of us who are used to the Outback life, but visitors first and foremost want to experience life in the outback as it happens, as people live it. In Longreach, the coach tour from which the quotes at the beginning of this feature were taken, did tours of Qantas, the Hall of Fame and Longreach School of Distance Education. Which tour received the highest accolade? The School of Distance Education! Why? Because the visitors could hear the students carrying out on-air classes – life as it happens, the Outback Experience.

So if you are considering tourism in a remote region, and have a smiling, welcoming face, can supply simple but clean accommodation and can share living experiences ... there is income to be derived from tourism.

And as the region gains better market share and uniform approaches to the issues facing visitation can be resolved, this potential income can be expected to grow over coming years.

WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS

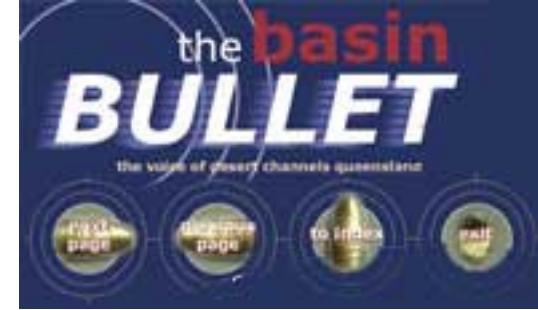
THE 2005 QUEENSLAND LANDCARE CONFERENCE HELD IN BARCALDINE HAS BEEN HAILED A SUCCESS WITH DELEGATES FROM ALL CORNERS OF THE STATE GETTING A GLIMPSE INTO LIFE IN THE DESERT UPLANDS. BUT WHAT DO THE PARTICIPANTS FROM WESTERN QUEENSLAND THINK ABOUT THE CONFERENCE? THUMBS UP FOR LANDCARE ... OR JUST ANOTHER TALKFEST?

The theme of the State Landcare Conference, held in Barcaldine on August 4 to 7, was 'The Outback Speaks'. The complex planning, organisation and coordination of the event was carried out by the Desert Uplands Committee and the event ran without a hitch.

Two keynote speakers brought grass roots ideology to the meeting. Dr Siwan Lovett spoke on connecting communities and got broad audience approval on her ideas of getting rid of the bureaucratic jargon, clichés and acronyms currently infesting land and water management. Leann Wilson, with her homespun style of storytelling, told of the complexity of people working

together using the metaphor of making a sponge cake. Leann pointed out the wise women of the west in years gone by left us not just a recipe for a cake but also a recipe for living.

A broad range of workshops were run during the conference ranging from using goats and camels to control prickly acacia to gaining an appreciation for the Y Generation, from understanding the vegetation management



legislation to sustainable grazing and coming to terms with native grasses.

The field trips opened many of the delegates eyes, with one quote overheard explaining woody weeds control to a coastal delegate, "In Landcare you spend most of your time

planting trees, out here we spend most of our time killing them." The field trips looked at diverse areas throughout the Desert Uplands: The Lakes Region near Aramac; a self drive four wheel drive desert trip; a look at historic and cultural heritage in Aramac; a visit to several properties reviewing management and land care practices; and an overview of hydrology on the Alice River and a climate workshop.

Desert Channels Queensland was the major supporter (Night Parrot category) of the Conference and assisted producers from throughout the Desert Channels Region to attend the days. Most feedback has been positive, with many western landholders believing the Barcaldine Conference was far more relevant to them than would one held on the coast have been.

Networking played an important part of the conference and sharing ideas over

a cup of tea or a beer was as important as the formal workshops.

One DCQ sponsored delegate said he was surprised to meet greenies at the conference, "and they were greenies," he said, "but they had their feet on the ground, we could talk to them and see where they were coming from and I guess they weren't so bad, we've got more in common with them than I thought."



ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER

WELCOME to the first issue of the Basin Bullet from Desert Channels Queensland. This newsletter – or perhaps the term e-zine is more appropriate – comes to meet several needs. First and foremost the Bullet will bring news of Desert Channels Queensland each month, new projects, happenings and opportunities throughout the region.

But it will bring far more than that, with an independent editor – Bruce Honeywill - who brings long experience in magazine publishing along with radio and television, the Bullet will deliver enquiring journalism of a high quality looking at issues affecting people living in the Desert Channels Region.

The Bullet will be a forum for opinion and debate from within the Region. This is started this issue with the profile of Charlie Phillott from Carisbrooke. Charlie doesn't pull any punches and undoubtedly will ruffle a few feathers. Emails to the editor are welcome and all viewpoints will be published in forthcoming issues.

'So slip one into the breach and pull the trigger'

The Bullet is a forum of debate for all people living in, or with an interest in, the Desert Channels Region. So land holder, town dweller, government employee or corporate executive, slip one into the breach and pull the trigger because it is through robust and fair debate that we can all move forward and see each other's point of view.

Artists, photographers, cooks, writers, poets, land managers ... there is we hope a little something for everyone in the Bullet, even a recipe for those with a sweet tooth.

Desert Channels Queensland

The Basin Bullet

The Voice of Desert Channels Queensland

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GOLD, GLORIOUS GOLD

GROUPS INVOLVED IN NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACROSS THE DESERT CHANNELS REGION SHONE AT THE RECENT QUEENSLAND LANDCARE AWARDS IN BARCALDINE, WITH THREE WINNERS, A RUNNER-UP AND A HIGHLY COMMENDED ACROSS FIVE OF THE TEN CATEGORIES – AS MARK KLEINSMIDT REPORTS...



Longreach-based regional group, Desert Channels Queensland won the prestigious Australian Government Landcare Regional Award for its innovative and highly successful work in reinvigorating local Landcare across the region.

Through investments of more than half a million dollars the group has successfully reignited participation in Landcare activities on more than 200 properties across the region where the capacity to deal with land-management issues on a broad scale had been sapped by long-term drought conditions.

"This award is tremendous recognition for the all the hard work put in by landholders, our staff and Board members," says DCQ's Executive Officer, Leanne Kohler.

"We're getting good awareness of Landcare and natural resource management generally and that can only be good news for the third of Queensland that is Desert Channels Queensland."

Hosts of the Landcare conference at which the awards were held, Desert Uplands Committee, took out the Australian Government Bushcare Nature Conservation Award in recognition of their outstanding efforts in on-ground nature conservation.

They also celebrated 10 years of working with their community on the sustainable management of the natural resources of the Desert Uplands bioregion, a designated biodiversity hotspot.

Also in the winner's circle was the Towerhill & Torrens Creek Landcare Group with the Alcoa Landcare Community Group Award. This group has been very active in the headwaters of the Cooper Creek catchment working on weed control and property management planning.

The Winton Shire Council was runner-up in the



DCQ Chair, Peter Douglas and Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, Henry Palaszczuk (Photo DCQ).

Landcare Australia Local Government Landcare Community Partnerships Award. This council has been a great support to its land management community, particularly in weed control.

The fifth finalist from the Desert Channels Queensland region was the Aramac Landcare Group which was Highly Commended in the Murray Darling Basin Commission Rivercare Award for its weed control work along waterways.

"These awards are great recognition for the blood, sweat and tears of everyone involved in Landcare in the region," says Ms Kohler.

JOBS – BETTER LAND – BETTER WATER



MORE THAN A MILLION DOLLARS WILL BE INVESTED IN THE DESERT CHANNELS REGION IN ON-GROUND PROJECTS TO REDUCE WEED PROBLEMS, IMPROVE GRAZING EFFICIENCY AND HELP ENSURE CLEAN AND ADEQUATE WATER AND SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIES FOR THE FUTURE.

The million dollar plus cash flow will provide employment opportunities and strengthen land and water programs in Western Queensland.

The funds are outlined in Desert Channels Queensland's **Regional Investment Strategy** recently launched at the State Landcare Conference in Barcaldine.

Executive Officer of Desert Channels Queensland, Leanne Kohler, says the investment comes from Natural Heritage Trust funding.

"The funds are devolved from the Government through Desert Channels Queensland to Landcare groups, individuals and other groups in Western Queensland," says Leanne, "The Regional Investment Strategy is another example of the important role DCQ is playing as a catalyst between Government and people and groups actually carrying out on-ground

works."

The Regional Investment Strategy outlines the million dollars to be spent in projects on the land, with water, supporting the community, helping biodiversity, indigenous land management and cultural heritage.

Land projects will help maintain pastoral land where it is in good condition and assist in rehabilitation where there is deterioration, at a first year cost of \$360,554.00.

'maintain water quality and develop water use efficiencies'

The Water Program will assist communities and landholders to maintain water quality, develop water use efficiencies and create projects to help maintain important wetlands at a cost of \$193,798.00.

The Community Program will fund projects to help build the capacity, knowledge and awareness of land holders and communities at a one-year cost of \$432,436.00.

The Biodiversity Program will support on-

ground projects to enhance biodiversity and increase public awareness of its importance in developing sustainable industries at a cost of \$148,729.00.

The Indigenous Program will create projects to involve the indigenous community and place cultural heritage in natural resource management decisions at a first year cost of \$45,069.00.

Leanne Kohler says, "A clear goal in developing these investments is to ensure integration and the potential to deliver tangible outcomes across multiple programs."

Interested in finding out more about the Regional Investment Strategy?

**Ask DCQ for a full copy of the strategy or ask about the availability of the DVD "What's the RIS?"
4658 0600**

NEW LOGO TURNS HEADS



THE NEW LOGO OF DESERT CHANNELS QUEENSLAND MADE ITS FIRST PUBLIC APPEARANCE AT THE STATE LANDCARE CONFERENCE

The new logo is designed to give the organisation an improved symbolic image to reflect the professional standard of the Group when competing in the nation's corporate atmosphere.

The idea to give the old logo a facelift came from staff members when realising the professional image projected by logos of other groups and organisations when undertaking the bid process for funding in their regions.

"We put the idea to community board members earlier this year, and while there was some resistance, discussion brought strong support for the new image," said DCQ's Communications Officer, Mark Kleinschmidt.

Tenders were called from graphic designers to come up with ideas for the new logo and Jo Glasheen of Clifton was given the job on the merits of pricing and creative ideas.

Jo then submitted three concepts and the new logo design was chosen.

"The design elements remain the same as the original logo: the sun, land, rivers, a sand-hill and vegetation. Jo has successfully merged them into a balanced and polished design," says Mark Kleinschmidt.

Publications and material sporting the old logo will continue to be used at the regional level and replaced as needed by the new logo to prevent wastage and reduce the cost of transition.

A Labour of Love

PLANTS, TREES, SHRUBS AND GRASSES

AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

RHONDDA ALEXANDER'S LONG-AWAITED BOOK ON THE PLANTS OF THE CHANNEL COUNTRY WAS RELEASED AT THE STATE LANDCARE CONFERENCE IN BARCALDINE ... AN ESSENTIAL INHABITANT OF EVERY GLOVEBOX IN THE REGION.

The field guide to the Plants of the Channel Country is a 324 page publication that describes in detail, with nearly a thousand colour photographs, the hundreds of trees, shrubs, forbs and grasses found in the Channel Country of the Cooper, Georgina and Diamantina river systems.

Author Rhondda Alexander has been collecting and sketching plants of the Channel Country since childhood. She has worked on this project for nearly five years.

Rhondda spent most of her life on Marion Downs on the Georgina River, many of those with her husband Bill Alexander who managed the cattle station.

"This book has been a labour of love," says Rhondda, "but the labour, particularly over the past year, has been intense. But to see all those plants in colour with their descriptions gives me an amazing feeling of completion."

The book fills a need as an information and knowledge resource about the plants of the Channel Country.

The publishing project was undertaken by the Channel Landcare Group with funding from corporate sponsors and project funding arranged through Desert Channels Queensland.

"Projects like this build on the body of knowledge available for our unique region," says DCQ Executive Officer Leanne Kohler, "The more understanding there is of our landscape, the better we all can manage it. This book is a step towards building that knowledge."

"A Field Guide to Plants of the Channel Country" is available through Linda Young on 07 4657 3959.



WHERE THE PIGEONS FLOCK

LITTLE IS KNOWN ABOUT THE FLOCK PIGEON. IT'S A FAR-RANGING NOMAD DISTRIBUTED ACROSS THE DESERT CHANNELS REGION. A STUDY BEING CARRIED OUT BY THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY WILL FILL IN SOME OF THE GAPS.

Two pink-eared ducks spoon through the water with a gentle splash of their scooping bills, a kitehawk soars through the deepening blue of late afternoon. They're almost invisible as you walk along the bank of the dam, now the earth moves in front of you as thirty flock pigeons erupt into flight, their wings thudding in the air, squat solid pigeons with rich brown wings and a bandit's stripe striking through their white face and black head. They fly over the golden flowering mimosa, closing in their group and in a tight formation fly across the water, the noise of their flight subduing as they land on the opposite bank to continue their late afternoon drinking session.

These are flock pigeons (*Phaps histrionica*) and the search is on to find out where they are travelling, where they live and more about their habits.

Desert Channels Queensland is urging landholders to be part of a new three year research project examining the ecology and management requirements of these nomadic wanderers of the black-soil grasslands.

This striking native bird was once found in 'countless millions' throughout semi-arid Australia, but has suffered a substantial decline over the last century.

Peter Dostine, a PhD student from Australian National University aims to find out why, and what we can do to ensure they don't vanish completely. He is leading a research project with support from the Australian Research Council and the Northern Territory Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment.

"We don't know much about this bird other than they are nomadic seed-eaters that travel large distances to locate feeding areas after good rainfall," he said.

He said this mobility made it very important to devise conservation strategies for the birds in partnership with landholders.

Landholders throughout the range of the Flock Pigeon can make a significant contribution to this project later in the year when a survey is posted to properties throughout northern and central Australia, seeking information on if and

when the birds have been seen there.

Mr Dostine said that working with landholders on the project will provide vital information and a long-term perspective on the ecology of this species.

"Peter Dostine can be contacted by telephone on (08) 448 475, by email at peter.dostine@nt.gov.au, or by mail at PO Box 496, Palmerston, NT 0831.

For more information on the work of Desert Channels Queensland, call 4658 0600.



The Flock Pigeon (*Phaps histrionica*) is a nomad found through the Desert Channels Region. A study will seek more knowledge about this little known bird. (Original pics by Graeme Chapman, composite by Bruce Honeywill)

NEW DVD

Desert Channels Queensland has launched a newly produced DVD to explain “Who are we and what do we do?”

“The multiple and complex changes in community groups over recent years has muddied the water a little and we wanted to establish, in simple language and in around three minutes, just where we fit in the landscape of Western Queensland,” says DCQ Independent Chair Peter Douglas, “We who work closely with the group know what it’s about, but we understand there is still a little confusion in the general community.”

Desert Channels Queensland commissioned the corporate DVD to meet these needs and to bring some clarity to where the group sits in the community.

“Desert Channels Queensland is a community owned and managed organisation,” said Mr Douglas, “but was formed as part of the regionalisation process of the Federal Government and new funding flow requirements of the Natural Heritage Trust II.”

“So we sit as something of a catalyst between on-ground community groups such as Landcare groups and land managers on one hand and Federal and State Governments on the other,” he said.

The DVD was produced by Longreach-based film maker and writer / producer Bruce Honeywill.

The script was developed by the producer, working with all DCQ staff members to produce an accurate and distilled message on what Desert Channels is all about.

“The bottom line is we need on-going community support,” said Mr Douglas, “we go into bat for community groups at the State and Federal levels to ensure the Desert Channels Region gets its fair share of funding for on-ground projects in natural resource management. But we need that support and understanding. We hope this DVD will help a little in having people understand who we are and what we do.”

WESTECH
BARCALDINE
SEPTEMBER 13 & 14

AROUND THE CATCHMENTS

The **Cooper’s Creek Catchment Committee** has commenced the Wise Urban Water Usage program in the catchment. The Committee is working with shire councils and communities throughout the Catchment in investigating ways to increase water use efficiencies.

The Committee is talking to the community about ways people can contribute to water use efficiencies such as arid land gardens using native species, as well as introducing other water saving options within the home environment.

The project involves partnerships with shire councils with trials and introduction of water saving innovations that have been trialed successfully in other areas.

In early September, Committee members met with a group of representatives from shire councils in a ‘think tank’ on the trialing of water saving devices such as water-less urinals, underground park and oval irrigation, the ultraviolet treatment of grey water and evaporation-lowering systems for open water storages.

The **Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee** is finalising the listing of priorities across the catchment as part of the major DCQ project “Protecting Our Future,” while the **Desert Uplands Committee** concludes the finalisation of the State Landcare Conference so ably managed by the committee.

All committees are planning for involvement in Westech in Barcaldine on the 13th and 14th of September with a wide range of speakers organised by DCQ.

Planning is also under way for the traditional Cooper’s Creek and Georgina Diamantina combined meeting at Birdsville in November.

DCQ IS PART OF WESTECH 13TH AND 14TH OF SEPTEMBER. BE THERE!



PROFILE: CHARLIE PHILLOTT



Since the mid 1960's, only half a decade into his ownership of Carisbrooke Station and half a decade into the worst recorded drought for that part of the Diamantina, Charlie Phillott has been perfecting P. A. Yeoman's Key Line irrigation system to suit the arid landscape of the upper Diamantina.

"The secret with this system," Charlie tells me, "is to make running water walk."

He has dug channels several kilometres long to guide the water into two dams. These channels are level so the water lies there for extended periods soaking into the surrounding landscape.

"Making Running Water Walk"

"This was a scalded claypan 20 years ago," Charlie tells me, showing me a green pasture of Mitchell Grass intertwined with other native grasses and sedges, the soil now productive and rich. "The idea is to provide nature with the environment to keep everything in balance."

Between the river red gums emerald green grass grows with the seed heads of buffel. "That's Cloncurry Buffel," says Charlie, "only grows this far south where water lies. It's the buffel brought in with the Afghans and their camels. This one is different from the more common buffels that have been introduced from Africa."

We drive along a dam wall. The dam surface is more than 100 acres. Water is released from this dam through a series of cocks to flood strips of pasture. "The idea is to get rid of the water quickly to reduce loss through evaporation. With the dam full at the end of March, after a Wet Season, we would expect to empty it by May."

In effect what the setup does is slow the traverse of water down through the channels, dams and irrigation strips. In broad concept, it is not

Charlie Phillott is a man in love... a man in love with his landscape, his family, his life. He gazes across his paddocks with their tumbled toss of Mitchell Grass, herbage and succulents. River red gums grow from a channel holding the coffee-coloured source of everything in this dry country ... water!

"You have to manage water in this country, not land. If you manage water, everything else looks after itself."

Charlie is full of life-worn adages and platitudes most of which make immediate sense. Spending

an hour with Charlie inspecting his irrigation system or climbing into the red escarpments and looking over the beauty of the stretching valley of the Diamantina is to spend an hour in the presence of an Elder of the Outback.

unlike the natural system of narrow and tortuous braided channels of the Channel Country further downstream.

Charlie Phillott says the debate will go on as to who owns the water. His theory is there is enough water for all to share. He agrees the wetlands and Channel Country graziers downstream have a right to water but so do producers upstream and he believes all have the right to make the best of the water as it passes through their property.

“Since we started the system in 1967, there has been only one year the dams haven’t filled. That was 1985. In many other years they have filled three or four times.”

“Time for New Blood”

Bringing some understanding of the different problems of graziers all along the rivers was, according to Charlie, the biggest achievement of what has become known as the Lake Eyre Basin process. “We started to see rivers as entire systems, meet people from downstream and upstream and share our stories. We began to see ourselves as all being part of the Lake Eyre Basin.”

As founding Chairman, Charlie Phillott headed up the Georgina Diamantina Catchment Committee from 1998 until 2003. To Charlie, the biggest challenge over that time was finding the ability to deal with immediate problems – translate words into actions. He is pleased with the emphasis and actions that weed control has attracted but is disappointed by less focus and action on water management.

“I see the role we are given in stewardship and responsibility to manage our resources as important. I am disappointed in the reticence of Governments and bureaucrats in giving land owners a go with innovative management techniques. They try to stop anyone trying to do things a little better or a little differently.”

“Community Process has stagnated”

Charlie Phillott considers the community process of the Lake Eyre Basin has stagnated over time. He says better representation is needed

and people with differing opinions need to be continually drawn into the process. “We can’t remove community people but we can change the leaders and I think some people have been in committee positions for too long. It’s time for new blood.”

Charlie, always the gentleman, strokes his chin, and looks through the windscreen as we drive, “You can’t claim to speak for the community if you don’t listen.”

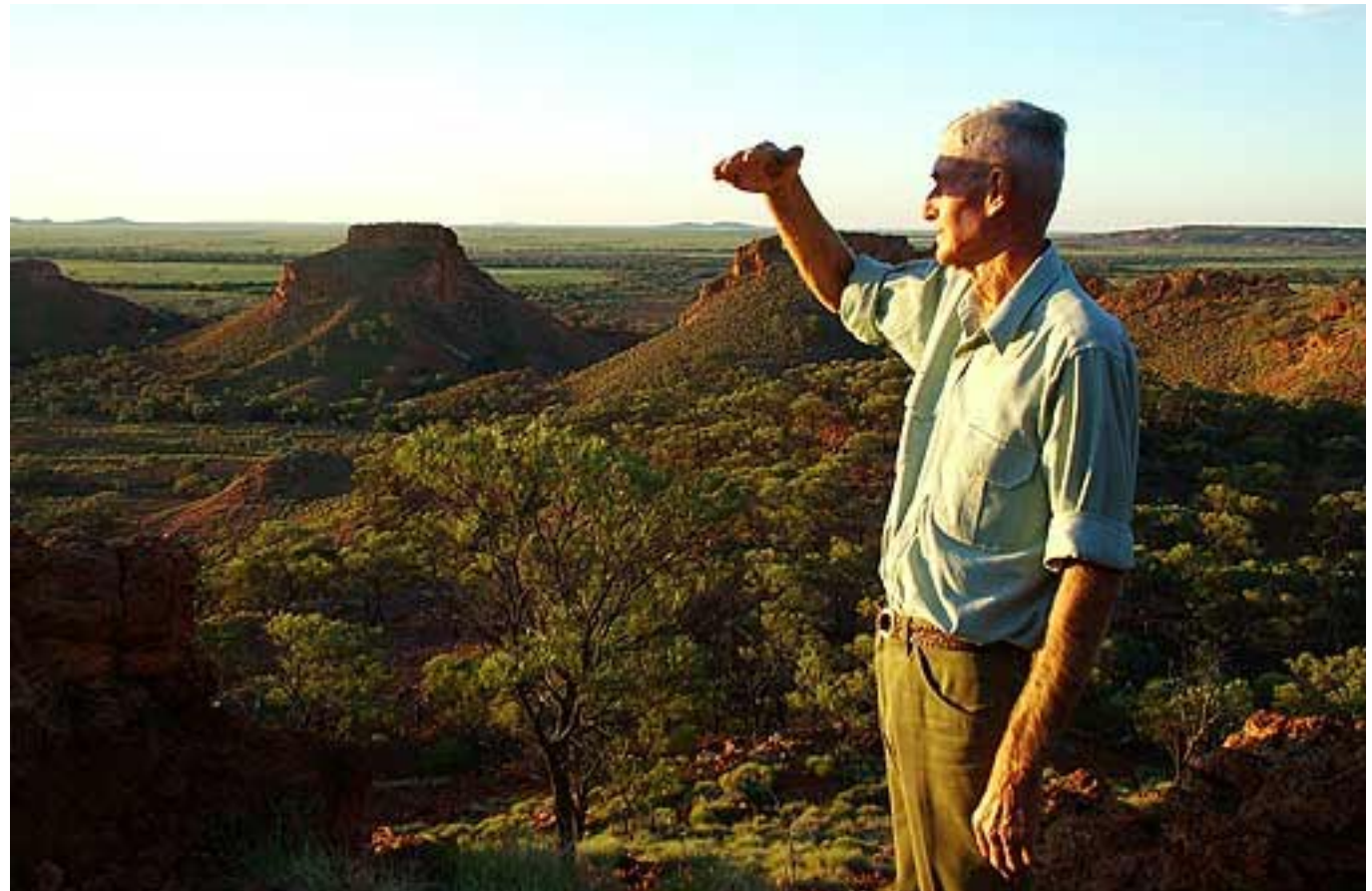
For the future of the catchment committees and Desert Channels Queensland, Charlie says, “We need to encourage people to manage their resources better.” He believes management systems should be in place that approach the day to day issues as a whole – vegetation, weeds, and



water and land development.

Vegetation management is an issue throughout the Basin. He says Carisbrooke is carrying three to four times more gidgee than when he took the property over in 1960.

“And Government legislation – it needs to encourage land holders to have a go, not to be as restrictive as it is.”



Chilli and Chocolate – taste treat or taste disaster?

If the response from the gang at Desert Channels was anything to go on – after some very tentative tongue-tip-tasting - the warmth of chopped chilli forms a cuddly relationship with dark chocolate. This recipe adds a little biodiversity to the bikkie tin.

Choc-Chili Brownies

- 2/3 cups semi- sweet choc chips/chocolate bar
- 100g butter
- 4 eggs
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 2 cups of sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla essence
- 1 1/4 cups flour
- 1/4 cup finely chopped fresh chillies
- 3/4 cup chopped nuts

In a large saucepan melt butter and choc chips together. In a bowl beat eggs and salt until foamy. Slowly beat in sugar and vanilla. Stir in the chocolate mixture, then the flour until almost blended. Then stir in chillies and nuts. Butter a 13 x 9 inch baking tray and pour in batter. Bake at 180C for 35 mins.

Recipe from Larissa Cordner, Wilderness Society.



The Voice of the Region:

Outback Australia identifies itself with its stories, its images, its writers, poets, painters, photographers, song-writers, sculptors. This section of the newsletter is seeking input from all the creative people within the Desert Channels Region. Send your writings, scans or photos of your paintings or handicrafts, your photographs (in digital form) and let the voice of the region be heard.

To commence the series, here is an award winning short story from DCQ Board Member, writer and poet Helen Avery from Nogo. 'Wednesdays' won the 2005 Western Times Literary Prize and is here published with permission of the author.



WEDNESDAYS

helen avery

It's his missus keeps things going. Brooksie's old farm they've got – about two mile down Stillman's Road. You'll see the gate just before you get to that big bend. A cyclone gate that's never been the same since Charlie forgot to open it that time. It's been hanging on a permanent rusty lean for years. You can't see the house from the road. There's a patch scrub and suckers, the creek and a bit of a flat, then up this big hill that sorta drops down over the other side of itself. The house is tucked in there behind the hill. It's just a bit of a house hanging dull and low to the ground like it grew out of it a long time ago, not like it got built on top of it. There's no garden. Just a rain tank with a tub of mint growing under where the tap drips, and a bit further on the yards and the dairy leaning on each other and one a them great big Moreton Bay fig trees. Always a couple of mongrel dogs – half fed, yapping and skittering out of reach ... and chooks... a patch a dirt worn and packed as grey and bare as misery. It's a hard block. Soil's hungry, even on that bit of a flat. Not like the other side of the river where there's lucerne flats as green

as Ireland and lush. But by gee, she can work, that woman. Some years she's turned off the best pumpkins I ever seen from that bit of a creek flat.

**“He's one a them here today, gone tomorrow
sorta blokes”**

Charlie doesn't really count. Sometimes he's here, sometimes not. It doesn't really make much difference. He's one a them here today, gone tomorrow sorta blokes. He'll be away for ages and you'll only notice he's been gone when he's back again. I'll look out from behind the counter and see him leaning there on the fence - small an dark an hard with red blood vessels busted out all over his face, working on the makings of a roly. It's as if he doesn't wanta come inside in case he gets trapped. Outside he's got a chance of getting away. He's just dead set against *having* to do anything – having to make a commitment – even to a conversation. He'll drift inside eventually. Won't say much. Cigarette hanging from his bottom lip, eyes slit shut against the smoke, shifting around and behind, never pinning

down on anything - like he's looking for someone or someone's looking for him. Hands working. One a them belligerent little buggers, always regretting that they never become what they oughta become and blaming everyone else. Drinks a bit...and it's not nice – turns him harder and mean – real mean. He's smart enough not to take on the blokes in the bar. Bottles it all up instead – like poison – bottles it up and takes it home with him I reckon – holding the meanness close like he needs it for fuel.

One time – Charlie was away. It was raining like hell. Had been for a week. Bog wet. Sky started to shift and clear about four after I'd shut up shop and I don't mind a walk after being cooped up all day. She'd missed coming for the bread, so I wandered over. There was no one around when I got there. Even the chooks were cooped up somewhere in their miserable feathers. I wandered to the yards and gave a bit of a cooee and finally saw her down in the bottom paddock where they've got this bit of a dam. Shoveling wet sand she was, into old feed sacks and dragging them over to where the dam had been cutting out real bad – a great gout of muddy water by- washing and eating up the crumbling dirt of the dam wall fast and greedy as a monster. Could have lost the whole lot if it had kept going – lost a year's water and cost a small fortune to fix. I gave her a hand but she'd done most of it. Twenty bags of wet sand – shoveling, dragging and humping them into the washout, wet skirts tucked up above her knees,

hair stuck to her face with sweat and rain, Billy flopping around in puddles catching frogs. We went back up to the house for a cuppa when we'd done. It was one of them cups of tea I've never forgotten – the two of us sitting at the kitchen table with the tea black and hot and sweet. Not that we said much. She wasn't much of a talker, but I can remember it still ... a good cuppa tea, the yeast smell from the bread I'd brought over on the table between us, the room dry but as grey as the day outside.

“she looked worn – somehow worn thin”

It wasn't the tea that made that afternoon memorable though. There was just something about her, about the whole afternoon, the place. She had this look. I mean she'd been down there for hours... and she looked worn – not worn out/exhausted – somehow worn thin, resigned to it all, to everything that could ever happen, a sort of infinite patience ..dunno but there was something about it I can still feel like an old hurt but more.

She still had to do the milking after I went. I reckon she was damn near born milking cows. Day in, day out for more years than I can remember – milking cows, shoveling cow shit, hosing out, shifting pipes ...She looks it mind you, no oil painting. Probably not even that old really. Always looked pretty much the same – never old, never young. Like the old house – as if she'd been so close to the ground for so long she'd become part of it. A fair lump of a woman – wide I mean, not tall but she didn't look fat even though she was broad as a barn. Just hunkered down from so much stooping and bending to lift and shift and work. I know she worked like a slave for her old man from the time she could walk. All those Bunting kids left home as soon as they could get work, but Flora stayed, then ended up with Charlie. She wears those

floral dresses with gathers round the middle and big white buttons down the front and bunches of flowers like those pink ones on old brown linoleum. Hardly ever wears shoes – mud boots sometimes, or rubber thongs. Feet rough and blackened as that tree where it thrusts itself out of the dirt. I reckon she shovels all the love a woman has for giving into those old milkers and that bit of dirt – and Billy.

Usually they come over to the shop Wednesdays. The bread comes in fresh then. They'll walk over together, that great lump of a Billy shambling along behind. He follows her like a big dog – poor beggar.



Western Queensland author and poet Helen Avery of Nogo, Longreach. Helen's latest book 'Seduced by Sky' will be published for Christmas

Always been the same from when he was born. Born wrong I suppose. Pretty damn wrong all right, but harmless. I think of him as a boy still but he'd have to be twenty five. You know how they are those kids. They've got that look in their eyes like they're lost, stuck somewhere between boy and man. Being a kid and wanting to be a kid but being a man too



and feeling ashamed because something's not right and it's too hard to figure out what or why. Poor old Billy. He'll stand there ducking and hiding behind his eyebrows, scratching his balls and swiping his nose on the back of his arm. He's a big feller now! It's as if he's kept growing but his clothes could never keep up and sure as hell, Billy couldn't keep up neither. Billy in his standard stubbies and t-shirt – like a lump of bread dough shoved in a swimsuit.

But there's times, I'll watch them meandering across that paddock and I'll watch them and think... poor beggars ... But you know, there's other times ...I sit here in this shop week in, week out and after a while every man and his dog have come dragging their bits and pieces of life through that door and back out again – full of wanting and having and needing and wanting more again...

And I'll watch that couple crossing that paddock like it's a brand new adventure every time. They'll come in, Mrs.B and Billy, and that Billy, he'll be just all over happy with something – nothing really – something he's picked up or found – coloured stones or bits of glass or a feather and you'd reckon he had all the world in his big grubby hands, and she's just happy because he's happy.

I look at them then... him all busting out of his skin over nothing and her just quiet and kind of glowing ... and I look at the rest of us, and y' know... sometimes... I reckon Billy, he's got it all sorted... and us, we don't know nothing., not one damn thing.