



February 2014

Breaking new ground

Following early, scattered rain in November and December, a coordinated weed control programme, in areas of high public benefit, started near Aramac. This initial work involved three properties, and kicked off a program built on more than 10 years experience of treating weeds in the region.

Targeting Prickly Acacia, it builds on landholders' previous efforts tackling the weed and coordinates the control work over multiple properties to prevent re-infestations. It is also the first time the Area Management Plan, developed in consultation with the Queensland State Government, has been used.

Prickly Acacia infestations on each property were carefully mapped, for density, age and accessibility, so appropriate control techniques, including for regrowth, could be planned. The five year plan has DCQ providing labour, co-investment in chemicals and specialist equipment for treatment in areas of high public benefit, such as major seed sources along watercourses.

In the first three properties, high public benefit areas of dense and ultra-dense infestations were tackled by the DCQ 'hit' team, while the landholders and their staff dealt with abutting areas and scattered plants in the paddocks. The ongoing investment by DCQ and the Australian and Queensland governments will see this process continue and, while control works by the landholders will extend past the project life, by that time, it is expected the infestations will be down to isolated plants.

This project saw a number of firsts for DCQ:

1. Coordinated control works undertaken on a landscape-scale (30,000 hectares), targeting seed sources in strategic, high public benefit areas.
2. Improvements in pasture and waterway health are being measured in a structured way.
3. High use of residual chemicals designed to not only kill the parent tree, but to remain in the soil for multiple years killing seedlings (mature native trees were protected by hand spraying a buffer around each tree).
4. Using an helicopter drone to apply chemicals with 417,000 Prickly Acacia trees treated in 30 flying hours while protecting 225 mature native trees.
5. Almost 100 kilometres of bore drain treated.

Many of the most significant infestations have been caused by seed from trees along flowing bore drains, which either discharge into waterways, or are breached by storm rains. This, coupled with the recent run of good seasons, has seen an explosion in Prickly Acacia numbers. On one property nearly 9000 litres of diesel and chemical were needed to treat established Prickly Acacia along creek lines that had become so dense that no other vegetation was growing.

Follow-up rain has ensured that residual chemicals are now dispersed in the soil and starting to show results. Hand-sprayed trees began to die after two weeks, while the trees along bore drains took three months before showing serious signs of ill health. Our monitoring program will continue at six month intervals for the next five years.

We are replicating this process in the Upper Diamantina and Thomson rivers for the next 5 years, so if you and your neighbours are interested in working together to control weeds and would like to know more, you can contact our field supervisor, Peter Spence on 4652 7827.

Made round to go 'round

A recent email from a colleague read: 'Just heard you are running a coffee shop at the Longreach airport ... that's a bit left field, isn't it?'

My response? - 'Left field, right field, centre field ... as long as you're on the field!'

We launched Flight Bites in late January as another profit centre for DC Solutions - the commercial arm of Desert Channels Group. While environmental services and project management are centre field for us, we'll play any position to generate profits for reinvestment in the Desert Channels region.

As a commercial enterprise, DC Solutions' job is to make a profit for its shareholders; in this case, there is only one: Desert Channels Queensland, a community-based not-for-profit.

Each year, DC Solutions donates its profits to Desert Channels Foundation, the public trust of Desert Channels Queensland. These funds are then disbursed to worthy projects within the Queensland section of the Lake Eyre Basin. In short, our profits go to public benefit, not into private investment.

So when you buy a coffee or a snack at Flight Bites (either coming, going or farewellling), you are actually investing in our region. You are helping to fund additional environmental projects to achieve our vision of our inland river catchments preserved, productive and secure ... for all ... forever.

If you share our vision, find out how we can help your business on a commercial basis (info@dcsolutions.org.au), use us to cater for your next function (4658 0600), donate to the Desert Channels Foundation (<http://www.dcfoundation.org.au/index.php?content=6>), or buy a coffee at Flight Bites!

After all, money is made round to go 'round!

Information, Knowledge, Wisdom ... The Hub

The best business people are considered wise, and for good reason: they always base their decision-making on knowledge. And it is from information that we draw knowledge; therefore, information is a prime ingredient of wisdom.

That being the case, Australia is set to reap the benefits of a new initiative of the National Rangelands Alliance, a grouping of the 13 regional bodies responsible for the sustainable management of the natural resources of more than 80% of the continent.

The Natural Resource Management (NRM) Spatial Hub is a central element of a 15 year blueprint developed by the National Rangelands Alliance, which aims to improve the delivery of NRM at a national level to improve sustainable land management in the rangelands of Australia.

The Hub, as it is affectionately known, will work with land managers to demonstrate and implement next-generation spatial information systems, tools, data and skills to be used to improve the sustainability of production.

It will also establish 12 super-sites of over 50,000 square kilometres each, to demonstrate best practice online digital farm planning. This will incorporate world-leading time-series remote sensing of ground cover to overcome barriers to long-term monitoring.

By providing land managers with the systems, tools, data, and skills needed to dramatically improve access to farm-scale information and knowledge, The Hub will be underpinning better management decisions along with improvements in landscape condition and productivity that can be measured over time.

Collecting the information, building the knowledge ... enabling the wisdom.

If things are hotting up, what does that mean for us?

The Commonwealth Government has recently funded a project to update natural resource management (NRM) plans within Australia to help plan for climate change. This funding is split into two categories. The first is for regional bodies like Desert Channels Queensland to engage with the community about how climate change will affect natural resources and the community. The second category of funding is for research bodies such as CSIRO to investigate the impacts of climate change on Australia and how adaptation may take place. These two projects will come together in 2015 to see an updated release of the DCQ NRM Plan.

Community input into the updated NRM plan is vital and community engagement will occur in the region from April 2014 onwards to allow you to discuss your natural resource issues. Opportunities will also exist on the DCQ website for you to make comment about the NRM plan through available 'Community Information Papers'. These papers will break down important issues relating to the NRM plan based on certain assets, such as agriculture or environment. These papers will be released throughout 2014 and the community will be notified through web updates or facebook notifications.

Some examples of current issues that are being looked into as part of an updated NRM plan in relation to climate change include:

- Agriculture - impacts of warmer temperatures on weeds and pastures

- Environment - identification of important wildlife refugia for species in a warmer climate
- Community - possible impacts and adaptation from changes in water availability.

You can view DCQ's current NRM plan at www.dcq.org.au/sites/default/files/DCQ%20Regional%20NRM%20Plan%202010.pdf. For further reading about the impacts of climate change on agriculture, the environment or communities within Australia, a range of publications can be viewed from the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility website: www.nccarf.edu.au/publications.

If you would like to find more about the project or updating the NRM plan, you can contact Andrew Burrows on 4652 7826 or andrew.burrows@dcq.org.au.

You have been warned!

Cactus infestations in the DCQ region are on notice with the commencement of biodiesel production from recycled cooking oil. In an initiative with the Longreach Lions Club and businesses throughout western Queensland, DCQ will be recycling waste cooking oil to drastically reduce the cost of weed control.

The ever increasing cost of chemical control of weeds has seen DCQ undertaking a range of field tests throughout the year on ways to reduce costs and increase efficiency. Our field trials of biodiesel to replace regular diesel in cactus control, is part of this process.

This week, the first drums of the much awaited biodiesel began to be delivered around the region. This cheap fuel will be mixed with chemical to treat cactus and will benefit landholders, local authorities, community groups and DCQ in their ongoing fight against this thorny pest.

The control of cactus remains a key focus for DCQ and trials on local properties have already delivered techniques which reduce the cost for landholders; the use of converted cooking oil will reduce costs even more.

Our CEO, Leanne Kohler, described this initiative as one of the most important collaborations DCQ has formed. "With the help of the Longreach Lions Club and local businesses, we are seeking to halve the cost of weed control for landholders when compared to last financial year," she said.

"It is crucial to help landholders keep the pressure on cactus while battling the costs of this drought."

If you would like more information about this initiative contact Peter Spence on 4652 7827.