



**May 2015**

**It makes me proud**

Killing two million trees usually isn't a cause for celebration, but when they are Prickly Acacia trees in western Queensland, it sure is. Our dedicated team notched up 1,000,000 in 8 months, and has peeled off a further mil in only another 7 months - they just keep getting better and better. We expect to get our tally to 3,000,000 before Christmas.

It isn't only the team, it's our government backers, our landholder partners, and our research and development gurus who have all played critical roles in getting DCQ to this point, where we can realistically say we have a shot at getting the Queensland section of the Lake Eyre Basin free of core infestations of Prickly Acacia.

Better still we have been able to give landholders hope, and Government confidence, that the job is doable. Early results show that our new methods have reduced chemical costs by nearly 40%, while overall treatment costs per tree have reduced by 9 times.

Studies have shown that core infestations of Prickly Acacia are generally land condition D, meaning they have little ground cover (pasture biomass), less than 100 kilograms per hectare. Improving land condition to A/B can result in pasture biomass of greater than 2000 kilograms per hectare, and lift carrying capacity by a factor of 10.

The benefits aren't just to graziers: getting rid of the core infestations and regenerating native pasture also provides wider community benefit through improved soil condition, biodiversity and water quality.

Prickly Acacia, a declared weed of national significance, has doubled its area of infestation in the Desert Channels region over the past 15 years. It chokes out grass, lowers production, reduces biodiversity, increases mustering and maintenance costs and, as shown recently, provides a highway for feral animal movement.

For over 10 years DCQ has been fighting this weed using the same techniques that landholders have for the last 75... the results have been the same: increasing infestations, especially after good years.

In 2013, that changed. Teaming with industry, and backed by State and Federal regulatory instruments, DCQ introduced a raft of new techniques and technologies, all aimed at reducing cost and increasing efficiency while maintaining the environmental values that make the west so special.

These techniques are now being targeted towards rehabilitating watercourses, which were traditionally the hardest areas to treat, and often not attempted. They then act as seed sources from which stock,

particularly cattle, can carry the seeds, in their gut, out into surrounding paddocks, reinfesting where control work has been done.

Peter Spence, our Field Supervisor, said working principally in watercourses presents challenges. “The prickly trees get really thick from the extra moisture, but it’s also where the native trees are thickest, which is probably our biggest challenge,” he said. “Protecting mature native trees is very high on our agenda and our techniques have been very successful.”

“Government is very pleased with how it’s going, but the best part of the program has been the way landholders have come on board. We all know things are tough and some of these blokes have been battling this weed for decades and losing, but when they see how the program meshes together, the results we get, and how they can build on it, it really does give them a shot in the arm.”

“It makes me proud.”

Peter worked the land himself for many years, and knows what it takes. “It probably took five years or more for landholders and contractors to kill a million trees using conventional hand spraying, at a cost of over \$2.20 per tree; now we’re killing that many for just 24 cents, in only 7 months.”

Our CEO, Leanne Kohler, has done more than anyone to drive this program, and she said there was initial skepticism because DCQ wanted to do things differently. “We really put ourselves out there,” she said, “and people can now see we’ve delivered.”

“Two million trees is great, and represents a huge amount of sweat for both our team and everyone who works with us, but it’s only the start: I believe it’s achievable to have a weed free region if we continue to learn and to embrace new opportunities.

“I’m hoping for 5 million trees before the end of this funding round and, as a group, we’re always lobbying Government to put more money in the program. The sky’s the limit if we all take some responsibility.

“We’ve proved what can be done, and I’m very proud of the team for achieving so much so quickly, but now, as a community, we all have to step up. This weed is primarily moved in the bellies of cattle, and those cattle are most often moved in trucks. We all need to be responsible for a weed seed hygiene program to stop the spread and help eradicate this pest.”

DCQ can help with a weed hygiene program or advice on weed control... give Peter Spence a call on (07) 4658 0600.

The eradication program is now focussed on the Mills Creek area, so give us a call to get involved. This weed work would not have happened without funding from the Queensland and Australian governments and Desert Channels Foundation.

### **Pain-free plan**

Most written plans are a pain to plough through, trying to make sense of linkages, intent and language. Even the well-written ones can be challenging... unless you have an interest in the content. And why else would you read a plan?

If you have an interest in the rivers, landscapes and agricultural production in the our region - the Queensland section of the Lake Eyre Basin - then our latest NRM plan was written with you in mind.

Natural resource management is what we do, but we can only do it with you, and we only do it for you, the people of the Desert Channels region.

Our latest plan is in draft form and awaiting your comments; when it's finalised, it will guide investment in the region for the next five years to help protect our rivers, landscapes and agricultural production. In particular, this plan focuses on stopping significant weed and feral animal issues.

"We really have produced a user-friendly plan," said Group CEO, Leanne Kohler. "It is so easy to use and make sense of, and it clearly states what we want to achieve, and is full of maps showing where we want to achieve it."

"I know I find plans tedious; they are usually very dry and confusing. But we've made this plan easy to follow by simply using a central navigation page. You just click on the bit that interests you, and when you're finished, you click back to the navigation page. So, if you just want to read about agriculture, the natural environment or about the community, you don't have to wade through all the other stuff."

The NRM Plan is now open for community feedback at <http://www.dcq.org.au/plans>. View the plan and complete the electronic feedback form, or give DCQ a call on (07) 4658 0600 to organise to view a copy of the plan and provide your feedback.

"Given the community is such a vital part of natural resource management, having people provide feedback on what and where investment is needed will make the plan much more valuable."

Have your say on how we should invest to sustain the natural assets of the region, the soils, pastures and waters that we all depend on.

### **Whether you like it or not!**

Sellar and Yeatman wrote, 'You have to love your garden, whether you like it or not.' Well, 100 individuals in agreement with that statement attended our Outback Gardening and Water Quality Field Day at Kelly and John Seccombe's Muttaborra district property, Kenya.

Despite, or perhaps in spite of, the severe drought conditions, people are loving that last tiny daub of greenery in an increasingly barren landscape, a verdant refuge at the end of a disheartening day. But even in the garden, they are having challenges.

With surface waters all but disappeared, properties have to rely on bore water for both their stock and domestic use, pumping water of unknown quality onto soil of unknown quality, trying to grow something with particular preferences for where it drops its roots.

So, when we announced a gardening and water quality field day, there was plenty of interest and, on the day, keen propagators turned up in droves with their little bottles of water and soil for testing by Lachlan Rich and Lew Markey respectively.

Under the guise of 'The bore water garden - alkalinity, salinity, sodicity, iron slime and not knowing', Lachlan imparted his knowledge on water quality parameters and what they mean for gardens in the alkaline soils of the area. As expected all the bore and dam waters tested on the day were alkaline, and require care, and very heavy mulching on our soils. The humic acids (produced by biodegradation of dead organic matter) that result are the best long term solution in our soils.

Lachlan, a groundwater management technical officer with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, impressed everyone with his talk of dissolved solids, conductivity, evaporation and microsiemens per centimeter.

On the other hand, Lew got down and dirty with soil texture and pH. Lew is the Climate Risk State Coordinator at the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, but spent 15 years as a soil conservation advisor, identifying and working with sodic and saline soils, so he really knows his dirt. He had them kneading handfuls of soil, swapping assessments and using pH kits to nail down their soil quality - sandy soil from the Desert Uplands was neutral, Muttaborra sandy soil was mildly alkaline, and all the clays were strongly alkaline, some as high as 9.5.

Despite a delicious spread prepared by Fiona from the Muttaborra Shop, the usual after lunch torpor failed to materialise. This was due entirely to the star of the day, Tom Wyatt of ABC Local Radio Gardening Talkback fame, a household name to a generation of outback radio listeners.

Tom's dry humour, laconic wit, practical garden remedies and sound advice kept everyone entertained and informed. The most common ingredients in Tom's remedies were urine, Condy's crystals, gypsum and manure, and despite telling listeners for 30 years to use Lux Flakes as a wetting agent, he said that was the main piece of advice that people forget.

The day was rounded out by a presentation on the Hydrosmart electronic water conditioner, which produces an electrical field that dissolves minerals, and The Garden Shed, purveyors of 'gorgeous gifts for your home, yourself and your garden'.

As one enthusiastic attendee wrote, 'Very informative, as so many people have had to put their gardens onto bore water and it was helpful to get the facts about that, and a water test done. DCQ shone! Thanks Leanne and your staff... professional, efficient, helpful and friendly'.

### **5000 records**

Desert Channels Group has never been one to sit back and wait for things to happen, and Fulcrum is a case in point. We developed our Fulcrum App to assist landholders, shire rural lands officers and anyone else with an interest in control feral animals and pest plants, to collect data on the distribution, which then feeds into control planning.

By 'crowd-collecting' data, we aim to get a richer data set sooner,,, and we have just hit 5,000 records in Fulcrum. This can then be visualised in Fulcrum, or in another program like Tableau.

Our GIS guru, Jade Fraser, has just produced a new shire level visualisation that allows local government to see what's happening in their shire, and to plan accordingly.

Jade has also developed a range of Fulcrum Apps for our internal use, for example, vehicle log, asset tracking, events tracking, project log, project assessments, chemical spray-sheets, biocondition assessments, and travel costs. Just about any data collection process can be turned into an app.

Fulcrum, Tableau, DCG and crowd-collecting... it's all app'ning!

### **Stay a night and spend a dollar**

Desert Channels Queensland is proud to be a sponsor of the 13th Queensland Weed Symposium, from the 14th to the 17th September in Longreach. The Symposium is not just about learning and expanding

your knowledge and experience of weed management issues, it's about showing your support for a town and region buckling under a debilitating drought. 'Stay a night and spend a dollar' is more than a catchphrase, it's a way to help, it's a way to show solidarity, it's a way to say 'You're not alone'.

The Symposium brings together people involved in weed management from all parts of Queensland to share experiences and knowledge, and to catch up with friends and acquaintances, and make new ones. Whether you're a Landcare or community group member, someone who is involved in controlling weeds or supplying those who do, or just anyone with a passion to get rid of weeds, Longreach is the place to be in September.

The Weed Symposium will also see the launch of DCQ's new, 15 minute film on weeds and weed control in the Desert Channels region, currently in production. The film looks at the challenges and successes of the past two years as the team developed and implemented an inspirational new program for dealing with Prickly Acacia infestations in the rangelands.

The 13th Queensland Weed Symposium, 14th to 17th September in Longreach; register before 30 July 2015 to take advantage of the early bird rates - see <http://qws2015.com>.

### **Biosecurity Act on risk**

With more biosecurity threats than ever, due to increased global travel, trade in animal and plant products, and diversity of land use, the new Biosecurity Act 2014 will, according to Biosecurity Queensland, have the State better prepared.

The new Act, expected to come into force in early 2016, will take a risk-based approach to biosecurity threats and be less prescriptive than previous legislation. This will allow greater flexibility and more responsive approaches to manage each specific circumstance.

The Act focuses on biosecurity risks that are, or are likely to become, a significant problem for human health, social amenity, the economy or the environment. A biosecurity risk exists when you deal with any pest, disease or contaminant. This includes moving an animal, plant, turf, soil, machinery and equipment that could carry a pest, disease or contaminant.

To manage your biosecurity risks, you will need to take all reasonable and practical steps to prevent or minimise the risk. In determining the action to take, you will need to consider the likelihood and consequence of the risk for that specific circumstance.

Biosecurity Queensland will focus on providing education about reasonable and practical steps to minimise biosecurity risks.

To learn more about the new biosecurity laws and a risk-based approach to biosecurity, download the information brochure from [www.daf.qld.gov.au](http://www.daf.qld.gov.au) or contact 13 25 23.