



December 2014

Collaboration in survey and control

The connection between weeds and declining water quality is well known, which is why our water quality project is focussed on eradicating weeds in riparian areas. This, along with our desire to collaborate with partners wherever possible, has seen us integrate into our project, the training of a group of Lake Eyre Basin Land and Sea Rangers in weed survey and control.

In late November, Lake Eyre Basin Ranger Coordinator James Newman and Longreach-based Rangers, Nerissa, Bevan, Waylon and Josh took their tablets and Fulcrum Apps to Towerhill Creek to cut their teeth on surveying rubber vine.

There were known rubber vine infestations along the creek, but the records were old and needed updating. The team moved through on foot and with a quadbike and recorded rubber vine sightings with the Fulcrum App on their tablets as they went. Most plants were severely stressed from the drought but, surprisingly, some were flowering and seeding. Density ranged from sparse, low vines to impenetrable thickets reaching into the canopies of melaleucas and river red gums.

On the control front, the group treated woody weeds on the Truro Reserve north of Muttaborra. The work on Truro Reserve formed a valuable link in the work being undertaken by DCQ and landholders to control woody weeds in the riparian zone of the upper Thomson River catchment.

The rangers spent the week putting into practice the theory of weed control that they had learnt. Consistent with the DCQ Area Management Plan, they sprayed any prickly acacia trees that were closer than 30 metres to mature native trees to ensure they were protected. Tebuthiuron was then applied by hand outside of that area; this will kill the current prickly acacia trees when rain takes the chemical down to the root zone, and it will also kill any germinating plants for a number of years.

Since the treatment, there has been some rain at the site, so our team will closely monitor the effectiveness of the control work over the next three months.

Pig portraits

Further collaboration work with the LEB rangers saw them assist with an estimation of feral pig population densities in areas previously covered through our aerial shooting campaigns. Working around six permanent waterholes in the Diamantina and Cooper catchments, the rangers honed their skills at estimating current population densities, trapping and baiting residual populations, and establishing long-term monitoring sites.

Data from eight established monitoring sites on Farrars Creek and the lower Diamantina River was collected and will be used for population monitoring and potential targeted control in early 2015. Ground surveys were conducted throughout the target areas and a further five long-term monitoring sites were established on the upper Cooper Creek and Farrars Creek expanding the monitoring network and allowing for more detailed analysis throughout the catchments.

This survey indicated a significant reduction in pig numbers in the area since 2011, with the surveyed waterholes showing as much as a 94% reduction in numbers. The program will continue for another three years and, through ongoing monitoring and control campaigns, DCQ aims to protect these unique inland river systems, the RAMSAR listed wetlands they feed, and many EPBC listed species.

Field Day and HEAT

The recent field day at Bush Heritage Australia's Edgbaston Reserve near Aramac included a tour of the spring complex hosted by the reserve's manager, Steve Heggie, and a meeting of the DCQ HEAT advisory group. Visitors on the day got to spot the elusive and endangered red-fin blue-eye, and Edgbaston goby, as well as marvel at the upwelling of life-giving water from the hard, dry earth. They also inspected the bunds and barriers installed to prevent the incursion into the springs of gambusia, an introduced fish, which outbreeds and outcompetes the endemic species. Such measures tied in neatly with the DCQ's high-value environmental area targets (HEAT) program whose advisory group met to look at how investments into species listed under the Commonwealth's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act are coordinated across a range of different groups.

Representatives from these groups (landholders, Aboriginal, local government, managers of protected areas and DCQ) planned how they ensure that limited dollars are coordinated to best effect, and what were the highest priority areas to seek investment for.

Rocketing along

The DC Solutions team is rocketing into the Christmas break with a dozen projects running full bore. These include weed control, desktop publishing, graphic design, sign design and production, project management and business support services. We extend our thanks to our valued clients for their continued support, and wish all our readers a very relaxing and recharging Christmas with family and friends, and a successful and rewarding 2015.

LEB Facilitator

Given DCQ's position of sustainably managing natural resources across the largest single portion of the Lake Eyre Basin, and that the Queensland rivers of the Basin are the most significant contributors to the Lake itself, it was hardly surprising that we have been invited by the Australian Government to supply regional facilitator services to the Lake Eyre Basin. This service will facilitate knowledge flow of current and emerging issues in the Basin by monitoring, collating and reporting on matters concerning water and related natural resources that may be of concern to the Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum.

The Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum comprises the Australian Government Minister for the Environment; the Queensland Minister for Natural Resources and Mines; the South Australian Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation; and the Northern Territory Minister for Land Resource Management. The Forum arises from the Lake Eyre Basin Intergovernmental Agreement signed by the Australian, Queensland and South Australian governments in 2000, and by the Northern Territory Government in 2004.

Weed Outliers

If your property sits outside the containment lines for prickly acacia and parkinsonia (see map), and either of them are present on your place, then we'd like to hear from you. Our current project targeting outliers of these weeds in the Aramac Creek, Upper Barcoo and Georgina river systems aims to eradicate them along the watercourses of these catchments to prevent further seed spread. By removing these pest plants from our landscape, native vegetation will regenerate, improving productivity, water quality and native species habitat. This year we have concentrated on the Aramac Creek, upper Barcoo River catchments, and we will be continuing in those areas in the New Year as well as moving into the Georgina River area. So if you're outside the containment line, and have any of these weeds, give us a call, after 12th January, on 4658 0600 to discuss opportunities under this project.

PACT update

An important aspect of our PACT (Positive Action Cluster Team) program, which many landholders across the region have signed on to, is to ensure improvement to pasture condition and, ultimately, agricultural productivity. Pasture condition is declining across Queensland's rangelands due to the ongoing drought and encroachment of weeds. While DCQ has projects aimed at controlling weeds, this alone will not improve the condition of pasture. A range of techniques can be used to help with pasture recovery, such as wet season spelling, fencing or rotation of stock. To demonstrate options that may be available, and to assist landholders improve pasture productivity, DCQ currently has some trials underway to identify techniques to regenerate pasture quickly. If you have any suggestions or ideas about trials you would like to see occur for the regeneration of pasture, give DCQ a call on 4658 0600.

In addition, if you are interested in possible Stocktake courses in 2015, please submit your expression of interest to admin@dcq.org.au.

Christmas wishes

From all the team at Desert Channels Group, a very Merry Christmas and a healthy, happy and wet 2015.

To those we had the pleasure of working with throughout 2014, many thanks for your companionship, collaboration and wisdom - we are on a journey together and, together, we have achieved so much more than we can apart.

To our many supporters around the region, the country and the world, may your 2015 be as positive and fulfilling as you have helped make our 2014.

Rest, recharge, enjoy family, friends and festivities, and rejoin us in 2015 as we continue to make a difference in our very special part of the world.

Thank you from Leanne and the Team.