



June 14

The perfect Channel Country

What more could a feral pig want? ... fresh mud, oodles of water, plenty of tucker, and stuff-all people ... the Channel Country is perfect!

So perfect in fact, that the Channel Country has been the focus of our feral pig control efforts for the past 3 years ... ever since the wettest two year period in Australia since records began, 2010 and 2011 saw an explosion of the feral pig population.

With the assistance of State and Federal funding, DCQ has waged war on these destructive animals, implementing control programs across the Cooper, Diamantina and Georgina catchments.

Since DCQ's first control campaign in November 2011, we have done 44 days of aerial shooting to cull over 29,000 feral pigs.

These are pigs that would otherwise spread down the river systems and eventually colonise the RAMSAR listed wetlands of Coongie Lakes, as well as Lake Eyre itself.

A declared Class 2 pest, feral pigs have a dramatic impact on wetland and riverine ecosystems, particularly on the ephemeral floodplains of these watercourses. They rarely stray far from water, and are responsible for erosion of riverbanks and floodplains, uprooting of aquatic and terrestrial vegetation, fouling of water sources and predation on native species including birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and freshwater invertebrates.

Our 24 motion camera monitoring sites on waterholes across the catchments help us keep tabs on population growth and migration. Along with aerial surveys, these sites provide important data to help our staff and landholders determine when follow up control is necessary and on what scale.

And, adding another string to our feral pig control bow, we have been trialling "Hog Hopper" bait stations since early 2014, with a view to using them for small scale, targeted control programs when necessary.

One of the crowd ...

Remember crowd surfing? Now we have crowdsourcing and crowdfunding. And Desert Channels Group has chosen to embark on ... crowd control!

No, we are not gearing up our team with perspex shields, batons and pepper spray ... we want to gear up the whole community! Not with the aforementioned, but with a simple smartphone app!

Our information management and mapping expert, Jade Fraser, developed our smartphone app with the Fulcrum online package. It allows us to scale up our data collection capacity by using the crowd; we then have better information on which to base our control activities.

“Decision making depends on information,” Jade said. “The better the information, the better the decisions.

“So we thought, how do we get better information on things like weeds and feral animals like wild dogs?

“The obvious answer was to get more people collecting data, which is why we chose the Fulcrum system and built the smartphone app.”

DCG has always sought ways to punch above its weight, and to leverage greater returns for its investment; enlisting landholders, shire officers, roo shooters, travellers and locals as opportunistic data collectors means we have a far more eyes and ears out there than would otherwise be the case. We also have richer data to inform our weed and feral animal control decisions.

Jade recently released our [Feral Animal Map](#), a live, web-based display of data collected to date. It is a single system accessible by all land managers, be they landholders, community groups, local government or State Government.

DCG’s [Feral Animal Map](#) is building up a picture that simply can’t be ignored. Not only does it visualise the extent of the issues, it is a serious tool to help in making decisions.

To make it even better, we need you to be part of our ‘crowd control’. It’s easy! Simply [get the app](#) and start recording! Everything else happens automatically ... you don’t even need mobile service, just enter the sightings and the app will update the web map when your phone next connects to a network.

Crowdfunding is about getting the many to each donate a little bit to a good project; DCG’s ‘crowd control’ is about getting the many to each contribute a little bit to the control of weeds and feral animals across our inland river catchments.

The celebratory mood

There's nothing like the pounding of hooves, the roar of the crowd, the din of the betting ring, and the parade of fashionable ladies to get you in the celebratory mood. And celebratory mood it was when DC Events catered for the Alpha Race Day for the second consecutive year recently.

Not only were the locals celebrating a big day of country racing, DC Events was celebrating its big first birthday!

It was at the 2013 Alpha Race Day that Desert Channels Group's catering arm received its baptism of fire, run off their feet catering for an enthusiastic crowd celebrating the return of horse racing to their bush town after a hiatus of several years.

The 2014 Alpha Race Day was no different: a huge crowd revelling in the delights of country racing and country catering - meals, snacks, hot chips, coffee, platters, cold drinks and more.

For those of you who aren't sure why a community-based natural resource management group would want to get involved in catering, it's passion.

We're passionate about the work we do with landholders to improve the natural resources of the region, and we're passionate about wanting to do more than what we get funding for, so commercial enterprise is our only option.

Unless, of course, there is a fabulously wealthy philanthropist out there who shares our passion! Call 07 4658 0600 now, and ask for Leanne.

Flock Ewe a good show

Our Landcare Facilitator, Helen Cross, said it was great to be back in the heartland of the Upper Thomson Catchment Landcare Group at the recent Landsborough Flock Ewe Show at Muttaborra. She said the good thing about attending these little shows, was that you get to talk to landholders on a whole range of topics.

"Unsurprisingly, most people wanted to talk about weeds," Helen said. "It was the major problem in the region a decade ago, and it's still right up there."

An emerging issue for the top of the catchment, and one which DCQ has targeted in the past, is Rubber Vine. This invasive plant has the potential to spread south along watercourses toward Lake Eyre, and landholders need to be vigilant to ensure it remains contained.

As always, our caps were popular, as were the weed books, and our display was very popular with kids trying to win a prize with the 'Showbag Trail'.

Barcaldine sandhill fencing

A group of Lake Eyre Basin Rangers based in Longreach and Mt Isa have come out to help the Central Western Indigenous Landcare Group with a project at Barcaldine. They put their fence-building skills on show to erect a protective fence around a culturally and environmentally significant sandhill near the town.

The sandhill and the adjoining areas along Lagoon Creek, have cultural significance to the Iningai Custodians, and the Lake Eyre Basin Rangers embraced the opportunity to support the Central Western Indigenous Landcare Group, and to build on their traditional ecological and cultural knowledge of the area by working directly with the Custodians.

The 1.2 metre high wire-netting fence, with galvanised steel posts, was designed to keep a range of domestic, feral and native grazing animals from degrading the fragile, stabilising vegetation around the base of the dune. The fence also prevents indiscriminate four wheel drive and motor bike access.

In addition to protecting a culturally and environmentally significant location, this project is raising community awareness of this unique landform of Central Western Queensland.

To further promote the project and the site, an open day will be held, and information signage installed. In the meantime, the sandhill is protected and its cultural significance preserved.

The Central Western Queensland Indigenous Landcare Group, which is sponsored by DCQ, was able to undertake the project with a Caring for our Country Community Environment Grant.

Stories from the Rangelands ...

The Australian Rangelands Society is holding its 18th Biennial Conference in Alice Springs from the 12th to 16th April 2015, and it is already shaping up as one not to miss.

While it is still a work in progress, the preliminary program outlines session topics focussing on:

- Rangeland communication
- Leadership and leveraging distant relationships
- Mining and resource management
- Water sharing in the rangelands
- Pastoral production
- Natural resource management
- Emerging and alternative industries
- Policy directions.

You will be able to hear inspiring 'Stories from the rangelands', and be exposed to the youthful enthusiasm of the 'Student forum'. And for the 'tech heads', an opportunity to view new or adapted technologies, inventions or approaches that contribute to improved rangeland living, resource management, business, research or extension.

All info at www.arsconference.com.au/