



May2014

Careful management of our natural resources is our organisation's mission; it is also our staff's passion, as is for you who partner with us.

It is a labour of love but a job worth doing and so we share our progress and successes as we make steps towards a better future for all.

Happy reading.

Showing off great results

Landholders in the northeast of the Desert Channels region were treated to the very latest in sustainable production techniques at Desert Channels Queensland's RECENT field day at Auteuil, near Aramac.

More than 50 people heard and saw the new weed control program's successes and how it links with the Area Management Plan that DCQ developed and had endorsed by the State Government.

DCQ's Area Management Plan enables landholders to clear native vegetation when carrying out weed control operations under the guidance of an approved five year weed plan. (AB edited the above)

Leanne Kohler, DCQ's CEO, said the recent weed control work undertaken on Auteuil and neighbouring properties provided some clear lessons. "To have seen these Prickly Acacia infestations before work commenced, and to now compare the results of concerted control work, certainly shows that the proof of the pudding is in the eating," she said.

"Where there were thickets and no grass, there are now dead prickly trees and grass beginning to come back."

Auteuil was the first property to work with DCQ to form a cluster group with adjoining properties to develop five year plans. The plans provide a blueprint for landscape scale management of weeds and ferals, including guidance on stock movement, all aimed at improving grazing land productivity.

Attendees were also given expert presentations on how banks value a property with and without weeds, the Climate Champion Program, feral pig control, an update on the wild dog barrier fence, and a very practical exercise in land condition assessments.

There was also an opportunity to provide input to DCQ's new regional natural resource management plan, as well as an update on all things Landcare in the region.

"It was a big day with something for everyone," said Ms Kohler.

DCQ receives funding from both the Federal and State governments to work with landholders across the Queensland section of the Lake Eyre Basin on sustainable production and conservation projects.

Mystical maths!

In the 25 years since the Landcare movement was born, over 6,000 community-based, volunteer groups committed to caring for our land, have sprung up and blossomed across the nation. It has also spread to more than 20 countries around the world.

A large part of its success has come from it being community owned and driven, and the volunteers who populate the groups give freely of their time and passion to sustainably manage our shared environmental assets, the assets that underpin our agricultural productivity and ecosystem health.

Under the current program, Regional Landcare Facilitators (RLFs) work to support Landcare and production groups to adopt sustainable farm and land management practices, and to protect Australia's landscape. Landcare and production groups include land managers, local and regional Landcare groups, farming systems or grower groups and related community organisations.

RLFs assist groups to seek funding, membership and resources for natural resource management (NRM) activities and to build their capacity and skills. They also provide a link between community groups and regional NRM bodies.

Under the Caring for our Country initiative, the Australian Government funds one full-time equivalent Regional Landcare Facilitator position in each of the 56 natural resource management regions in Australia.

Desert Channels Queensland is one of those 56 groups, and as part of our Landcare efforts, we are establishing a steering committee to assist in the direction of the Desert Channels

Regional Landcare Facilitator (RLF) and provide advice and community input on strategic aspects of the role.

The steering committee will be comprised of representatives of Landcare, production or farm system groups, and a representative of DCQ, allowing for industry or local government representation as appropriate. Members will be identified for their networks and experience in sustainable agriculture.

While the RLFs are critical components of the Landcare system, the real engine room of the movement is the dedicated, passionate, motivated and engaged volunteers. And even though these people are driven by their passion, they are enabled, almost entirely, by the Landcare grants they can access to get things done on the ground.

In a move likely to devastate Landcare groups, the Australian Government has subtracted almost \$484 million from the Landcare program. Senate Estimates on 29th May revealed that there will be no funding for community grants over the next four years unless it was already contracted or committed.

Regional bodies like DCQ are expected to fill the gap by funding community grants for Landcare groups despite a further 26% slashing of their budgets on top of reductions over the past few years.

Without these grants, many are predicting that groups will fold. How far this will set back Landcare and the great work it does, on behalf of all of us, remains to be seen.

There must be an economic theory that explains how \$484 million can be taken from a program where more than 500,000 experienced volunteers do the work, replace it with a \$525 million program of up to 7,500 (at any one time) lowly paid, inexperienced, workers and get the same environmental and production outcomes.

Mystical maths indeed!

Survey that!

It seems 2014 is the year of the survey. Not only are we surveying weeds, significant environmental areas, community attitudes and fish, we also develop applications to capture information while on survey.

These smartphone and tablet applications do not rely on a mobile service to operate; they will record data anywhere, at anytime, then upload it to a cloud server when they enter mobile service.

This means they are an ideal platform for data collection in remote areas.

Once uploaded to the cloud, the data is displayed in real time on a web interface, giving managers access to the most up to date information on which to base their decisions.

With DCS, it's not just about the expertise to accurately record what is observed in the field, its about how we collect, process, store and display the data. Our aim is to collect data in the most efficient manner, get information to the client in the shortest time, and deliver the good return on investment.

So if you want anything surveyed, counted, examined, measured, studied or inspected, give DC Solutions a call on 0417 427 900 ... we'll do our best to help.

Boost to NRM plan

The recent DCQ field day at Auteuil was the perfect vehicle to gather community views for incorporation into the next version of the DCQ NRM plan.

The plan is being revised and updated by DCQ's Planning Officer, Andrew Burrows, who said it was a great opportunity to canvass the views of a broad cross section of the community.

"We had landholders, local government and government agency people together on the day, so we were able to get a diverse range of views on how DCQ can plan its natural resource management work for the next five years," he said.

Areas identified for action were:

- protection of the waterholes of the region
- increased action to reduce pest and weed species
- concerns about future pressures on coal seam gas operations
- protection of vulnerable native species
- total grazing pressure
- relationship building with all stakeholders
- good neighbour policies to reduce weed spread
- increasing climate variability and impact on livestock.

DCQ has also recently updated its Indigenous Engagement Strategy, and the revised NRM Plan will complement it by seeking to increase indigenous community participation in natural resource management.

A draft of the revised NRM plan will be completed by July 2014; it will then go out for wider community consultation until the end of 2015. The plan will remain open for comment, primarily through the DCQ web page; it will also be discussed at future DCQ field days.

Having community input into the plan is more than simply engaging, seeking endorsement and engendering ownership; it is primarily to ensure that community priorities are captured, and that we have guiding document to support future funding applications for natural resource management projects.

Further updates will be posted in Upfront Outback to make sure you don't miss the chance to have your say. If you would like further information on the NRM plan, or the planning process, please contact Andrew Burrows on (07) 4652 7826 or via email at andrew.burrows@dcq.org.au.

CSIRO soldiers on

Sadly, Australia's mammal extinction rate is highest in the world. Mammal loss in the arid zone has been particularly significant, with predation by feral animals like cats and foxes the most likely cause.

Contrary to popular belief, the CSIRO has not closed; in fact, it's running a three-year project focussed on the ecology and off-reserve management of small mammal 'refuges' in the arid zone of Queensland, Northern Territory, South Australia and New South Wales.

Refuges are the small areas that species retreat to during harsh times. In the arid zone, these refuges are not necessarily wet areas or areas with high levels of livestock feed. For this reason, refuges may exist happily within a livestock production system, and graziers may be the best people to help manage them.

The CSIRO team will be trying to answer questions about small mammal ecology. Where are the dry times refuges for threatened species? Why are they there? How do these refuges change through time? What are the main threats to these areas? Can we predict where new refuges might be?

These questions will be answered using small mammal surveys, modelling, genetic techniques and expert input.

The team will also try to understand what management options there are for these dry time refuges, and what sort of factors may help or hinder graziers in looking after these areas through the full boom/bust cycle. Discussions with graziers and other stakeholders, policy analysis and economic modelling will help them do this.

The team have been inviting graziers to share their perspectives on conservation options through surveys or interviews, or for permission to work on their properties. To begin this process, a survey has been sent out across the arid zone and the CSIRO team are keen to get as many responses back as possible.

In April, CSIRO sent out snail mail letters inviting people across the arid zone to complete the survey. The survey is also available online at www.surveymonkey.com/s/smallmammalsurvey. Participants who include their address will receive a \$20 Woolworths or Coles voucher - you can always send it to a friend or take it on holidays.

For hard copies or further information, contact Jane Addison, CSIRO Alice Springs on 08 8950 7176, or jane.addison@csiro.au.