



November 2013

Not the Basin Bullet

No doubt you will have noticed the hiatus in the publication of the Basin Bullet. For those readers hanging out for the next edition, I can assure you that Up Front Outback is not taking over from the Bullet, as it has become affectionately known throughout its wide readership.

The Bullet was an independent publication that didn't necessarily reflect the views of DCQ; its brief was to promote and stimulate informed discussion and debate on issues relating to our region or our work. Since its inception under founding independent editor, Bruce Honeywill, it has drawn on a variety of, generally unpaid, contributors the editor felt had something to add to current issues or debates.

Unfortunately, the independent editor, thought-provoking content and quality writing for which the Bullet has become so well known over the past 8 years comes at a price, and DCQ has made the difficult decision to direct its limited funds elsewhere. However, we have not performed the last rites, but remain hopeful we can devise a Lazarus strategy to enable The Bullet to return to your computer screen periodically.

In the meantime, I'm sure you will enjoy the news, updates and information in Up Front Outback, even though it's ... not the Basin Bullet.

Terminator

It is always exciting to see an idea come to fruition. For some time we have been nurturing and developing an idea, we have thrown it around the room, pulled it apart and put it back together. How could we could best use technology and a strategic approach to manage the ongoing war on weeds? We came up with a great solution.

This week the State Government gave our idea the thumbs up, seeing the benefit and positive impact it will have as we all work together to combat the problem. This is what they had to say: High-tech drones will soon make tactical strikes on pest weeds such as prickly acacia, mesquite, parkinsonia and rubber vine, as part of the Queensland Government's second Area Management Plan (AMP).

Minister for Natural Resources and Mines Andrew Cripps said the AMP would allow for more effective weed control, and support an industry struggling under Labor's mountain of red tape. "These AMPs and the use of satellite imagery and unmanned aerial drones fulfil our election promise to build up agriculture as one of the four pillars of the economy," Mr Cripps said.

"It is focused on controlling high density infestations of Weeds of National Significance that would otherwise be difficult to control using conventional techniques.

"Under Labor, rural landowners were drowned in paperwork attempting to carry out the most routine property management tasks, such as weed control.

"Now they will be able to get on with the job of killing weeds to maintain the productivity of their pasture lands.

"In the past, these sites have been problematic because of varying topography, very high density weed infestations and the presence of native species, with farmers all but ignored by the former Labor government.

"By using these tools, Desert Channels Queensland (DCQ) will step into the 21st century to overcome difficulties in accessing sites and implementing efficient control programs."

Mr Cripps said the drone would be operated by local aviation company, PBE Services, which will supply a commercial pilot and DCQ, which will provide a trained navigator and logistical support.

"The highly effective drones are able to cover one hectare for every eight minutes in the air and can deliver their payloads to within one metre of the target," he said.

"Due to the success of the drone, DNRM will be considering a possible expansion to the program."

Is your heart in the heart of the country?

If you have stood at Dion's lookout and surveyed the vast unending horizon, or if you have seen the sun set blood red over the rolling red dunes of Big Red, chances are, you have fallen

in love with this part of the world.

While it may not be the refined beauty of her fairer coastal sisters, the Outback country of the central west has a unique rugged beauty that is all her own. The heart of the country will captivate unlike anything else.

People and Passion

The Lake Eyre Basin is a very special place as more and more suburbanites are coming to understand. And there is nothing like the passion of the people who live there, to showcase its magic to the world.

Desert Channels Digital, the film and graphic design arm of DC Solutions, recently completed challenging logistical exercise to capture interviews with 14 passionate Basinites, across 8,362 kilometres in 20 days, accompanied by blowing dust, a few million flies, and occasional rain. The filming odyssey took Producer Alun Hoggett and cameraman, Harry Logan to within 350 kilometres of the Coral Sea, 300 kilometres of the Gulf, 1,250 kilometres of the Indian Ocean, and 300 kilometres of the Southern Ocean - a big trip around the big heart of a big country.

Apart from the logistics, travel, filming and editing, there was the public launch of the completed 14 short films. The first public viewing at the Port Augusta Lake Eyre Basin Conference had such an impact, one of the films was shown in the South Australian Parliament, and they will also be used at the opening of the 2015 Rangelands Conference. We are also in discussion with a major international airline to have them included in the In-flight entertainment.

The project was the result of a cross-border partnership where Desert Channels Queensland drew together funding from Queensland Government, Lake Eyre Basin Community Advisory Committee and Territory Natural Resource Management to achieve an economy of scale and quality of product that wouldn't have been possible had each of the funders gone it alone. Do yourself a favour and check out the results [here](#)

Not bad for two blokes in a ute, a couple of cameras, a couple of swags, a handful of people and a mountain of passion!

What's been going on ...

Unless you're a client, you probably haven't heard a lot from DC Solutions this year, but 2013 has been another very busy one in the commercial world.

We have conducted a number of weed surveys and control works, which dovetails neatly into the renewed focus on weeds and ferals by our parent, Desert Channels Queensland. While our work has focussed on Prickly Acacia, we have also conducted general weed survey and control work associated with road construction and development.

Also related to road construction is the Spotter Catcher and damage mitigation surveys and reports we have done, helping to ensure that the disruption to habitat and fauna is minimised in the course to routine construction and maintenance. Our surveys have been checking out bats and birds, lizards and snakes, and our use of a flexible 'snake' camera has made the job of inspecting cracks, crevices, hollows and nests so much easier and more efficient.

Most of our team spend much of their time on the road, and our water quality monitoring crew were no exception. Over the year they covered in excess of 35,000 kilometres in the course of collecting more than 100 batches for lab analysis. In addition to sampling surface water sites, our team undertook extensive analysis of bores, springs and waterholes to assess vulnerability to coal seam gas and coal mining activities.

On the data management and mapping front, we have developed a mapping tool to complement the work of our weed control team. This tool takes the results of field surveys, and satellite image analysis, and displays it as management and action zones complete with details of optimum treatment methods. Not only will this tool eradicate guesswork, it will reduce the time spent on planning weed control activities.

Our filming and digital production arm, Desert Channels Digital has just completed production of 20 short films under the title of *Lake Eyre Basin - People and Passion*. You can check them out at www.dcsolutions.org.au/showcase/. For something entirely different, have a look at what we put together on the recent Fashion Quest (www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzRDC2977GE). This is one of our many productions, most of which you can find on our YouTube channel www.youtube.com/user/desertchannels. In addition to video, we continue to produce brochures, flyers, maps, annual reports, calendars and books.

All of our commercial delivery has, as its cornerstone, dedicated project management. Not only do we apply our integrated systems and expertise to our own projects, we offer a full project management service to clients. As a result, we are currently providing dedicated project management to two major projects worth \$250,000.

The reason for DC Solutions existence is to generate funds for additional environmental and community projects across the Queensland section of the Lake Eyre Basin. To this end, we were pleased to have been able to donate \$200,000 to Desert Channels Foundation in the 2012 - 2013 year. With the continued support of our valuable clients we are confident of building on that in this, and subsequent years.

Fulcrum provides additional leverage

Desert Channels Queensland has adapted the Fulcrum smartphone app to give it extra leverage against weeds and feral animals.

Desert Channels Group's Geospatial Consultant, Jade Fraser, said the Fulcrum data collection app can be run on your smartphone, tablet or personal computer, and gives everyone the ability to be a fully-fledged data collector.

"Fulcrum is really easy to use," he said. "People can be up and running, collecting data in no time, because it is a very intuitive piece of software."

DCG has negotiated a bulk, not-for-profit licence that is enabling them to roll it out across all the shires in the region; there has even been interest and uptake from outside of the Desert Channels region.

The old way of collecting weed and feral animal data was to mark sightings on a hand-drawn map; you then had to either collate all the data onto the one map, or try to get an overview of problem spots by looking at dozens of individual maps.

With the advent of the GPS, sightings could be recorded electronically and consolidated into a single map on the computer. The problem was, particularly for wild dogs and other feral animals, the data was out of date by the time the map was made, and, you had to go to an expert to get the map made in the first place.

Now, with Fulcrum, anyone with a smartphone, tablet or PC can collect data, even when you are out of service or off-line - as soon as you are back in service, the data is automatically uploaded to the Fulcrum database, and can be viewed by anyone with a licence.

"You simply log on to the Fulcrum site and you can see the data displayed on a map," said Jade, "and you can turn layers of. So if you only want to see where the wild dogs are, you turn off all the cats, pigs, foxes, parkinsonia, etc.

"The more people we can get collecting data, the better informed we all are about the size of the problem and where, exactly, it is."

Fulcrum gives everyone the opportunity to support the effort to control ferals and weeds, and enables those involved in control activities to see the hot spots in real time. This leads to better management decisions, and more accurately targeted investment of limited funds.

If you would like to find out more about Fulcrum, call Jade Fraser on 4658 0600. The more people out there collecting information in their travels or day to day work, the better data we have.

Whichever way you look at it, Fulcrum gives land managers more leverage.

Night Parrots and stuff

The Foundation is starting to get pumping: the Board has approved the draft prospectus, the first major donation has been received, the first contribution to on-ground work in the region has been made, and the first two Foundation projects are almost ready for specific fundraising.

There was much rejoicing earlier in the year when the Foundation received \$200,000 from DC Solutions, the commercial arm of Desert Channels Group. There was also a number of substantial donations from private individuals, all of which enabled us to build momentum toward achieving our vision of 'our inland river catchments preserved, productive and secure ... for all ... forever'.

Desert Channels Queensland is currently running a program to control weeds of national significance in areas of high public benefit ... the budget is limited; the need is huge. The Foundation has allowed them to greatly extend their on-ground work by covering the purchase of a 4WD and a quad bike for the control work. We are thrilled to have made a big contribution to protecting biodiversity and productivity in the region.

Sometimes when the stars align, they really line up: the recent discovery of a Night Parrot in the region, has given stronger sense of urgency and purpose to Nocturnal Enigma, our draft Night Parrot project. This is a research project to compliment other work currently being done in the Night Parrot field, and it will be open for specific donations as soon as the project is finalised and we have a target budget ... so get ready with your spare change!

An initiative that will complement the Night Parrot project, and guide all our management strategies, is Right Things; Right Places. This biological survey of the region will help fill the gaps in the great work already done over the years in surveying the plants and animals across our 510,000 square kilometres. Let's find out what we have, and where it is, then we can make sure we're doing the right things in the right places. We owe it to our kids.

To find out more on what Desert Channels Foundation is all about, check out <http://www.dcfoundation.org.au/>.

Oh What a Feeling

As a result of some significant donations, Desert Channels Foundation has been able to support DCQ's Prickly Acacia eradication campaign in the region. Desert Channels Foundation has funded the purchase of Toyota Landcruiser and quad bike to be used in areas of high public benefit, including current seed sources along waterways with the potential for rapid spread down the river systems.

Nothing Like the First Time

There is always something special about the first time! The first time you tried ice cream, your first roller coaster ride, for some of us out west, the first time we saw the sea. Then there is always the first kiss. Yep, there is something special about firsts ... we recently had one of those.

While it pales in comparison to a first kiss, it is, nevertheless, special to us: the Department of Natural Resources and Mines approved our Area Management Plan or an AMP as it is affectionately known. 'Huh?' you may well ask.

Acting Minister for Science, Information Technology, Innovation and the Arts John-Paul Langbroek said the mapping of weed density would be carried out using satellite imagery techniques developed by the Department of Science, Information Technology, Innovation and the Arts.

"This mapping will indicate areas where weeds will be targeted and will take into account the strategic nature of the infestation," Mr Langbroek said.

"The Newman Government believes research and innovation are vital to the future of Queensland.

"Initiatives such as the drone and the new mapping draws on our strong base of research infrastructure and world-class institutions.

"I am pleased to see this valuable technology put to good use to help the agricultural industry combat growing weed infestations."

DCQ CEO Leanne Kohler said DCQ would develop five-year property-based weed plans with property owners to ensure long term control of the target weed species.

"It is expected that 250,000 hectares per year will have reduced impacts from weed species as a direct result of work carried out by DCQ through the AMP," Ms Kohler said.

“Reducing these weed infestations will improve the biodiversity of regional ecosystems, promote suitable conditions for growing native species and improve the water quality and habitat of waterways and wetlands.”

The AMP will cover the Mt Isa, Richmond, Cloncurry, McKinlay, Flinders, Barcaldine, Winton, Boulia, Longreach, Blackall, Tambo, Murweh, Quilpie, Diamantina, Barcoo, Bulloo and Paroo shires in Western Bioregions code areas prescribed under the Vegetation Management Act 1999.