



**October 2014**

### **Winton Agreement**

While it may not quite have the significance of the Camp David Accord, our very own Winton Agreement marks a rolled gold milestone in our campaign against the biggest pest plant threat to the Mitchell Grass Downs, prickly acacia.

Reached at a recent meeting in Winton, the Winton Agreement sees DCQ, Flinders Shire Council, Winton Shire Council, Southern Gulf Catchments and Biosecurity Queensland joining forces to eradicate core infestations of prickly acacia in their respective areas by formally committing to coordinated action.

The area and density of prickly acacia in the Southern Gulf Catchment and the Desert Channels Queensland regions, has doubled in the last ten years and the Winton group cited the leadership shown by DCQ, as making eradication now possible.

DCQ's CEO, Leanne Kohler, said it was the culmination of a lot of hard work. "We've been funding weed control work for a decade, but during that run of good seasons a few years back, prickly acacia just exploded, despite everyone's best efforts.

"We knew we had to do things differently, so we approached it from four fronts: information and knowledge; skills and experience; research and innovation; and regulations and permits.

"Over the past couple of years, in partnership with the Department of Science, Information Technology, Innovation and the Arts, we have developed a way to analyse time series satellite images to identify the prickly acacia 'hot spots' - those areas of rapid expansion where eradication will give you the greatest landscape scale benefit.

"To be as effective as we can be at eradicating weeds, we put together a team of highly skilled and experienced weed control experts who, because they do it all day, everyday, apply herbicide like you wouldn't believe, and get fantastic kill rates.

"And to give us even more of an edge, we have trialled, perfected and implemented a range of new control techniques, the most visible of which is the drone we use for treating ultra-dense infestations.

"Finally, our expertise and track record enabled us to get a DCQ Weeds of National Significance Area Management Plan approved by the State Government to spray weeds next to mature native vegetation, as well as a APVMA permit to allow us to use herbicides in watercourses under extremely strict protocols.

“All in all, we now have an integrated, effective prickly acacia eradication system that has been proven to work, and has given confidence to others, that we can achieve what we set out to ... eradicate all core infestations of prickly acacia in our region by 2018.”

Leanne is confident the Winton Agreement will be the catalyst for other shires and landholders in affected areas of the Mitchell Grass Downs to join forces to restore agricultural productivity and biological diversity.

Prickly acacia comes from India and Pakistan and was promoted as a shade and fodder tree in the early 20th century. It is now a Class 2 declared pest plant in Queensland, and a Weed of National Significance (WONS). It currently infests more than 22 million hectares of Queensland, with the potential to spread to most of northern Australia.

### **Edgbaston Goby**

The unmasking of a new population of the endemic artesian spring fish, Edgbaston goby, in a property bore drain, has given fresh hope to fishos.

Discovered on a regular bore drain survey for the feral fish, gambusia, this new population of Edgbaston Goby got researcher, Adam Kerezsy very excited. According to reports, the normally phlegmatic Adam, almost broke into a celebratory jig, but couldn't suppress a slight smile.

What really got Adam excited was the fact that with no human intervention, these tiny fish were transported in some manner, from the few springs in which they are found, more than 40 kilometres to an artificial wetland that developed, without human intervention, from a property bore drain.

Adam says it gives hope that there may be other artificial wetlands out there with similar characteristics where Edgbaston goby might be living. Such places are critical insurance policies against a disaster in any or all of the 'home' springs of the species.

While Queensland's most endangered fish, the red-finned blue eye, has disappeared from those springs where gambusia have invaded, the Edgbaston goby habit of the male guarding the eggs may be giving it a chance to persist with gambusia present.

Also known as mosquito fish, gambusia were introduced from America in 1925 to combat mosquito larvae; however, they proved to be more adept in preying on the eggs and young of native fish, and displacing them through vigorous reproduction and aggressive competition for resources.

DCQ is now seeking funding to conduct a more detailed survey of other permanent waters in the Cooper Creek catchment to provide better information on which to base management decisions.

In the meantime, David and Liz Wehl, the owners of Ravenswood where the fish were found, were pretty chuffed that Queensland's second most endangered fish has chosen their bore drain as a new home.

### **Riverprize**

DCQ and fellow members of the Lake Eyre Basin Partnership have pulled off a huge coup with the \$200,000 Australian Riverprize for 2014.

DCQ got together with South Australian Arid Lands NRM, Territory NRM, Lake Eyre Basin Community Advisory Committee and the Lake Eyre Basin Scientific Advisory Panel to nominate the community process with the goal of cross-border protection of river flows and catchments.

The credit for the nomination goes to the main drivers, Richard Kingsford and Vol Norris, as well as all the others who contributed to a first rate nomination but, more importantly, kudos to those with the passion, knowledge, tenacity and vision who galvanised a community against threats to these magnificent rivers in the 1990s.

They built a cooperative framework for community participation, drawing in all stakeholders to work together across three states and the Northern Territory to keep the rivers of the Lake Eyre Basin healthy and productive.

The prize money will be spent on natural resource management activities in the Basin.

### **Water and weeds**

Our three year, Queensland Government funded project to improve water quality in the headwaters of the Thomson River through the control of serious infestations of prickly acacia and rubber vine, is well underway. In the first twelve months of this project we have taken out major infestations of prickly acacia along in the upper Aramac Creek catchment, with a total 148 kilometres of streambank treated.

Landholders and Landcare groups have worked alongside DCQ in getting this work done, and all parties have benefited from the DCQ Weeds of National Significance Area Management Plan, which allows the treatment of weeds near native vegetation.

Landholders working with DCQ are currently also benefiting from a new AVPMA permit (see 'Another permit!' article). This permit has again improved efficiencies and when combined with the innovation that DCQ introduced as part of this program, through the use of linked teams, high quality mapping and drones able to place chemical in the right place and at the right rates, has meant that we're seeing large numbers of woody weeds killed, native vegetation protected.

Moreover, the monitoring being undertaken by DCQ is showing recovery of native species critical to improved water quality and the protection of streambanks.

### **Another permit!**

We were very excited in September to receive official approval from the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (AVPMA) for the application of chemicals in water courses under a new permit.

We approached the Australian Government in 2013 following our Sesbania field day where landholders voiced their frustration at not being able to control dense stands of prickly acacia in water courses, which acted as seed sources to reinfest adjoining paddocks where they had already undertaken weed control.

Our ability to demonstrate that through the use of new techniques such as the drone, we could apply chemicals normally not permitted in the water course at a level of accuracy that gave the Australian Government the confidence in environmental safety.

Understandably, this permit comes with a range of strict conditions to protect critical ecological sites - it can only be exercised where there is an approved weed plan and chemical application is tightly prescribed.

When combined with the AMP approved by the Qld Government in 2013, it provides the missing link in cost effective control of prickly acacia across the full landscape.

Landholders in the Wokingham and Landsborough catchments have been the first to benefit from this new approval, but landholders throughout the region will benefit as they can now tackle these types of sites.

This AVPMA permit is the result of a lot of hard work over the last twelve months and DCQ would like to thank the community for their assistance, particularly the Entrikens on Sesbania, where not only the field day was held, but was the trial site for the huge amount of work required to demonstrate the techniques.

More information can be obtained about this permit by contacting DCQ on 07 4658 0600.

### **Bioregional Assessments**

The Australian Government is undertaking a program of bioregional assessments in order to better understand the potential impacts of coal seam gas and large coal mining developments on water resources and water-related assets.

The Bioregional Assessments will provide a single authoritative source for all interested parties to refer to when considering the water-related impacts of potential coal seam gas and coal mining developments.

The information will be available to government regulators, natural resource managers, coal seam gas and coal mining companies, and interested community members.

The Galilee Basin is one of the priority regions for the bioregional assessment program and the first report for this region has been released with more to follow.

DCQ has provided a considerable amount of information to the project on key water assets (springs, waterholes and important ecological sites) within the Galilee Basin and, more widely, across the region. We have also included information on economic features such as bores and town water supplies along with important cultural sites where information was available. The reports are available at [www.bioregionalassessments.gov.au/](http://www.bioregionalassessments.gov.au/)

### **Seed in the guts = kick in the guts**

Despite the drought, Prickly Acacia has set seeds across much of western Queensland and they are now almost ripe. These highly palatable seeds can remain viable in the gut of livestock for at least six days. Prickly Acacia is a Class 2 declared pest plant that can reduce on farm production by up to 75%.

This plant will grow in most areas of Queensland ... reducing its spread is crucial! The number one agent for seed movement is livestock. Landholders are obliged, under Queensland legislation, to control this plant; this includes ensuring stock are free of weed

seed when moved. Stock may need more than six days to pass seed before being placed into clean country.

If you are purchasing stock, ensure they are free of Prickly Acacia seed. Control is a cost you don't need, so make sure you have a weed seed hygiene program in place.

If you have any questions or need advice about a Prickly Acacia weed seed hygiene program for your property, contact Desert Channel Queensland's Prickly Acacia Eradication Program on 07 4658 0600.

### **Good Neighbour Deed**

While *Upfront Outback* keeps you up to date with grant opportunities, field days, workshops, and information on how we can work with you on the health and productivity of your land, your neighbour might be missing out. Why not give them a gift subscription by entering their details at the bottom left of our website homepage ([dcq.org.au](http://dcq.org.au)) or by calling the office on 07 4658 0600. Go on, do a good-neighbour deed!